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AUSDANCE NATIONAL SUBMISSION

National Cultural Policy Consultation 2026

Dance is not a discretionary luxury. It is a natural part of human life with proven, measurable benefits for physical health, mental wellbeing, social connection, cultural identity and longevity. Every dollar invested in dance returns many times its value to the health system, aged care, education and community. The new National Cultural Policy must recognise dance as ***essential public infrastructure.***

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With the support of:

Australian Dance Council, Ausdance (ACT) Inc
Australian Dance Council, Ausdance (QLD) Inc
Australian Dance Council, Ausdance (SA) Inc
Australian Dance Council, Ausdance (VIC) Inc
Australian Dance Council, Ausdance (WA) Inc

About This Submission

The Australian Dance Council – Ausdance – is Australia's national peak body for dance. Together with the federated state and territory Ausdance network, we represent hundreds of thousands of practising dancers, students, choreographers, teachers, studio owners and arts administrators across arts, education, health, sport, tourism and business.

This submission responds directly to the five pillars of the new National Cultural Policy consultation. Under each pillar we identify what has worked under Revive, what has not, and what we ask of the new policy. The evidence base for dance as social infrastructure grounds every recommendation in peer-reviewed and government-sourced data.

This submission draws on: the 2026 Australian Dance Sector Cultural Policy Survey (101 respondents representing approx. 2500 in sector, national, April–May 2026); the National Dance Gathering (2023); First Nations-led consultations (2024); Ausdance's prior national and state/territory submissions; AusPlay participation data (2023–24 and 2024–25); and peer-reviewed research cited throughout.

> *"Funding for dance needs to at least double; there must be clear regulations around that funding getting into the wallets of practitioners — rather than being syphoned off into marketing budgets, insurance premiums and venue hire. Dance cannot rely on or thrive on donations, philanthropy, volunteer work, or the piecemeal, grants-based funding framework."*
> **— NSW Major Organisation, 2026 Survey**

Executive Summary

Australia's dance sector is one of the most widely participated cultural activities in the country, yet it remains structurally underinvested and increasingly precarious. A central reform is required: Australia's cultural policy must shift from funding outputs to investing in ecosystems.

This shift underpins all recommendations in this submission:

- **First Nations First:** embed Cultural authority, Community-led governance and long-term investment in Cultural preservation and intergenerational knowledge transfer.
- **A Place for Every Story:** address inequitable access to participation and infrastructure, recognising rehearsal and creation space as essential cultural infrastructure.
- **Centrality of the Artist:** fund creation time explicitly; implement minimum three-year funding cycles; reinstate career transition support; address workforce precarity.
- **Strong Cultural Infrastructure:** invest in Ausdance and the state/territory network as permanent funded infrastructure; commission a national Dance Data Strategy; establish a Performing Arts and Exhibitions Production Tax Offset (PAPTO).
- **Reaching the Audience:** shift evaluation from attendance metrics to participation and wellbeing outcomes; establish formal cross-portfolio mechanisms with Health, Education, Aged Care and Community Services.

The Dance Sector: Scale and Conditions

Dance is one of the most widely practised activities in Australia — yet one of the most structurally underinvested artforms. AusPlay data (2023–24) places dance third for children behind swimming and soccer. By 2024–25, recreational dance and dancesport received their own dedicated AusPlay activity reports for the first time.

Nearly every dance professional in Australia — performer, choreographer, teacher, director, therapist, administrator, community leader — begins their training in a private studio or community group, *as a child*. This grassroots foundation is where the entire profession is built. It receives almost no government support. There are no nationally recognised qualifications required to teach dance, no consistent oversight of the training pipeline, and no policy framework connecting that first childhood class to the professional outcomes government values.

The pipeline argument: the quality of every outcome — on stage, in communities, in aged care, in schools — is a direct product of the health of that grassroots foundation. Government support must begin where the profession begins.

Indicator	Data / Source
Regular adult participants recreational/professional	368,100 (AusPlay 2023–24) + 238,500 (Dancesport, Ausplay) ***Total 606,600***
Regular child participants recreational/professional	265,000 (AusPlay 2023–24) + 132,200 (Dancesport, Ausplay) ***Total 397,000***
Children's activity ranking	3rd — behind swimming and soccer (AusPlay 2023–24)
Dedicated AusPlay dance reports	First issued Nov 2025 — recreational dance and dancesport
Estimated teaching workforce	~19,000 professionals (Ausdance estimate)
Cultural & creative sector GDP	$67.4 billion; 2.5% of GDP (BCARR 2023–24)
Dancer minimum casual rate	$37.05/hr vs $49.31/hr for musicians (Fair Work Commission)
Average professional retirement age	35 years — shortest career span of all performing arts
First Nations arts businesses	Approx. 20% of all First Nations businesses in arts & heritage (BCARR 2024)

2026 Survey: What the Sector Told Us

Ausdance conducted a national Cultural Policy Survey in April–May 2026, receiving 101 responses from across the sector representing an estimated 2500 people. Respondents

included teachers (33%), performers (13%), studio/business owners (12%), arts managers (9%), cultural practitioners (5%), small/medium companies (5%), major organisations (3%) and others. The survey was geographically distributed across all states and territories.

Biggest Barriers to Sustaining a Career in Dance

Barrier	% of Respondents
Lack of stable income	75%
Short-term / project-based funding	52%
Limited career pathways	41%
Lack of performance opportunities	33%
Lack of affordable rehearsal/creation space	29%
Burnout / injury / safety concerns	25%
Lack of training opportunities	20%
Lack of Cultural Safety	11%

Access to Affordable Rehearsal and Creation Space

Only one in three respondents reported consistent, affordable access to rehearsal or creation space. A further 43% have access only sometimes. Fewer than one in three dance practitioners can reliably access the space their practice requires.

Where Government Should Collaborate Outside Arts

Asked where government should collaborate beyond arts to support dance (select up to 3), respondents prioritised:

- Education — selected by ~86% of respondents
- Health — selected by ~74% of respondents
- Community Services — selected by ~46% of respondents
- Employment/Skills — selected by ~38% of respondents
- Tourism — selected by ~32% of respondents

These responses confirm that practitioners see dance as social infrastructure, not merely an artform — and that the new National Cultural Policy must have a cross-portfolio architecture from the outset.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

First Nations dance is foundational to Australia's cultural identity. It is not a component of the arts sector — it is the origin of Cultural practice on this continent and these islands, maintained and transmitted across tens of thousands of years. Any cultural policy that does not begin here is not, in any meaningful sense, Australian.

What Has Worked Under Revive

The inclusion of First Nations First as the lead pillar in Revive sent an important signal. The review of the Indigenous Art Code, increased investment in the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry

Support program, and the stated commitment to self-determination are positive steps that Ausdance acknowledges.

What Has Not Worked — and the Gap We Ask the New Policy to Close

Despite good intentions, structural change has been limited. The four barriers Ausdance consistently hears from First Nations dance practitioners and Cultural leaders are:

- **Governance mismatch:** grant accessibility, acquittal requirements and reporting timelines do not align with Community-led governance and capability. Funding cycles impose a project logic incompatible with long-term Cultural preservation.
- **Consultation without authority:** consultation processes are often inaccessible and do not transfer decision-making power. Being consulted is not the same as providing authority.
- **Cultural preservation underfunded:** contemporary Cultural production is supported but the foundational work — preservation of traditional Cultural knowledge, intergenerational transmission, Elder-led practice — receives insufficient long-term investment.
- **AI and digital risk:** there is no consistent national protection for First Nations ICIP in digital or AI contexts, exposing sacred knowledge and expression to misappropriation.

The Evidence

- **Cultural determinants of health (Wiley / Health Promotion Journal of Australia, 2024):** Music, dance and song are vital components of present-day First Nations cultural healing practices, interconnected with language, family, community and Country.
- **Cultural Identity and SEWB in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children (Springer Nature, 2022):** Strong cultural identity — fostered through dance and ceremony — promotes resilience, enhances self-esteem and protects from poor mental health. Children with stronger cultural connections have lower risks of emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Recommendations — Pillar 1

1. Embed Community-led decision-making in all arts funding: replace consultation with genuine co-design in which First Nations Communities hold authority.
2. Fund Elders and Cultural leaders as core cultural infrastructure — paid practitioners with authority, not as volunteers.
3. Invest in long-term (minimum 10-year) programs for Cultural preservation, intergenerational knowledge transfer and language-dance connections.
4. Mandate First Nations ICIP protections across all AI and digital policy affecting the arts sector.
5. Provide an enhanced production tax offset rate (45%) for First Nations-led dance productions and touring.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Dance is one of the most geographically distributed and demographically inclusive artforms in Australia, existing in studios, schools, community halls, parks, homes and online. Yet access to the infrastructure that enables participation remains deeply inequitable.

What Has Worked Under Revive

Revive's framing of participation and access as core policy concerns was welcome. Increased recognition of regional and remote practice, and acknowledgement of d/Deaf and disabled artists through the new Arts and Screen Employment Pathways Pilot Program, reflects a broadening of the policy lens.

The Space Crisis

The most immediate, practical and consistently reported barrier to dance participation and creation is access to affordable, appropriate, accessible physical space. Dance requires specific flooring — Safe Dance practice standards (developed by Ausdance) exist because inadequate surfaces cause preventable injury. Yet:

- **Survey finding (2026):** only one in three respondents have consistent, affordable access to rehearsal or creation space. A further 43% have it only sometimes.
- **Cost escalation:** government-owned venues built with public money are often priced beyond the reach of independent practitioners.
- **Regulatory barriers:** school halls, community halls and public spaces are frequently unavailable due to insurance and liability restrictions.
- **Regional access:** approximately 30% of Ausdance membership is regionally based. Dance-appropriate space in regional communities is critically constrained.

Multicultural Dance Forms

Non-Western cultural dance forms — from Kathak and Bharatanatyam to Latin, West African, Chinese classical and Pacific dance traditions — fall between existing funding structures, excluded from mainstream "professional dance" streams while not qualifying for First Nations Cultural practice investment. This leaves a significant portion of Australia's living cultural heritage without dedicated support.

> *"Independent dancers are the heart of the WA community. If even half the projects that apply for funding are successful, it would significantly increase employment and lead to a more stable and sustainable industry."*
> **— WA Performer/Choreographer, 2026 Survey**

Recommendations — Pillar 2

6. Recognise rehearsal and creation space as essential cultural infrastructure — equal in status to performance venues — and fund it accordingly.
7. Mandate affordable access policies at all publicly funded and government-owned venues, including subsidised access for independent and community dance groups.
8. Remove regulatory barriers that prevent schools and community halls from being used for dance.

9. Invest in a national audit of dance-appropriate community spaces and a targeted plan to increase supply in underserved areas.
10. Establish dedicated funding streams for multicultural and non-Western cultural dance forms, closing the gap between mainstream arts and First Nations Cultural streams.
11. Fund bursaries and fee concessions for disadvantaged students and participants.
12. Establish disability-inclusive design requirements for all new and upgraded cultural infrastructure.

Pillar 3: The Centrality of the Artist

Revive was right to name artists as workers. The dance sector's experience of the three years since, however, is that naming is not the same as acting. Dancers are the most financially precarious workers in the creative economy.

What Has Worked Under Revive

The Fair Work Commission's Modern Awards Review, supported by MEAA and informed by Ausdance data, has improved awareness of employment obligations. The Industry Code of Practice for dancers and choreographers intends to improve minimum standards. Recognition of artists as workers in policy language is a foundation to build on.

What Has Not Worked — and the Gap We Ask the New Policy to Close

The structural problem is unchanged: the funding model rewards outputs and ignores the process that creates them. Our 2026 survey confirms this:

Barrier Identified	% of Respondents
Lack of stable income	75%
Short-term / project-based funding	52%
Limited career pathways	41%
Lack of performance opportunities	33%
Lack of affordable rehearsal/creation space	29%
Burnout / injury / safety concerns	25%
Lack of Cultural Safety	11%

Income instability and short-term funding — cited by 75% and 52% of respondents respectively — confirm that the sector's core failure is a direct product of policy design, not market forces.

Creation Is the Work

The most consistent request in our 2026 survey, and in every prior Ausdance consultation, is investment in creation — not just performance. Eighty-two respondents answered our open question on this:

> *"Creation is about 80% of our work. It takes 1–2 years to create a full-length production. Creation and development needs to be valued just as much as performance — there would be no performance if it wasn't for valued, funded creation time."*
> **— WA Performer/Choreographer, 2026 Survey**

> *"The generation of original work enriches the sector culturally and economically, necessitating dozens of jobs in each development and workshop — equating to a sustained long-term work stream."*
> **— ACT Teacher, 2026 Survey**

> *"It would allow a career in dance to become a legitimate choice for the thousands of professionals who cannot make ends meet."*
> **— NSW Respondent, 2026 Survey**

Career Pathways Are Broken

Survey respondents consistently identified missing or unclear pathways: no structured transition from student to professional; no pathway from performance into teaching or choreography at career end; no mid-career re-entry support; insufficient full-time company employment. As one Western Australian performer noted: there is no dance company in Perth that employs a dancer full time except West Australian Ballet.

> *"As a young dancer and student, especially in Perth, there are not many clear pathways to stay and pursue dance. Companies are underfunded and in small quantity, and independent work is not stable."*
> **— Full-time Student, WA, 2026 Survey**

Specific pathway gaps identified by practitioners include: mid-career fellowship and re-entry programs; pathways from dancer to choreographer/rehearsal director; dance for health and dance therapy qualifications; community dance career structures (as exist in the UK, NZ and Europe); and formal arts management and producing training for artists.

Recommendations — Pillar 3

13. Shift to minimum three-year funding cycles for individual artists and companies.
14. Fund creation time explicitly — recognising the full cycle of artistic work, not only its public-facing outcomes.
15. Reinstate and expand the SCOPE programme (Securing Career Opportunities and Professional Employment for dancers), developed by Ausdance with the Australian Sports Commission.
16. Commission an independent review of pay equity in dance and implement binding minimum standards.
17. Invest in structured career transition pathways: student-to-professional, performer-to-teacher/choreographer, mid-career re-entry, and post-performance career support.

18. Develop a formal community dance career stream, modelled on UK and NZ precedents, with defined qualifications and funding.
19. Implement sector-safe AI guardrails: no broad copyright exemption for AI training data; collective licensing with remuneration; First Nations ICIP protections.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Dance's cultural infrastructure is more than venues and companies. It includes the service organisations that set standards, the safe-practice frameworks that protect children and workers, and the coordination systems that make a fragmented sector function. Since 2016, these have been drastically under-resourced.

What Has Worked Under Revive

Increased investment in major performing arts organisations has stabilised some company operations. The Creative Australia restructure consolidated some funding administration. Acknowledgement of cultural infrastructure as a policy priority reflects growing understanding that the sector cannot survive on project grants alone.

What Has Not Worked — and the Gap We Ask the New Policy to Close

Direct government investment in dance has had little lasting community benefit because there is no national body with adequate capacity to translate policy into practice. The most critical infrastructure gaps are:

- **Affordable creation space:** addressed under Pillar 2; noted here as an infrastructure failure, not just an access one.
- **Consistent national data:** on participation, workforce, economic contribution and health outcomes — without which evidence-based policy is impossible.
- **Child safety infrastructure:** nearly 350,000 children dance weekly. Ausdance receives regular reports of unsafe teaching practices causing physical and mental harm. Without investment in Ausdance, the work of embedding consistent national child safety standards cannot be done.
- **Sector coordination:** no consistent national approach to workforce development, professional standards or sector strategy. The National Dance Gathering (2023) identified this as the sector's most pressing systemic failure.
- **Tertiary education pipeline:** the Job-Ready Graduates scheme produced a 30–50% reduction in arts and humanities enrolments. Multiple respondents identified removal of tertiary dance courses as an immediate, structural harm to the sector pipeline.

Tax Reform: PAPTO

Ausdance supports a Performing Arts and Exhibitions Production Tax Offset (PAPTO) modelled on the UK's permanent cultural tax reliefs (Theatre, Orchestra, Museums and Galleries) at 40% for non-touring and 45% for touring, regional and First Nations-led productions. The UK reliefs are credited with unlocking productions, sustaining jobs and stimulating regional activity. Australia has no equivalent for live performing arts.

Recommendations — Pillar 4

20. Invest in Ausdance National and the state/territory network as permanent, funded national cultural infrastructure — not project grants.
21. Mandate Ausdance-developed child safety frameworks across all government-funded dance programs.
22. Commission a national Dance Data Strategy: consistent, disaggregated data on participation, workforce, economic contribution and health outcomes.
23. Establish a PAPTO at 40% base / 45% for touring, regional and First Nations-led productions.
24. Reverse the unfair tertiary arts fee increases from the Job-Ready Graduates programme, which produced a 30–50% reduction in arts and humanities enrolments.
25. Modernise tax settings for sole-trader dance artists: income averaging, FBT exemptions for arts not-for-profits, deductibility of injury treatment and compliance costs.
26. Recognise social enterprises in dance on the same terms as not-for-profits for government funding programs and venue hire subsidies.

Pillar 5: Reaching the Audience

For dance, the conventional distinction between 'audience' and 'participant' is almost meaningless. With over 961,000 Australians participating regularly in dance, and dance ranking third in children's activities nationally, the dominant mode of engagement is not watching — it is doing. Policy focused on audiences as ticket-buyers misses the vast majority of how dance operates in Australian life.

What Has Worked Under Revive

Some expansion of digital access and regional touring support has improved reach. Festivals Australia and Visions of Australia have supported regional activity. The recognition in Revive that engagement includes participation modes beyond attendance was an important framing shift.

What Has Not Worked — and the Gap We Ask the New Policy to Close

Evaluation frameworks continue to privilege attendance metrics over participation and wellbeing outcomes. Our 2026 survey asked where government should collaborate outside arts to support dance. Education was the overwhelming top priority (~86% of respondents) — confirming practitioners see dance as an essential educational tool, not an extracurricular add-on. Health was selected by ~74% of respondents, and Community Services by ~46%, reflecting the breadth of dance's social function.

BCARR Sectoral Analysis (2024) found that 76% of Australians would like to attend more performing arts events if barriers such as cost and accessibility were addressed — indicating substantial latent demand, not apathy. The barriers are structural, not cultural.

Recommendations — Pillar 5

27. Shift evaluation frameworks from attendance metrics to participation and wellbeing outcomes: health benefits, social connection, cultural identity and community cohesion.
28. Recognise participation — not spectatorship — as the primary mode of engagement with dance, and fund community dance programmes on that basis.
29. Establish formal cross-portfolio mechanisms with Health, Education, Employment, Aged Care and Community Services to fund dance as social infrastructure and preventative health.
30. Invest in community dance as a public health tool, drawing on the documented evidence for falls prevention, loneliness reduction, preventative health and mental health improvement.
31. Develop subsidised ticketing and participation bursary programmes addressing cost as the primary barrier to access.
32. Implement dance in education as a cross-portfolio priority, ensuring the Australian Curriculum (The Arts) is resourced and delivered by specialist teachers at all school levels.

The Evidence Base: Why Dance Is Essential Public Infrastructure

Every policy recommendation in this submission is grounded in evidence. This section sets out the peer-reviewed, government-sourced data that demonstrates dance's social value and makes the economic case for sustained investment.

Dance is among the most comprehensively evidenced physical and creative practices for human health across the entire lifespan. The peer-reviewed literature documents benefits spanning falls prevention, balance and functional mobility; reduction in anxiety, depression and stress; protection against cognitive decline, including in people living with Parkinson's disease and dementia; improvement in memory and neuroplasticity; reduction of loneliness and social isolation; development of body awareness, somatics and proprioception; and strengthening of cultural identity and self-esteem.

These are not peripheral effects — they are consistent findings across randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews. A cultural policy that funds dance is simultaneously investing in preventive health, mental health, aged care, education and community resilience. The evidence for each of these benefits is set out below.

Dance Reduces Falls — Australia's Costliest Health Condition

Falls are the single most expensive health condition treated by the Australian health system. According to the AIHW, injuries from falls cost $5.4 billion in 2023–24 — more than osteoarthritis, back pain, coronary heart disease or respiratory infection. As Australia's population ages, this cost will rise without intervention.

- **JAMA Network Open — systematic review and meta-analysis of 29 randomised clinical trials (2020):** Dance-based mind-motor activities were associated with a statistically significant 37% reduction in fall risk and 31% reduction in fall rate in healthy older adults, with additional significant benefits for balance, mobility and strength.

- **Frontiers in Sports and Active Living — systematic review (2025):** Dance interventions produce significant improvements in strength, balance and flexibility, contributing to fall prevention and maintenance of functional autonomy. Dance also reduces anxiety and depression, enhances mood, reduces loneliness and stimulates memory.
- **CultureCase — Using dance therapy to prevent falls: evaluation of Dance to Health (2025):** A programme integrating physiotherapy fall-prevention exercises with creative dance demonstrated improvements in balance, strength, flexibility, coordination and group bonding.

The policy implication is direct: investment in community dance for older Australians is a health intervention that reduces demand on a $5.4 billion falls budget.

Dance Reduces Loneliness — and Loneliness Is an Economic Crisis

Loneliness costs Australia an estimated $2.7 billion per year in health-care costs alone. People over 55 account for more than one-third of that cost. University of Sydney research (2025) finds more than 40% of young Australians are lonely.

- **Medical Journal of Australia (August 2024):** The total cost of loneliness in Australia is estimated at $2.7 billion in health-care costs per year, with additional uncounted costs from reduced productivity and educational outcomes.
- **PLOS ONE — global scoping review of dance interventions for older adults (2024):** Psychosocial and social functioning outcomes — including loneliness measures — showed benefits in 45.5% of tested outcomes across randomised trials.

A dance class in a community hall is simultaneously an arts programme, a falls prevention exercise, a loneliness intervention and a mental health support. It is also fun, fulfilling and enjoyable or as one specialist describes it *"dance is exercise in disguise"*. Policy that funds only one of those functions misses most of the return on investment.

Dance Supports Mental Health Across the Lifespan

- **PLOS ONE global scoping review (2024):** Mental health outcomes evaluated in 26 trials: dance interventions showed improvement in depression, anxiety, stress, self-efficacy and morale in 38.3% of conducted tests.
- **Dance for Wellness: Indigenous Adolescents' Perspectives (Tandfonline, 2024):** A four-week dance programme improved self-esteem, body image, confidence, mental health and wellness in Indigenous adolescents — identified by communities as culturally appropriate and effective for addressing intergenerational trauma.
- **For older adults:** dance protects against ageing-induced neurodegeneration, reduces the perception of pain, and maintains cognitive function and independence.
- **For people with Parkinson's, dementia or disability:** dance improves balance, functional mobility, body tone, stamina and gait.

Dance Strengthens Cultural Identity and Self-Esteem

Cultural identity is a recognised social determinant of health. For First Nations Peoples especially, connection to Cultural practice is directly linked to better health outcomes, higher self-esteem and protection from poor mental health.

- **Cultural Identity and SEWB in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children (Springer Nature, 2022):** Strong cultural identity promotes resilience, enhances self-esteem and protects from poor mental health.
- **Music as a Determinant of Health among First Nations People (Wiley, 2024):** Music, dance and song are vital components of present-day First Nations cultural healing practices, interconnected with language, family, community and Country.

Conclusion

The challenges facing Australia's dance sector are not new, and they are not mysterious. They have been documented consistently across four decades of consultation, research and submission. The new National Cultural Policy has an opportunity to align policy settings with established evidence and implement the structural changes the sector requires.

Dance reduces the $5.4 billion annual cost of falls. It counters the $2.7 billion annual cost of loneliness. It strengthens the cultural identity and self-esteem protecting mental health. **It is participated in by over a million Australians regularly, with 370,000 children dancing every week.**

Investment in dance is investment in a healthier, more connected, more culturally confident Australia.

> *"Dance is a natural part of life — as natural as language, as necessary as community, as powerful as medicine. It is time for policy to reflect what Australians already know and live."*
> **— Ausdance National, 2026**

Annex A: Endorsement of A New Approach (ANA) Key Actions

Ausdance National strongly endorses and supports the two key actions set out in ANA's landmark position paper Imagine 2035: Towards an arts and culture system that delivers for all Australians (July 2025), and urges their adoption alongside the new National Cultural Policy.

Action 1: Develop a 10-year National Arts and Culture Strategy, modelled on the National Sport Strategy (Sport Horizon), with an agreed national vision, principles, outcomes and measurements for long-term strategic cooperation across federal, state, territory and local governments. Ausdance specifically supports the inclusion of dance — as Australia's third most participated-in recreational activity — within the strategy's principles, priorities and measurement framework.

Action 2: Establish a Ministerial Council reporting to National Cabinet, focused on cultural access and the creative industries, to provide an enduring intergovernmental forum for structural reform and coordinated action. Dance's cross-portfolio relevance — to health, aged care, education, employment and community services — makes this kind of coordinating mechanism essential. Without it, dance will continue to fall through the gaps between portfolio silos.

Ausdance also draws on ANA's Transformative Edge 2024 report, which provides independently verified, metric-based evidence that cultural and creative engagement delivers measurable benefits across all five themes of Australia's wellbeing framework — prosperity, cohesion, security, health and sustainability. This evidence base directly substantiates the social return on investment case made throughout this submission.

Annex B: Endorsement of NAAE's Recommendation for a Sixth Pillar

Key Recommendation: Establish a sixth pillar within the National Cultural Policy — Arts Learning, Training and Pathways.

Ausdance National endorses the National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) recommendation that the new National Cultural Policy establish a dedicated sixth pillar for Arts Learning, Training and Pathways. The five existing pillars address participation, infrastructure, artists and audiences, but none provides the policy coherence required to treat arts education as the foundational national investment it is. Without a dedicated pillar, arts education remains split across portfolio silos — visible to neither the Arts nor the Education portfolio as a primary responsibility.

Dance is directly affected. Every professional dancer, teacher, choreographer and arts worker in Australia enters the sector through the education system — school, studio, TAFE or university. The pipeline argument made throughout this submission depends entirely on the health of that educational foundation. A sixth pillar is not supplementary to Ausdance's core asks: it is the structural precondition for all of them.

> *"Arts education is not a pipeline into the arts sector. It is the foundation of a culturally literate, creatively capable, economically resilient society. Policy must reflect that."*
> **— Ausdance National, in support of NAAE, 2026**

What the Sixth Pillar Would Do

The NAAE proposes a sixth pillar recognise arts education as essential national infrastructure and a shared responsibility across the Arts and Education portfolios, with the policy coherence, visibility and accountability to align existing commitments with practice on the ground. Ausdance supports this framing and the eight actions NAAE recommends to give it effect, summarised below.

NAAE Recommended Actions — Sixth Pillar: Arts Learning, Training and Pathways

1. Commission a National Inquiry into Arts Education and Training to establish a cross-portfolio evidence base and identify coordinated actions to strengthen participation, provision, equity and workforce sustainability.
2. Develop a National Arts Education Strategy aligning schooling, Initial Teacher Education, tertiary pathways and workforce development, with clear national targets, sustained investment and dedicated research.
3. Embed First Nations Leadership and Cultural Authority across arts education, ensuring First Nations-led curriculum, training and clear pathways into arts and cultural sector roles.
4. Fund Arts Education in Schools to ensure universal access: curriculum delivery, resources, teacher professional learning and a nationally coordinated Artist-in-Schools program.
5. Strengthen the Arts Education Workforce through targeted investment in teacher education and professional learning to address critical shortages and reduce out-of-field teaching.
6. Strengthen Tertiary Arts Education and Training Pathways to stabilise and expand Creative Arts programs across universities and TAFEs, and build stronger transitions from education into arts careers.
7. Fund Arts Professional Associations, Peak Bodies, Service Organisations and Cultural Institutions to expand access to high-quality arts learning and partnerships, particularly for students in regional, remote and disadvantaged communities.
8. Establish a national Arts Education Working Group jointly convened by the Office of the Arts and the Department of Education, with sector representation, to coordinate implementation and ensure policy coherence across the decade.

Why This Matters for Dance Specifically

Dance sits at the intersection of every action listed above. It is one of the five mandatory learning areas in the Australian Curriculum (The Arts), yet it is the most consistently under-resourced and most frequently taught out-of-field. Studio and community dance training — the grassroots foundation of the profession — receives no government support and operates with no nationally recognised qualification standard for teachers. University and TAFE dance programs have been among the hardest hit by the Job-Ready Graduates fee increases, with direct consequences for the professional pipeline.

A National Arts Education Strategy with dance explicitly named — as a curriculum area, a health intervention, a cultural practice and a vocational pathway — would address structural failures that no arts funding program alone can fix. Ausdance commits to active participation in any national inquiry, working group or strategy process established under this pillar, and calls on the government to convene that process as a matter of priority.

References

Participation and Sector Data

- **Australian Sports Commission — AusPlay Results 2023–24.** Dance ranked 3rd for children (behind swimming and soccer). 573,726 adult and 387,617 child regular participants nationally. https://www.ausport.gov.au/clearinghouse/research/ausplay/results
- **Australian Sports Commission — AusPlay Results 2024–25** (November 2025). First-ever dedicated activity reports for recreational dance and dancesport. https://www.ausport.gov.au/clearinghouse/research/ausplay/results
- **Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research (BCARR) — Revive: Sectoral Analysis** (December 2024). Cultural and creative sector contributed $67.4 billion (2.5% of GDP) in 2023–24. 76% of Australians want to attend more arts events if barriers removed. https://www.arts.gov.au/news/new-data-released-value-australias-cultural-and-creative-sector

Health Evidence — Falls

- **AIHW — Health system spending on disease and injury in Australia 2023–24.** Injuries from falls: $5.4 billion — the single highest-spending health condition in Australia. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/health-welfare-expenditure/health-system-spending-disease-injury-aus-2023-24/contents/summary
- **Bhatt T et al. — JAMA Network Open (2020).** Systematic review and meta-analysis of 29 RCTs: dance-based activities associated with 37% reduction in fall risk and 31% reduction in fall rate in healthy older adults. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7519422/
- **Frontiers in Sports and Active Living — Systematic review (July 2025).** Dance interventions show significant improvements in strength, balance and flexibility; fall prevention; reduced anxiety, depression and loneliness; improved memory. https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sports-and-active-living/articles/10.3389/fspor.2025.1594754/full
- **CultureCase — Using dance therapy to prevent falls: evaluation of Dance to Health (2025).** https://culturecase.org/research/2025/05/using-dance-therapy-prevent-falls/

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