

# Submission: Towards a new National Cultural Policy

22 May 2026

## Noro Music Therapy (Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy Australia)

Noro Music Therapy welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next National Cultural Policy. We are an NDIS-registered not-for-profit and one of Australia's largest employers of Registered Music Therapists and Community Musicians, delivering programs across aged care, disability, health, education and community settings throughout Western Sydney and NSW. We write from the front line of where arts and wellbeing meet.

## Culture is essential – and music therapy proves it

REVIVE states that culture is essential to our economy, our wellbeing and our sense of belonging. For music therapy, that is not an aspiration. It is a job description. Our therapists use music to help veterans process trauma, to bring older Australians living with dementia back into connection, and to give disabled children a voice. The paper notes that participation in culture is linked to better mental health and stronger communities. We deliver that link every day, as skilled professional practice.

## What we are seeing on the ground

Over the first 18 months of our REVIVE pilot, we have identified a growing and troubling gap: as NDIS funding is cut, people with disability are losing access to music-based programs – and with it, their participation in community life.

This matters because music is unlike almost any other activity. It is one of the very few in which people of widely varying capacities can take part together, meaningfully, at the same time.

A music group builds individual capacity, creates genuine community participation, and forms friendships that outlast the session. When that access is withdrawn, it is not a service that disappears – it is a person's connection to other people.

It is simply not acceptable that this cohort can no longer access music on their terms.

## The policy blind spot

Music therapists sit in a gap of their own. They are highly trained creative practitioners, but cultural policy tends to treat them as a health service while health and disability

systems treat them as artists. The result is a skilled creative workforce – and the communities it serves – with no secure home in either system. When one portfolio withdraws, there is no cultural-sector counterweight.

## What we ask for

**Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story.** Recognise inclusive music-making – in disability services, aged care and community settings – as genuine cultural participation, not merely clinical activity. For many people with disability, it is their primary means of taking part in cultural life at all.

**Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist.** Explicitly recognise Registered Music Therapists, and allied creative-health practitioners, as arts workers within the policy's definition of the creative workforce and bring them within the remit of Creative Workplaces.

**Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure.** Treat small, place-based not-for-profits as cultural infrastructure in their own right. Organisations like ours take years to build and can be undone quickly by a funding change in another portfolio. Cultural policy can provide the stability that single-portfolio funding cannot.

## In closing

Australia's next cultural policy should be brave enough to claim the full breadth of its workforce – and the audiences who depend on it most.

Music therapists and Community Musicians are artists. The Australians with disabilities and other challenges they work with are not recipients of a service; they are participants in our shared culture.

Protect that access, and the policy's promise that culture is essential, becomes something every Australian can feel.

Belinda Leonard  
Chief Executive Officer

Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy Australia