

22 May 2026

Office for the Arts
Canberra, ACT

RE: National Cultural Policy Submission

I am pleased to provide Library For All's submission to Australia's National Cultural Policy consultation. Library For All welcomes the Federal Government's ongoing commitment to inclusive arts, literature and creativity in Australian society, building on the successful delivery of Revive.

Library For All is a not-for-profit subsidiary of Save the Children Australia. We make this submission as Australia's leading child rights organisation, and as an organisation dedicated to supporting children's literacy and social and emotional wellbeing through access to culturally relevant children's books. Library For All has significant expertise working for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities to publish culturally relevant, locally authored storybooks, authentically reflecting First Nations identities and lived experiences, and have published almost 400 First Nations children's books with communities in ACT, NSW, NT, QLD, SA, and WA.

In the next National Cultural Policy, Library For All joins Australia Reads in calling for the Australian Government to invest in a reading nation.

Reading, stories, and storytelling are a pathway to education, connection, healing, and resilience.

Australia is facing a reading crisis, and children, particularly Indigenous Australian children, are being hardest hit by this crisis. Children must learn to read so they can successfully read to learn. Yet, recent report by the Grattan Institute found 1 in 3 Australian children can't read proficiently¹, and Indigenous children in remote areas are trailing non-Indigenous children by 14–20% in NAPLAN scores². By Year 7, roughly only 15% of remote Indigenous students meet reading benchmarks compared to ~90% of non-Indigenous peers³. The Grattan Institute report estimates that the results of these failings will cost the economy an estimated \$40 billion⁴.

¹ Hunter, J., Stobart, A., and Haywood, A. (2023). The Reading Guarantee: How to give every child the best chance of success. Grattan Institute

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2024, *2.04 Literacy and numeracy*, Indigenous Health Performance Framework, Australian Government, viewed 22 May 2026, <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-04-literacy-and-numeracy>

³ Ibid

⁴ Hunter, J., Stobart, A., and Haywood, A. (2023). The Reading Guarantee: How to give every child the best chance of success. Grattan Institute

In addition to needing foundational literacy skills, children who read for pleasure experience better mental health, future economic success, and personal and emotional capabilities,⁵ and children's books with authentic representation that reflect lived experiences or validates cultural identities is an essential component for children to establish meaningful connections to and enjoyment with reading. A 2023 U.S. study found that children previously struggling with literacy showed increased reading scores in just 5 months when intentionally provided with culturally reflective reading materials.⁶

The next National Cultural Policy must support the next generation of engaged and empathic readers by:

- Supporting creation and access to Indigenous Australian stories.
- Supporting access to books and reading for all communities.
- Elevating the profile of authors, illustrators, and publishers that reflect the diversity of Australia.
- Building the infrastructure for a reading culture.
- Increasing public commitment for children and young people as readers.

Revive Pillar 1: First Nations first

As the country's original storytellers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be at the centre of cultural policy to support reading. There is growing consensus that increased access to authentic, culturally diverse literature supports social cohesion by improving empathy and intercultural understanding and reducing prejudices.

Recommendations:

- Support First Nations-led reading programs in Indigenous communities and languages.
- Provide funding to support emerging and existing First Nations authors, illustrators, and publishers producing children's literature, particularly as AI disruptions have the potential to outsource authentic voices in the publishing industry.
- Fund school library collections to purchase contemporary First Nations titles and related teacher support materials.

⁵ Sun, Y.-J., Sahakian, B.J., Langley, C., Yang, A., Jiang, Y., Kang, J., Zhao, X., Li, C., Cheng, W. & Feng, J. 2024, 'Early-initiated childhood reading for pleasure: associations with better cognitive performance, mental well-being and brain structure in young adolescence', *Psychological Medicine*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 359–373, doi:10.1017/S0033291723001381.

⁶ [First Book Research & Insights](https://firstbook.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2023-Impact-of-a-Diverse-Classroom-Library-FINAL-9-6-23.pdf) 2023, *The impact of a diverse classroom library*, First Book, viewed 22 May 2026, <https://firstbook.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2023-Impact-of-a-Diverse-Classroom-Library-FINAL-9-6-23.pdf>

Revive Pillar 2: A place for every story

Every Australian child deserves access to diverse books and meaningful reading experiences. Communities around Australia, particularly in rural and regional areas, need support to access the high-quality books, authors and events that engage the whole community in reading culture.

Recommendations:

- Fund an Australian Book Voucher program for school students and young adults, redeemable at bookshops nationwide.
- Expand the LitUp authors in schools program to showcase diverse authors and illustrators and service all States and Territories, with a specific focus on schools in regional and rural areas.
- Provide schools with tools and resources to help parents and caregivers create positive home reading environments.

Revive Pillar 3: Centrality of the artist

Children need to see themselves and their communities reflected in the books they read, yet a 2018 study by the First Nations and People of Colour Writers Count (FNPOC Writers Count) found less than 1% of Australian books were by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander authors and only 7% were by People of Colour.⁷ Alongside support for more diverse authors, illustrators, and publishers, the profile of Australian creators must be elevated to make these stories easier for young readers to discover, countering saturation from big technology algorithms that discourages localised discoverability.

Recommendations:

- Fund national campaigns promoting diverse Australian stories and creators, championed by our country's bookshops and libraries.
- Support paid touring initiatives for diverse authors and illustrators to connect with readers, increasing events and book sales opportunities.
- Track the impact on reading engagement rates of Australians seeing themselves represented in a wide variety of Australian literature.

Revive Pillar 4: Strong cultural infrastructure

A healthy reading culture relies on a strong infrastructure of bookshops, libraries, schools, and publishers. With rising costs and changing social and digital pressures, these institutions need

⁷ Russell, K. 2023, 'Who sees themselves in the books they read? An analysis of diversity in CBCA shortlisted middle-grade literature', *Bound Blog*, Bowen Street Press, 23 August, viewed 22 May 2026, <https://bowenstreetpress.com/bound-blog/2023/8/23/who-sees-themselves-in-the-books-they-read-an-analysis-of-diversity-in-cbca-shortlisted-middle-grade-literature>

support to continue inspiring today's young readers and facilitating equitable access to books in communities.

Recommendations:

- Mandate a library in every school, with qualified staff and collection funds.
- Invest in data systems to increase visibility of Australian books, track buying and borrowing patterns across print, audio and ebooks, and make it easier to find and access Australian titles.
- Back a national book club program to reach new readers, through existing library and bookshop infrastructure.

Revive Pillar 5: Engaging the audience

To get more Australians reading more often, we need targeted campaigns that increase the visibility of reading and empower more Australians – from children to adults – to add books into their daily lives.

Recommendations:

- Invest in a series of targeted, research-backed campaigns for children and families that address barriers to reading.
- Track and share reading rates across age groups, monitoring uptake and capturing how Australians discover, access and interact with books.
- Sponsor the National Reading Symposium, increasing industry skills and leadership to drive increased reading participation.

Thank you for considering Library For All's views on the importance of investing in a reading nation for the next National Cultural Policy. We would be happy to provide more information, or to discuss ways that Library For All can support you in reviewing and improving the National Cultural Policy to support the critical needs of Australian children.

To discuss this submission or for more information, please contact Zola Maddison, Head of Programs, at [REDACTED]

Kind regards,



Zola Madison,
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