

To the Honourable Tony Burke,

Beyond Empathy (BE) is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the consultation process of the next National Cultural Policy and offers this submission for consideration.

Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place was a significant moment for the Australian Community Arts and Cultural Development Sector (CACD) as it was a step towards recognising the scale and scope of social and cultural impact from our field and method.

We extend our appreciation and highlight the positive impact Revive has had on the creative economy and community. However, alongside an alliance of CACD organisations and practitioners, we are concerned that unless Community Arts and Cultural Development is formally recognised and resourced in the next National Cultural Policy, the aims and values of Revive will not be fully realised.

Key Recommendations Summary

- **Formal Recognition**

Explicitly recognise Community Arts and Cultural development within the new cultural policy as a distinct and essential field of practice.

- **Establish a National CACD Entity**

Embed a national body dedicated to CACD within Creative Australia to lead coordination, advocacy, research and sector development.

- **Increased investment in CACD practice**

Supporting local arts initiatives that strengthen social cohesion and foster belonging in Australian communities

- **Invest in Workforce & Practice Sustainability**

Support training, mentoring, wellbeing and trauma-informed practice frameworks specific to the needs of CACD practice.

- **Reform Funding Models**

Shift to long-term, place-based and relational investment models for CACD practice.

- **Embed CACD Across Policy Areas**

Position CACD across health, disaster management, climate adaptation, justice, education and regional development.

- **Strengthen Research & Evaluation**

Further develop national CACD data, impact measurement and evidence frameworks.

- **Equity of Access**

Ensure equitable access to funding, resources and participation nationwide.

What is CACD?

Community Arts is cultural democracy in action.

Community Arts is the creation and sharing of new artwork by professional artists and non-professional artists collaborating as equals through a process in which the final outcomes and artwork is not pre-determined or known.

Cultural Development is the foundation of cultural representation and access.

Community cultural development is a strengths-based community development framework which builds the capacity, social connections and resilience of communities through investing in their artists, cultural leaders and cultural infrastructure.

Beyond Empathy is a community arts and cultural development company founded in 2004 and working with remote and regional communities throughout Australia. We're a not for profit organisation and a sector leader in delivering both levers of CACD methodology:

1. Partnering long term with communities considered disadvantaged or marginalised to co-create new Australian works which reflect their lived experience and then share this work on the national stage.
2. Investing in emerging artists and cultural leaders experiencing recurring trauma, hardship and systemic pressure.

We co-produce artworks, films, exhibitions, performances to tell their own stories and share their own culture.

These communities are often considered disadvantaged such as public housing communities, or people experiencing homelessness, compounding trauma, mental illness, systemic oppression, incarceration, disability and much more.

But we know that despite the downward systemic pressures, these communities have stories and culture that we all benefit from.

Not as lessons or case studies but as cultural leaders and artists in their own right.

Our primary goal is cultural democracy.

Access to mainstream culture and arts participation as audience is not enough. The Community Arts methodology enacts the human right and resources for participants to create and share culture on their own terms.

Community Art projects are not simply for people to individually 'tell their story' but instead it is a self-aware and self-determined act of a group of people interfering with the world around them. The work produced is created to be shared and to have systemic and cultural impact.

This leads to social cohesion, brings together diverse groups, develops cultural competency, strengthens intergenerational contact, builds capacity for communities to respond to crises and is a protective factor against radicalisation.

We use the involvement of local support providers in the delivery of our programs to broker relationships that help build and strengthen local support networks.

And, we use the public presentation of artistic products created in Beyond Empathy's arts workshops and activities to engage with the broader community and encourage an understanding of, and a dialogue about specific issues relevant to participants and their communities.

Our secondary goal is social impact.

Participating in community arts is also a bridging, engagement and development tool.

We often refer to what we do as providing the "glue" that allows communities to come together. Participating in community arts is also a bridging, engagement and development tool.

Beyond Empathy's programs additionally use art as a mechanism to engage young people and provide them with a fun, safe space in which to explore the issues that influence their lives and trial new ways of being..

The projects provide a forum through which to connect people and broker relationships between them. We help participants to develop skills, build a positive sense of what they are capable of, strengthen their support network and take responsibility for themselves and their future.

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Social Cohesion & CACD

Beyond Empathy's understanding of social cohesion aligns with Multicultural NSW's model of resilience building. We believe social cohesion is goal and process which requires a diverse, pluralist society in harmony with all voices able to be seen, valued and heard.

We believe that CACD is the method by which this is most effective, inclusive and cost effective. We know that through the process of gathering, collaborating, experimenting and sharing stories that participants and communities learn new ideas, build and bridge social capital, develop yet go beyond empathy and into relationship.

These unique relationships are critical for breaking down prejudices, connecting distrustful neighbours and building capacity to respond quickly to disaster and conflict.

Every pillar of REVIVE describes fundamental principles of CACD practice, yet it is not recognised.

And if it remains unrecognised then Australian society misses out on a critical, cost effective and impactful tool to develop national culture, cultivate a thriving arts sector and embed cultural creative practice in every day Australians.

At a time when audience development and community engagement in arts institutions requires adaptation, CACD has so much to offer.

We have established trusting relationships with audiences and communities who would never step into a theatre or a museum.

Practical Projects

We understand that the CACD methodology is not commonly known. So we've provided brief descriptions of Beyond Empathy's past projects.

Parting: Parting worked with families to interweave fictional stories about death and dying from people who have experienced hardship and disadvantage. The project explored the lower life expectancy of people living in public housing with workshops, connections and dialogue.

Through audio, storytelling, multi-media and live performance, stories became accessible and relevant to a broad audience. Parting prioritised dignity, building personal and family agency to deal with the related emotions of grief and loss, longing and belonging when in crisis.

Ready Steady: Studies show that the more words children hear in early childhood, especially words of encouragement, the better their educational experiences and the more opportunities they have later in life. Ready Steady focused on improving early literacy development for children in welfare dependent areas by engaging parents in dynamic language development.

We collaborated with families using film, storytelling, audio recordings, and performance to boost the number of words children encounter and to ensure more of them are words of encouragement.

Blue Rose: Blue Rose was a project created with people of diverse abilities and their families about the experience of those who do not use verbal language as their primary way to communicate. Over several years the project's content, activities and workshops were led by the interests of the participants.

The team developed a way of experiencing the completed film, inspired by its stars. The result was a series of immersive installations which enabled visitors to play with shadows and light and create visual echoes as they walk through interactive projections.

Beyond Empathy is represented in the national alliance of leading community arts organisations and practitioners to unite in our submission recommendations.

Please see the attached statement.. Beyond Empathy welcomes the next National Cultural Policy and are thankful for the opportunity to provide feedback in the consultation process.

Please do not hesitate to contact myself or the Beyond Empathy team if you require any clarification or have any questions.

Warm regards,



Alice Burns-McClintock

CEO

Beyond Empathy



Dear Minister Burke,

We write to you as a national alliance of **Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD)** organisations and independent practitioners working at the forefront of arts, culture and community life across Australia.

Our collective practice - Community Arts and Cultural Development - sits at the intersection of creativity, community and public value, cultivating social cohesion, strengthening resilience, and enabling meaningful cultural participation in communities experiencing both opportunity and increasing complexity.

We welcome the review of the REVIVE National Cultural Policy as a critical moment to ensure that Australia's cultural framework reflects the full breadth of creative practice shaping our nation.

Through this submission, we seek to highlight the essential role of Community Arts and Cultural Development as the social and relational cultural practice that enables communities to participate in, shape and sustain cultural life—making REVIVE's vision of "a place for every story" achievable in practice.

By relational practice, we refer to long-term, trust-based, community-led creative processes that build connection, participation and collective capacity. Known across Australia through traditions of community arts, community arts and cultural development, socially engaged practice, applied arts and arts for social change, this work has a long and significant history of enabling diverse communities to express, shape and sustain the cultural life of the nation.

Drawing on lived experience across regional, remote and metropolitan communities, and informed by national research and policy priorities, we offer both evidence and practical recommendations to strengthen the next cultural policy's capacity to deliver on equity, access, participation and cultural democracy.

We look forward to contributing constructively to this process and to working with the government to ensure that no community is left behind in Australia's cultural future.

Key Recommendations summary

1. **Formal Recognition**
Explicitly recognise Community Arts and Cultural development within the new cultural policy as a distinct and essential field of practice.
2. **Establish a National CACD Entity**
Embed a national body dedicated to CACD within Creative Australia to lead coordination, advocacy, research and sector development.
3. **Increased investment in CACD practice**

Supporting local arts initiatives that strengthen social cohesion and foster belonging in Australian communities

4. **Invest in Workforce & Practice Sustainability**

Support training, mentoring, wellbeing and trauma-informed practice frameworks specific to the needs of CACD practice.

5. **Reform Funding Models**

Shift to long-term, place-based and relational investment models for CACD practice.

6. **Embed CACD Across Policy Areas**

Position CACD across health, disaster management, climate adaptation, justice, education and regional development.

7. **Strengthen Research & Evaluation**

Further develop national CACD data, impact measurement and evidence frameworks.

8. **Equity of Access**

Ensure equitable access to funding, resources and participation nationwide.

Recognising Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD)

To deliver on REVIVE's vision of *"a place for every story,"* the government must invest in the people, practices and relationships that ensure those often-invisible stories are seen, heard and valued. **Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) is that infrastructure and must be recognised, resourced and embedded as the cornerstone of Australia's cultural future.**

What is CACD?

Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) is a nationally embedded, practice-led field of arts and cultural activity that leads to **social cohesion, resilience and collective wellbeing**.

Through long-term, place-based and relational arts practice, CACD enables communities to:

- Respond to complex social, environmental and economic challenges
- Process lived experience
- Be creative
- Experience aesthetic enrichment
- Gain knowledge, ideas and insight
- Engage with and appreciate diverse cultural expressions
- Break down barriers and build connections and trust
- Challenge prejudices
- Present creative experiences to audiences which inspire, challenge and provoke perceptions, building greater understanding and awareness for those most marginalised, and present voices rarely heard on the mainstage
- Through participatory engagement grow new audiences for Australia's creative sector, many of whom would not otherwise attend theatre performances or visual art exhibitions

CACD operates across arts, health, education, justice, community services, disaster management, climate adaptation and social policy—delivering outcomes that extend far beyond traditional cultural metrics.

Our vision of social cohesion is a diverse, connected and socially healthy nation where cultural and creative practice is recognised as **essential infrastructure** supporting cultural, social, ecological, economic and civic harmony.

The Gap in REVIVE

Despite its national reach and impact, CACD is **not explicitly recognised within the current REVIVE policy framework**.

This absence limits:

- Visibility of a critical cross-sector creative practice
- Effectiveness of policy outcomes related to inclusion, access and participation
- Capacity to mobilise creative practice in response to compounding national challenges (social fragmentation, economic inequality, climate, disaster)

Without CACD, REVIVE risks overlooking the **primary mechanism through which many Australians meaningfully engage with arts and culture**.

This gap is particularly significant in light of national policy and research priorities that emphasise:

- Equity and inclusion (e.g. *The Arts and Disability Associated Plan*, 2024)
- Cultural diversity and representation (*Towards Equity 2*, 2026)
- Audience diversification and participation (*Leading Change*, Deakin University & Creative Australia, 2024)
- Youth engagement (Creative Industries Youth Advisory Group)
- Multicultural participation (Australian Government Multicultural Framework Review response)
- Community and First Nations led Climate adaptation and recovery - National Climate Risk Assessment <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/policy/adaptation/ncra>

Collectively, these frameworks identify participation, representation and access as central policy challenges—**all of which CACD directly addresses in practice**.

Structural Under-recognition and Under-resourcing of CACD

Despite its central role in delivering public value, CACD remains **structurally under-recognised and under-resourced within national funding frameworks**.

Analysis of the *Creative Australia Annual Report 2024–25* indicates CACD receives approximately \$13–15 million in total investment within an overall funding pool of approximately \$237.4 million, representing only ~5–6% of total national arts investment. It sits well below major artforms like Music ~18 and Visual Arts ~14%. On face value, this positions CACD as a minor category within the cultural economy. However, this figure is **structurally misleading**.

CACD is not a niche artform—it is a **cross-cutting methodology** underpinning work across First Nations arts and culture, theatre, music, dance, visual arts, literature, digital media and community-led initiatives. As a result:

- Community-engaged practice is funded across multiple panels
- Outcomes are embedded within broader programs (including First Nations, multi-year funding and cross-sector initiatives)
- There is **no consistent mechanism to track or report CACD-aligned investment**.

This produces a systemic distortion:

Undercounting

Community-engaged practice is dispersed and not consistently identified across funding streams, masking its true scale and reach.

Undervaluation

With only ~5–6% explicitly labelled, CACD appears marginal—reinforcing the perception that it is peripheral rather than foundational, and constraining the case for proportional investment.

Policy Misalignment

This contradicts national commitments to access, participation, equity and cultural democracy embedded across REVIVE and associated frameworks, weakening their implementation.

Why This Matters

This is not simply a reporting issue—it has **material policy consequences**.

- What is not counted is not prioritised
- What is not visible is not scaled
- What is not recognised is not sustained

At a time when Australia is seeking to:

- Increase arts participation (National Arts Participation Survey, 2025/26)
- Address systemic inequities in access and representation
- Strengthen social cohesion and community resilience

The under-recognition of CACD **limits the effectiveness of national cultural policy itself**.

Recent mapping work ([Where Community Meets Creativity, 2025](#)) demonstrates the breadth of CACD activity across Australia, particularly in:

- Regional and remote communities
- Disaster-impacted areas
- Diverse and marginalised populations

Yet this scale of activity is not reflected in funding visibility, measurement frameworks, proportional investment or policy architecture.

As outlined in this submission, CACD provides the **relational infrastructure** that enables communities to connect, adapt and respond—particularly in contexts of social change, climate disruption, and recovery. Without increased, clearly identified and trackable investment, this infrastructure remains fragile, limiting both its impact and its capacity to meet growing national demand for community-driven solutions to complex challenges.

Policy Implication

If government is serious about cultural inclusion, social cohesion and equitable access, CACD must be:

- Recognised as **core cultural infrastructure**, a cornerstone of Australia’s cultural future not a marginal category
- **Properly measured** across all funding streams, not confined to a single panel
- **Equitably invested** alongside other artforms within Creative Australia, ensuring inclusive, community-led cultural practice is valued and resourced on an equal footing.
- Resourced in proportion to its **cross-sector impact and national reach**

Until CACD is accurately counted, it will continue to be underfunded. And while it remains underfunded, Australia’s cultural system will continue to fall short of its commitments to **equity, participation and inclusion**.

What CACD Delivers

Through its community centred creative process, CACD delivers outcomes across multiple policy domains:

Social

- Improves social cohesion
- Increases sense of belonging
- Improves mental and physical wellbeing
- Strengthens relationships and trust
- Bridges social difference without erasing it
- Produces innovative and transformative solutions to challenges faced by communities
- Creates safer, inclusive spaces for expression and connection where people feel valued
- Increases sense of safety and security

Economic

- Builds local economies through creative participation
- Develops skills and workforce pathways
- Builds resilience

Civic

- Advances democracy
- Amplifies community voice
- Builds civic trust and participation
- Enables culturally responsive policy design
- Builds shared identity and civic participation

Environmental

- Inspires environmental stewardship and supports First Nations led environmental stewardship
- Deepens ecological understanding
- Supports climate response and adaptation
- Activates place-based sustainability practices

Outcome:

CACD builds the creative **relational infrastructure** that enables communities to mobilise, adapt and thrive.

How CACD Works

CACD is not a single artform—it is a **creative methodology** grounded in:

- Equity and access
- Community-led decision making
- Cultural democracy
- Long-term relationship building
- Lived experience as expertise
- Trauma informed practice

It is:

- Place-based
- Intersectional
- Cross-sectoral
- Responsive and adaptive

It prioritises **ongoing engagement over one-off delivery**, ensuring sustained impact.

Alignment with REVIVE Pillars

CACD strengthens all five pillars of REVIVE:

1. First Nations First

- Supports self-determined cultural activity, storytelling and long-term cultural relationships
- Builds respectful, long-term relationships with First Nations community and organisations

2. A Place for Every Story

- Ensures all voices – particularly underrepresented communities - are visible and valued
- Activates storytelling as a tool for inclusion and equity

3. Centrality of the Artist

- Recognises community artists as essential cultural workers
- Supports practice that is collaborative, relational and socially embedded
- Actively invests in arts career pathways for emerging artists and arts workers of diverse backgrounds

4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

- Positions CACD as social infrastructure

5. Engaging the Audience

- Moves beyond audiences to participation and co-creation
- Reaches diverse audiences that experience barriers to participation in the arts
- Builds lifelong cultural engagement through belonging and agency

Priority Communities

CACD plays a critical role in engaging:

- First Nations Communities
- Children and young people
- Refugee and migrant communities
- d/Deaf and disabled communities
- LGBTQIA+ communities
- People of Colour
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Communities experiencing racism and marginalisation
- Seniors
- Regional and remote communities

- Disaster-impacted communities

It ensures these communities are **not just included in, but actively shaping cultural life reflective of lived experiences.**

Key Recommendations

1. Formal Recognition

Explicitly recognise CACD within the new cultural policy as a distinct and essential field of creative practice and core cultural infrastructure.

2. Establish a National CACD Entity

Create a national body within Creative Australia to:

- Advocate for the CACD sector
- Develop and safeguard CACD practice frameworks
- Coordinate national collaboration amongst CACD practitioners
- Lead research, evaluation and data collection to further understand and communicate the impact of CACD
- Strengthen cross-sector partnerships
- Amplify community voice in policy

3. Increased investment in CACD practice

Invest in local place-based arts initiatives that:

- Strengthen social cohesion
- Foster belonging in Australian communities
- Build local capacity and agency
- Promote well-being and inclusion

4. Invest in Workforce & Practice Sustainability

Invest in:

- Training, mentoring and professional development specific to CACD practice
- Support for emerging and established CACD practitioners
- Professional supervision and wellbeing frameworks specific to CACD practice
- Recognition of frontline, trauma-informed practice

5. Reform Funding and Measurement Systems

- **Introduce** cross-program tracking of CACD-aligned investment
- **Report annually on** total community-engaged funding (direct + embedded)
- **Shift from short-term project funding to** long-term, place-based investment models for CACD practice
- **Resource** the relational and ongoing nature of CACD practice

6. Embed CACD Across Government Policy

Position CACD as a **cross-government delivery mechanism** across:

- Health and wellbeing
- Disaster preparedness and recovery
- Climate adaptation
- Social services and Justice
- Regional development
- Education and community development

7. **Strengthen Research & Evaluation**

- Invest in and support activation of national CACD data collection and impact measurement
- Build Partnership with research institutions
- Align with national datasets (participation, equity, diversity)
- Ensure CACD informs evidence-based policy

8. **Equity of Access**

Guarantee equitable access to:

- Funding and resources
- Cultural participation opportunities
- Networks and infrastructure

Particularly for:

- First Nations communities
- Regional and remote communities
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Disabled and marginalised groups
- Children and young people

Why This Matters Now

Australia is facing:

- Social fragmentation
- Increasing climate instability
- Rising inequality
- Compounding disaster impacts

These are not just policy challenges—they are **relational challenges**.

CACD provides the creative, relational and community-led infrastructure required to respond. Social cohesion is not a fixed outcome — it is an aspirational ongoing goal. CACD practice achieves outcomes across the cultural, social, environmental, economic, and civic policy domains that help move Australian society towards this goal.

Through creativity, cultural practice and collective expression, CACD:

- Builds a sense of belonging and connectedness
- Deepens understandings and appreciation of others
- Strengthens trust

- Enables voice and agency

These are relational outcomes that represent the human infrastructure of a healthy society and ones that cannot be achieved by policy alone.

Conclusion

CACD is how communities come together in times of change, crisis and recovery. Through creativity, aesthetic enrichment, ideas, and cultural practice, CACD builds belonging, appreciation of difference, voice and connection—things policy alone can't achieve. We need the next iteration of REVIVE to recognise and resource this work so no community is left behind.

To realise the vision of REVIVE, it must be **recognised, resourced and embedded as a cornerstone of Australia's cultural future.**

#REVIVECOMMUNITYARTS

The Alliance of Community Arts and Cultural Development organisations and individuals that have formulated this submission:

Australian Disability Arts Network
Creative Climate
Creative Recovery Network
Diversity Arts Australia
Arts 7 Cultural Exchange
ActNow Theatre
Beyond Empathy
Community Arts Network WA
Curious works
Crossroad Arts
DADAA
Darwin Community Arts
Footscray Community Arts
Sharing Stories Foundation
Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company
Vulcana Circus
Western edge
Wilurarra Creative

Alissar Chidiac
Claudia Chidiac
Emmanuel Asante
Moale James-Proud
Nathan Stoneham
Paula Abood
Scotia Monkivitch
Travis Tiddy

Practitioners and organisations supporting this document and its recommendations can be found here at revivecommunityarts.com/statement