

Submission from the Children, Young People and the Arts (CYPA) Advisory.

We acknowledge the First Nations people on all the lands we are from across Australia and the powerful leadership in culture, identity and intergenerational connection that is offered by First Nations communities

Who are we?

This group is the Children and Young People's Theatre and Performing Arts Sector Advisory (CYPA) linked to the global association for theatre and performance for with and by children and young people – ASSITEJ International. It has representatives in Northern Territory, Queensland, Regional South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, all of whom are signatories to this submission. It is a vital part of Theatre Network Australia (TNA)'s strategic focus, supported by TNA, and as an Advisory, works to connect with the CYPA sector in all states and territories.

We write with deep knowledge of the Australian performing arts sector, working across art forms of dance, theatre, participation, community arts, circus, multi-disciplinary and experimental arts, and across several age groups – from pre-walking children, to teens and young adults. We work to create performance for young audiences, with children and young people in collaboration, and to create and present work by young people.

This moment

Having a working National Cultural Policy is a first. Feeding into the next one at this stage, when so much has already been achieved, is a great opportunity for the arts sector. The Federal Government is to be congratulated for identifying the need for celebrating strong cultural identity for our country, led by First Nations and with deep consideration of the artistic community, through a National Cultural Policy.

Addressing this sector's marginalisation and its importance

The Minister says in his introduction to the consultation paper: "If we get it right, it will help us see ourselves more clearly and as we learn about each other, the world will come to know us better." We urge the need for children and young people to be included in this vision for identity if we are to have any long term impact.

Children and young people have fundamental human rights to play, to access culture, and to engage with complex art, to have opportunities for self-expression and to have a voice and be heard, as stated in Articles 31, 13 and 12 in the UN Declaration of the Right of the Child. This benefits their holistic wellbeing and contributes significantly to our cultural fabric, community cohesion, and national identity. If we are to be serious about lifelong engagement in the arts, this must begin from the youngest age.

Yet currently, **there is a strategic blind spot for children and young people's arts**, resulting in limited access and underfunding, reinforcing systemic disadvantage. Children and young people under 25 years old make up 29% of Australia's population. *Revive's* articulation of children and young people as creators or participants in the arts outside of education is limited, and it contains few specific actions related to this cohort, especially children. This submission distinguishes between different age groups (children 0-12, young people 13-17 and young people 18-24) acknowledging their distinct developmental stages and challenges, urging recognition of their pivotal role in shaping cultural narratives. We wish to underscore the transformative potential of arts engagement from early childhood to early adulthood, highlighting its critical importance in fostering creativity and contributing to a more inclusive society. **Children need this focus because they are so often not counted**: one example is the National Arts Participation survey (Creative Australia) which only counts young people over the age of 15. Adult understanding of the current adult-bias and the benefits of early participation is crucial to ensure art for children and young people is adequately funded and widely accessible.

The 6th Pillar – Next Generation Now

We acknowledge that the Minister for Home affairs, Immigration, Cyber Security and the Arts, has indicated strongly that currently the intent is to not have any more pillars created in the next National Cultural Policy. However, we support the strong push to have recognition embedded structurally through an extra pillar in the National Cultural Policy – one for **Children and Young People: Next Generation Now**. This submission supports this as an ideal outcome, knowing that the marginalised population of 29%, that includes children and young people from birth to 25 years, cuts across all sectors in government as well as all art forms and across all pillars in this policy. We stand in solidarity with the wider sector, including youth arts, arts education and other art forms who focus on this age group, in calling for stronger national recognition of children and young people in cultural policy.

Without this dedicated policy focus, we urge that children and young people be considered across all pillars for their equitable access to the arts.

Our recommendations in brief.

Strategy, policy and self-determination: Ensure decision-making for the sector is cohesive, efficient and informed by the specific needs and aspirations of children and young people.

1. Create and implement a 10 year strategy for Children, Young People and the Arts, in collaboration with children, young people and sector cultural workers.
2. Develop and implement a Children and Young People’s Advisory body, working with sector professionals to ensure authentic methodologies of collaboration. This would work in tandem with Office for Youth’s Creative Industries Youth Advisory Group and feed into the Strategy.

Targeted investments: Increase the support and security for children and young people’s arts to ensure the vitality of the sector.

3. Increased investment in organisations that create work for, with and by children and young people.
4. Dedicated funding for children and young people projects, that encompasses work created across all age groups, and for the youth arts sector who develop work by young people.

Supported pathways and capacity building: Support the sector, its emerging leaders, and the organisations, children and young people they serve, to increase their capacity and ensure sustainability

5. Professional development funding, and supported mentorships and placements for First Nations and D/deaf and/or Disabled leaders and emerging artists in this sector
6. Commission national audience development strategies for children and young people’s arts to reduce barriers to access

Why is this sector important?

Early cultural engagement predicts lifelong participation

Decades of research show that lifelong arts attendance is strongly predicted by exposure before age nine – particularly when experiences are child-led, not just school-based. Without deliberate investment, the sector risks losing future audiences. (Andersen, 2025)

Children and young people are cultural citizens now, not just “future audiences”

They create, produce, and participate in art today. (Andersen, 2025) Their work shapes new practices, from the way a baby audience will challenge what theatre is, to digital storytelling to youth-driven performance festivals. Recognising them as cultural citizens honours their rights and agency.

A strategic investment in Australia’s future workforce

Arts participation builds workplace readiness via collaboration, communication, creativity, and problem-

solving – the human capabilities flagged as essential in the *Working Futures: Employment White Paper (Treasury 2023)*.

Strengthening wellbeing and resilience

Arts engagement reduces anxiety and depression, strengthens parent–infant attachment, and builds resilience. At a time of rising youth mental ill-health and loneliness, the arts are a low-stigma, community-based prevention tool. Arts and cultural programs provide safe spaces for expression, community, and hope.

Equity and access cannot be left to chance

Without clear policy, arts access remains concentrated among privileged, inner-urban families. A stand-alone pillar or a dedicated 10 year strategic approach, ensures national reach – across regional, remote, and under-resourced communities – preventing the entrenchment of inequality.

Parents and carers need support to unlock opportunities

Parents and adults around children and young people are cultural gatekeepers. (Giles and Abrahams 2024) Policy must enable all parents and carers to access child-centred cultural experiences, not just the privileged in metropolitan areas.

Children’s arts experiences drive literacy and learning

Storytelling, music, drama, and visual arts build “first literacies” and learning dispositions like curiosity and persistence. Memory and interpretation, “reading’ the human condition, are fuelled by performing arts experiences. (Andersen, 2025)

Whole-of-government alignment

A dedicated strategy for children and young people reinforces and aligns with other national strategies – from the *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Department of Education, 2022)* to *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025-2034) (Government, 2024)*, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Government, 2020)*, and *Measuring What Matters (Government, 2023)* Cultural policy becomes a driver of wellbeing, education, equity, and social cohesion.

Visibility and priority

Children and young people must be seen and heard in our new National Cultural Policy. Arts for children and young people are undervalued due to societal perceptions that prioritise adult cultural participation. This bias often relegates children and young people’s participation to education rather than acknowledging the need for diverse, rigorous, and meaningful artistic experiences.

Accountability

The cultural rights and contributions of children and young people are not optional, but central to national policy with accountability. (United Nations, 1990) With this comes the need to recognise specialisation and expertise – we have the artists who can deliver arts engagement on every level of engagement from birth to early years through to tertiary education, in communities and in non-traditional spaces – in every place where children and young people are.

How children and young people intersect with the current National Cultural Policy Pillars.

Pillar 1 — First Nations First

Recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia’s arts and culture

Revive 1.0 places First Nations First and we recognise and acknowledge the government’s strong commitment and record of achievement. First Nations leadership must shape how First Nations stories, languages and ways of knowing reach Australia’s children. There must be recognition of the importance of intergenerational learning and the place of family and community in cultural access and strong identity for children growing up. Entry points to the sector are challenging due to the deficit in training, leadership support, pathways, lack of sector value and audience development. Barriers to engagement in the arts for

young people include differing levels of shame and self-consciousness due to limited cultural support, and a lack of cultural protocols, community permissions or co-design processes. (Office for the Arts 2025)

Pillar 2 — A Place for Every Story^[1]_[SEP]

Reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

All Australians must include children from birth, acknowledging their rights to complex art created for with and by them. (United Nations 1990) The diversity of Australian children and young people must be reflected as audiences for and creators of art, wherever they are. Currently this is not the case. Lifelong engagement with the arts begins at birth.

Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist

Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators.

The arts sector working with children and young people has been systematically de-funded, and the sector struggles with chronic under investment, low value and lack of recognition. (Gattenhof & Saunders, 2026) The CYPA sector lacks cultural and linguistic diversity and safe cultural pathways for greater inclusion. Currently only six children's theatre organisations hold multiyear federal funding nationally, with no ongoing federally funded children's theatre company in New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory or the Australian Capital Territory and no youth dance companies receiving federal funding. Australian artists are recognised nationally and internationally for their expertise in making work for, by and with children and young people, doing this in safe and equitable ways to support the authentic agency and power of participants.(Andersen, 2025)

Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage.

Children's theatre - whether youth arts, organisations creating work for young audiences, or artists working in communities or schools – is always cultural and social. The intersection of wellbeing, development, happiness and hope with arts experiences is well documented and researched. The artists and organisations who work in this sector have skills, methods and deep knowledge of the impact of their work.

We urgently need dedicated multi-year organisational funding as a sector, to provide sustainable access, pathways, arts eco-systems, continuity and employment in our sector. Strong cultural infrastructure for children is not a smaller version of the infrastructure that serves adult audiences. It needs distinct funding architecture, distinct producing capacity, distinct touring infrastructure, and distinct policy recognition. Without it, cultural participation as part of childhood becomes rhetoric rather than reality.

Pillar 5 — Engaging the Audience

Making sure our stories connect with people at home and abroad.

Children currently do not have equitable access to theatre and performance created for, with and by them. There is significant evidence that children and young people with lower socio-economic status are less likely to have access to or participate in the arts (Creative Australia 2023, *Widening the Lens: Social inequality and Arts Participation*)

The barriers for children and young people include the fact that they have no buying power themselves - their adults are the gatekeepers to cultural experiences. Children under the age of 15 are not counted in the Creative Australia National Arts Participation survey.

Lack of specialised programs and training excludes many young d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse children and young people from arts engagement. There is very little self-determined d/Deaf and disabled-led artistic practice created for children and young people, and a particular need for training and knowledge growth in neuro-inclusive artistic practice.

Arts and cultural spaces are frequently not welcoming, inclusive or accessible to d/Deaf or disabled children or young people, with research citing physical, psycho-social, financial and sensory barriers to participating or attending arts programs or events.

Lack of parent, carer or family interest in arts and cultural activities creates negative role models and acts as a barrier to young people's creative participation, even if there are no associated participation costs. There can also be a belief that arts engagement is reserved for the wealthy, privileged or exceptionally talented.

Internationally the Australian children's theatre sector is respected and tours extensively. Australian Youth Arts practitioners hold worldwide leadership in expertise. The national picture is not so rosy. We need a dedicated audience development project that works in partnership with venues, festivals and cultural institutions to educate and raise awareness of the vital contribution of work created for, by and with children and young people, and the need to include – proactively and with enthusiasm – this marginalised population.

Our recommendations - steps towards inclusion

Recommendation 1: Create and implement a 10 year strategy for children, young people and the arts, in collaboration with children, young people and sector cultural workers.

Apply a children and young people's lens across every aspect of Creative Australia's work, e.g., in investment, peers and industry advisors, leadership and capacity building programs, service delivery programs, staff recruitment, data collection, evaluation and research.

The strategy should:

- Have consideration for the different needs of children aged 0-12, young people aged 13-17 and young people aged 18-25
- Consider the intersectionality of children and young people with other communities of interest, many of whom are also marginalised, such as First Nations, d/Deaf and disabled, CALD and LGBTQIA+ people, and people living in regional and remote areas.
- Have specific outcomes and measures across Creative Australia's investment, advocacy and development work. This includes identifying specific investments and programs for implementation, including clear and identifiable actions and where appropriate, and public reporting measures.

Recommendation 2: Develop and implement a children and young people's reference group, working with sector professionals to ensure authentic methodologies.

As a key component of the new children, young people and the arts strategy (recommendation 1), a children's and youth reference group should be implemented to advise on issues pertaining to the needs of children and young people in an ongoing way, ensuring young Australians have a direct voice to the decision makers impacting their creative lives.

- This group should not be token and should have direct contact with senior executives, Board and Councils to successfully enable self-determination.
- It should be divided into two parts: a young people's group and a children's group, which should be facilitated by practitioners with experience in the methodology of children's participation.

- Representation of First Nations, d/Deaf and disabled, CALD and LGBTQIA+ people, and people living in regional and remote areas is vital.

We note that 'listening to young people' and 'working with young people' are both core tenets of the Office for Youth's Engage! strategy. This group should work in tandem with any future iterations of the Office for Youth's Creative Industries Youth Advisory Group.

Recommendation 3: Increased investment in organisations that create for, with and by children and young people.

The current investment capacity for organisations, as well as for individuals and groups through project funding, fellowships and disability initiatives, is insufficient. Additional funding specifically for children and young people's arts, and for young and emerging artists, is urgently required in each of these programs. As there are insufficient investment funds, they are highly competitive. This means there is a need for quarantined funding to support this sector.

Recommendation 4: Dedicated funding for children's and young people's projects that encompasses work created across all ages, and for the youth arts sector who sustain work created by young people.

There can be unconscious (or even conscious) bias in peer and industry assessors against children and young people, resulting in a preference for supporting organisations and projects which work exclusively with professional artists rather than in collaboration with children and young people, or which privilege the creation of work for adult audiences over young audiences.

Young people who have less experience competing with more established artists in open funding rounds where limited funds means that the most experienced artists are more likely to be funded

7. Fellowships for young and emerging artists are required in order to support individuals excelling in their field but still establishing their practice.
8. Peers and industry advisors with CYP A expertise are required to ensure sufficient expertise when assessing applications.
9. Additional data should be collected to ascertain if the applicant or project supports people aged under 25 to help Creative Australia identify projects supporting young people, and to track their success rates.
10. This funding must be recurring as success cannot be achieved with fixed term investments.

Recommendation 5: Professional development funding, and supported mentorships and placements for First Nations and Disabled leaders and emerging artists in this sector

A new emerging artist and creative workers investment program is required to support professional and skills development in order to create pathways to employment or self-generated income. One of the most cited needs from the sector is the return of the ArtStart grants. The evidence of ArtStart's impact is clear, but there were also problems in its program design which created barriers to access.

- Targeted streams for First Nations people and d/Deaf and disabled people.
- Expanding eligibility beyond tertiary graduates (ArtStart often unintentionally excluded First Nations people with this requirement) to include a documented emerging career practice.
- Allowing the payment of wages to the participant if activity is part of a professional development or applied learning activity.

Recommendation 6: Commission national audience development strategies for Children and Young People's Arts to reduce barriers to access.

Three aligned national arts audience development strategies (children aged 0-12, young people aged 13-17 and young people aged 18-24) are required to diversify audiences and reduce barriers to access for marginalised groups.

11. Engaging audience development specialists to undertake this work with a national focus over at least a five-year period.
12. A focus outside of education programs.
13. Devising clear strategies to diversify audiences, including increasing attendance by First Nations, d/Deaf and disabled, CALD and LGBTQIA+ children and young people, as well as people living in regional and remote areas.
14. Working in partnership with a group of arts presenters on a pilot project, which should be evaluated and could be upscaled nationally if successful.
15. Providing funds to presenting partners to implement recommended strategies, including programming, transport, marketing and community engagement funding. It should also include the creation of resources to ensure the legacy of the work.
16. Including community arts, circus, dance, experimental arts, First Nations arts, multi-arts, theatre and music in the strategy.

Conclusion

The theatre and performing arts for children and young people is in rapid decline, impacted by systemic under-funding, relegation to education which is unable to support growth, lack of public recognition of value. It is also the art form and population most affected by COVID with decreased participation in alarming percentages. The children and young people's sector feeds and nourishes the entire arts sector from injection of talent to the audiences that attend. We cannot ignore or sideline this population of creators, cultural contributors and audiences and the adults that come with them.

We need children and young people to be considered with every pillar and throughout all art forms, at every table. **This is their right.**

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The CYPA Advisory endorses the submissions made by colleagues:

- National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation May 2026
- Theatre Network Australia (TNA)
- Children Young People and The Arts Coalition - Next Generation Now: Embedding Children and Young People in Australia's Next National Cultural Policy

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