

National Youth Arts Network Submission

The Youth Arts industry specialises in giving young Australians a voice in our world. Youth Arts is a living cultural practice through which children and young people produce artistic works of excellence and contribute actively to Australia's social and cultural life. It's a sector that encompasses youth-led and co-created work, emerging artist development, participatory and community-engaged practice, arts education and school engagement, early childhood audiences, socially engaged and CACD practice, pre-professional pathways and workforce development.

Youth Arts organisations sit at the intersection of culture, community, and the professional arts sector, delivering measurable benefits to cultural diversity and innovation, educational outcomes, mental health, social cohesion, and resilience. They are also where many of Australia's artists, performers, writers, and cultural leaders develop their practice, take risks, and experiment. Without sustained investment in Youth Arts, Australia risks the cultural participation of a generation and the long-term vitality of the national arts sector itself.

Their work brokers relationships within communities and starts conversations that connect them with one another, with service organisations, and with adults in their lives. Research conducted in Australia and across the world demonstrates significant benefits for educational outcomes, community building, and improved mental health and resilience.

Youth arts organisations are also a critical part of Australia's cultural ecology and artistic pipeline. They are often the first place where young people encounter serious artistic practice, develop creative voice, technical skills, collaboration and leadership, and begin pathways into the broader arts sector. Many artists, performers, writers, directors and cultural leaders who later contribute to major companies and institutions begin their journeys in youth arts settings. These organisations therefore function not only as community engagement programs, but as essential training grounds and talent incubators for the future of Australia's cultural life. Collectively, the hereunder signed organisations service over 35,000 young people through their programs and deliver theatre to over 250,000 young audiences each year. Sustained investment in youth arts is an investment in the long-term vitality, diversity, and sustainability of the national arts sector.

Youth Arts companies in Australia share an understanding that improving the lives of young people can positively change generations of Australians. The youth arts sector specialises in facilitating opportunities for young people to be and feel seen and heard. Our program development and delivery actively prioritise the needs and empowerment of First Nations, culturally and/or linguistically diverse, regional and remote, socially disadvantaged and differently abled young people.

There is a need to invest in initiatives that get young people interacting with each other and the wider community. Young people need to be recognised within Australian society, with opportunities to share their own stories, listen to others, and build relationships across generations.

An investment in Australia's Youth Arts industry should be included among initiatives to address the nation's deteriorating mental health and support in community-building.

If we are to have a vibrant storytelling industry into the future, it cannot be done without investing in Youth Arts.

Our Key Recommendations:

1. Include Children and Young People as a pillar of the national cultural plan.
2. Establish a sustained national funding stream for children and young people's arts organisations that recognises their role in artistic development, cultural leadership, and as a critical pipeline for the future arts workforce and major cultural institutions.
3. Establish a separate cross-portfolio funding stream for youth arts participation and engagement, co-managed alongside Health, Education, Employment, Youth Justice and Social Services, to support programs that improve wellbeing, social connection, learning, inclusion and community participation through arts engagement.
4. Establish a standing Youth Advisory Committee for Creative Australia that is managed independently by the Youth Arts sector, and reflects the diversity of young Australians, ensuring they have a direct voice in cultural decision-making.

Signed by the National Youth Arts Network below:

SIGNATORIES



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