

A National Disabled-Led Cultural Pipeline

This submission responds to **Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story**, **Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure**, and **Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience**. [REDACTED]

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This submission argues that Australia's next National Cultural Policy must recognise disabled-led creative practice not as niche or specialist activity, but as **essential contemporary cultural infrastructure**, and as a foundational precondition for equitable cultural participation, representation and inclusion. We propose the establishment of a coordinated **national disabled-led cultural pipeline** that supports the full lifecycle of creatively ambitious disabled-led work, from development and commissioning through to national and international touring.

At present, there is no fully functioning pipeline connecting development funding, commissioning, presentation and touring for Deaf and Disabled artists at scale. Existing support remains fragmented and inconsistent, limiting artistic ambition, audience growth and equitable cultural participation. This creates a major structural gap in Australia's cultural infrastructure. Deaf and Disabled artists have historically not been enabled to 'dream big' within existing systems of cultural production — not because of a lack of capability, but because the infrastructure required to support large-scale ambition, **access-led innovation** and sustained presentation pathways has not been consistently available.

This submission also intersects and aligns with recommendations from **Accessible Arts** and **Morwenna Collett**, who call for: the introduction of a dedicated **Sixth Pillar: Access for All Australians**, formally establishing access as essential national cultural infrastructure at the highest level of cultural decision-making; the embedding of **disability inclusion and representation as a principle across all pillars of cultural policy** including funding frameworks, program design and workforce development; and explicit **recognition of access as the precondition for cultural participation** — framing access as foundational infrastructure rather than an optional enhancement, essential to genuine inclusion and full participation for all Australians.

Research, including **Towards Equity 2**, highlights that many arts organisations remain uncertain — or resist the work needed — to diversify audiences. Disabled-led training and knowledge exchange would strengthen access literacy, workforce sustainability and equitable participation across the sector. Without embedding **access as foundational cultural infrastructure**, the sector cannot achieve a representative workforce or the conditions needed for showcasing ambitious, world-class artistic practice by Deaf and Disabled artists.

A Structured Investment: \$10M over Four Years

The structural changes outlined above require both policy commitment and practical investment. Alongside embedding **access as foundational cultural infrastructure** across all pillars, we are calling for a practical, stepped approach to implementing change — beginning with a coordinated national pipeline that connects development, commissioning and presentation for disabled-led work at scale, through three interconnected streams:

1. Capacity Building Fund – \$1M

To strengthen the ecosystem required to support disabled-led work nationally, including:

- **Venue and presenter capability development** (access, programming, producing) through an 'Agent for Change' model, modelled on the Arts Council England initiative
- Artist development and producing support, including leadership pathways into governance, artistic direction and producing roles
- Cross-sector training, knowledge exchange and **Access Coordinator** employment pathways
- Development of accessible touring infrastructure and systems
- Research, including **Towards Equity 2**, to ensure policy is informed by **disability-led research and lived experience**

2. Commissioning Fund – \$5M

A national commissioning fund, modelled on initiatives such as **Unlimited** in the UK, to:

- Commission 10 major works over 4 years, enabling Deaf and Disabled artists to develop work with national and international potential
- Increase the artistic ambition and production value of disabled-led work
- **Embed access from the outset** as part of creative development — not an add-on — funding captioning, Auslan, audio description, relaxed experiences and assistive technologies as core costs
- Shift perceptions of what ambitious, disabled-led work can be, and demonstrate the established and growing audience for this work

3. National and International Touring Fund – \$4M

To establish a functioning touring circuit for disabled-led work through:

- Touring support of commissioned works across a network of committed **access-ready venues** with national access accreditation
- Incentives for presenters to join a national disability touring network, including audience access subsidies
- International exchange and co-commissioning partnerships, and support for inbound international disabled-led work as cultural exchange
- **A clear pathway to Brisbane 2032**, showcasing Australia's disability-led practice as part of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Cultural Program

A key outcome of this investment would be the establishment of a functioning **national touring circuit for disabled-led work** — connecting artists, venues and presenters through a coordinated system of capacity building, commissioning, development and presentation. Without this network approach, individual funding initiatives remain isolated and do not translate into sustained cultural infrastructure.

Evidence from international models — including **Unlimited**, established as part of the Cultural Olympiad for the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games — demonstrates that targeted investment in commissioning and touring infrastructure can deliver significant long-term outcomes for disabled artists and audiences. It also presents a timely opportunity for Australia to develop a comparable model aligned with **Brisbane 2032**.

With targeted investment across capacity building, commissioning and touring infrastructure, Australia could establish a **world-leading model for disabled-led cultural practice** — expanding audiences, strengthening participation, and positioning **accessibility as a driver of artistic innovation** and contemporary cultural life.