



**Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure,
Transport, Regional Development,
Communications and the Arts.
Via email:**

[Redacted]

Dear Consultation Team

Tutti Arts is pleased to submit this response to the National Cultural Policy consultation.

As South Australia's leading multi-arts organisation for learning-disabled and neurodivergent artists, Tutti Arts is committed to ensuring these artists are recognised as central contributors to Australia's cultural life. Our submission outlines the urgent need to embed disability as a core principle across all pillars of cultural policy, rather than treating it as a separate or marginal concern.

We bring both lived experience and sector expertise to this consultation, demonstrating how disability-led practice strengthens storytelling, artistic innovation, cultural infrastructure, and audience engagement. We also highlight the risks posed by broader policy settings, including NDIS reforms, and the need for coordinated cross-government action to safeguard equitable participation in the arts.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to a policy that reflects the full diversity, creativity, and lived experience of Australia, and we would be pleased to engage further as the framework develops.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature block]

Gaelle Mellis
Creative Director, Tutti Arts

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Executive Director, Tutti Arts

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

Organisation: Tutti Arts

Date: 24 May 2026

Introduction

Tutti Arts welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Cultural Policy consultation. As South Australia's pre-eminent multi-arts organisation for learning-disabled and neurodivergent artists, Tutti has a bold 2025–2028 Strategic Plan to ensure they seize their rightful place at the centre of Australian culture. We seek a national policy that is genuinely equitable and reflective of the full diversity of Australia.

Context and Rationale

Disability is a normal part of life and therefore disabled people should be accorded their human rights. This includes the right to participate in arts and culture as creators and as audiences.

Stories affect how we live our lives, how we see other people, how we think about ourselves and how people see us. To be disabled is to live in a society where identity is often shaped by non-disabled beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes. Disabled people must be the producers of our own image and the storytellers of our own lives.

Learning-disabled and neurodivergent artists are already shaping the arts in powerful ways, offering new perspectives, challenging conventions, and expanding what art can be. Disabled people are not a single homogenised group; they exist across all demographics and contribute to every part of cultural life. Their perspectives deepen our understanding of the human experience, and without them, Australian arts and culture are fundamentally diminished.

If the National Cultural Policy is to genuinely reflect Australia, it must begin by recognising that disability is not a limitation, but a vital source of cultural knowledge, creativity, and innovation. Organisations like Tutti Arts demonstrate that the real barriers lie not within individuals, but within systems and unconscious bias that underestimate the capacity of learning-disabled and neurodivergent people. By dismantling these biases and embracing the Social Model of Disability, we can unlock a richer, more inclusive cultural landscape.

To embed disability meaningfully in policy, it must move from being a separate inclusion issue to a core design principle. It is vital that the National Cultural Policy creates the conditions for disabled people to thrive as both creators and audiences, nurturing creativity and discourse from a disability perspective.

The next iteration of Revive must address the systemic barriers faced by learning-disabled and neurodivergent artists. It is only through changing systems and changing minds and culture, that we can create a fair and just reality for all disabled creators and audiences.

A Vision for Parity and Leadership

We want to see a deep committed to disability leadership in the arts. The National Cultural Policy must similarly support a pipeline of emerging disabled leaders, ensuring that "artist" is a label readily available to those currently sidelined by systemic barriers.

Strengthening the Five Cultural Policy Pillars by Embedding Disability: Tutti's Position

Across all five pillars, Tutti Arts demonstrates how embedding disability strengthens the cultural sector. Our practice positions disability as a driver of cultural innovation, participation, and equity—showing not only what is needed, but what is already possible when disability is treated as a core design principle rather than an add-on. By embedding disability, Tutti strengthens storytelling, expands artistic practice, solidifies infrastructure, and broadens audiences, providing a working model for how a National Cultural Policy can meaningfully reflect the diversity, creativity, and lived experience of Australia.

1. First Nations First

Tutti champions First Nations artists, ensuring those we work with are connected to their ancestral lands, culture, and fellow First Nations creators. Our Disability Justice framework acknowledges the intersectionality of First Nations disabled people.

Disability must be embedded within First Nations cultural leadership by recognising:

- the experiences of First Nations disabled artists
- culturally safe, accessible pathways into arts practice
- disability as part of intersectional identity within First Nations communities

Disability here ensures First Nations policy is fully representative and equitable, not leaving disabled voices behind.

2. A Place for Every Story

Learning-disabled and neurodivergent voices to be amplified within a radical, contemporary arts framework. This requires a commitment to parity to, ensuring that stories emerging from the learning-disabled and neurodivergent communities are valued, resourced, and platformed with the same urgency as any other stories in Australian culture.

Disability is fundamental to this pillar.

- Disabled people must be authors of their own stories, not subjects of representation by others
- Disability-led narratives expand what stories are told and who gets to tell them
- Creative work from disabled artists challenges stereotypes and broadens cultural understanding

Disability ensures this pillar moves from token inclusion to authentic representation and authorship.

3. Centrality of the Artist

Tutti places learning-disabled and neurodivergent artists at the centre of all creative activity, supporting them as professional practitioners with distinct artistic voices. We recognise diverse, non-linear, and neurodivergent ways of working, and provide tailored supports that enable artists to develop their practice, build portfolios, and sustain careers. Our model redefines who is recognised as an artist and expands the parameters of professional practice.

Embedding disability means recognising:

- disabled artists as professional artists, not participants or beneficiaries
- diverse ways of working, including non-linear, neurodivergent creative processes
- the need for supports that enable disabled artists to sustain careers

Disability strengthens this pillar by redefining who “the artist” is and valuing diverse creative practices.

4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure

As a Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) organisation, Tutti operates as essential cultural infrastructure—providing accessible, inclusive environments where disabled artists can create, collaborate, and thrive. We embed access at every level of our work, demonstrating that equitable participation is not an add-on, but a foundational requirement for a healthy cultural ecosystem.

Disability must be recognised as essential to infrastructure, not an add-on:

- access (physical, sensory, cognitive) must be standard practice
- funding models must support both creation and access simultaneously

Disability ensures infrastructure is usable, sustainable, and equitable for all.

5. Engaging the Audience

Disabled people must be recognised as both creators and audiences, with a vital role in shaping cultural life. Experiences must be accessible, engaging, and culturally relevant, ensuring that disabled audiences are not only included but actively valued. Not every mind or body will experience art the same way. But every mind and body is entitled to the experience. Our work challenges traditional notions of audience engagement by centring participation, belonging, and shared experience.

Disability reframes audiences as active participants:

- disabled audiences are a significant and valuable cultural market
- engagement must include accessible formats, environments, and communication
- participation includes both audience experience and cultural belonging

Disability strengthens this pillar by expanding who audiences are and how engagement happens.

Summary

Disability is not separate from the five pillars of a National Cultural Policy—it is vital that it is embedded across all of them. It deepens storytelling by expanding whose voices are heard, broadens artistic practice through diverse ways of creating, strengthens cultural infrastructure by making it accessible and equitable, and widens audience engagement by recognising disabled people as vital participants in cultural life. Disability must be embedded across all five pillars so that artists, stories, infrastructure, and audiences truly reflect the diversity, creativity, and lived experience of Australia.

Success will be measured when disabled artists are leading their own projects and telling their own stories from their unique perspectives; when disability-led arts practice is valued and sought after by a wide range of producers and presenters; and when disabled audiences are recognised as a valuable and engaged market for arts and cultural organisations.

However, this vision cannot be realised in isolation from broader systems. Social reforms such as the NDIS aimed to increase a person's independence to help achieve their goals in life. New NDIS reforms will make it harder to pursue an arts career by cutting access, reducing funding, and narrowing what supports are considered valid. Fewer people will qualify, and those who lose eligibility risk losing essential supports such as mentoring, transport, and assistance needed to participate professionally. As a result, creative careers are increasingly treated as non-essential, forcing many artists to scale back their ambitions or rely on arts as a hobby rather than a livelihood.

Recommendations and Actions

- **Embed disability across all pillars**
Every policy area must include disability-specific commitments.
This demands a move from add-on inclusion to whole-of-policy integration.
- **Apply the Social Model of Disability**
Policy must recognise that barriers are created by systems, not by individuals.
This demands a move to fixing systems
- **Mandate measurable outcomes and accountability**
If it is not measured, it will not happen. Policy must require data, benchmarks, and reporting on participation and funding.
This demands a move from vague commitments to accountable outcomes.
- **Fund access as core infrastructure**
Access costs must be standard and embedded, not competing with creative budgets.
This demands a move to recognising it as baseline infrastructure.
- **Recognise disabled people as cultural contributors**
Disability must be valued not only as an equity issue, but as a driver of artistic innovation and cultural expression.
This demands a move from inclusion to cultural leadership and influence.
- **Recognise different ways of working and creating**
Policy must support non-linear and alternative creative practices through flexible funding and evaluation models.
This demands a move from rigid systems to diverse creative practice.

- **Ensure intersectional inclusion**

Disabled people exist across demographics. Policy must reflect this diversity and respond to overlapping barriers.

This demands a move from single-issue inclusion to intersectional policy.

- **Align cross-government action**

Ensure learning-disabled and neurodivergent creators and audiences are not further disadvantaged by NDIS reforms through coordinated policy alignment across government. **This demands a move from siloed systems to integrated, cross-government action that enables equitable participation in arts and culture.**

Conclusion

The call is clear: disability and access must not sit on the margins of cultural policy it must be embedded as a core principle across every pillar of a National Cultural Policy—shaping how we fund, measure, design, and value the arts—so that disabled artists are recognised as essential to Australia’s cultural identity and future.

A disability perspective is important to the evolution of the arts and arts practice. It is platform for experimentation, multiple narratives, new ways of working.

Disability exposes another aspect of the lived human experience, and it deepens the richness of creative language, the arts are lesser without it.