



Blind Citizens Australia

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Response to Australian Government Consultation on the National Cultural Policy 2026

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1. Introduction

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a renewed National Cultural Policy (NCP).

BCA is the national representative organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired. Our work is directly informed by lived experience and we advocate for equity, inclusion, and full participation in all aspects of Australian life, including arts, culture, and creative industries. It is estimated that there are over 500,000 people living in Australia who are blind or vision impaired and the extent to which they can actively and independently participate in community life relies on public facilities, services and systems being designed in a way that is inclusive.

Access to cultural life is recognised as a human right.¹ Creative engagement supports inclusion and social connection, whereas exclusion from shared cultural experiences reinforces social isolation and reduces opportunities for equitable community participation.

For people who are blind or vision impaired, access to arts and culture in Australia remains inconsistent and often inadequate. All Australians must be able to independently discover, access and engage with arts and culture on an equal basis with others, including through accessible physical, digital and communication environments.

BCA recognises that cultural participation is part of broader inclusion infrastructure and our submission is underpinned by the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2. Challenges and opportunities

BCA supports the NCP's five-pillar framework and its continued role in shaping cultural policy. BCA acknowledges the commitment to inclusion and diversity in the NCP, as well as work underway via Equity: The Arts and Disability Plan 2022–2026².

However, we believe that more needs to be done to address the systemic barriers faced by people who are blind or vision impaired in accessing cultural life. These

¹ [Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations](#)

² [Equity: the Arts and Disability Associated Plan | Office for the Arts](#)

barriers continue to restrict participation and limit opportunities to engage in shared cultural experiences.

While disability arts organisations continue to demonstrate leadership and innovation in accessible cultural practice, lasting inclusion cannot rely solely on specialist organisations, and requires a coordinated, system-wide commitment to accessibility and disability inclusion across the entire arts and cultural sector.

It's our view that accessibility should be explicitly reflected in the revised NCP and consistently embedded as a mandatory structural requirement across all cultural funding, infrastructure, and audience engagement systems.

Pillar 1 — First Nations First

BCA recognises the centrality of First Nations culture and leadership. First Nations people who are blind or vision impaired often experience compounded exclusion due to the intersection of disability, racism, geographic isolation, socioeconomic disadvantage and barriers to participation, access and inclusion³. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, First Nations Australians experience vision impairment at almost three times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians⁴.

Cultural knowledge and storytelling delivered through visual art and performance without provision for audio description or tactile features, and written or visual language resources not offered in accessible formats can exclude First Nations people who are blind or vision impaired.

While significant national efforts are underway to revitalise and teach First Nation languages – with First Languages Australia supporting a network of language centres across the country – there are currently no braille resources available in Australian Indigenous languages. First Nations people who are blind or have low vision are effectively excluded from language revitalisation programs that rely on written materials. Ensuring that First Nations stories are published in accessible

³ Sheelagh Daniels-Mayes (2023) Researching Indigenous people living with a disability: The urgent need for an intersectional and decolonising approach (BlakAbility), First Nations Health and Wellbeing - The Lowitja Journal, Volume 1.

⁴ [Eye health measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2025: interactive data, Prevalence of vision impairment and blindness \(1.1.1\) - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)

formats, including audio and braille, is essential if the policy's commitment to First Nations cultural expression is to be genuinely inclusive.⁵

Through co-design with First Nations people who are blind or vision impaired, the Australian Government should invest in culturally safe and accessible arts, media and cultural programs that enable First Nations people with disability to participate in, create, share and lead cultural activities and storytelling.

Pillar 2 — A Place for Every Story

People who are blind or vision impaired must be able to participate in cultural life on an equal basis with others, including as audiences, artists, creators, storytellers, workers and cultural leaders. Despite the existing focus on diversity and inclusion within the NCP and associated plan, people who are blind or vision impaired continue to experience exclusion.

While Pillar 2 rightly focuses on inclusion and representation, it is our view that accessibility and disability inclusion are inherently cross-cutting issues that influence who can create, access, lead, experience and participate in cultural life across every pillar of the NCP.

Accessibility of infrastructure (Pillar 4) directly determines whether people who are blind or vision impaired can participate independently and safely in cultural life. Accessible audience engagement measures (Pillar 5) including access to information is also fundamental to participation because without them, people who are blind or vision impaired remain excluded.

Disability inclusion, in practice, remains largely aspirational, with insufficient accountability, limited measurement of accessibility outcomes and inadequate consequences for failure to comply with recognised accessibility standards.

“A place for every story” requires information in formats that everyone can use. Older Australians with changing vision, people with temporary injuries, readers in challenging environments, and speakers of other languages who rely on text-to-speech and adjustable formatting all benefit from information and publications designed with accessibility in mind.

⁵ Round Table on Print Disability (2026) Unpublished submission to consultation on National Cultural Policy

Pillar 3 — Centrality of the Artist

People with disability, including people who are blind and vision-impaired, are underrepresented in Australia's cultural narrative⁶. Equitable participation requires blind and vision impaired people to be recognised not only as audience members but also artists, performers, writers, technicians, educators and cultural leaders.

To be able to participate effectively as a creator requires the opportunity to be influenced by other artists, the chance to have a quality grounding in the arts through education, and an equal chance to access professional opportunities, funding and employment.

Attitudinal barriers faced by people who are blind or vision impaired in education and employment are persistent and include assumptions that blind people cannot work in visual or creative fields.

Creative disciplines such as visual arts, design, film, photography and media studies are frequently taught using highly visual approaches without equivalent tactile, auditory or descriptive alternatives.

Authors and illustrators with print disability routinely encounter inaccessible submission portals, contracts in non-accessible formats, and production workflows that do not support assistive technologies.⁷

Other reported barriers include:

- inaccessible learning management systems and materials (e.g. inaccessible PDFs and readings) and online learning environments that do not work well with screen readers or magnification technology
- visual-only teaching materials, poor captioning or audio description
- physically inaccessible rehearsal, studio and performance spaces
- creative and digital tools (e.g. editing software, design platforms) that don't meet digital accessibility guidelines and aren't compatible with screen readers

⁶ [Arts and Disability: A Research Summary - Creative Australia | Creative Australia](#)

⁷ Round Table on Print Disability (2026) Unpublished submission to consultation on National Cultural Policy

- funding application processes and assessment criteria that do not account for access requirements or provide information in alternative formats (e.g. large print, audio, braille).

Pillar 4 — Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Accessing the arts as a consumer requires access to information, physical access to premises, and appropriate assistance from staff. Under both state/territory and federal law, ensuring an event is accessible for people with disability is a legal requirement⁸, yet accessibility is still not consistently embedded in cultural infrastructure.

Common barriers include:

Venue accessibility – Navigation of cultural spaces for people who are blind or vision impaired can be difficult due to poor wayfinding design, inconsistent signage, inadequate lighting and the absence of accessible orientation features such as tactile ground surface indicators, tactile maps, braille signage and audible navigation information. These barriers can reduce independence, create safety risks and limit full participation in cultural experiences as artists, employees and audience members. Cultural events are often hosted in heritage buildings which may rely on exemptions or minimum compliance approaches that do not remove access barriers or deliver genuinely equitable access for people with disability.

Staff awareness and capability - Accessibility challenges are often compounded by outdated assumptions and limited staff capability to respond to the access needs of blind or vision impaired people (e.g. appropriate guiding techniques and communication practices).

Booking and ticketing systems – Can be inaccessible for people who are blind or vision impaired, particularly where websites are difficult to navigate using screen readers, there is a reliance on inaccessible forms or CAPTCHA systems, or event information is provided in inaccessible formats (e.g. PDF, images without alt-text).

Digital infrastructure – Websites and apps that do not meet recognised accessibility standards (e.g. latest version of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines⁹) limit access

⁸ [Access for all: Improving disability accessibility](#)

⁹ [WCAG 2 Overview | Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\) | W3C](#)

to information about events and services. Payment kiosks with touchscreens and no or limited tactile/audio options limit independent participation and financial privacy.

Transport pathways – People who are unable to drive due to blindness or vision impairment rely on alternate transport options to participate. Inaccessible public transport systems, poor pedestrian infrastructure, unsafe drop off/pick up zones and inadequate wayfinding create barriers that are often heightened at night, during major events, or when temporary infrastructure, crowds and changed traffic conditions reduce navigability.

Pillar 5 — Engaging the Audience

Audiences, including people who are blind or vision impaired, must be able to independently discover, access and meaningfully engage with arts, culture and creative content on an equal basis with others. As digital platforms and emerging technologies increasingly shape how creative work is produced, distributed, promoted and experienced, accessibility and inclusive design must be embedded from the outset. Without deliberate action, digital transformation risks reinforcing existing barriers and creating new forms of exclusion that further widen inequality in cultural participation and access.

Gaps in audio described screen content and live performances

Australia lags behind much of the developed world in the provision of Audio Description (AD)¹⁰. Availability of AD in screen content and theatre performances remains inconsistent, and for cinema and live performances it is often limited to a small number of scheduled sessions (predominantly metropolitan areas) which restricts choice and spontaneity for audiences who are blind or vision impaired. Even where AD is available for a film or performance, it can be difficult to locate or activate due to inconsistent interfaces, equipment or technology failures and staff not trained, equipped or available to assist.

The proposed Associated Plan for Accessible Information and Communication¹¹ under Australia's Disability Strategy recognises AD as a key accessible

¹⁰ [Blind Citizens Australia \(2023\) Position Paper Audio Description](#)

¹¹ [Recommendation 6.1 – A national plan to promote accessible information and communications | Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing](#)

communication format that should be available across different settings, including arts and cultural participation.

AD is more than just a visual description. It provides a means to understand why things happen on screen or on stage, enables access to emotion, atmosphere, humour, and tension, and provides a mechanism for people who are blind or vision impaired to participate fully with friends, family, and audiences. These support belonging and cultural participation beyond just access to information.¹²

Gallery and exhibition access gaps

Exhibition interpretation commonly relies on visual materials such as wall text, signage, maps, images and visual displays without equivalent accessible formats or non-visual alternatives. As a result, people who are blind or vision impaired are often unable to independently access or fully engage with artworks, exhibitions and cultural narratives.

Where audio guides are available, they often focus on curatorial commentary or general interpretation rather than providing the detailed visual description required for equitable access. Meaningful access to exhibitions requires a combination of AD, opportunities for tactile interpretation and multisensory design from the outset.

Inaccessible information, marketing and communications material

Promotional materials are often image-based without sufficient text or audio alternatives, issued in formats that can't be utilised by assistive technology (e.g. a PDF that can't be read by a screen reader) which limits independent access to information for people who are blind or vision impaired.

There remains no consistent or centralised way to identify accessible options making it difficult for people with disability to independently plan and participate in cultural activities. Information about accessibility features such as AD, tactile experiences, captioning, accessible seating, navigation support and companion ticketing is often inconsistent, incomplete or difficult to locate across arts and cultural venues, booking and ticketing systems. This creates additional planning burdens and can discourage participation by people who are blind or vision impaired.

¹² Curtin University Audio Description Research Team - unpublished consultation findings

3. Recommendations

1. Embed accessibility and disability inclusion across the National Cultural Policy

Embed accessibility and disability inclusion as core principles across all pillars of the National Cultural Policy, recognising access to arts, culture and creative expression as a fundamental participation right for people with disability, consistent with Australia's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Accessibility should underpin cultural leadership, workforce development, infrastructure, audience engagement, digital participation and cultural decision-making.

2. Establish enforceable accessibility requirements across all publicly funded arts and culture initiatives

Move beyond aspirational statements of inclusion by introducing clear, measurable and enforceable accessibility requirements across all publicly funded arts and cultural activities. Embed accessibility expectations into procurement, funding agreements, infrastructure investment and program delivery. Require cultural platforms, digital services, cultural content, communications, and emerging creative technology to comply with recognised accessibility standards and universal design principles, including accessible ticketing and booking systems, accessible formats and high-quality audio description.

3. Increase investment in accessible cultural content and experiences

Fund the development, delivery and promotion of accessible cultural content and experiences including expansion of:

- High-quality, nationally consistent audio description across live performances, television, film, streaming services, galleries, museums and digital media, including equitable access in regional and remote areas.
- Timely production and distribution of accessible formats, including braille, DAISY, large print, tactile formats and accessible e-text, to ensure equitable access to cultural and creative content.

- Tactile, immersive and multisensory cultural experiences co-designed with blind and vision impaired people across museums, galleries, performances and public cultural spaces.

4. Embed accessibility into cultural infrastructure, venues and event delivery

Require all publicly funded cultural venues, festivals, galleries and infrastructure projects to embed accessibility through universal design principles and whole-of-journey planning. This should include accessible transport connections, integrated wayfinding systems, tactile and audible navigation supports, accessible seating, assistive technologies, step-free access, staff disability awareness training and consultation with people who are blind or vision impaired to ensure venues are independently accessible and safe to navigate.

5. Ensure nationally consistent accountability and reporting requirements for disability access and inclusion in arts and culture

Require publicly funded arts and cultural organisations to implement disability inclusion and accessibility measures, collect consistent data on participation and barriers, and publicly report on accessibility outcomes, audience experiences and employment of people with disability. Independent monitoring mechanisms should be established to drive continuous improvement across the cultural sector.

6. Strengthen support for artists and creative industry workers who are blind or vision impaired

Support disability-led storytelling, creative leadership and workforce participation by improving access to funding, employment, mentoring, training, leadership opportunities and creative development pathways for artists and creative industry workers who are blind or vision impaired. This should include equitable access to arts funding programs, accessible professional development opportunities, accessible residencies and touring programs, and action to remove structural barriers in creative education and employment systems.

7. Embed accessibility and disability inclusion across First Nations cultural initiatives

Ensure all First Nations arts, media and cultural initiatives are accessible and inclusive of First Nations people with disability, including people who are blind or vision impaired. This should include funding for accessible storytelling, language preservation and cultural participation through audio description, tactile interpretation, accessible digital formats and community-led approaches, alongside dedicated support for leadership, employment and decision-making opportunities for First Nations people with disability across the cultural sector.

8. Adopt a coordinated whole-of-government approach to cultural accessibility

Align the National Cultural Policy with broader disability rights and accessibility frameworks, including Australia's Disability Strategy, the Disability Discrimination Act, national digital accessibility standards and accessible procurement obligations. Cultural accessibility should be addressed through coordinated action across arts, communications, infrastructure, education and disability policy portfolios.

9. Invest in disability-led co-design, consultation and leadership

Embed co-design and lived experience expertise across the development, delivery and evaluation of cultural policy and programs. Invest in disability-led arts and culture organisations, advisory mechanisms and leadership opportunities. People who are blind or vision impaired should be meaningfully involved in cultural decision-making processes at all levels.