



Everybody NOW!

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

CONTEXTUAL STATEMENT

Everybody NOW! is a multi-arts organisation based on the Gold Coast, Queensland, specialising in Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) and large-scale participatory practices.

For more than a decade we've created original, contemporary community-engaged works-of-scale with over 80,000 people across 250+ communities nationally. Our organisation centres:

- local storytelling,
- intergenerational participation, and
- an arts-led approach to building belonging, social cohesion, and improving health and wellbeing through arts and culture.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the redevelopment of Australia's National Cultural Policy.

Our submission is informed by both our position on the Gold Coast, Australia's sixth largest city and one of the country's fastest-growing economies, and our engagement nationally, particularly within community-engaged and socially-engaged arts, arts participation and Creative Health sectors.

Our contributions are centred on our belief that arts and culture should be understood not only as creative output, but as essential civic and social infrastructure.

At Everybody NOW! we work across various community settings - in hospitals, aged care, schools, arts centres, major festivals and public spaces - with diverse peoples including First Nations people, people with Disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, regional communities, young people, older people, and marginalised voices.

We often reach people who have limited access to, or relationships with the arts. Working in this way enables communities to participate in, and shape their own cultural life, telling stories that are relevant and connected to them and their communities.

While there is much work to do in order to create a nation where *all* Australians can meaningfully engage with and contribute to arts and culture, there is also rich opportunity within a National Cultural Policy to reshape how our nation understands and values arts, culture, and creativity.

CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES:

1. Arts Access and Participation

We believe access to, and participation in the arts needs to scale up outside of centralised sites of cultural activity, with models that allow arts to be embedded into daily life.

It's our experience that not all Australians have equitable access to the arts, nor understand opportunities for engagement beyond consumption and toward participation and co-creation.

Increasing meaningful engagement with the arts, by prioritising the work of skilled artists and community-engaged or CACD practitioners, can significantly advance Creative Australia's and the Australian Government's policy priorities across inclusion, Disability Arts, Cultural diversity and representation, First Nations Arts, Youth, Climate adaptation and recovery, and Arts and Health.



Artists and organisations like Everybody NOW! who specialise in participation and non-traditional modes of engagement, are well-placed to deliver long-term, creative initiatives that draw on lived experiences and respond to local specificity.

These creative processes and outcomes can be ambitious, innovative, and mobilise communities at scale.

At Everybody NOW! we remove as many barriers to participation as possible. This often means the artistic work is free, outdoors or in non-conventional spaces, and requires a diversity of paid artistic, cultural and community expertise to deliver.

This work does not neatly fit traditional presentation models - it is funded across multiple artform panels and requires investment beyond one-off project funding.

Despite its central role in delivering public value, and the growing need to respond to complex social, environmental and economic challenges, this practice is structurally under-recognised and under-resourced within national funding frameworks.

We call for greater investment in work that:

- Centres communities as co-creators
- Reaches people who experience barriers to arts participation
- Amplifies diverse and marginalised voices
- Builds lifelong cultural engagement through belonging and agency

We see an opportunity to:

- Evolve the Works-of-Scale initiative implemented as part of the current REVIVE Policy, to include a dedicated program for community-engaged and participatory practices capable of achieving scale through both reach and depth of engagement over time.
- Increase civic participation in the arts through a national voucher or subsidy program such as Queensland's Play On Sports, the Sporting Schools model or Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) initiative delivered within both educational and community settings, and available to the whole population.
- Deliver a national campaign to profile and promote participation in the arts, to better increase the visibility, value and celebration of arts and artists in daily life.

We believe community arts, participatory practice, and place-based art-making can directly advance all five pillars of REVIVE, and as such should have greater representation, actionable priorities and resourcing within the policy.

2. Creative Health

Australia is experiencing a loneliness and social isolation epidemic. Everybody NOW! is deeply committed to improving connection and belonging for all Australians through our work.

There remain largely untapped opportunities for arts and culture to provide positive health and wellbeing outcomes to Australians.

Creative Australia, along with various researchers, practitioners and Arts Health Networks have been researching the impacts of arts in health, centring the artist and artist-led experiences for over a decade. Internationally, we are lagging behind in our implementation of Creative Health frameworks.



The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), are calling for social prescribing to be recognised as an essential part of modern healthcare with arts and culture being leading approaches to addressing social determinants of health.

To date, organisations and independent practitioners have been forging innovative arts and health initiatives with minimal resourcing and a disjointed, siloed approach to navigating cross-sector implementation.

Since 2019, Everybody NOW! has delivered artist-in-residence programs embedding artists in aged care, hospitals and community health settings with positive impacts and outcomes. However, without proper investment and an allied approach between sectors, projects remain one-off successes.

National infrastructure, with peak body oversight, supporting grassroots local approaches could provide greater sector cohesion, opportunity for more integrated policy outcomes and support for artists and artworkers.

For example: On the Gold Coast, the city is trialling a sports-on-prescription program as part of the legacy opportunities surrounding the 2032 Olympics and Paralympic Games. There is opportunity for Queensland and the Gold Coast to partner nationally in the leadership of Arts-on-Prescription, and achieve Olympic Legacy objectives across access and inclusion, preventative health, long-term social wellbeing.

3. Targeted Investment in Fast-Growth Regions

Communities need their own thriving artistic ecologies which:

- attract and retain artists and artworkers,
- reflect their own distinct cultural identities,
- build local audiences,
- embed arts participation into place, and
- meet population needs.

While the current policy does address regional support - and we encourage this focus on regional and remote strategies to deepen and continue - we also see a need for targeted investment into high growth areas and non-capital city cultural hotspots nationally or 'second cities', such as the Gold Coast, Newcastle, Geelong and Western Sydney, for example.

On the Gold Coast we are the fastest-growing area in Australia, on track to become the first non-capital city to reach one million residents by 2040. Like many regional centres, our local government has carried much of the responsibility for arts funding and cultural outcomes over the last decade.

- This has built strong – but centralised - cultural infrastructure,
- Increased the number of residents who agree that arts and cultural activity help them to enjoy a greater quality of life (89% in 2025 up by 4% from 2023), and
- Seen the formation of several small-to-medium arts organisations working locally, and touring nationally and internationally, who are supported by State and Local Government Organisational Funding; with only one company currently supported through Creative Australia's Four-Year Investment program, and no company funded as a Major Performing Arts Group (Adelaide, the city one up in population size to the Gold Coast, for example, has three such groups.)

As is often the case in rapid growth areas, the social and physical cultural infrastructure and programming are not keeping pace with our population's needs, and our artists struggle to achieve national profile, investment, and opportunity.

On the Gold Coast we also have an upcoming a once-in-a-generation opportunity with the Brisbane 2032 Olympics. A meaningful Cultural Olympiad will require coordinated federal, state and local investment to maximise both immediate and long-term impact.

This presents a significant opportunity for the Australian Government to partner with Queensland to advance cultural diplomacy, creative workforce development, First Nations leadership, Disability arts, arts and health outcomes, and the global profile of Australian culture.

More broadly, second cities and non-capital city cultural hotspots are increasingly where Australia's demographic, cultural and social future is being shaped and require targeted arts and cultural investment frameworks that match our growth, diversity and ambition.

All five pillars will best succeed with well-supported place-based initiatives which funnel new and targeted investment into fast-growing regional centres like the Gold Coast.

4. Cultural Infrastructure is People and Places

The current policy pillar of 'Strong Cultural Infrastructure' does not adequately address the soft infrastructure that underpins a thriving arts ecosystem: people, programs and practices.

An unrepresented but vital part of our nation's Cultural Infrastructure is the small-to-medium sector. This engine room of Australia's cultural activity continues to operate with limited resources and ongoing precarity.

The small-to-medium sector create jobs, pathways to presentation, nurtures and protects artists, are deeply connected to their communities and often outperform their larger counterparts in terms of reach, representation, access and return on investment.

A structural reform to how small-to-medium arts organisations are funded and supported is urgently needed. This includes;

- Equitable investment in small-to-medium organisations nationally, with the distinct needs of diverse geographical communities considered.
- Increased investment in multi-year operational funding that represents organisations of all sizes, and accommodates stability for established organisations, as well as opportunities for new organisations to enter investment programs.
- Supporting capacity building, governance and cultural leadership skills that represent a diversity of voices.

Investing in the small-to-medium sector and explicit acknowledgment within the Cultural Policy signals the value of arts and culture outside of discretionary activity but as essential civic and social infrastructure.

5. Arts Education and Prioritising Young People

Arts-in-education remains in crisis or in a 'polycrisis' as recently described by Professor Gattenhof and Dr Saunders.

We endorse the National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) call for a reversal of the 2020 Job-ready Graduates reforms.

The pathway to a career in the cultural and creative sector begins with arts education, and the future of our sector is impacted by the quality of, and access to affordable tertiary education. Similarly State Policies and ATAR scaling is discouraging students from arts subjects as young as Year 9.



At Everybody NOW!, we have seen a decline in the number of practising artists and arts workers post-COVID, both nationally and on the Gold Coast, as well as a decline in the number of emerging artists coming through the sector.

Beyond developing future artists and arts workers and positioning the arts as a viable and important career path, arts in education improves the lives of children and young people.

An arts-rich education raises school engagement, social-emotional learning, empathy, and overall academic achievement.

Australian kids need libraries and librarians in their school, access to instruments and trained music teachers, Artists-in-residence programs, touring performances and visits to galleries and museums. This is currently not being achieved in Australia and we need greater cross portfolio advocacy and policy alignment to centre arts in education.

Further, outside of Arts in Education, artists and organisations who create work for and with children and young people need dedicated investment, greater visibility in the policy, and prioritising after a decade of systemic defunding and underrepresentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY PILLARS

First Nations First

We support the continued prioritising of the First Nations First pillar and First Nations determined outcomes across all pillars. We refer to and endorse the submissions from our First Nations colleagues.

1. We support **funding the cost of cultural processes** across all Creative Australia funded organisations and Government entities, and recommend supporting **capacity building in governance and First Nations leadership roles** which centre First Nations voices across the organisations and art-making.

A Place for Every Story

2. **Implement a national works-of-scale initiative focused on Community Arts and Cultural Development, and participatory, accessible practices.**
3. **Increase Investment in local place-based arts initiatives and organisations that:**
 - a. Strengthen social cohesion
 - b. Foster belonging in Australian communities
 - c. Build local capacity and agency
 - d. Promote wellbeing and Inclusion
4. **Formal Recognition**
 - a. Recognise Community Arts and Cultural Development as a distinct and essential field of creative practice and core cultural infrastructure.
 - b. Recognise Youth Arts and Arts for Children and Young people as essential to the National Cultural Policy.

Centrality of the Artist

5. **Whole of Government Approach**
 - a. Create structures and systems that deliver cross-portfolio opportunities for artists with shared investment across Government - Health (such as a national Arts-on-



Prescription Model), Education, Climate and Environment, First Nations, Multicultural Affairs and others.

- b. Ensure strategic cross-sector initiatives incentivise joint funding instruments.
 - c. Establish a transparent and visible mechanism (or body) dedicated to intergovernmental cooperation that allows for shared impact frameworks and data collection, guidelines and safeguards for artists e.g. (fair pay, safety and quality frameworks).
- 6. **Reverse the 2020 Job-ready Graduates reforms** and improve accessibility and viability of arts and humanities degrees.
 - 7. **Support non-tertiary based training and development programs** for artists and art workers including regional based and digital programs that allow artists to stay living and working in their local communities.
 - 8. **Invest in arts education in schools from Prep to Year 12.**

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

- 9. **Explicitly recognise the value of 'soft' or social infrastructure** within the Cultural Infrastructure Pillar, particularly acknowledging community-engaged practices' vital role in advancing the priorities of the policy.
- 10. **Increase Investment available to small-to-medium organisations.**

Engaging the Audience

- 11. **Targeted investment in high-growth areas (Second Cities)** that match population growth.
- 12. **National Arts Participation Campaign** for example a voucher-based program that incentivises access and supports arts business, and small to mediums organisations.

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