

Investing in Australian wellbeing

About Patternmakers

Patternmakers is a research and insights consultancy specialising in arts, culture and social impact. We bring people and evidence together to grow good causes.

Since 2015, we have worked with artists, creative businesses and cultural institutions across Australia on audience research, program evaluation and strategic consultancies.

Our work includes the [Audience Outlook Monitor](#) (2020–2023), a national tracking study with 159 organisations and 116,522 Australians, which helped the arts sector connect with audiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our priority for 2025 to 2028 is creative wellbeing. When more people connect with creativity and community, the world is a happier, *healthier* place.

Observations

In recent years, Patternmakers has observed a growing paradox at the heart of Australia's arts and cultural sector.

On one hand, the need for arts and cultural engagement has never been greater. The communities we work with are grappling with loneliness, mental ill-health, natural disasters, cost-of-living pressures and global uncertainty. Australians recognise the benefits of the arts for connection, comfort and meaning — but often lack access to the experiences that would benefit them.

On the other hand, artists and arts organisations are limited in their ability to reach audiences and serve the growing needs of their communities. Long-term capacity challenges, compounded by the disruptions of the pandemic and economic conditions have left many organisations with hollowed-out teams, struggling to reach fragmented audiences and with shrinking budgets for outreach work.

The communities with the greatest need are often the hardest to reach, and the organisations closest to those communities are often the least resourced to do so.

The result is that Australia is missing out on opportunities to realise the benefits of arts and culture.

Key opportunity areas

The next National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to invest in arts and culture for national wellbeing. Key ideas include:

- **Adopt a whole-of-government approach** to arts and culture. Australians engage with culture in schools and hospitals, foreshores and town squares, in airport terminals and skate parks. Arts organisations want to add value to other portfolio areas, but lack the mechanisms and partnerships to grow this work. A whole-of-government approach is needed to see the arts connect with more parts of society.

- **Establish sustained, multi-year partnership frameworks** between arts and Health, Aged Care, Disability, Education and Tourism portfolios. The benefits of the arts ripple outwards across the economy, and co-investment will ensure Australia benefits from the arts in more ways.
- **Give ‘Engaging the Audience’ the strategic attention it deserves.** When Australia has so much to gain from the arts, audiences cannot be an afterthought in either policy or practice. The next National Cultural Policy must adopt audience- and community-centric thinking and champion its application across the cultural ecology.
- **Fund applied behavioural insights research** to equip the arts sector with tools to connect more people with the experiences and stories relevant to their needs. The [Australia Reads](#) campaign from BehaviourWorks Australia at Monash University provides a great example. It’s vital to understand what draws communities to engage with arts in everyday settings and how to unlock greater engagement.
- **Rebuild arts marketing capacity** and ensure sector initiatives respond to the audience development challenges of independents, small to medium organisations and major institutions, wherever possible pooling resources to cut through to audiences.
- **Invest in and recognise socially-engaged practice.** Art that happens in community settings, in genuine partnership with communities is an under-recognised tool for social cohesion, resilience and wellbeing. Practitioners need support to work effectively in health, disability and aged care settings; and institutions can be better equipped to commission, partner and host creative work with confidence.
- **Draw explicit connections between arts and culture and the [Measuring What Matters](#) framework.** Cultural participation speaks directly to at least four of the framework’s five national wellbeing priorities, including Healthy, Cohesive, Secure and Prosperous. Making this connection explicit in cultural policy would strengthen the case for cross-portfolio investment and position the arts as a central contributor to national wellbeing.

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