National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous
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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Approximately 23 per cent of Australia's children live in Queensland, yet no Queensland-based performing arts company receives federal funding for children and young people's work. This reflects a systemic failure of federal arts investment in Queensland, leaving children with unequal access to live performance.

The metrics by which arts funding bodies evaluate success fundamentally misalign with early years performing arts. Economic measures such as reach and attendance do not capture the qualitative value of work for children. Box office targets are inappropriate for work serving families with limited income. Production costs equal those of adult work, yet ticket prices must remain affordable. When funding is unavailable, works are made on constrained budgets.

Research demonstrates that participation in performing arts in childhood assists development, improves wellbeing, fosters cultural appreciation, and deepens belonging. Live theatre provides communal experiences that strengthen social and emotional connection. For children aged 0-5, these experiences are foundational to cognitive and social development. Yet evaluation frameworks designed for economic return fail to recognise these developmental and wellbeing outcomes.

Dedicated companies that focus solely on work with, by, or for young people receive no subsidy in Queensland. These organisations require sustained operational funding to maintain consistent, quality service to Queensland's 1.6 million children and young people. Dedicated practice demands specialised expertise in child safeguarding, early years development, and age-appropriate artistic practice that cannot be sustained without secure, long-term investment.

The next National Cultural Policy must implement the following measures.

Annual funding must be quarantined specifically for projects developed for, by, and with children and young people. This funding should support development, presentation, and touring of performances and programs, benefiting children aged 0–18. Early years performances linked to early learning frameworks should receive dedicated subsidy.

Infrastructure investment is essential. A 10-year commitment to rebuild capacity in Queensland CYP organisations should support artistic development, career pathways for emerging practitioners, and new work creation. Operational funding for dedicated CYP companies and a peak body would provide stability. Regional artists and companies must be endorsed to lead from the regions, ensuring equitable access across Queensland.

Funding mechanisms must recognise that early years performing arts requires subsidy commensurate with developmental and wellbeing outcomes, not commercial viability. Evaluation frameworks should measure qualitative impact including social cohesion and developmental benefit, rather than box office return. First Nations practitioners, disability arts practitioners, and regional artists must be supported within this framework.

This submission aligns with recommendations made by the National Advocate for Arts Education, National Children's Theatre Initiative, Children and Young People in the Arts Advisory Group, Theatre Network Australia, Alliance of CACD organisations, Creative Climate, Youth Circus, National Youth Arts Companies, Arts and Disability Network Australia, and advocates for arts accessibility and freedom of expression.