

Towards a new National Cultural Policy.

Submission, May 2026.

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I live and work in Burramatta in Western Sydney on Dharug Country. I have been working in diverse contexts and capacities for over 45 years - as a community arts worker, performer, dramaturg, curator, creative producer, trainer and mentor. My experience of cultural action and culture making is founded in collectivity and collaboration.

I have achieved national recognition through Creative Australia: I received a community arts Fellowship (in 2005) to document **Arab Australian contemporary arts**, and the Ros Bower Award (in 2010) which acknowledges a **life time contribution to community arts and cultural development**.

These are the two professional areas of critical concern in my submission to the 2026 review of the National Cultural Policy:

1. COMMUNITY ARTS AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT / CACD

I have deep experience of CACD practice across sectors of community arts - with decades of work since 1980 - including community theatre and theatre in education, small community based programs and model developments within cultural institutions. I remain connected and committed to next generation community arts workers through mentoring and training. I have a long term commitment to greater Western Sydney, a region which has grown in demographic complexity and public infrastructure, although still not matched with an equitable share of public resources. Our communities and our arts and cultural practices have also grown, and we need to move forward with support for conscious and ethical approaches to engagement and art making.

2. ARAB AUSTRALIAN CONTEMPORARY ARTS AND CULTURE

Since 1991 my focus has been on Arab Australian arts and cultures, through contemporary cultural production, cultural heritage and performance work. Some of my initiatives and long term developments in local Arab cultural work include: "*Café Hakawati*" with Death Defying Theatre in 1991; *Taqqa Theatre* productions in the decade of the 1990s; major programs through 1998-2005 at the Powerhouse Museum with the "*wattan project*"; Auburn Poets and Writers Group, and the Arabic calligraphy programs with Auburn Community Development Network; "*No Added Sugar*" the national Australian Muslim Women's Arts Project with Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre 2011-2012; "*Burra Wa Ba'eed*" bilingual theatre for community health 2013; and now for over a decade, Arab Theatre Studio.

I support the following two submissions which have been collaboratively developed and written by practitioners across the continent, as they reflect the urgency of our issues within COMMUNITY ARTS & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT and ARAB AUSTRALIAN CONTEMPORARY ARTS & CULTURAL PRACTICE.

1. I support the submission from the national alliance of Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) organisations and individuals.

We argue that Australia's next National Cultural Policy must recognise and invest in CACD as essential cultural infrastructure. As outlined in the full submission, CACD operates at the intersection of creativity and community, delivering social cohesion, resilience and meaningful cultural participation across the continent.

Despite its national reach and impact, CACD is not explicitly recognised within the current REVIVE framework. This omission creates a critical policy gap. It limits visibility of a cross-sector practice that delivers on national priorities of equity, access and participation, and constrains the capacity of government to mobilise creative practice in response to compounding challenges including climate impacts, disasters, inequality and social fragmentation. Without CACD, REVIVE risks overlooking the primary mechanism through which many Australians engage meaningfully with arts and culture.

CACD is not a niche artform. It is a methodology embedded across disciplines and sectors including health, education, justice, disaster management and climate adaptation. Only 5–6% of national arts investment is explicitly attributed to CACD, this significantly underrepresents CACD's reach, as it is dispersed across multiple funding streams and not consistently measured. This systemic undercounting leads to undervaluation and misalignment with policy commitments to inclusion and cultural democracy.

CACD delivers outcomes across multiple domains. It strengthens social cohesion and belonging, improves wellbeing, builds local economies and workforce pathways, enhances civic participation, and supports environmental awareness and climate adaptation. Crucially, it provides the relational infrastructure that enables communities to respond to complex challenges and to participate in shaping their cultural futures.

CACD directly advances all five pillars of REVIVE. It supports First Nations self-determination, ensures diverse stories are visible, recognises community-based artists as essential workers, and shifts engagement from passive audiences to active participation. Its impact is particularly significant for priority communities, including First Nations peoples, young people, culturally diverse communities, disabled communities, and those in regional and disaster-impacted areas.

To address this gap, the submission proposes:

- formal recognition of CACD within the National Cultural Policy;
- the establishment of a national CACD entity within Creative Australia;
- investment in workforce development;
- funding reforms toward long-term, place-based models;
- improved national data and evaluation systems;
- embedding CACD across government portfolios including health, climate, disaster management and regional development.

At a time of increasing climate instability, social fragmentation and compounding disasters, Australia requires approaches that build trust, connection and collective capacity. These are not

outcomes policy alone can deliver. CACD provides the creative and relational mechanisms to achieve them.

To realise the vision of REVIVE— “a place for every story”—CACD must be recognised, properly measured, and resourced as a cornerstone of Australia’s cultural future. Without this, the policy risks falling short of its commitments to equity, participation and inclusion.

#REVIVEcommunityarts

2. I support the submission that calls for the end to censorship, political interference and racism in the arts.

It is crucial that the forthcoming National Cultural Plan reflects current issues faced by artists and arts workers, as well as the arts sector at large. I am concerned by the prevalence of censorship, political interference and racism in the arts. As such, this submission is grounded in core values of and commitment to decolonisation, anti-racism, anti-discrimination; artists as the moral compass of the sector; freedom of artistic expression without limitations; and freedom from political interference in the arts.

- Commitment to decolonisation, anti-racism and anti-discrimination (Pillars 1: First Nations First, 3: Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)
 - The National Cultural Policy must take a decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination approach. It should respect and take leadership from those in the sector who are already working from a strong decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination framework.
 - The IHRA definition of antisemitism must be removed from all arts, cultural and educational institutions and be replaced with the UN Core Stance of Values: “The UN asserts that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, without distinction of any kind, including race or ethnic origin. It maintains that no state, institution, group, or individual should make any discrimination in human rights and fundamental freedoms.”
- Artists are the moral compass of the sector (Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist)
 - The National Cultural Policy must support artists to continue to be ethical and values-driven leaders of the sector and broader community.
 - Artists must be able to speak freely, sign letters and participate in boycott actions without harming their reputation and livelihoods.
 - Arts and cultural institutions must respect cultural diversity, and support, champion and care for the diverse conversations that artists bring to their programs, particularly those who have been targeted in the media for speaking out against injustices.
 - Artists must not be instrumentalised by institutions, lobbyists, the media and politicians.
- Freedom of speech and artistic expression (Pillars 3: Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- Strong cultural infrastructure must be based on artistic freedom of speech. This is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (11.e “to uphold and promote freedom of expression in the arts”) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy.
 - In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, art must be able to facilitate critical discourse, address political issues and critique power and class structures.
 - In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, there must be an end to the culture of intimidation that prevents artists from expressing and creating art freely.
 - The National Cultural Policy must address the prevalence of censorship, targeting and cancellation of artists who speak out against injustices, particularly in relation to nations that have been condemned by the UN for acts of apartheid, genocide and war crimes.
- Freedom from political interference in the arts (Pillars 3: Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)
 - In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, the arts must remain independent and free from political interference.
 - The National Cultural Policy must ensure independent and ‘arms length’ funding processes across federal, state and local government. This includes ensuring that politicians at all levels must not influence or give advice that results in the provision or removal of funding support of a particular project or artist. This is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (article 14.2) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy.
 - A key action for the National Cultural Policy must be to implement an inquiry into political interference in the arts, including through donations and board membership and lobbying.
 - Donors must not influence arts organisations and institutions.
 - Board members with connections to political parties or lobbyists must be removed.