

Submission to the Review of the National Cultural Policy, Revive.

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Achievements since 2023

- Since the introduction of Revive, arts and cultural activity in Australia has continued to demonstrate strong impacts across health, wellbeing, social connection and community resilience.
- Music therapy supports active cultural participation through music-making, self-expression, communication and connection with significant work conducted in community settings and for groups of people with similar quality of life or healthcare needs. Music therapy is an evidenced based creative arts therapy with particular focus for people with disabilities, mental health needs, in rehabilitation following acquired brain injuries, for those hospitalised with life limiting illnesses and within dementia care including home care, supports for early and younger onset dementia and at end of life through palliative care across the lifespan.
- The current Revive policy has already demonstrated the strong impacts of the arts and cultural activity in Australia through the Creative Therapies Pilot, improving access, particularly in underserved communities, and strengthening mental health, social connection and cultural participation. The next National Cultural Policy should build on this by continuing to invest in music therapy and other evidenced creative therapies as part of Australia's cultural and community infrastructure.

Why the five pillars matter

First Nations First

Challenges: Limited flexibility in government systems to support First Nations-led, community-based and culturally grounded ways of working.

Opportunity: Expand First Nations leadership and embed trauma-informed, culturally connected approaches across arts, health, and community systems. Co-designed programs are essential. We have much to learn from First Nations arts-based approaches in health, healing and repair.

A Place for Every Story

Challenge: Unequal access to arts participation, particularly for regional, disadvantaged, and marginalised communities. Funding pathways remain

fragmented and overly focused on narrow clinical/functional outcomes rather than broader cultural participation and connection.

Opportunity: Scale inclusive, community-based programs that support storytelling, identity, participation and social connection.

Centrality of the Artist

Challenge: Artists face precarious working conditions, low income, and poor wellbeing, limiting the sustainability of the sector.

Opportunity: Strengthen workforce support through fair pay, training, and long-term career pathways.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Challenge: Fragmented sector coordination and lack of national structures to support collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Opportunity: Establish national coordination and support systems that connect research, practice, and community outcomes. Registered music therapists are uniquely positioned to address these challenges, combining expertise in music, inclusion, attuned and trauma-informed supports and accessibility to support meaningful participation for diverse communities.

Engaging the Audience

Challenge: Barriers remain to sustained participation, especially in communities experiencing isolation, illness, or environmental disruption. People with disability, neurodivergent people and people living with mental ill-health need programs that are accessible and provide healthcare support.

Opportunity: Expand community-engaged and arts-and-health programs that build connection, wellbeing, and resilience.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Arts-wellbeing initiatives must be trauma informed, anti-oppressive and fit for the challenges of climate change

Recommendation #2: Explicitly recognise therapeutic arts practice, specifically music therapy and evidenced creative arts therapies as part of Australia's cultural and creative national cultural policy and workforce.

Recommendation #3: Create structures, mechanisms and processes that deliver cross-portfolio integration with shared funding streams

Recommendation #4: Involve registered music therapists in future policy development, implementation and any expansion of the Creative Therapies Pilot program.

Recommendation #5: Support sustainable funding pathways for community-based, inclusive and therapeutic arts programs

Recommendation #6: Improve equitable access to therapeutic arts programs, specifically music therapy, across metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

Recommendation #7: Create a grassroots-embedded national body for creative health / arts and wellbeing

Recommendation #8: Ensure sector sustainability by strengthened arts education and increased economic security for artists

Recommendation #9: Support research translation, national outcome measurement frameworks and evaluation of arts-based policy outcomes.

Conclusion

Arts and culture are essential to wellbeing, connection and resilience across Australian communities.

The [REDACTED] has a key role to play in support enhanced program design, equity and skills development of a national workforce that can enhance and sustain national cultural policy and practice.

The next National Cultural Policy should build on recent progress by addressing structural barriers and enabling sustainable, cross-sector practice. A cohesive working group, including, music therapists is essential to this progress.