

24 May 2026

RE: Consultation for a New National Cultural Policy

Dear Minister Burke and Ms Templeman,

We Are Studios is pleased to provide feedback to support a revised National Cultural Policy that better reflects the needs and experiences of d/Deaf and Disabled people in the arts.

We endorse fully all of the recommendations made by the following peak bodies:

- Accessible Arts
- Arts and Disability Network Australia
- Western Sydney Arts Alliance

Australia's next National Cultural Policy must recognise access and inclusion for d/Deaf and Disabled artists, arts workers and audiences directly through a new sixth pillar. We recommend strongly that the next National Cultural Policy recognise d/Deaf and Disability communities as cultural groups, not just a series of access needs.

We want, and need, the support from Government to tell our stories, generate incomes and have our access needs met in culturally safe ways.

We believe that disability-led mechanisms are the best way forward for full inclusion in the arts and that future funding support for d/Deaf and Disability arts should only be available for genuine disability-led commissions, programs and initiatives.

In an era of declining financial support and villainisation of d/Deaf and Disabled people, including massive reductions in funding for NDIS participants, and next to no support available for non-NDIS participants, the next National Cultural Policy must recognise and fund equitable access without consideration or reliance on alternate funding mechanisms.

About We Are Studios

We Are Studios is a 100% disability-led, artist-run initiative and accessible studio based in Blacktown, Western Sydney, on Dharug Land.

Founded in 2023 *by and for* Disabled artists, We Are Studios exists to dismantle the systemic barriers that exclude Disabled people from cultural life.

We Are Studios supports 20 Disabled artists from across Western Sydney, working across different mediums, practices, ages and lived experiences. Artists are supported to build ambitious and sustainable creative careers through accessible studio space, peer-led mentorship, professional development, paid opportunities, artist management, exhibitions, commissions and pathways into the arts sector.

Working outside existing service-provider models, We Are Studios is a peer-led cultural space built by Disabled artists, for Disabled artists. It does not exist to profit from artists' access needs, but to build creative careers, cultural power and long-term change. Creative excellence, fair pay, self-determination and leadership are central to the work. Artists are collaborators, decision-makers and leaders.

Uniquely, We Are Studios works with artists across all types of disability, not one diagnosis, access need or pathway. Based in one of Australia's most diverse regions, the collective reflects the intersectional realities of Western Sydney, bringing together wide-ranging cultural, linguistic and lived experiences across physical, cognitive, psychosocial and intellectual disability, neurodivergence and chronic illness.

Through partnerships with the Powerhouse and Blacktown Arts, We Are Studios creates direct access to major cultural institutions and decision-making spaces, reshaping how Disabled artists are represented, commissioned, employed and collected.

Alongside its artistic programs, We Are Studios drives systemic change through advocacy, policy engagement, leadership development and institutional collaboration. We believe Disabled people should not only be included in the arts, but should lead, influence and transform it.

At its core, We Are Studios is about creative power, community and cultural equity. It is building the future of disability arts in Western Sydney and contributing to a more accessible, representative and ambitious national cultural landscape.

Recommendations

1. The formation of a sixth pillar: “Access for all Australians.”

We support the collective call from the disability arts sector (including from Arts and Disability Network Australia and Accessible Arts) for a dedicated sixth pillar to be added in Australia’s next National Cultural Policy.

This sixth pillar requires Government investment, accountability and a clear commitment to the representation of d/Deaf and Disabled people in Australia’s cultural life – not just as audiences, but as storytellers and culture keepers.

The existing system has failed in this regard. d/Deaf and Disabled people make up 1 in 5 Australians, yet we are not reflected as 1 in 5 stories told, 1 in 5 artists, 1 in 5 curators or 1 in 5 cultural leaders.

Current Government funding for arts and culture is being used to entrench our systemic underrepresentation in the arts. A sixth pillar with appropriate funding and oversight will force structural change in a sector that has not made nearly enough progress to be left to its own devices.

1 in 5 Australians are d/Deaf and/or Disabled. 20% of funding is an acceptable starting point for resourcing.

2. Recognise access as essential for our creative workforce

The next National Cultural Policy must embed access as a funded requirement across all arts and cultural grants. Any institution, organisation or individual receiving public funding must be required to deliver accessible outcomes for d/Deaf and Disabled audiences, artists and participants, with access costs funded through dedicated additional budget allocations rather than drawn from core project funds. This would ensure accessibility is planned, resourced and delivered without reducing the artistic or operational capacity of funded projects.

3. Mandate accessibility as a condition of public funding

All government-funded organisations and programs must be forced to meet clear standards, with concrete outcomes to ensure accessibility and inclusion for d/Deaf and Disabled artists, arts workers and audiences.

4. 20% of funding in every grant round for d/Deaf and Disabled artists

This funding should be distributed to reflect the full diversity of d/Deaf and Disabled artists, practices and lived experiences, ensuring no single disability experience or type of organisation is over-represented or treated as representative of the whole community.

5. Introduce national targets for d/Deaf and Disability representation

Set 20% targets across all funded festivals, commissions, touring programs and publicly funded institutions - with a commitment to a d/Deaf and Disability-only round of selection for the Australian pavilion at the Venice Biennale (within the next 3 cycles) to address historical inequities and force the embedding of d/Deaf and Disabled cultures with our cultural landscape.

6. Invest in disability leadership, especially from underrepresented communities

We must create accessible pathways to leadership for d/Deaf and Disabled people, particularly addressing barriers faced by intersectional communities including First Nations, people of colour, culturally diverse, people experiencing poverty and other intersectional groups - including people unable to participate in tertiary education or existing pathways to the arts.

7. Genuine Disability-led creative development and commissions.

We support the establishment of an annual commissioning opportunity and development programs, as recommended by Arts and Disability Network Australia, to support ambitious, large scale work by d/Deaf and Disabled creatives.

These opportunities should only be available to individual artists and organisations that are genuinely d/Deaf or Disability-led. We do not support funding being directed to organisations where d/Deaf and Disabled artists do not hold real financial and creative control over the final work. Organisations that provide services to d/Deaf and Disabled artists, rather than being led by or accountable to them, should not be eligible for this commission.

8. Recognise community arts a critical pathway into professional arts practice for d/Deaf and Disabled Artists

We endorse Revive Arts' call for Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) to be recognised in the next National Cultural Policy. We call for increased investment, long-term

place-based funding, and the establishment of a national body dedicated to CACD within Creative Australia.

We Are Studios has grown from this place-based, community-driven model and is now firmly embedded within the professional arts sector. Among our artists, 96% have no tertiary arts education, 80% receive income support, and 70% had never visited an art gallery before We Are Studios was established in 2023.

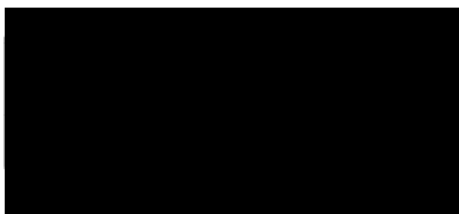
Stories like ours should be far more common across Australia. To address gaps in representation, the arts must be genuinely available to creatives from all backgrounds in safe, welcoming and culturally safe spaces where people can see and make art often for the first time without cost or ableist/institutional judgement.

9. Recognise Western Sydney as a distinct metropolitan area from Eastern Sydney and invest equitably to address historic underinvestment.

We endorse the Western Sydney Arts Alliance’s submission regarding historic inequities in Federal arts funding for Western Sydney. We recommend that Western Sydney be acknowledged in the Next Cultural Policy as a unique metropolitan area, completely distinct culturally, economically and socially from Eastern Sydney.

10% of Australia lives in Western Sydney but this large population does not receive a fair distribution of funding – devaluing our stories, communities and cultural contributions. There is a large, intersectional community of d/Deaf and Disabled people in Western Sydney – one of the largest concentrations in an urban environment in Australia.

Yours sincerely,



Jordan Valageorgiou

Executive Director

We Are Studios Arts and Disability Incorporated

