



Submission to the Planned Revision of the National Cultural Policy, *Revive*

From: Dance for Parkinson's Australia

To: Office for the Arts, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

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Summary

Dance for Parkinson's Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the planned revision of Australia's National Cultural Policy, *Revive* (2023). As a leading national organisation delivering specialised, evidence-based creative health interventions, we offer our full endorsement of the joint submission compiled by the Arts Health Networks in Queensland (AHNQ), New South Wales / ACT (AHNNA NSW/ACT), South Australia, and the Victorian Network for Creativity and Wellbeing.

Since 2013, our organisation has operated at the vital intersection of the arts, disability, and healthcare sectors. Our foundational expertise lies in addressing Parkinson's disease—which is now the fastest-growing neurological condition globally, affecting over 200,000 Australian. Our scope has expanded over the past thirteen years to support dance initiatives for broader populations of older adults, creative ageing programmes and to continue to lead in dance for health best practice.

The urgency of embedding creative health into our national policy architecture cannot be overstated. In March 2026, the Federal Government launched the landmark National Parkinson's Action Plan (NPAP) to build a more connected, multidisciplinary healthcare ecosystem. Simultaneously, the broader aged care sector is undergoing historic structural reform to support a rapidly ageing population.

Dance for Parkinson's Australia delivers directly on these concurrent national priorities. We witness daily how specialised dance classes serve as a powerful non-clinical intervention, offering human-centred health strategies that target motor and non-motor symptoms, improve executive cognitive function, reduce the risk of falls, and combat the epidemic of social isolation among older Australians. These activities deploy hundreds of "active ingredients" to directly combat neurological decline and physical frailty.

However, the full public health and economic benefits of creative health programmes remain restricted by rigid portfolio silos, a lack of grassroots-embedded national infrastructure, and acute workforce precarity. To meet the needs across communities, the Australian Government must transition from policy aspiration to structural change by adopting the following core recommendations.

The Australian Government's 2023 Intergenerational Report (IGR) outlines a dramatic demographic and fiscal trajectory over the next 40 years (to 2062–63) that makes the structural integration of creative health a public policy necessity:

- Considering increased life expectancies (projected to rise to 87 years for men and 89.5 years for women), the number of Australians aged 65 and over will more than double, and those aged 85 and over will more than triple. By 2062–63, nearly a quarter of the population (23.4%) will be over 65.
- Older Australians already account for roughly 40% of total health expenditure. The IGR explicitly warns that hospitalisations for cognitive and neurological conditions will skyrocket, with dementia admissions projected to experience an 81.5% surge by 2032–33.
- Government spending on aged care is set to more than double, growing from 1.1% to 2.5% of GDP. Concurrently, the old-age dependency ratio will jump from 26.6% to 38.2%, while the formal care and support workforce will need to double in size to meet demand, presenting an immense labour recruitment challenge.

Creative Health directly answers these systemic crises. By slowing cognitive decline, maintaining fine motor skills, improving spatial awareness, and preserving physical mobility, specialised dance and arts programmes act as low-cost, scalable interventions. They directly support "ageing in place" and delay or prevent entry into expensive residential care facilities, offering a highly sustainable framework for the forward liabilities detailed in the IGR.

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

Pillar: First Nations First

Dance for Parkinson's Australia supports the centring of justice practices—both social and epistemic—and acknowledges the global leadership of First Nations communities in delivering holistic, culturally embedded care models that interweave community wellbeing with creative expression.

- **The Regional and Equity Health Gap:** Inequity in arts access and health outcomes across Australia is heavily dictated by postcode, geography, and regional resourcing. As the old-age dependency ratio rises, regional and rural areas with shrinking younger workforces will be hit hardest by care deficits. For older adults and individuals navigating progressive neurodegenerative conditions in these areas, a lack of local cultural infrastructure worsens isolation and accelerates poor health outcomes.
- **Community Capacity:** We echo the call for flexible, co-designed funding frameworks within government ministries and agencies to accommodate diverse, community-engaged ways of working. Funding must incentivise hybrid (digital and live) delivery models, ensuring that vulnerable older cohorts navigating chronic illness and regional isolation are structurally supported through continuous community connection.

Recommendation #2: Create structures, mechanisms, and processes that deliver meaningful cross-portfolio integration with shared funding streams.

Pillars: All 5 Pillars, with special relevance for Engaging the Audience

This recommendation is of paramount importance to our organisation. Because our programmes operate across the boundaries of the Arts, Health, Disability, and Aged Care portfolios, they are frequently stuck in regulatory and funding gaps.

- **Overcoming Portfolio Silos:** Currently, government ministries operate in isolated silos, with limited shared knowledge regarding the high return on investment and synergistic health benefits that arts-engaged processes offer to non-arts portfolios. The National Parkinson's Action Plan explicitly calls for cross-sector collaboration across health, disability, and aged care to ensure equitable support, a principle that must be extended to all creative ageing policies.
- **Joint Funding Instruments:** We strongly support the proposal for joint funding instruments where non-arts portfolios (such as Health or Aged Care) supply a minor redistribution (even at 1% of agency funding) to co-fund arts-based health initiatives. This minor reallocation would provide a highly feasible mechanism to meet crucial preventative health and aged care outcomes while simultaneously alleviating the sustainability crisis within the arts sector.
- **Cross-Sector Infrastructure:** We advocate for a standing cross-portfolio coordination function jointly resourced by the Office for the Arts and relevant social portfolios. Establishing standardised paycodes, safety and quality frameworks, and shared impact assessment models for artists operating within health and aged care contexts is critical to formalising care pathways and protecting participants.

Recommendation #3: Create a grassroots-embedded national body for creative health / arts and wellbeing.

Pillars: Strong Cultural Infrastructure and A Place for Every Story

The National Parkinson's Action Plan and broader aged care strategies place significant emphasis on data collection, research impact, and translating peer-reviewed evidence into community-level allied health pathways. A dedicated national infrastructure is required to facilitate this within the creative health sector.

- **Sustaining the Infrastructure:** Rather than relying on the exhausting and unsustainable volunteer labour of committed individuals, the creative health and creative ageing sectors require a sustainable, grassroots-embedded national structure or organisation.
- **Data Integration and Translation:** A national body would provide the centralised capacity needed to integrate and analyse Australian data, advance the creative health research base, and translate findings directly into scalable, community-level practice. This would bridge the gap between cultural participation and measurable medical outcomes, directly

addressing the IGR-projected neurological and aged-care disease burden. Dance for Parkinson's Australia eagerly supports a sector-wide co-design process alongside the Arts Health Networks, major research centres, and professional bodies to establish this entity.

Recommendation #4: Ensure sector sustainability by strengthened arts education and increased economic security for artists.

Pillars: Centrality of the Artist and Strong Cultural Infrastructure

The core proposition of the creative health sector persists: arts and cultural assets for health and ageing cannot be available without healthy, economically secure artists.

- **Alleviating the Care Workforce Deficit:** The IGR highlights that the traditional care sector workforce must double, creating an unprecedented recruitment strain. The creative sector offers a highly skilled, ready-made parallel workforce.
- **Workforce Fragility:** Teaching dance to older adults and individuals with complex, progressive movement disorders requires highly specialised, ongoing professional development, anatomical understanding, and trauma-informed training. However, our workforce is structurally fragile, constrained by low and unstable incomes, short-term contracts, and a heavy reliance on precarious grant funding. This environment exposes specialised teaching artists to high rates of anxiety, depression, and burnout, threatening the continuity of care for vulnerable participants.
- **The Education Pipeline and Structural Solutions:** The severe erosion of tertiary and school-based arts education imperils the future pipeline of creative health practitioners. We support the recommendation to develop a future creative health workforce strategy jointly with the Department of Education to explicitly train the workforce and educate the broader health sector on the economic and clinical value these artists provide. Furthermore, we urge the government to trial bounded income support schemes, such as limited basic income pilots, specialised fellowship programmes, or cross-portfolio secondment placements to secure economic stability for these vital practitioners.

Transitioning from a "Deficit" to an "Asset" Model of Ageing

Pillar: A Place for Every Story

Traditional public policy and macroeconomic reports, including the IGR, frequently frame an ageing population purely as an economic "burden" or an unsustainable drain on the tax base. Embedding creative health and creative ageing frameworks into *Revive* fundamentally flips this deficit model on its head.



By 2062–63, nearly a quarter of the Australian population will be over 65. They represent a massive, historically unprecedented pool of lived experience, memory, and skill. Creative ageing reframes older Australians not as passive recipients of care, but as active cultural producers, storytellers, and mentors. Maintaining their active participation in the arts preserves high levels of social capital, reduces late-life depression, mitigates chronic isolation, and ensures older generations remain visible, valued, and celebrated in Australia's cultural narrative.

Conclusion

The concurrent implementation of the National Parkinson's Action Plan, the ongoing reforms in aged care, and the stark demographic projections of the Intergenerational Report highlight a critical turning point for Australia. Conventional, siloed frameworks alone cannot manage the increasing prevalence of chronic neurological conditions and the fiscal pressures of an ageing population.

Arts and culture are not merely supplementary activities; they are critical, essential infrastructure central to collective wellbeing, preventative non-clinical care, and national resilience. Dance for Parkinson's Australia stands alongside the Arts Health Networks in calling for a renewed National Cultural Policy that moves beyond aspiration to structural, cross-portfolio change. By supporting our specialised creative workforce, breaking down inter-ministerial silos, and investing in a coordinated national body, the Australian Government can ensure that life-changing creative interventions are structurally embedded to support Australians who need them most.

-Submitted by the Board of Dance for Parkinson's Australia