



# National Cultural Policy Submission

## 1. Introduction

Art is a human right (Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 27). Yet people with disability are often excluded, segregated, and encounter barriers to working, participating and attending the arts.

## 2. About Access Arts - <https://accessarts.org.au/>

Access Arts is Queensland's acknowledged leader for arts and disability. We build opportunities for community and professional artists who experience disability or disadvantage to create work of excellence, and then to showcase, document and sell it.

We create career pathways for people with disability to paid work in the arts. We advocate for equality for artists with disability within the arts industry. Through art, Access Arts transforms lives.

## 3. General Observations

**Cultural map:** The National Cultural Policy should consider the cultural scaffolding Australia needs to put in place in preparation for our arts to shine at the 2032 Cultural Olympiad and beyond. A unique opportunity for Commonwealth Government to consider – what is the cultural map Australia needs? Where are the gaps in provision? How will these gaps be filled?

What should our workforce look like in 5, 10, 20 years' time? What do we need to put in place to attract and retain skilled arts professionals in this gig economy – to prevent the brain drain to other better paid industries, to capital cities, and overseas? What should a 'fair pay for Australian arts professionals' policy look like?

Is geographic spread of funding across the nation equitable? Does the majority of arts funding gravitate to certain States and demographics? Are tax payers across Australia getting their fair share?

The National Cultural Policy should take a pro-active approach as cultural leader to deliver the cultural map Australia needs, not leaving arts development to piecemeal or kneejerk reaction.

**Culture of tolerance:** The 2013 National Cultural Policy *Creative Australia* promoted a culture of 'tolerance' towards people with disability (page 106 in the first published version). I trust this disastrous reference will be righted in the new policy, and career pathways for people with disability to correct previous inequity are celebrated and clearly mapped.



**Participation in the arts:** this appears to be omitted from the pillars, and is an important part of the arts continuum. I will address this under 'Reaching the audience'.

## 4. Pillars

### **A. First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.**

**First Nations stories subject to government funding vagaries:** Access Arts has 30 years' experience delivering Therapeutic Arts Workshop Program for First Nation Queenslanders (with and without disability) that supported social and emotional well-being and mental health recovery. Through art, we have innovatively created early intervention pathways to address specific needs of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Funded by Australian Government since the Keating Government, most recently the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet through the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), our Program has delivered exceptional Closing the Gap outcomes under socio-economic indicator 'Safety and Wellbeing'. However, the NIAA's recent policy decision to redirect this whole budget to professional counselling means that NIAA funding to Access Arts will shortly terminate. Unless alternative funding is identified, this Program will be guillotined and the immense benefits First Nations Queenslanders have experienced from this Program will cease. The Australian arts economy has benefitted from three decades of this grant from non-arts sources. It is sad there is a lack of quick-response Government funding to enable this impactful Program to continue (currently \$100,000 per annum).

A quick response budget that can respond to such emergencies would beneficially support the arts industry.

### **B. A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.**

**The National Cultural Policy should foster disability-led work,** encourage these unique stories to be told. As well as positive action funding programs for creative developments, this means accessible spaces, safe environments to create, access needs met, work professionally showcased and marketed. We need a roadmap to seeing more disability-led work professionally showcased on stage and exhibited - internationally. 'Unlimited' revolutionised the UK's disability arts industry and has become an international magnet. Australia needs to place greater investment in the sector, the importance of the work needs greater recognition. Undercover Artist Festival, founded by Access Arts, is a trail-blazer: <https://undercoverartistfest.com/>



### **C. The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.**

**People with disability and Australia's arts industry:** Since the launch of the National Arts and Disability Strategy (2009) funding programs, leadership programs, mentorships, and other initiatives have sought to address barriers to representation, participation, and employment in the arts for people with disability. However Australia Council and Census data indicate that artists with disability still struggle to secure access to training, production opportunities, and employment. While >18% of Australia's population identify as having disability, only 9% of professional artists in Australia identify as having disability. These artists earn 42% less than their non-disabled peers. Artists with disability are underrepresented in leadership roles where decisions about employment, programming and representational practice are made.

Research shows that artists with disability may be skilled in their artform, but less skilled in teaching, facilitating, directing, or administering programs and projects, as a reason why many find it difficult to secure desired employment.

It is often difficult for mainstream training centres and organisations to understand and adapt to needs of people with disability eg people who are non-verbal, vision impaired, d/Deaf so they can excel. Not all people with disability find mainstream programs most conducive to their learning.

What should our workforce look like in 5 years' time? Where are people with disability in senior roles in Australia's arts industry?

**The imperative for capacity-building career pathways to skill-up people with disability to transition to senior roles in Australia's cultural workforce.** Because of the crucial need to up-skill our sector and redress the balance, Access Arts now has the following career pathway schemes in place to address the inequity:

- **Producing House:** Access Arts is about to embark on the first feasibility study of a Producing House or Producing Hub to skill-up people with disability in a safe supported environment for paid employment as performers, producers, technicians, administrators. This has national potential. We need to understand the pipeline, get directors and presenters on board, consider the whole producing journey, grow market demand.
- **Sync Leadership Australia Online Program:** To develop leadership skills in Australian arts professionals with disability, Australia Council and British Council funded Access Arts to run the first Sync Leadership Australia Online Program in 2021, disability-led by UK experts Sarah Pickthall and Jo Verrent: <https://accessarts.org.au/sync-australia-leadership-program/> Being on-line we could reach out national-wide. Australia Council has funded us to run this again in 2022, but this short-term 'stop-start' process disallows us to long-term plan.
- **Earn From Your Art** is another skill development leadership program we are piloting for artists with disability leading to paid employment. It is disability-led by Professor Bree Hadley, takes



place over 2 years, aimed at emerging arts professionals at the very outset of their leadership journey, and raises career aspirations among the disability sector – a sector traditionally with low expectation due to statistical evidence that professionals with disability in Australia’s paid arts workforce are a rarity. Access Arts initiated this scheme as we identified there is no such ‘beginner’ program that meets needs of people with disability in Australia.

Australia needs a capacity-building policy and implementation plan for artists and artsworkers with disability to transition into the mainstream paid workforce. For example, the ‘centrality of the artists’ in terms of the 2032 Cultural Olympics does not mean artists with disability segregated into the Paralympics: like Dame Evelyn Glennie in London 2012 they should proudly take centre stage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULjRfinS39g>

The National Cultural Policy needs to chart a ladder of development and planned approach to skill-up people with disability into paid leadership positions in Australia’s arts industry.

#### **D. Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.**

**An holistic approach to arts and disability delivery across Australia’s arts industry:** While Access Arts is Queensland’s acknowledged leader for arts and disability, we should not be the sole repository or the ‘conscience’ of the arts industry. Mainstream arts organisations should be empowered and charged to do heavy lifting, and government funding should reflect this.

Our arts and disability sector is looking to the next iteration of the National Arts and Disability Strategy (NADS). We hope this next iteration will come with a timetabled action-plan and implementation budget. We trust that the arts sector will be made aware of NADS (many arts professionals even at senior level are unaware of the existence of NADS), and be expected actively to deliver on implementation. Arts Council England introduced ‘stretching’ targets and sanctions for those cultural organisations that do not attract more diverse workforces and audiences: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/feb/18/arts-bodies-threatened-with-funding-cuts-over-lack-of-diversity>

**Organisations like Access Arts need multi-year core-funding:** We deliver on national policy. We need multi-year core-funding to grow and create much-needed new initiatives, like Undercover Artist Festival and the Producing House mentioned above. However Australia Council’s multi-year investment guidelines only allow *national* peak bodies to apply, which seems short-sighted. It does not fund State peak bodies for core work. This reduces the scope of how we can future plan and what we can achieve.

**Authoritative research supports arts advocacy:** When I worked in the UK arts, I found authoritative documents produced by Arts Council England immensely helpful. One example: as Strategic Director



of Milton Keynes Theatre and Gallery Company, I used their macro research on the theatre economy to evidence to local councillors that my theatre (based on size and location) contributed £4 million annually to the City's local economy. A 'wake-up' call to councillors who no longer saw our arts programs as 'fluffy', but refocused their view of our theatre as an economic driver for the City's wellbeing, and directed support for the Theatre and Gallery Company accordingly.

The National Cultural Policy should encourage a planned course of macro research that supports arts advocacy.

UK Government's 2017 All Party Parliamentary Report into Arts, Health and Wellbeing is a case in point, a powerful advocacy tool for arts and health benefits such as Arts on Prescription.

**Aligning the arts agenda with other Government departmental agendas** such as health, employment, education helps lever additional funding from other government departments into Australia's arts economy, which supports strong arts institutions, powerful work, great impacts.

## **E. Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.**

**Disability-led work needs market development.** Australia needs to grow audiences for this often edgy innovative work with unique stories that inform social change. Access Arts has been driving audience development for work by disabled people through schemes such as Undercover Artist Festival: we negotiated for Undercover to become part of Brisbane Festival for the first time in 2021, the Festival attracted British Council funding and now has national reach. In 2020 during COVID, Undercover Artist:Online's international reach attracted audiences from the US, Canada, New Zealand, UK and mainland Europe.

**Barriers to accessing mainstream arts activity:** which people with disability encounter. To overcome these, there needs to be proper recognition of access costs, the necessity for arts organisations to factor these into their budgets, and proper marketing of their programs to the disability sector. Because, if a program suddenly becomes accessible, people with disability who till now have not been able to access the program previously, need to know and be assured that these programs are now open, available and accessible to them.

**Benefits and challenges of NDIS funding to Australia's arts economy.** In terms of participating in arts activity, NDIS funding contributes to program costs but does not fully cover the cost of quality arts participatory programs. Too often people with disability are made to suffer 'paint pot colour-by-numbers' low cost time-filling programs run by unskilled disability support workers in day centres, instead of having access to the stretch of quality art programs delivered by teaching artists that raise the spirit and feed the soul. If NDIS funding is to contribute to quality arts, then there needs to be



proper recognition that NDIS funds contribute to Australia's arts economy but do not cover the full cost, and a solution found for how this funding gap will be met.

When this is in place, people with disability will be able to experience art – their human right – instead of the current low-level 'bingo-type' activity. They will be able to progress on their artistic journey from entry level, develop their arts practice, have the opportunity to progress up the career ladder from participant to paid professional. Employment opportunities and income-earning potential for Australia's practicing artists will multiply, supporting their economic viability as practicing artists and sustainability. Similar practice can be applied to the Aged Care industry, one of the fastest growing sectors in Australia.

**Pat Swell**

*Chief Executive, August 2022*