



25 January 2024

The Hon Stephen Jones MP  
Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services  
Australian Government – The Treasury  
[Stephen.Jones.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Stephen.Jones.MP@aph.gov.au)

**Re: 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a pre-budget submission for the 2024-25 Federal Government Budget.

Theatre Network Australia (TNA) is a leading industry development organisation for the performing arts, prioritising independent artists and small to medium companies. A national organisation with a dedicated Victorian program, TNA serves over 590 members, and reaches and represents over 5,000 more performing arts workers through our communications and research.

TNA commends the Government on the launch and first year of implementation of the commitments of the National Cultural Policy, *REVIVE*. A significant amount has already been achieved, providing strategic direction and development for an industry that contributes \$17 billion in value added (GDP).<sup>1</sup> This forward-looking, ambitious policy gives Australians a real sense of belief in a future that is joyful and meaningful.

The policy's overarching whole-of-government approach is very welcome, and one that the arts industry has been calling for over the past decade. It is well understood that arts and culture can play a significant role in helping to deliver long term gain in critical pressure areas such as education, health, international relations, workforce development, and disaster relief.

TNA supports the [2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission made by A New Approach](#), which emphasises the need for further interjurisdictional collaboration and coordination to capitalise on an unprecedented focus on arts and culture across Australian jurisdictions. TNA's recommendations below focus on leveraging this proposed increased interjurisdictional capacity and building cross-portfolio initiatives that are cost-effective and address current priority areas.

TNA welcomes any opportunity to discuss these recommendations further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joshua Lowe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joshua Lowe  
Co-CEO  
Theatre Network Australia (TNA)

## Summary of Recommendations

### Recommendation 1: A cohesive strategy for arts and culture international touring and exchange

### Recommendation 2: Support for national touring, exchange, and regional development

- A. Coordinate investment in national touring by federal, state, and local governments
- B. Increase investment in Creative Australia’s Playing Australia program

### Recommendation 3: Support for arts and culture workforce development

- A. Facilitate stronger implementation and accountability of the Australian Curriculum by requiring states to publish compliance reports
- B. A pilot program for a national Creative Schools program modelled on Sporting Schools
- C. Reinstate Creative Australia’s ArtStart program

### Recommendation 4: Increased capacity of arts and culture to contribute solutions to the mental health crisis

- A. A national Social Prescribing Scheme that includes arts and cultural activities and specified pathways for mental health referral
- B. Support training and accreditation for artists and arts workers active in mental health settings

Rec.	Portfolio, Entity, Outcome	Budget 2024-25	Forward Estimates			All years
			2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	
1	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, DITRDCA, Outcome 6	\$0.5m	\$0.5m			\$1.0m
2A	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, DITRDCA, Outcome 6	Included within the scope of Recommendations 1 and 4 made by A New Approach in their 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission.				
2B	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, DITRDCA, Outcome 6	\$5.0m	\$5.0m	\$5.0m	\$5.0m	\$20m
3A	Education, Department of Education: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Outcome 1	\$0.15m and 1 ASL	\$0.15m and 1 ASL	\$0.15m and 1 ASL		\$0.45m and 1 ASL
3B	Education, Department of Education, Outcome 1.	\$0.5m and 1 ASL	\$5.0m and 3 ASL			\$5.5m and 1/3 ASL
3C	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, DITRDCA, Outcome 6	\$1.0m	\$1.0m	\$1.0m	\$1.0m	\$4.0m
4A	Health and Aged Care, Department of Health, Outcome 1 (Program 1.2)	Requires additional scoping				
4B	Health and Aged Care, Department of Health, Outcome 1 (Program 1.2)	Requires additional scoping				

## Recommendation 1

### A cohesive strategy for arts and culture international touring and exchange

Australian performing arts organisations and artists have a growing appetite to return to international touring, as the challenges and restrictions of the pandemic begin to recede. However, Australian cultural relations efforts are fragmented across multiple agencies and the lack of an international cultural relations strategy within and between these agencies hampers effective investment. Given the touring landscape has changed and costs have increased significantly, a new, coordinated plan is needed.

*REVIVE* contains a number of actions under Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience around strengthening exchange, engagement, and cultural diplomacy, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, which TNA welcomes. Supporting greater longitudinal international cultural exchange in this region will be a key tool for effective cultural diplomacy, and Australian artists and arts organisations are an asset in this work.

These newer markets need new approaches and will take time and investment to build. In the short-term, there is still appetite for Australian work in existing markets in Europe and the US that provides our artists and organisations with opportunities to create greater return on investment on new work through touring, but that still needs attention and investment, particularly following the disruptions from the pandemic.

The creation of a strategy would pull these threads together, identifying where investment can be directed in the short- and long-term for maximum value and return. This strategy should also have intergovernmental involvement, led by Creative Australia, and bringing together agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Office for the Arts in a coordinated way.

## Recommendation 2

### Support for national touring, exchange, and regional development

#### A. Coordinate investment in national touring by federal, state, and local governments

Touring activity is heavily reliant on government investment from local, state, and federal government (including Australia Council). For touring producers and presenters, the interdependence of these three main investors and their respective policy positions present strategic and operational risks that could be avoided or mitigated.

Harmonisation of federal and state tour funding (e.g. aligning application timelines, coordinating support, standardising desired outcomes etc.) would save considerable time and administrative effort for applicants and potentially allow more national tours to be realised.

The role of local government as a cornerstone investor in national touring is not evident or is undervalued in the vast majority of the investment decisions of federal and state bodies. Local government represents \$752m of annual recurrent expenditure into the cultural sector.<sup>2</sup> Local government investment in programming touring work is required to make touring happen.

As outlined more fully in the [National Performing Arts Touring Scan \(2020\)](#), harmonisation between States/Territories and the Federal Government (i.e. Office for the Arts and Creative Australia) can be achieved through aligning Playing Australia with jurisdictions' grants programs and touring funds.

As recommended by A New Approach in their 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission, an intergovernmental plan, and support for interoperable implementation and evaluation across jurisdictions would drive this work, and so TNA fully supports these recommendations.

#### B. Increase investment in Creative Australia's Playing Australia program

The Playing Australia grants program, administered by Creative Australia, supports performing arts companies by helping to meet the high costs associated with touring live productions to regional and remote locations. Regional touring allows presenters to access new audiences and offers numerous employment opportunities, as well as ensuring regional audience engagement with a diverse range of touring product.

The primary challenge for national touring is the significantly increasing costs – in higher performance fees, travel and freight, and venue and wages costs – and the price sensitivity of audiences (i.e. increasing ticket prices to cover increased costs results in reduced audience numbers). These increased costs combined with stagnant federal and state investment levels and reduced and more risk averse local government budgets, means that the capacity for national touring is severely reduced simply because producers can no longer afford it. While coordinated investment across three levels of government will go a long way towards maximising value and outcomes, it simply cannot make up for the fact that current investment is not keeping up with the increasing costs of living.

A permanent increase of at least \$5m per annum to Playing Australia is needed to sustain national touring in Australia.

## Recommendation 3

### Support for arts and culture workforce development

Our cultural and creative industries are rich in human capital, and before the pandemic, in 2016, more than 400,000 people were employed in the cultural and creative industries in Australia.<sup>3</sup> Arts workers are increasingly working and applying creative skills in non-creative sectors,<sup>4</sup> adding value to other industries and portfolios in transition, such as regional development, tourism, mental health and aged care.

However, a general assumption in policy settings that there is ready supply of creative workers, together with COVID-19 impacts, has resulted in a 'leaky pipeline' of talent and skills development and a lack of appropriate industrial settings. The sector is now challenged by supply and retention issues.

An increase in demand for key skills across the creative sector – following a period of unprecedented disruption throughout the COVID19 pandemic – has resulted in greater competition for an already limited pool of skilled workers. Over the course of the pandemic, the industry also lost thousands of creative workers to other sectors, resulting in a severe skill and labour shortage.<sup>5</sup> Between February 2020 and 2022, there was a 260% increase in job vacancies within arts and recreation services, the highest of all industry divisions.<sup>6</sup>

We need to build confidence in creative sector careers and better equip young creatives to apply their skills across sectors – responding to future demands and disruptions. To do that, we must consider training pathways from early years through to employment. While there are certainly issues within creative education at a tertiary level that need to be addressed as a priority, TNA's recommendations focus on earlier stages of the creative workforce pipeline that need urgent attention.

#### **A. Facilitate stronger implementation and accountability of the Australian Curriculum by requiring states to publish compliance reports**

The Australian Curriculum has been well designed to deliver the best educational outcomes for Australian children and young people. The Curriculum acknowledges the real benefits and learning outcomes in the arts for students and includes a direction that all students from Foundation to Year 8 have the opportunity to engage with at least one arts experience per year.

The reality is that there are huge discrepancies between each state and territory in how this is delivered, and little to no accountability or oversight to ensure it is even delivered at all. Today, many young Australians still do not have access to the basic entitlements outlined in the Curriculum.

Strategies need to be put in place to ensure the Australian Curriculum: The Arts is implemented in full, so that all young people, regardless of where in the country they live, or what kind of school they're at, can benefit from engagement in the arts, driving greater skills development, job readiness, and social connectedness. It is well known in the industry that Australia's creative workforce relies on students having these early creative experiences, which informs and inspires their choices of further study and careers.

The first step to supporting this is to require state governments to publish reports detailing how many of their schools are achieving basic entitlements for students regarding arts engagement. These

reports will inform Federal and state governments where, and how significant, the gaps are, and where targeted investment is needed.

## **B. A pilot for a national Creative Schools program modelled on Sporting Schools**

One of the reasons that many Australian schools are unable to fulfil the requirements of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts is the shortage or unavailability of qualified/experience teaching staff. Schools must often rely on external providers to provide arts engagement opportunities for their students, and then only if their budgets allow for it, leading many students, particularly in regional Australia, to miss out.

Creative Schools is a proposed Federal program that would be delivered by the Department of Education in collaboration with the Office for the Arts and Creative Australia, which would partner with local arts organisations to help schools increase children and young people's participation in the arts and connect them with community arts opportunities. This is based on the existing Sporting Schools program.

[Sporting Schools](#) is an Australian Government initiative designed to help schools increase children's participation in sport and connect them with community sport opportunities. Sporting Schools programs are provided free to children and their families to help students build the confidence and capability to be active for life. To help achieve this, Sport Australia has partnered with more than 35 national sporting organisations (NSOs).

Grants of between \$1,000 and \$3,600 are available per primary school for each term, and schools use these funds to engage the NSOs to deliver sports activities for students. This ensures students have access to free, high-quality sport programs at school, establishes partnerships between sporting organisations and schools to promote involvement in sport outside of school, and builds capabilities in both school teachers and coaches in the sport workforce.

This is an excellent youth engagement model because it provides accessible services for young people in spaces they already attend, connects schools and young people with community organisations, gives agency to schools and local communities, and is a cost- and resource-effective, devolved method of government spending. Creative Schools would ease pressures on schools trying to comply with the arts curriculum, and address workforce issues by both providing employment and strengthening early stages of the talent pipeline.

TNA proposes that initially a targeted, fixed-term pilot program is devised in 2024-25, and trialled in schools in 2025-26, followed by evaluation to inform the next stages.

## **C. Reinstate Creative Australia's ArtStart program**

[ArtStart](#) was a program by Creative Australia, which was available to recent creative arts graduates to support a career or business development strategy for their arts practice. Between 2009 and 2015 grants of \$10,000 were given to young artists wanting to establish a career as a professional artist, until [the program had to be cut](#) after the government at the time dramatically reduced Creative Australia's budget.



A [longitudinal study of early career artists](#) by the Creative Australia found that ArtStart recipients spent more time on their practice and earned a higher proportion of their income than non-recipients. They also found recipients had more confidence in their career, felt their artistic practice met or exceeded their expectations, and saw a large increase in their network of contacts after receiving their grant.

ArtStart is a proven, cost-effective program model for developing a secure arts workforce, the absence of which has contributed to the skills shortages and workforce decline that the sector is experiencing today. It's reinstatement via additional investment in Creative Australia will be welcomed by the sector.

## Recommendation 4

### Increased capacity of arts and culture to contribute solutions to the mental health crisis

It is now estimated that over two in five Australians aged 16–85 will experience a mental illness at some point in their life.<sup>7</sup> Young people are particularly at risk, with the prevalence of mental ill health in young people increasing by more than 50% from 26% in 2007 to 39% in 2020–21.<sup>8</sup>

The cost of the mental health crisis is widespread, with mental health services costing the Australian Government \$11.6 billion in 2020–21,<sup>9</sup> while the cost of mental illness to the broader economy has been estimated to be \$70 billion.<sup>10</sup>

The arts have a key role to play here. There is a growing body of evidence that recognises the crucial role arts and creativity can play in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Arts and creativity have been shown to support improved mental and physical wellbeing,<sup>11</sup> combat anxiety and depression,<sup>12</sup> decrease loneliness and promote social inclusion.<sup>13</sup> Over half of Australians recognise the benefits of engaging with arts to improve our health and wellbeing. Australians are increasingly acting on that belief and attending arts and cultural events to improve their wellbeing.<sup>14</sup>

The Productivity Commission's [Mental Health Inquiry Report \(2020\)](#) recommended mental health reform to support a people-centred mental health system that can meet changing community need. The report identified a disproportionate emphasis on clinical services and a lack of attention to the social determinants of mental health. We currently have a distinct opportunity to better connect our healthcare system with arts practitioners, and so to foster thriving, cohesive and resilient Australian communities.

Successfully addressing mental wellbeing requires a 'whole of government' approach, engaging investment across portfolios – such as health and aged care; Indigenous affairs; education, skills and employment, the arts – and across jurisdictions. It is imperative that wellbeing is considered across all levels of government so that early intervention can mitigate adverse downstream impacts.

There is a need to professionally develop the workforce of artists and arts workers in mental health settings, both to protect individuals and communities seeking wellbeing support as well as the artists and arts workers conducting this work. Such development feeds into the Government's [National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2022-2032](#), which aims to attract, train, maximise, support and retain an appropriately skilled, motivated and coordinated mental health workforce to meet the evolving needs of the mental health system into the future.

TNA's recommendation draws on the research and recommendations by Creative Australia in their reports, [Connective lives: Creative solutions to the mental health crisis](#) and [Creative Solutions: Training and sustaining the arts for mental health workforce](#).

#### A. A national Social Prescribing Scheme that includes arts and cultural activities and specified pathways for mental health referral.

Social prescribing is an innovative practice that seeks to improve overall wellbeing in non-medical ways in conjunction with healthcare workers. It is rapidly gaining legitimacy among health consumers and



practitioners, and within health and other portfolios across government, and has the potential to reduce the burden on the health care system and reduce overall costs of medical intervention.

A national social prescribing scheme could be integrated into general practice primary care health settings, to connect people with mental and physical health challenges to arts activities and/or art therapy.

A 2019 survey conducted by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Consumer Health Forum (CHF) found more than 90% of general practitioners (GPs) and allied health professionals believe that referring patients to non-medical services in the community is extremely helpful for improving health outcomes.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, almost nine in ten Australians are 'very open' or 'somewhat open' to being prescribed arts engagement for a mental health condition (85%).<sup>16</sup>

'Arts on prescription' programs exist in pockets around the country, and many general practitioners are already referring health consumers to community groups and activities in ways that can be understood as 'social prescription'. What is needed at this point is greater coordination and upscaling – both to assist primary care workers in helping health consumers access cultural resources, and to improve access to these resources around the country.

This scheme could be designed in accordance with that proposed by the Consumers Health Forum. It could also, alternatively, build on existing pilot programs that have strong digital and data foundations, such as that conducted by SANE's digital and telehealth mental health service.<sup>17</sup>

Additional scoping beyond the capacity of TNA needs to be undertaken to determine how this scheme could be devised as a collaboration between the Department of Health and the Office for the Arts, potentially initially as a fixed-term pilot program.

## **B. Support training and accreditation for artists and arts workers active in mental health settings.**

Artists working in community settings can play a key role in the health ecosystem, filling a gap in service provision. Community arts and creative health programs bring innovative and non-clinical approaches to the area of mental health and wellbeing, and often operate in complex and trauma-impacted environments. However, practitioners lack the formal support structures that are common to the health and mental health sectors.

There is a need to professionally develop the workforce of artists and arts workers in mental health settings. Standardised and recognised training, accreditation and regulation would provide much needed structure for this field of practice, ensuring that best practice standards and ethical frameworks are established and met. Regulation of the field would also provide certainty about the different approaches, identifying the educational requirements for each and legitimising them with the oversight of a professional body.

There is a variety of approaches taken to this work at present, with varied degrees of cross-sectoral collaboration, standardisation, or oversight. Regulation that spans both arts and cultural and health sectors would make sure that practitioners, individuals, and communities are protected in the course of this work.

Additional scoping beyond the capacity of TNA needs to be undertaken to determine how this initiative could be developed as a collaboration between the Department of Health and the Office for the Arts.

## End Notes

---

1. Eltham B and Pennington A 2021, [Creativity in Crisis: Rebooting Australia's Arts and Entertainment Sector After COVID-19](#)
2. Cultural Development Network (2020). Representative of the 2017-18 Financial Year.
3. Cunningham S and McCutcheon M 2019, [The Creative Economy in Australia: Cultural Production, creative services and income](#).
4. Trembath J L and Fielding K 2020, [Australia's Cultural and Creative Economy: A 21st century guide](#), produced by A New Approach think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra. Bureau of Communications Arts and Regional Research (BCAR).
5. Australia Council 2022, [Submission to the Employment White Paper Consultation](#), November.
6. ABS 2022, [Almost Half a Million Job Vacancies in May](#) [Media Release], 30 June. Note, ABS's classification of the 'arts and recreation' services is diverse and expands beyond the cultural and creative industries. This activity includes heritage activities, creative and performing arts activities, sports and recreation activities and gambling activities. Any mention in this report to 'arts and recreation businesses' or 'arts and recreation services' refers to this broad group of activity.
7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023, [Prevalence and Impact of Mental Illness](#).
8. ABS 2023, [National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing](#).
9. Productivity Commission 2020, [Mental Health – Inquiry Report](#).
10. Productivity Commission 2020, [Mental Health – Inquiry Report](#).
11. Fancourt D and Finn S 2019, 'What is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving health and Well-being? A scoping review', Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report, 67. Davies C, Knuiman M and Rosenberg M 2015, 'The Art of being Mentally Healthy: A study to quantify the relationship between recreational arts engagement and mental well-being in the general population', BMC Public Health, 16:15.
12. Sumner RC, Crone DM, Hughes S and James DVB 2021, 'Arts on Prescription: Observed changes in anxiety, depression, and well-being across referral cycles', Public Health, 192.
13. Perkins R, Mason-Bertrand A, Tymoszuk U et al 2021, 'Arts Engagement Supports Social Connectedness in Adulthood: Findings from the HEartS Survey', BMC Public Health, 21:1208.
14. Creative Australia 2023, [Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participations Survey](#)
15. Consumers Health Forum 2022, '[Tackling loneliness with a social prescription](#)', Media Release 17 June 2022.
16. Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research 2021, [The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes](#).
17. Creative Australia 2022, [Connective lives: Creative solutions to the mental health crisis](#).