



ADVANCING THE
PERFORMING ARTS

This Is How We Do It 2024

TNA's report on the working trends of independent artists and creatives in the performing arts in Australia

“[It] makes me feel like real change can happen and we as artists don’t have to just accept the issues that affect us as the norm.”

– Independent Artist



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The 2024 Survey

How

This report analyses results from 273 complete, valid responses from independent artists and creatives to an online survey. The survey was open for over two months from 25 June to 21 August 2024.

Independent artists and creatives from across Australia were invited to take part via call outs on social media, direct email, and communications through TNA's members and national network. To acknowledge the ongoing unpaid work that comes with being an independent, TNA offered a \$50 payment and a complimentary one-year membership for the time taken to complete the survey.

The survey asked questions about working conditions, financial arrangements, personal and business management, and individually set working rates. Conducted on Survey Monkey, it is the fourth survey by TNA with a focus on independent practitioners in the performing arts. The 2024 survey asked many of the same questions as previous years, and so provides some comparison to the [results from 2018, 2020](#) and [2022](#). Questions on the impact of COVID-19, introduced in the 2020 and 2022 surveys, have been removed. Additional questions were included to track new trends, such as those resulting from post-pandemic and cost of living issues.

For this survey, we asked respondents to use data from 2023 calendar year activities.

Why

This *Is How We Do It* contributes to the health of the sector by collating and publishing data that reflects the realities of making work and living as an independent artist or creative in Australia.

It de-mystifies the lives and work of independents in Australia today. We hope it leads to greater understanding, appreciation and valuing of their dedication and practice — without which, so many major festivals, companies, and venues would cease to exist.

More importantly, it informs TNA's advocacy and assists others to call for more equitable working conditions and fees for independent artists and creatives in the performing arts.

The conclusion provides some observations and recommendations, which have been informed by our ongoing work with independent artists and creatives nationally.

Notes on Terminology

TNA acknowledges the complexity of terminology that relates to a person's identity, ancestry, ability, sexual orientation, gender, mental health and health, and appreciates respondents who engaged with these questions in the survey.

Language and identity terminology are ever-changing and by their very nature a 'term' or 'label' cannot ever represent the diversity of lived experiences that they attempt to encapsulate.

We have made a few changes this year and will continue to review terminologies with each survey.

We continue to reference 'Culturally &/ Linguistically Diverse' as it is the most common term currently being used by governments and their associated arts agencies, and allows us to compare data to 2022, 2020 and 2018 responses. In this 2024 survey, we have introduced the term 'Person of Colour' as an increasingly common term used in our sector. However, we acknowledge both terms bring together a wide variety of experiences, backgrounds and beliefs that are not homogenous.

We continue to follow guidance provided by Arts Access Victoria who preference the identity-first term 'Deaf and Disabled people'.

We use 'Trans, Non-Binary, Gender Diverse or In Another Way' after reading the guidelines 'Clear Expectations'.¹ This year, we have separated out the terms 'Trans', 'Non-Binary' and 'Gender Diverse', alongside 'Male' and 'Female', with the option to select more than one.

We acknowledge that the terms 'health', 'mental health' and 'wellbeing' mean something different to everyone. Mental health could mean diagnosed mental condition or mental illness, mental health of a neurotypical person, or complex mental health condition of a neurodivergent person etc. We also respect that topics such as neurodivergence, complex mental health and illness can be personal and sensitive. As with the survey questions relating to identity, respondents were given the option not to answer.

While these terms will shift and change, it is important to document this data — as it assists our work in achieving fairer access and representation.

¹ [Clear Expectations: Guidelines for Institutions, Galleries, and Curators Working With Trans, Non-Binary and Gender Diverse Artists, Spence Messih & Archie Barry, 2019.](#)

About TNA

TNA is a leading industry development organisation for the performing arts. We work to support the ecology of our sector, with a particular focus on independent practitioners and small to medium companies.

As a national organisation, TNA acknowledges the traditional custodians of the different lands on which we meet, gather, and work. We especially acknowledge the people of the Kulin nation where our office is based. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Founded by the sector in 2009, TNA works to strengthen artists and arts organisations, influence cultural policy, facilitate critical debate and networking, and advocates for a safe, healthy, and relevant sector.

Our Manifesto

TNA believes in the central role that creativity plays in a society. We work towards a more diverse and fairer performing arts sector, which puts First Nations people first. We value independent artists, small to medium companies and large organisations and we want greater interconnections between them. We believe in life-long learning. We support different models of working, and we value flexibility. We advocate for fair pay and conditions for our sector. We know that risk and experimentation are important. And we foster ongoing, respectful, and challenging conversations that connect us, open new ideas, and lead to a stronger sector.

In practical terms this means TNA:

- runs industry forums
- delivers workshops on current issues for the sector
- drives advocacy campaigns in partnership with other service organisations and the sector
- undertakes and promotes research and benchmarking
- provides advice to industry, the education sector and government
- provides information and resources through our popular E-News and the online resource library.

We design our work to address the gaps, and our approach is underpinned by a spirit of care, deep listening, and trust in the sector's capacity to make progress.

Chapter 1

The Respondents

For the 2024 survey, respondents provided their age and years of practice, self-nominated their career stage, shared the country in which they were born, and provided information on how they identify themselves.

Age

The wide range of ages in each career stage suggests that respondents begin their practice at varying stages of life and that different interpretations exist for the terms emerging, mid-career, and established (see Table 1.1).

	No. of Respondents	Average Age (years)	Age Range (years)
All	273	40	18 - 78
Emerging	86	29	18 - 49
Mid-Career	116	39	23 - 75
Established	71	54	32 - 78

Table 1.1: No. of respondents, average age of respondents, and age range of respondents by career stage

Career Stage

There is a fairly even representation across career stages (See Figure 1.1), with the years of practice varying from one year (3 respondents) to 55 years (2 respondents).

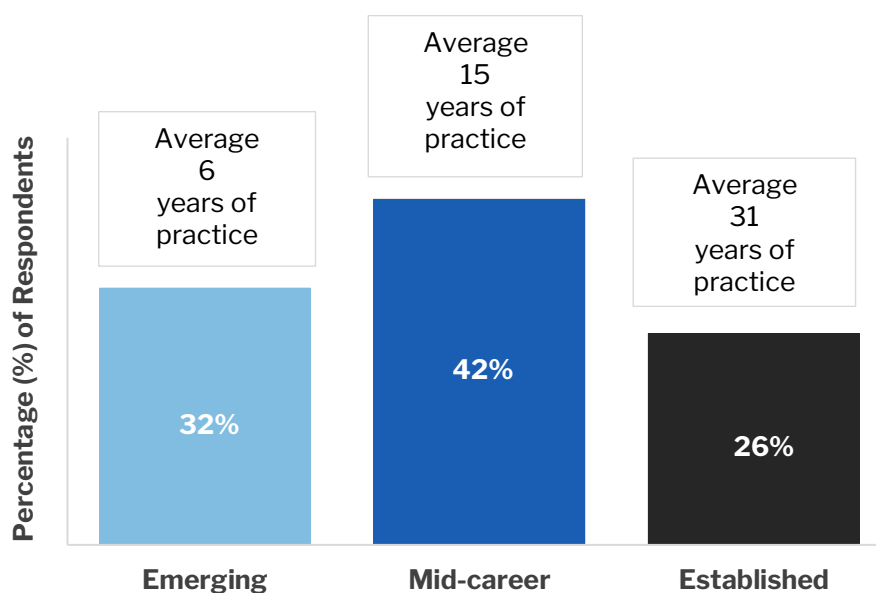


Figure 1.1: Percentage of respondents by career stage

Location

The location of respondents (see Figure 1.2) is reflective of our membership structure and the TNA 'T' model, which provides a broad level of advocacy, research and communications across the country, and a deep program of funded activity in Victoria.

There were 52% of respondents based outside Victoria in 2024 compared to 47% 2022. This indicates a growing national engagement with TNA.

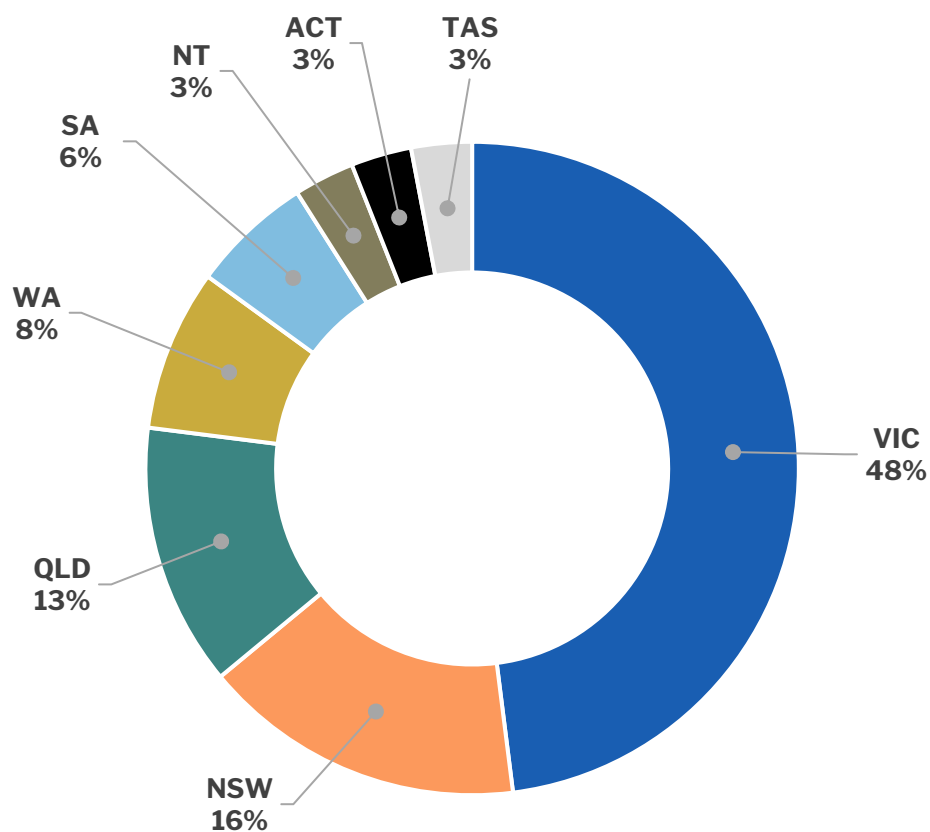


Figure 1.2: Percentage of respondents by state/territory

Geography

The percentage of respondents based regionally is steadily increasing. 21% of respondents lived regionally in 2024, up from 18% 2022 and 14% in 2020 (see Figure 1.3).

However, this 21% is still lower than the 26% living regionally in the broader Australian population.² 76% of respondents live in urban areas, compared to 73% in the broader Australian population.

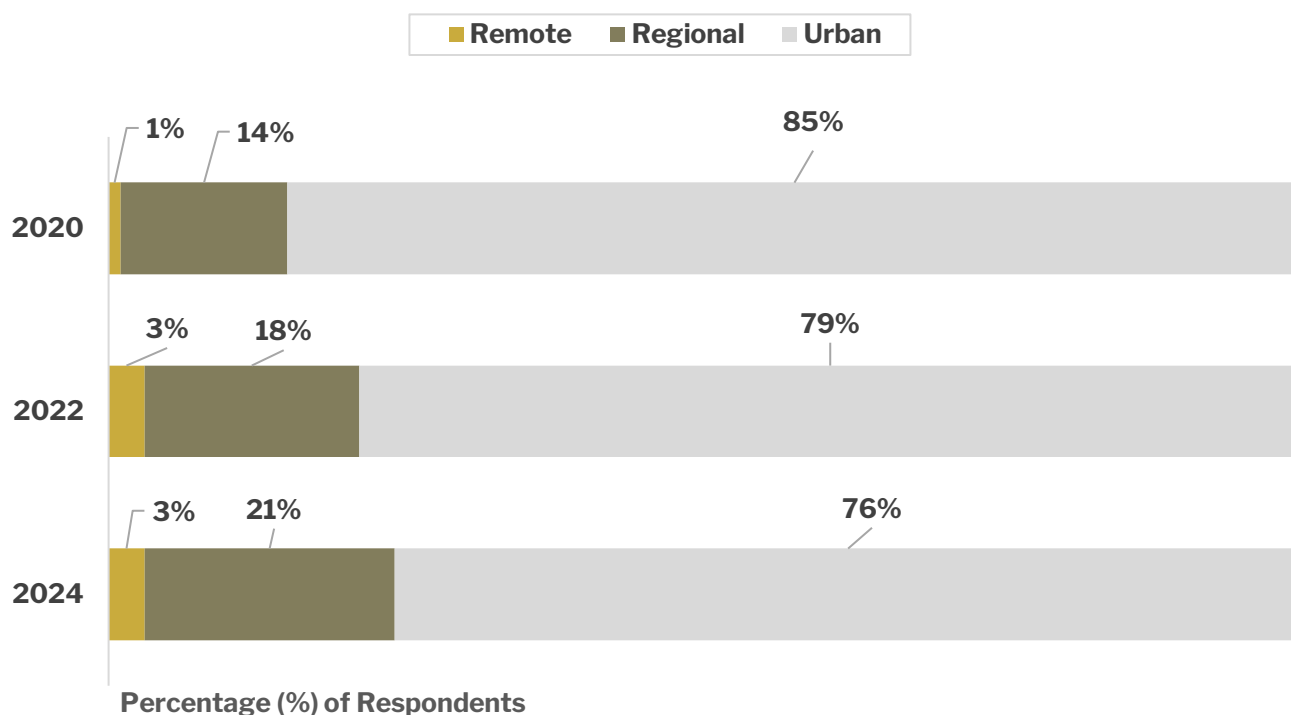


Figure 1.3: Percentage of respondents by geographical area

Country of Birth

Of the 273 respondents, 80% were born in Australia. 20% were born overseas, a slight decrease compared to the 22% reported in 2022.

Of those born outside of Australia:

- 4% were from the United Kingdom
- 3% were from New Zealand
- 2% were from the United States of America.

² [Profile of Australia's Population, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024.](#)

Respondents were also born in Brazil, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Croatia, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Netherlands, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Romania, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and Vietnam.

Overseas-born independent creatives (20%) are underrepresented in our sector compared to the 31% in the broader Australian population.³

Representation

Our 2024 survey respondents (see Figure 1.4) are largely not representative of the general population.

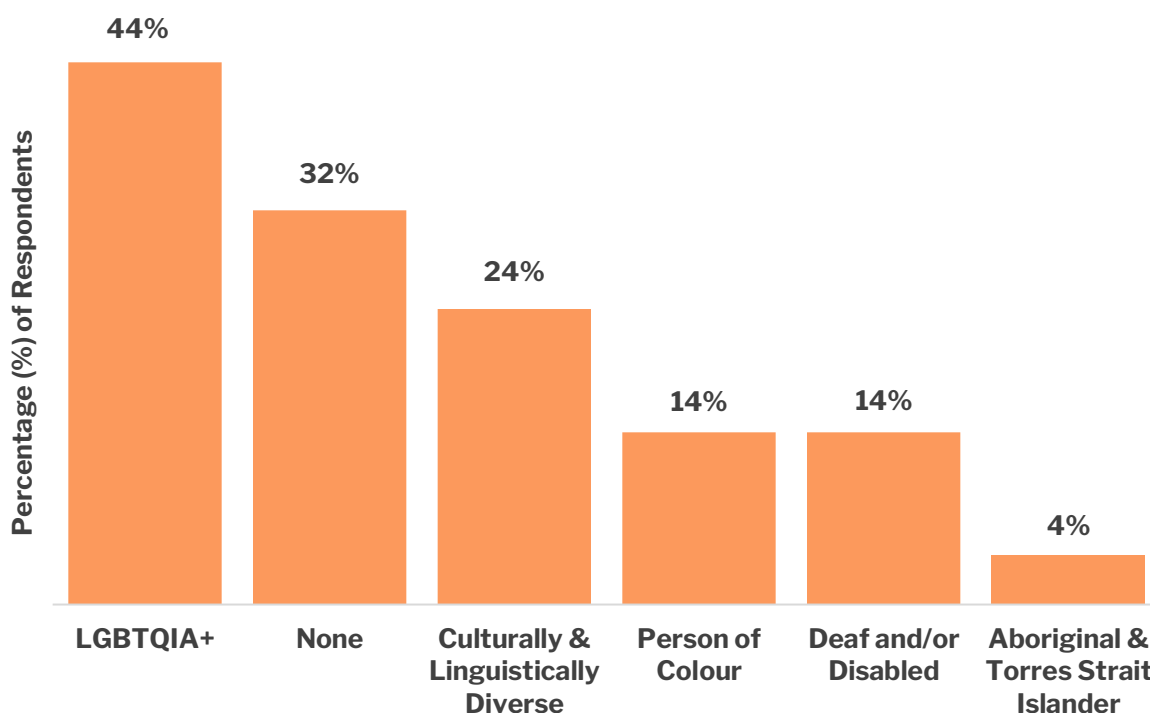


Figure 1.4: Percentage of respondents by identity

Of the respondents, 24% identify as Culturally &/ Linguistically Diverse, which is below the 48% who have at least one parent born overseas or the 28% who speak a language other than English at home.⁴ 14% identify as a Deaf and/or Disabled compared to the 16% of people who are Deaf and/or Disabled in the working age population.⁵

³ [11 things you may not know about Australians born overseas 2024, Australian Bureau of Statistics.](#)

⁴ [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Australian Bureau of Statistics.](#)

⁵ [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2024, Australian Bureau of Statistics.](#)

By contrast, 44% of respondents identify as LGBTQIA+ compared with the 11% estimation for the general Australian population.⁶

4% were Aboriginal &/ Torres Strait Islander – about the same as the 3.8% estimate for the general Australian population.⁷

Representation and Career Stage

People of Colour and LGBTQIA+ respondents were less likely to be established compared to those who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, Culturally &/ Linguistically Diverse, or Deaf and/or Disabled. Those who identified as ‘None of the above’ were most likely to be established (see Figure 1.5).

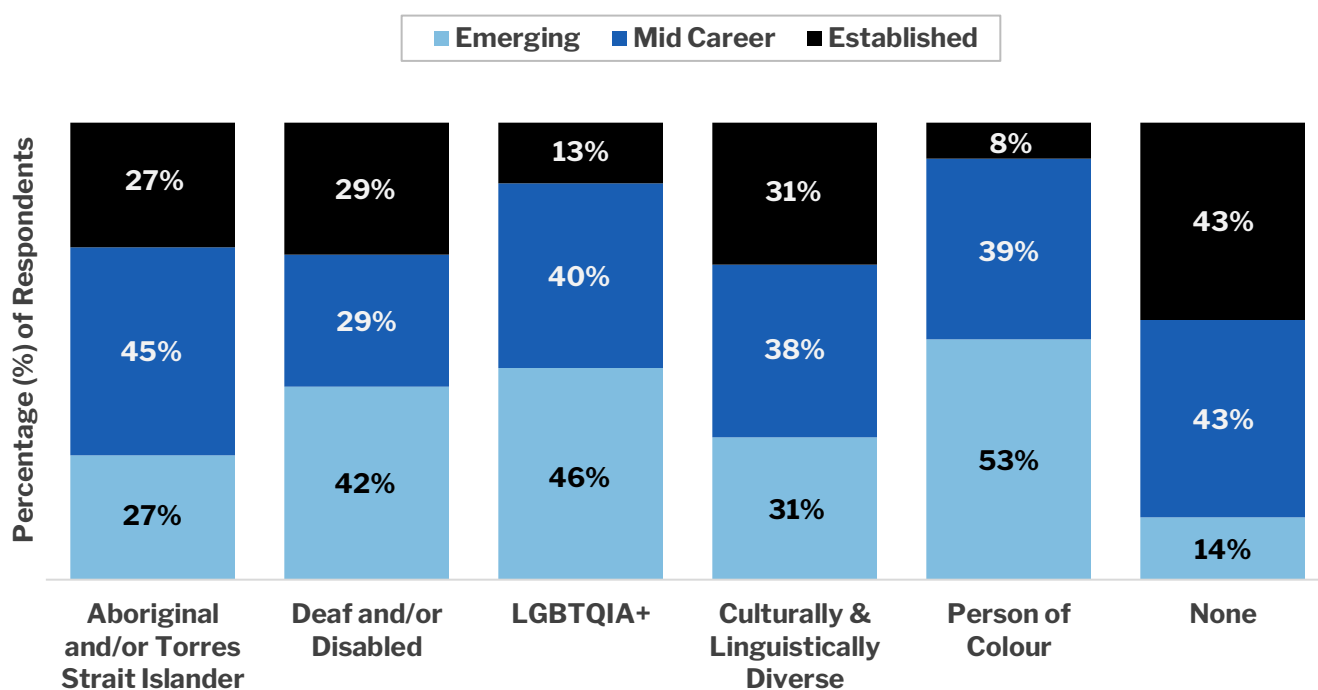


Figure 1.5: Representation across career stages

53% of People of Colour and 46% of LGBTQIA+ respondents were emerging.

Based on the data alone, we cannot draw conclusions on the distribution of career stages across demographics. It could be due to a) attrition and barriers to career progression, b) recently reduced barriers to entry or c) a higher percentage of young and emerging artists identifying as a particular demographic.

⁶ [Toward Equity Report 2021, Australia Council.](#)

⁷ [Census 2021, Australian Bureau of Statistics.](#)

Gender

Gender representation is consistent with previous surveys, with majority of respondents identifying as female (see Figure 1.6).

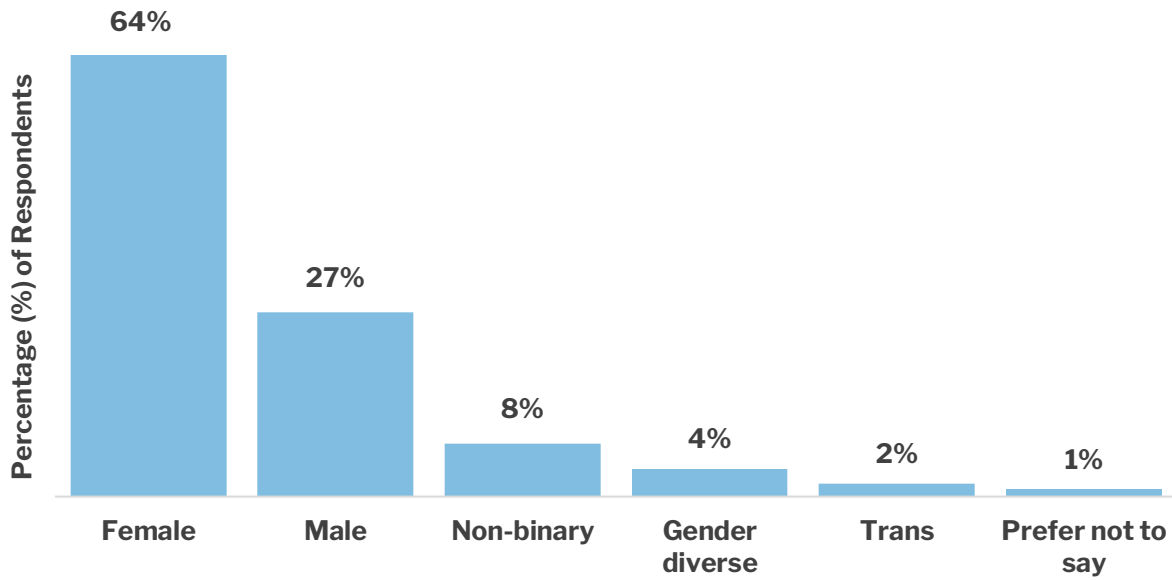


Figure 1.6: Percentage of respondents by gender

Chapter 2

The Art

Respondents are working across different artforms, in multiple roles across projects, and with varied working arrangements.

Artform

Respondents could select up to three artforms if applicable.

Most respondents identified one of their artforms as Theatre (see Figure 2.1).

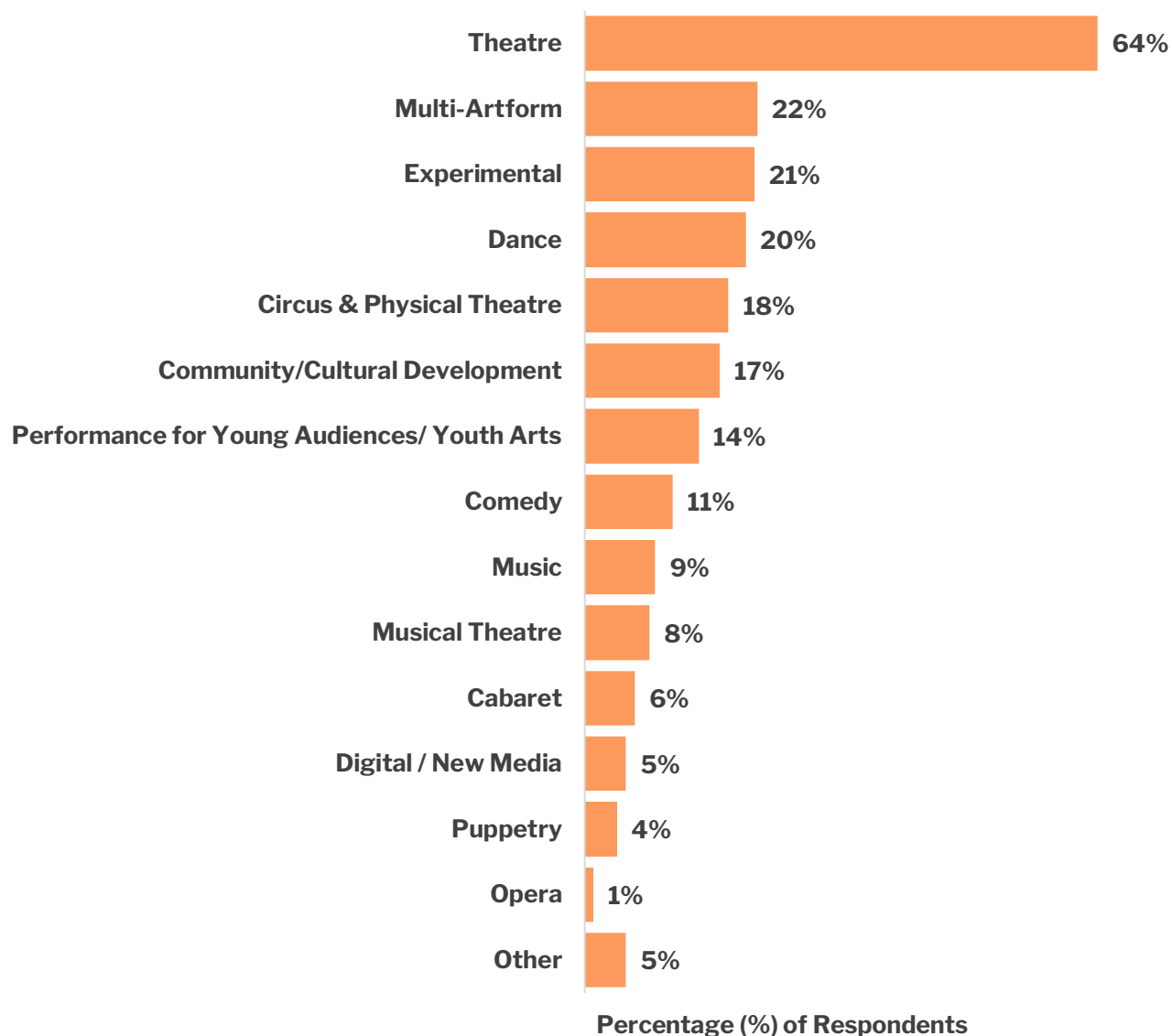


Figure 2.1: Percentage of respondents by artform

'Other' respondents work in the areas of Interactive Place Making, Parkour, Screen, Audio, Poetry, Prose, Healing and Transformative Music, Visual Arts, Instrument Making, Film, Spoken Word, Participative Art, Simulation, Screen, Activist Practice.

Roles

To examine how independent practitioners define themselves, we asked for respondents' focus areas in their art practice. Respondents could select up to three focus areas. Only 12% selected one focus area.

'Other' roles added by respondents were: Access Consultant, Advocate, Collaborator, Composer, Lyricist, Consultant, Creative Community Leader, Filmmaker, Grant Writer, Instrument Inventor, Intimacy Coordinator, Lead Artist, Mother Artist, Movement Director, Musical Director, Musician, Participatory Performance Maker, PhD Candidate, Project Designer for large scale community arts interventions, Rigger, Scent Designer, Sound Artist, Sound Installation, Videographer, Visual Artist.

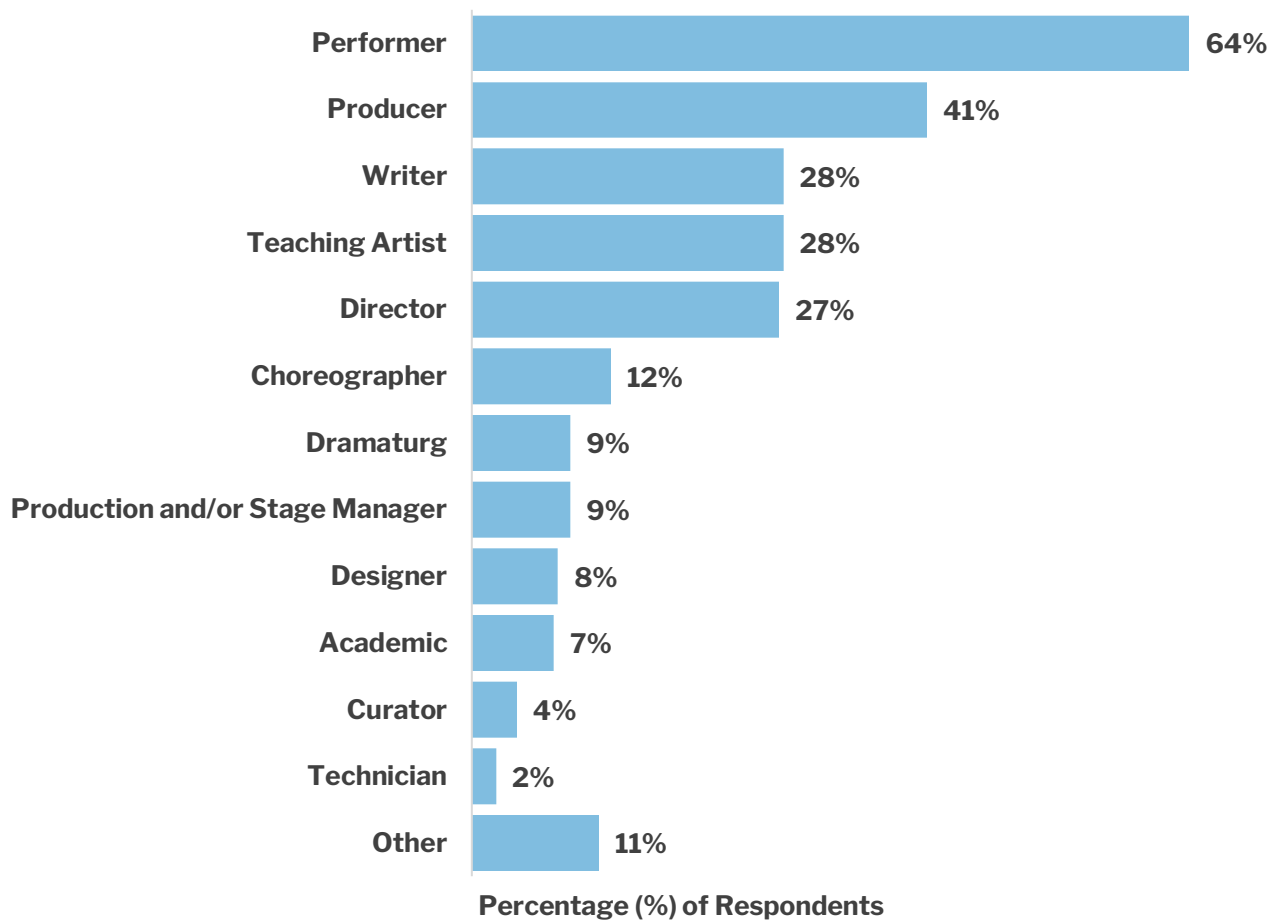


Figure 2.2: Percentage of respondents by roles

More indie creatives are working as Production and/or Stage Managers – 9% in 2024 compared to 7% in 2022. 2% identified as Technicians compared to 0% in 2022. While this seems like only a small increase, 54% of Production and/or Stage Managers and 50% of Technicians identify as emerging.

Working Arrangements

We asked respondents about their working arrangements on creative projects (see Figure 2.3) – whether they are the lead creative or work more on projects initiated by others. Respondents could select up to two options. The majority are creating their own work and projects, which is consistent with our findings in previous reports.

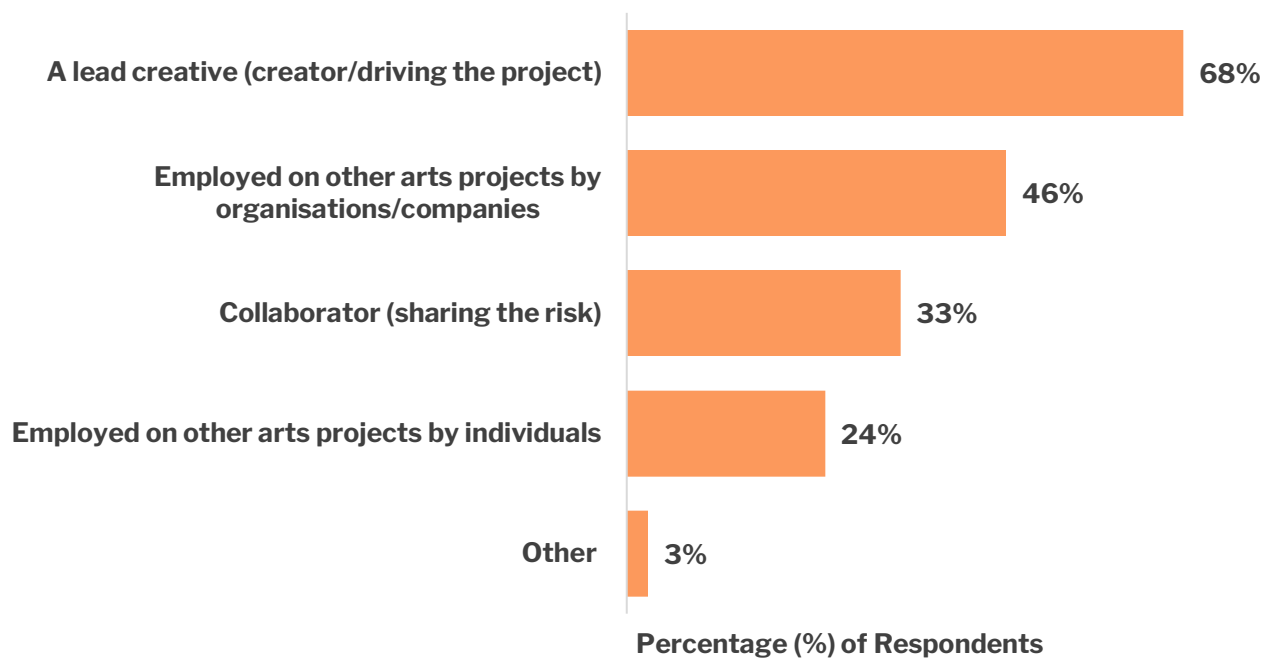


Figure 2.3: Percentage of respondents by working arrangements

Many of those who answered ‘Other’ selected one of the options listed and used the ‘Other’ option to specify or elaborate on their responses.

With over half of the 273 respondents being the lead creative on projects, the amount of artistic practice driven by individuals within the sector is significant.

Number of Creative Projects Worked Per Year

We asked respondents how many projects contributed to their income in the 2023 calendar year. The overall average number of creative projects worked on annually has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels (see Figure 2.4).

Looking across career stages, the number of creative projects has returned to pre-pandemic levels for mid-career and established artists. However, emerging artists are only working an average of six projects compared to eight projects pre-pandemic.

This may suggest that those who were studying, training or graduating during the pandemic have taken a while to navigate the sector, access opportunities, establish networks and find their footing.

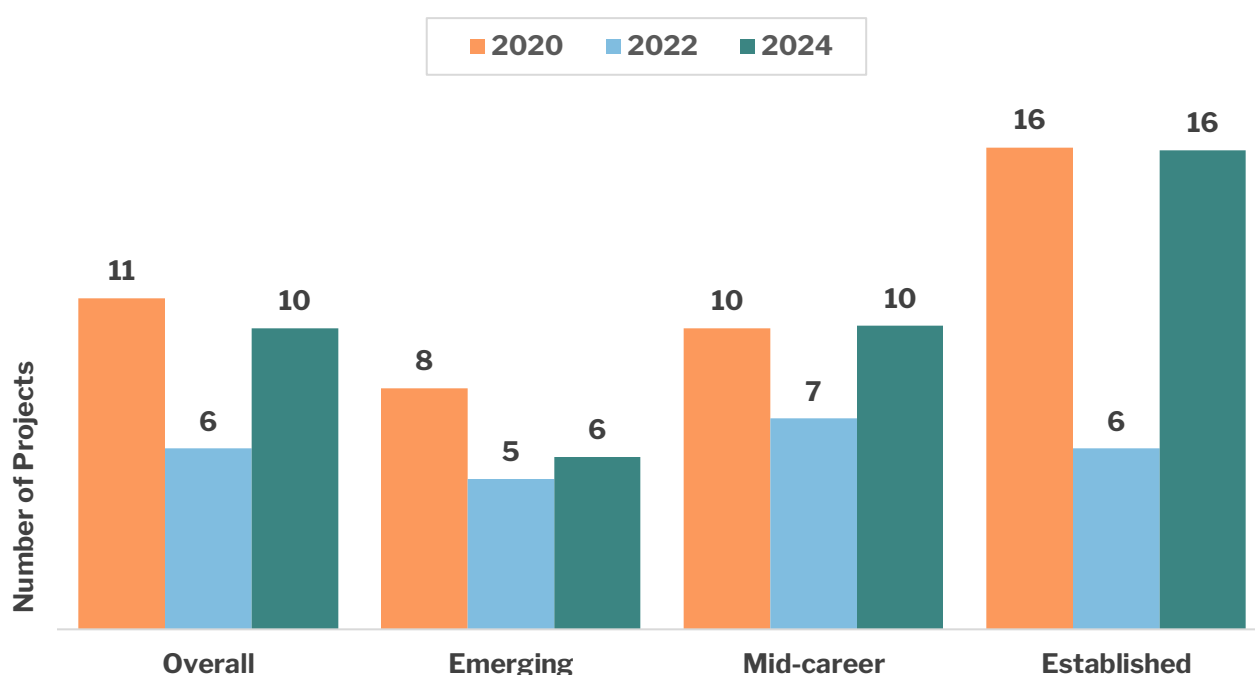


Figure 2.4: Average number of creative projects per year by career stage

Regional artists worked an average of nine projects and Remote artists worked an average of eight projects, fewer than their urban peers who worked an average of 11 projects per year.

Directors and Choreographers experienced the greatest growth in volume of projects, surpassing the number of projects they worked on pre-pandemic (see Figure 2.5).

The number of projects for Performers and Producers has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, especially for Performers.

Designers and Writers experienced a drop in projects during the pandemic, but the number of projects worked on has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

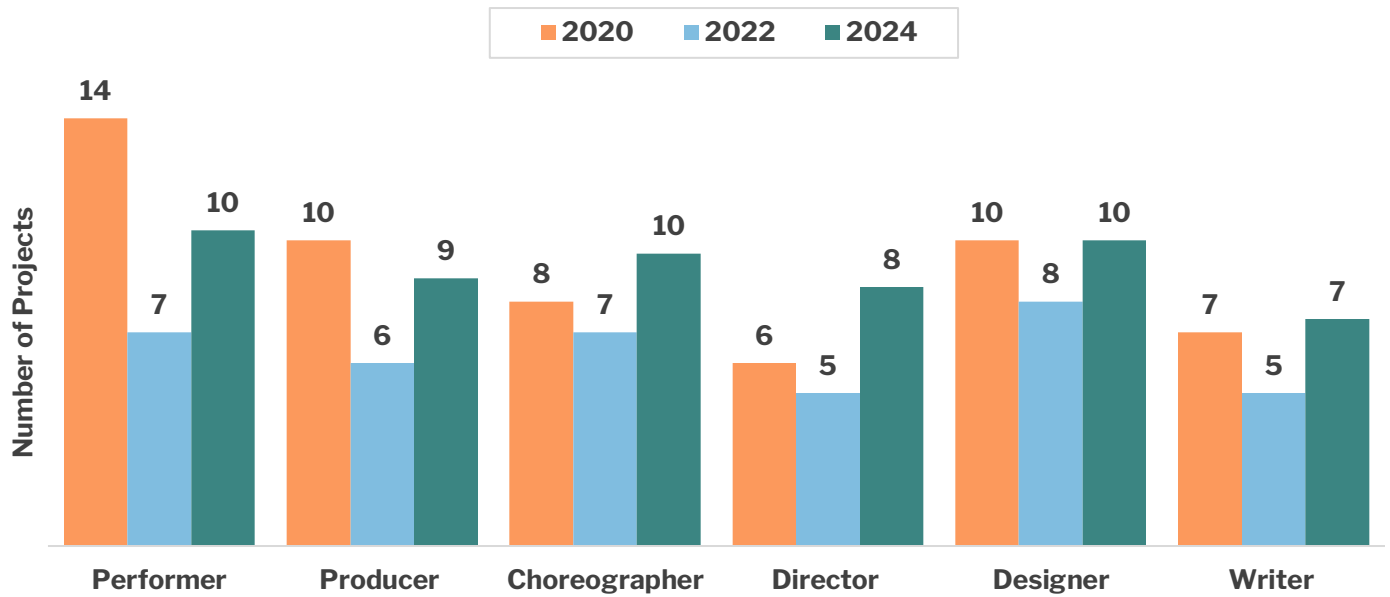


Figure 2.5: Average number of projects per year by role

Working Exclusively in Creative Practice by Career Stage

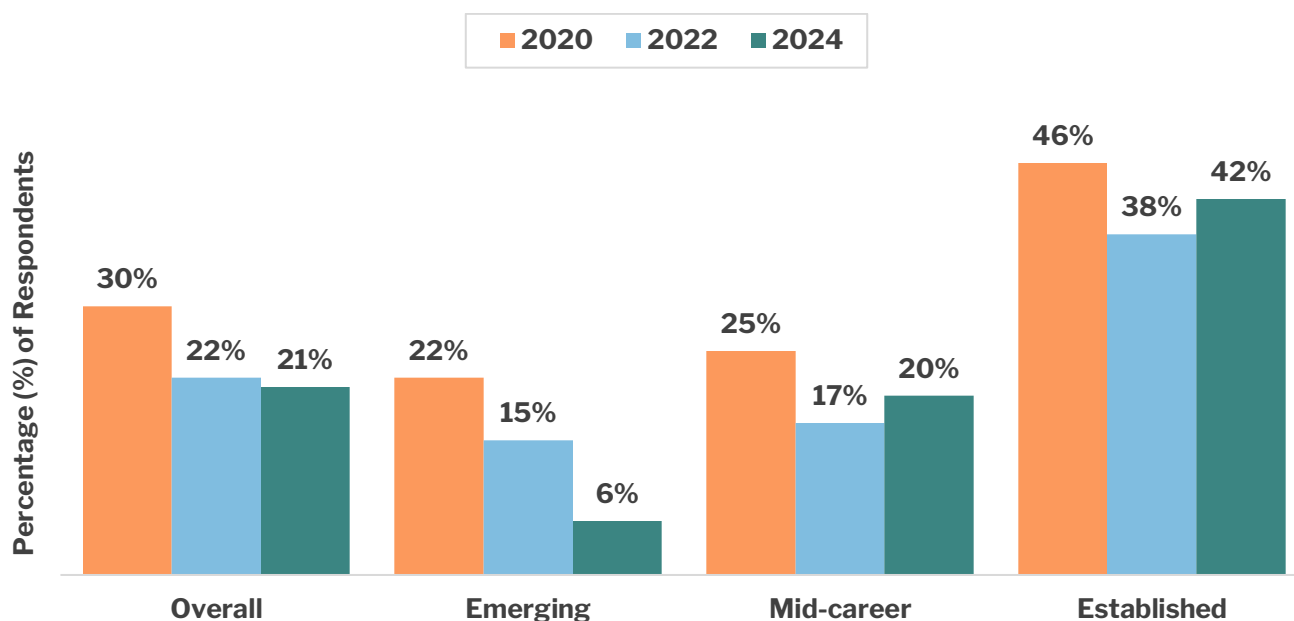


Figure 2.6: Percentage of respondents working exclusively in creative practice by career stage

The percentages of respondents working exclusively in their creative practice without other employment have gone up since 2022 for mid-career and established respondents, but not to pre-pandemic levels (Figure 2.6).

However, the percentage of emerging creatives able to earn an income solely from creative practice continues to fall drastically. This decrease is sharper post-pandemic, suggesting that the ongoing impact of the pandemic is most felt by emerging creatives.

There is a growing disparity between career stages now, compared to before COVID-19. In this 2024 report, only 6% of emerging creatives were able to earn an income solely from creative work, with mid-career artists three times more likely to do so (at 20%), and established artists seven times more likely to do so (at 42%). In previous years, the gaps between career stages were felt to a lesser extent.

Hours Per Week Spent on Creative Practice

We asked respondents to estimate the average number of hours per week spent on creative practice, considering quieter and peak periods. Most indies' work hours fluctuate across the year, with some working as many as 80 hours per week during busy periods. Many also work flexibly to accommodate other employment (Figure 3.1) and other commitments (Figure 3.3).

Looking at the averages reported, respondents who spend 1-10 hours per week on creative practice has steadily increased, from 11% in 2020 to 22% in 2024 (see Figure 2.7). This shows that creatives are increasingly spending one to two days a week on creative practice. It makes sense given that indies are more likely to now have part-time and full-time work (Figure 3.1).

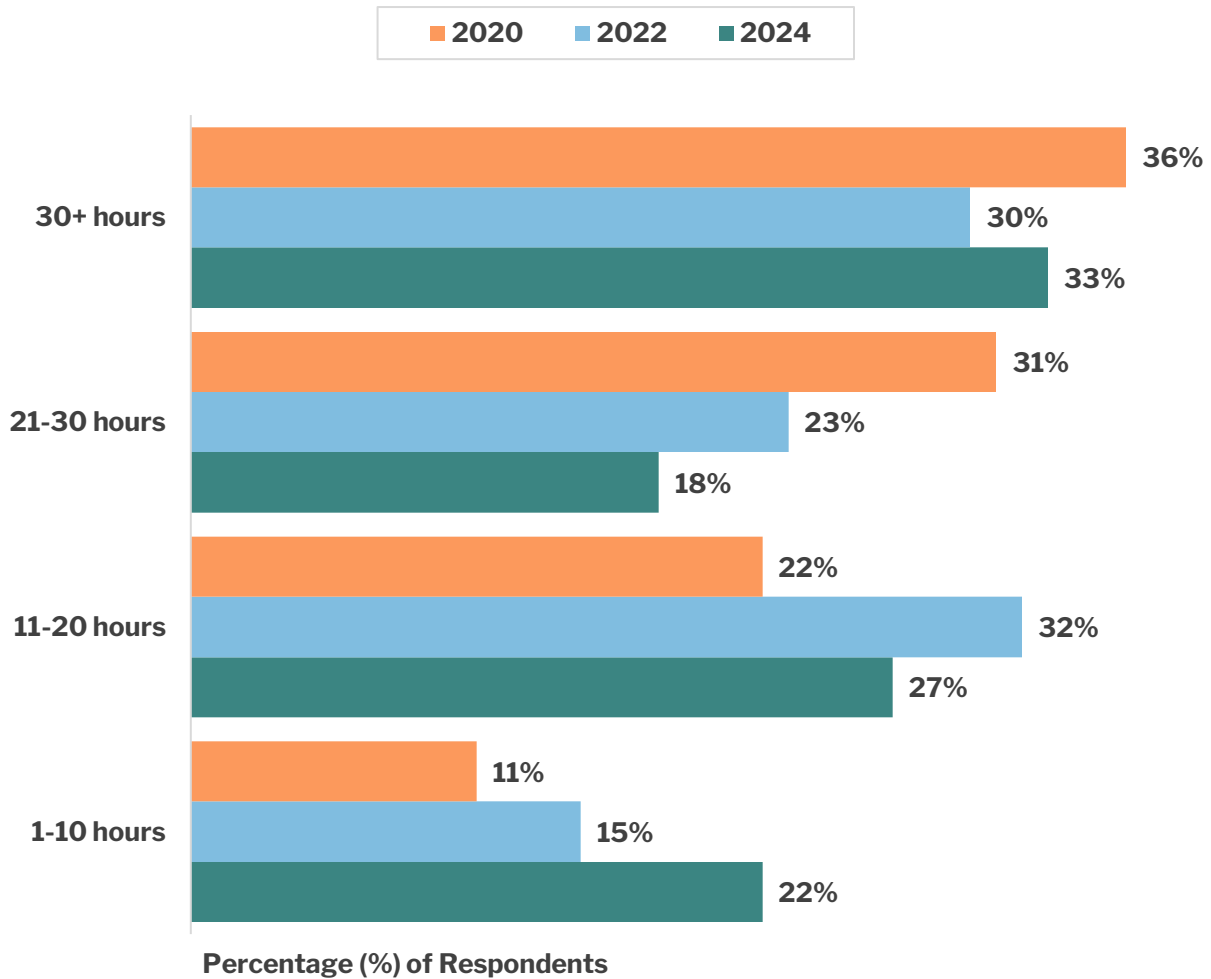


Figure 2.7: Hours per week spent on creative practice

Indies working more than 30 hours per week has increased slightly to 33% since 2022, but has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Only 51% of respondents spent over 20 hours a week on their creative practice, down from 53% in 2022 and 67% in 2020.

Chapter 3

The Other Work

Other Employment

Most independents surveyed split their time between creative projects and other employment to earn money. 79% of respondents maintain some form of employment outside of their creative practice, with some engaged in more than one job. This figure is similar to the 78% reported in 2022.

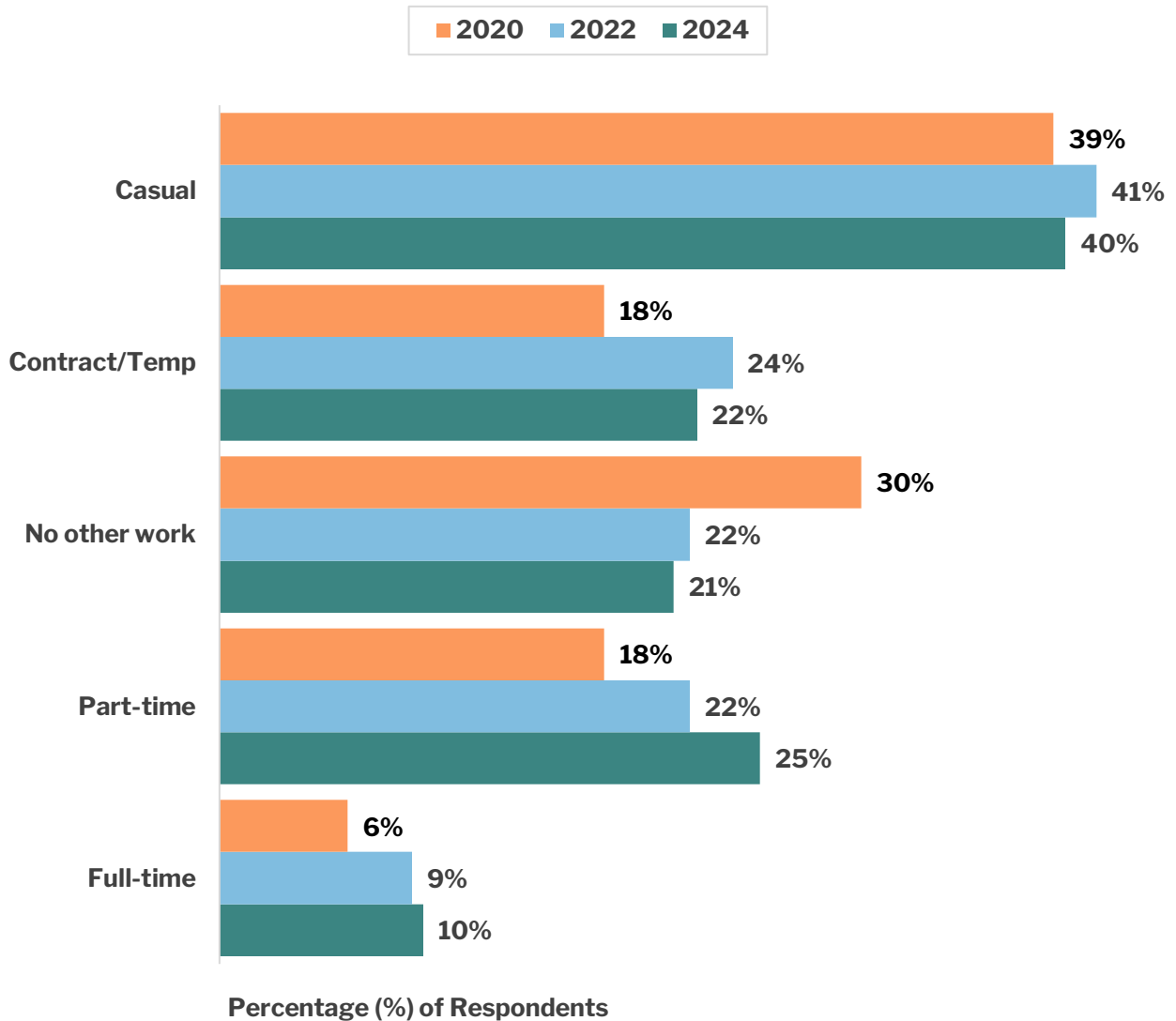


Figure 3.1: Percentage of respondents employed outside creative practice by employment type

Casual employment continues to be the most common type of employment held by independents (see Figure 3.1), making them particularly vulnerable financially, but perhaps also providing the flexibility they need to deliver creative projects.

52% of emerging respondents and 36% of mid-career respondents maintain casual employment, which drops to around 28% for established respondents. Conversely, only

6% of emerging respondents and 20% of mid-career respondents work exclusively on creative projects, which increases to 42% of established respondents (Figure 2.6).

More respondents took on part-time and full-time work during the pandemic, and this trend continues post-pandemic, with a quarter of respondents holding part-time jobs and 10% juggling full-time jobs (Figure 3.1).

Industries of Other Employment

Money earned by independents outside of their creative practice is still very reliant on the performing arts sector in areas such as Arts Management/Administration, Education, and Front of House/Venue/Events (see Figure 3.2).

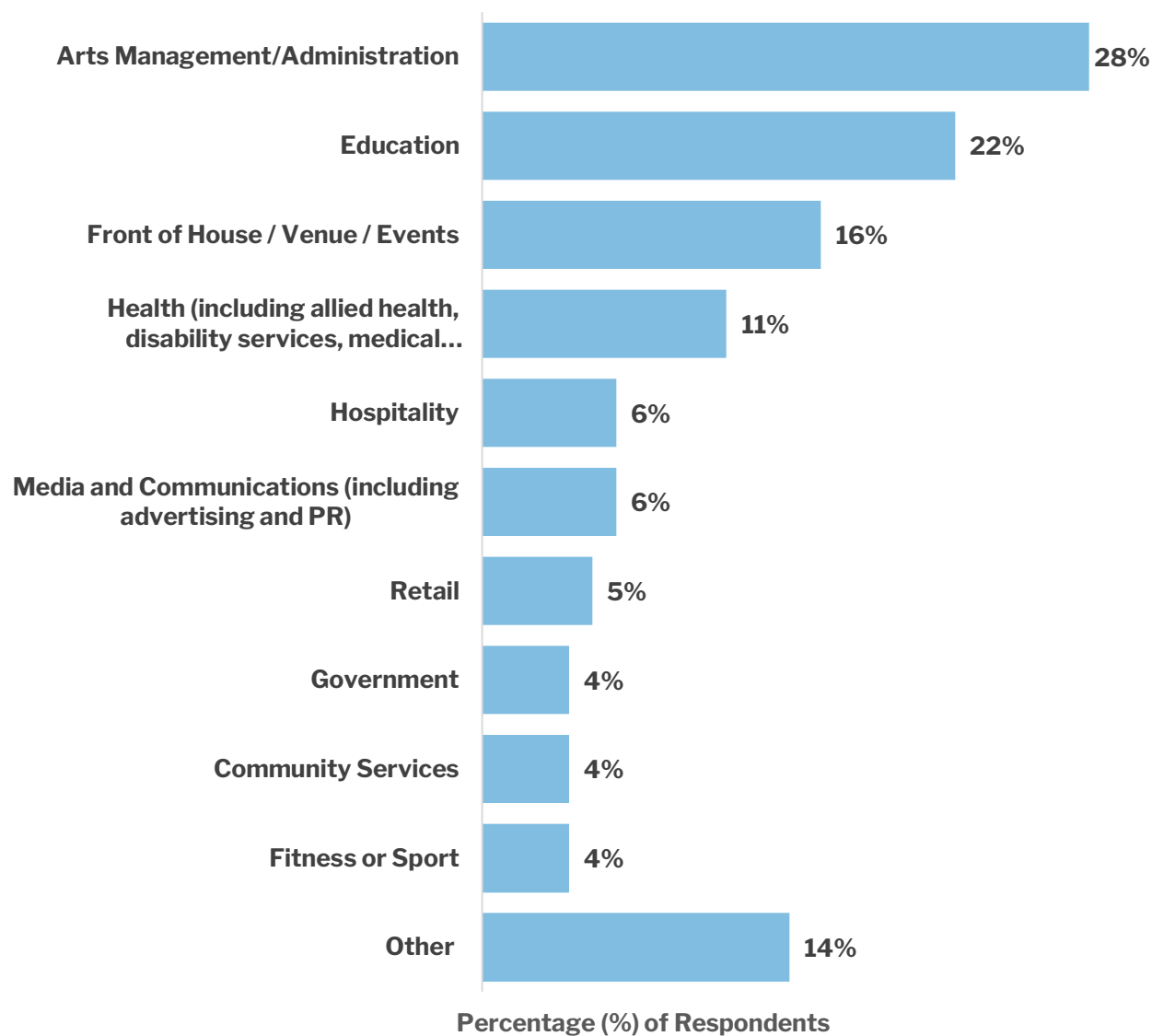


Figure 3.2: Percentage of respondents employed in other industries

However, there has been an increase in respondents working in Arts Management/Administration (28%, up from 23% in 2022) and decrease in respondents working in Education (22%, down from 28% in 2022). Those working in Hospitality, Retail and in Government remained at similar levels to 2022.

In this 2024 survey, we added four new options to reflect the diversification of industries reported in 2022 (almost threefold increase in respondents working in 'Other' industries in 2022 compared to 2020). New industries added in this year's survey were: Health (11%); Media and Communications (6%); Community Services (4%); and Fitness or Sport (4%).

The data shows a sizable portion working in these new industries added, totalling 25%. Adding this to those who selected 'Other' (14%) in this 2024 survey, this 39% is a significant increase from the 29% reported as 'Other' in the 2022 survey. The data shows a continued trend of independents diversifying their income streams across non-arts industries.

'Other' industries reported in this survey included tourism, landscaping, labouring, building and construction, urban planning, transport driver, agriculture, waste management, film, cleaning, transcribing, procurement, consulting.

Other Commitments

To obtain a fuller picture of how independents spend their time, we asked about any other significant commitments respondents had in addition to their creative practice and other employment (see Figure 3.3).

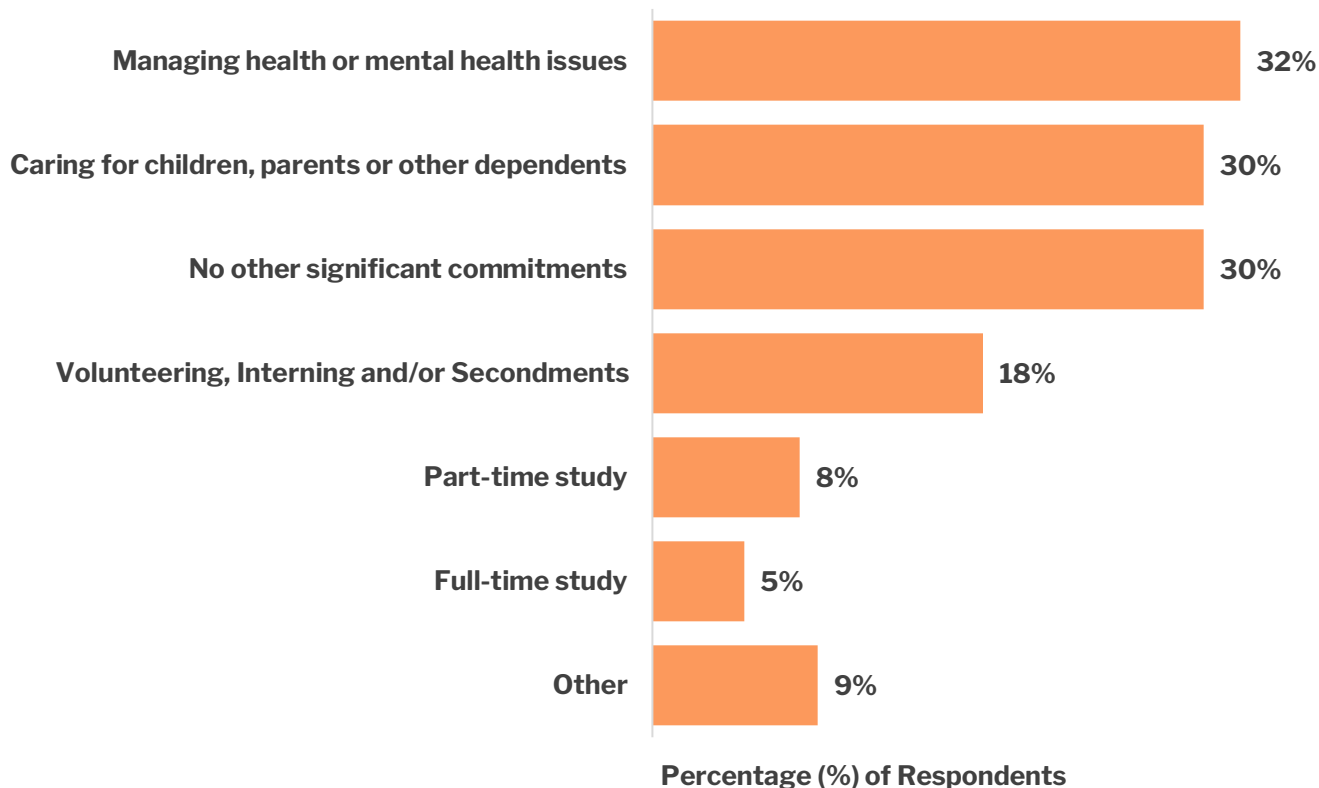


Figure 3.3: Percentage of respondents with other commitments

70% had other significant commitments, such as managing health or mental health issues; caring for children, parents or other dependents; volunteering, interning and/or secondments; full-time study, part-time study.

‘Managing health or mental health issues’ was added as a new option in this 2024 survey, in response to ‘Other’ commitments specified in the 2022 survey. It is now reported to be the leading commitment faced by indies outside creative practice and work.

16% of respondents undertook part-time study in 2022, which has halved to 8% in 2024. 13% of respondents undertook full-time study in 2022, which has more than halved to 5% in 2024.

Emerging artists are most likely to be managing health and mental health issues (38%); mid-career (35%) and established artists (41%) are most likely to be caring for children, parents, and dependents.

Chapter 4

The Money

We regularly field requests from independent creatives for fee benchmarking in a range of employment circumstances. Here we **average the figures provided by respondents** for common activities to get a sense of the **current 'going rates'** (see Tables 4.1 to 4.5) We also sought insight into the factors they take into consideration when setting rates.

These numbers were calculated from respondents who charge for their time – many respondents working for Unfunded Artists or Collectives do not charge any fees.

Working with Different Employers

	Established Organisations	Funded Artists or Collectives	Unfunded Artists or Collectives
Overall	\$74/hour \$1505/week	\$60/hour \$1226/week	\$40/hour \$816/week
Emerging⁸	\$68/hour \$1257/week	\$58/hour \$1034/week	\$40/hour \$680/week
Mid-career	\$72/hour \$1602/week	\$56/hour \$1280/week	\$37/hour \$863/week
Established	\$85/hour \$1632/week	\$67/hour \$1358/week	\$44/hour \$896/week

Table 4.1: Average rates of pay by career stage, when working with different employers

Average Fees Charged for One-Off Engagements

One hour of private tutoring \$88
Up from \$77 in 2022

Emerging	\$75	Mid-career	\$94	Established	\$100
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Table 4.2: Average rates of pay for 1-hour of private tutoring by career stage

Planning and facilitating a two-hour masterclass \$331
Up from \$302 in 2022

Emerging	\$256	Mid-career	\$363	Established	\$363
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Table 4.3: Average rates of pay for planning and facilitating a 2-hour masterclass by career stage

⁸ While emerging respondents may seem to charge a higher hourly rate than mid-career respondents when working with other artists or collectives, the averages here do not include '0' figures. In reality, emerging creatives are more likely to charge nothing when working with other artists and collectives.

One-hour industry panel discussion \$234

Down from \$238 in 2022

Emerging	\$173	Mid-career	\$251	Established	\$277
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Table 4.4: Average rates of pay for a 1-hour industry panel discussion by career stage

Writing and delivering a formal keynote \$485

Down from \$522 in 2022

Emerging	\$326	Mid-career	\$530	Established	\$596
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Table 4.5: Average rates of pay for writing and delivering a formal keynote by career stage

Notes on Rates

Many respondents included comments with their rates.

Common themes included:

- getting paid a one-off fee instead of charging hourly or weekly wages
- working on profit-share projects or working for free – especially on unfunded projects
- not actually having much agency in fee setting, and simply accepting/rejecting what is offered
- creative leads ‘sacrificing’ their pay so that they can offer a better fee to collaborators
- large organisations paying less or less equitably than funded artists/collectives
- offering services at no/low cost to emerging artists or underrepresented and marginalised groups

A range of reference points that assist them included:

- [National Association for Visual Arts’ Code of Practice](#)
- [Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance guidelines](#)
- [Australian Writers Guild guidelines](#)
- [Live Performance Award](#)
- Advice from agents
- Peer consultation

Factors influencing rates charged included:

- who is running the project and their funding status
- creative outcomes, benefits, and potential for professional growth
- previous rates offered/ received

- career stage
- total hours of work required, including planning and administration
- impact of the project
- working conditions e.g., whether there is flexibility
- financial position of the artist e.g., how much they need work at the time
- other personal and life commitments
- cultural load allowance for emotional labour and expertise
- weekend rates, holiday rates, casual loading
- travel time if based regionally or remotely
- superannuation, if not paid directly into super account

Most independents set rates on a case-by-case basis and do not have a standard amount they charge.

'I am hardly ever in a position to negotiate fees! You take what is offered in the small to medium sector because you know that it's all that can be afforded. The people you are working with are usually your (underpaid) friends and colleagues, and you know that any demand for more money will mean less money for them or some other vital part of the project. We thus continue to devalue our work and subsidise the arts in this country.'

'Usually when working with established organisations, we don't get to set our rates, and they often offer lower rates than funded projects. It feels like we are meant to be grateful to be working with them and therefore accept rates that are comparable to their full-time staff rates, which is ridiculous, considering we don't receive any of the other benefits of working in an ongoing permanent role!'

'Established orgs I worked for actually paid less than fellow funded/artist collectives.'

'I am getting better at factoring in admin time / meetings when quoting for projects.'

'I have always struggled with asking for people to value my time and expertise. [A] breakthrough in recent years: I have a friend

who has straddled working in the arts sector and corporate settings, so [she] understands how artists feel / knows what things cost! She has volunteered her time to go over my varied practice and design a model I now use when quoting for projects. As a result, I finally have benchmarks and can invoice without overthinking and stressing. My income has increased considerably as a result!

'I have received holiday pay @ 7.7% and sick pay from [a small to medium organisation I worked with].'

'In our theatre company, we [work with the principle of] Universal Basic Income (UBI). [We try] to at least crack the 1000 bucks a week mark for everyone involved, even when we're working profit share. We don't always hit it, but that's the target.'

Access Costs

There are barriers to participating in projects as an independent, which may include (but are not limited to) being Deaf or Disabled, living regionally or remotely, and being a parent or carer. We asked respondents if they are paid for access costs, childcare costs, and/or remote/regional transport costs on top of a professional fee (see Figure 4.1).

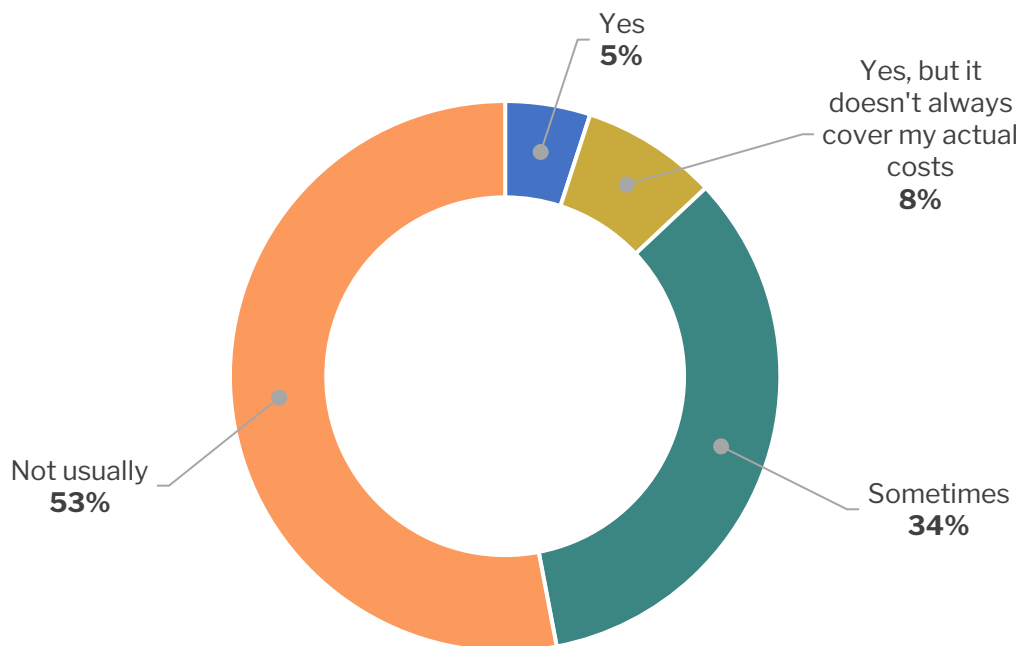


Figure 4.1: Percentage of respondents who incurred and received payment for access, transport, childcare, or related costs

We found that of those respondents who do incur such costs, only 5% said they were paid/reimbursed, and 8% were partially paid. This leaves an overwhelming majority who pay for access costs out of their professional fee.

As reported in 2022, majority of indies do not have their access/transport/childcare costs covered.

'There is only ever a chance of it being paid if the individual artist raises the issue themselves. It can add to the admin involving long chain emails with other employers of the company.'

'I live in regional Victoria, just within commuting range of Melbourne. In dealing with Melbourne gigs, I try to mention where I live as little as possible as I believe there's a good chance employers will see that as making me less reliable or flexible. Asking for travel expenses could be an unwise move as you could be seen as already demonstrating the difficulty of working with you.'

'While I'm usually paid for expenses incurred to fly, including land transport to and from airport, in the last gig the established company refused to pay the team of 3 for the 8 hours return travel (drive) to a regional gig. They paid for the petrol and vehicle use but not for the time. Gone twice. Total 16 hours. This is not a complain. Just one example of what can happen in the industry.'

'Childcare costs are never offered, and I never feel able to ask because everyone's budgets are so tight. But often 50-60% of my fee will go towards childcare costs.'

'I have experiences [of] female workers being granted access to childcare costs, but this was not extended to me as a male worker, even though I share parenting 50%.'

'Childcare fees are not generally included or offered in theatre - and if they were, I wonder if they would come out of the budget bottom line. [On a recent screen project], I was given Childcare ON TOP of the fee for the writing I did. The producers said it comes from a different budget than the one for development. It was easy and simple and great to be asked!'

'Regular part-time childcare does not align with haphazard boom/bust nature of independent projects.'

'I mostly put all of these into my hourly fee. If I know I will have to travel for a long time or a lot, I will just raise my fee a little.'

Annual Income from Creative Projects

For the first time, we asked respondents for their total income earned from creative projects in the calendar year 2023. The average income from creative projects across all 273 respondents was \$21,608.

Average income from creative projects \$21,608

Emerging	\$10,459	Mid-career	\$22,102	Established	\$34,307
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Table 4.6: Average annual income from creative projects

4% of respondents did not earn an income from creative projects. Of those that did earn an income from creative work, the average income was \$22,516.

This is lower than the \$38,500 reported in Creative Australia’s ‘Artists as Workers’ report released earlier this year, keeping in mind that the latter report included not only independent artists, but artists employed in salaried roles such as artistic directors and company dancers.⁹

⁹ [Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia 2024, Creative Australia](#)

Other Income Sources and Financial Support

Even with employment in other industries (on top of working in their creative practice), most independent creatives still require alternative income sources and financial support to sustain themselves.

41% reported some kind of alternative income source or financial support, a significant decrease compared to the 71% reported in 2022. This is likely due to the end of COVID-19 support schemes that many indies relied on during the pandemic. (About half of the 2022 respondents reported support from government schemes, with many receiving JobKeeper and JobSeeker).

14% of respondents received financial support from family (see Figure 4.2), similar to the 12% reported in 2022. Family support included a partner's income and living with family (and not needing to pay rent).

'Other' included Superannuation payments, Pension, Parental leave payment, Fellowship and PhD Scholarship.

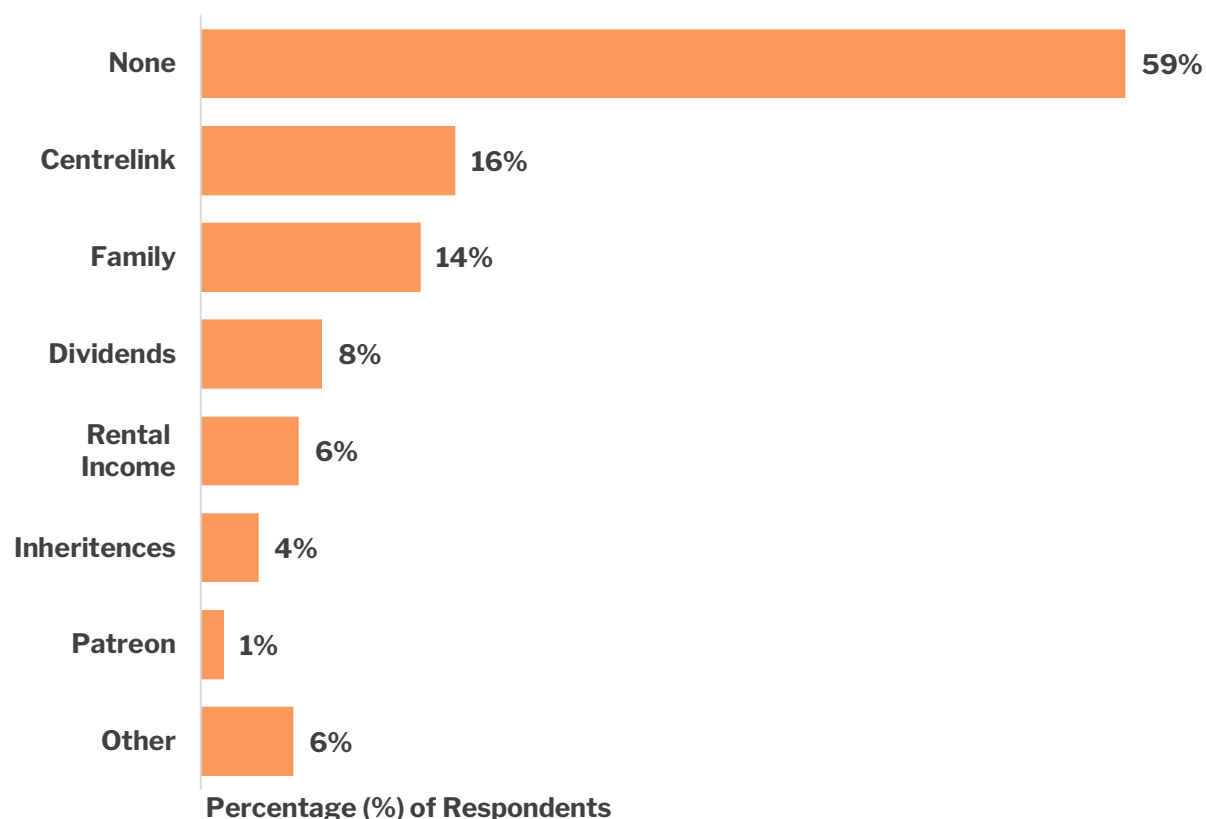


Figure 4.2: Percentage of respondents who received other income sources and financial support (excluding income from creative practice and other employment)

Expenses

There are direct expenses incurred while maintaining an artistic practice, including professional development and financial advice/services.

We asked respondents how much they spent on professional development in the calendar year 2023.

Average professional development spend \$2,585

Up from \$1,976 in 2022

Emerging	\$2,090	Mid-career	\$3,012	Established	\$2,489
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Table 4.7: Average professional development spend by career stage per year

Professional development could include education, courses, workshops, attending conferences, forums or events, or anything required to keep up with the latest in the industry. The maximum spend on professional development was \$30,000 and the minimum was \$50.

Only 63% of respondents sought advice or services from a registered accountant for income tax, down from the 78% in 2022 and 77% in 2020.

Superannuation

Only 2% of respondents had no superannuation fund or did not know if they did, which has decreased from the 3% reported in 2022 and 8% reported in 2020.

When an independent in the performing arts is working as an employee or as sole trader contracted mainly for their labour, the employer or contracting party is obligated to pay 11.5% super (at the time of writing) on top of the fee into their nominated superannuation account.¹⁰

There has been no minimum threshold since 2022 and super guarantee must be paid for workers regardless of their fee. In addition, anyone can make personal contributions to their superannuation account.

In this survey, 29% of respondents report making personal contributions to their own superannuation, a 4% decrease from the 2022 survey.

¹⁰ [How to work it out: employee or independent contractor, ATO](#)

‘Were you paid super as an independent contractor?’

As there is now no minimum threshold, we asked respondents if they were paid super as an independent contractor. We also sought to understand the circumstances under which indies were not paid superannuation.

While respondents were more likely to be paid super than not paid (see Figure 4.3), a significant portion (27%) indicated that they were “never” or “rarely” paid super, with 4% unsure.

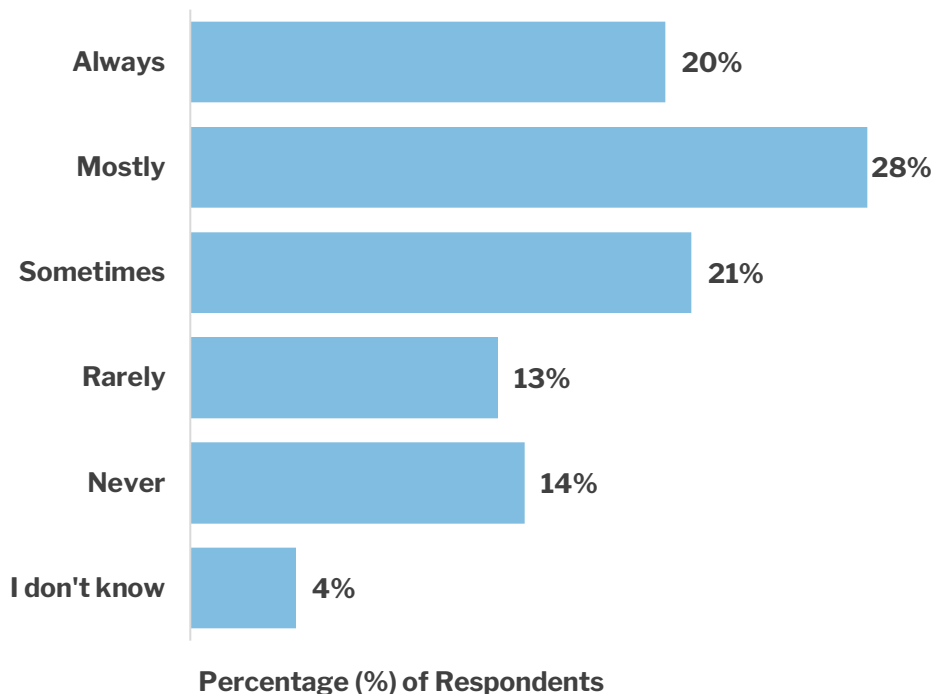


Figure 4.3: Percentage of respondents who were paid super for independent creative work

For respondents who indicated “rarely”, “never” or “I don’t know”, only 20% self-contributed to their own super. This leaves a vast majority from this group without superannuation payments.

Across career stages, emerging creatives are least likely to get paid superannuation and most likely to be unclear about super entitlements.

Recurring misconceptions, confusion and issues raised around superannuation included:

- Unsure of being eligible because of invoicing through an ABN
- Not knowing it was a legal requirement
- Indies reporting large and established organisations not being aware of current and up-to-date regulations
- Being asked to include superannuation in a fee invoice and self-contributing

- Being ineligible because of providing own tools
- Being deemed 'too difficult' and losing work, or not being engaged again.

Other circumstances where indies were not paid super included:

- Profit-share arrangements
- Engaged by other indies with no budget
- Royalties.

'It is always an issue that independent artists have to raise and adds to the admin they are already doing.'

'It's been really hard to convince orgs that it is a legal requirement. I'm often met with 'we don't do that here' or 'we don't know how to do that.' I've had some experiences of losing the contract as it was 'too difficult.'

'There seems to be a few companies that have found loopholes for not paying super. Seems dodgy to me, but their 'legal teams had looked into it.'

'At age 61 and having been working in the industry for 36 years, I have about \$16,000 in superannuation.'

'I had to chase up some super and had to fight the company tooth and nail to be paid my super. I had to refer them to my tax agent and it took weeks and weeks, and they did not employ me again.'

Governance and Leadership

The percentage of **independents on boards has halved** from 42% in 2022 to 21% in 2024.

Similarly, independents paid for attending advisory groups/panels/meetings has more than halved from 56% reported in 2022 to 25% in 2024.

Many respondents' sentiments reflect that panel members are often under-remunerated for the amount of work involved (assessing applications and attending meetings).

Respondents reflected on the lack of standard rates to be on panels, with remuneration "varying from a \$20 gift voucher to a \$530 daily rate". Similarly, some boards are voluntary while others are paid.

Independent creatives continue to subsidise the sector with their time and expertise (on top of subsidising their own creative practice), with one respondent estimating their in-kind contribution to a board to be worth \$25,000 based on skills and hours.

For comparison, the Australian Institute of Community Director's (AICD) 2023–24 'NFP Governance and Performance Study' showed 21 per cent of not-for-profit directors are now remunerated — a significant increase from 14 per cent five years ago. By sub-sector, only 8% of 'Culture, arts, recreation and sports' board directors were paid. (The only sub-sector less likely to remunerate board members was 'Religion', at 5%.) Of the not-for-profit organisations who pay their board members, the average salary across all NFP sub-sectors was \$24,934.¹¹

¹¹ [Not-for-Profit Governance and Performance Study 2023-24, Australian Institute of Community Directors](#)

Alternative Economies

With the average salary from creative work at \$21,608, it is not surprising that many independents trade, swap and exchange services and items to minimise costs. 85% of respondents entered into in-kind arrangements, up from 70% in 2022.

Advice or consultation, mentoring, and space were the most common in-kind supports offered, received, or exchanged (see Figure 4.3).

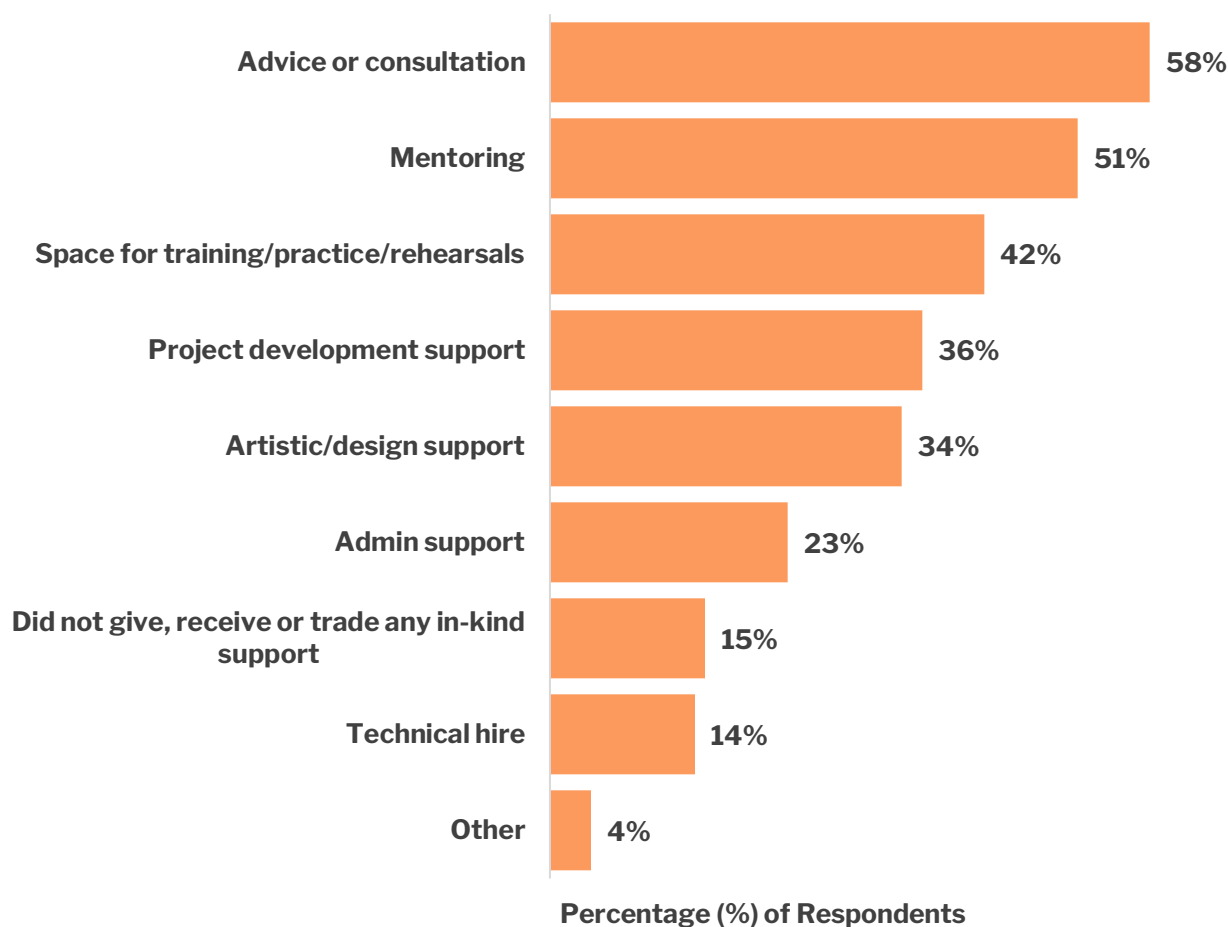


Figure 4.4: Percentage of respondents who gave, received or traded in-kind support

‘Other’ types of in-kind support specified were: fundraising, grant writing, access and inclusion, advocacy, disability confidence training, marketing, photography, accommodation, food, and documentation.

Chapter 5

The Hard Stuff

This section reports on mental health and may be confronting for some readers.

Impact of COVID-19 (in a Post-Pandemic Environment)

With COVID-19 restrictions lifted, the challenges faced by our sector during the pandemic (lockdowns, cancellations) may feel like a thing of the past.

We wanted to ascertain the extent to which independents' practices or projects were still being impacted by COVID-19. As with other questions in this 2024 survey, we asked respondents to reflect on the 2023 calendar year – the first year where there were no COVID-19 restrictions.

45% of respondents were not affected (Figure 5.1), compared to 26% in 2022. While this seems like good news, more than half (55% of independent creatives) were still impacted by COVID-19 in this post-pandemic environment, but without the COVID-19 financial support mechanisms that existed during the pandemic.

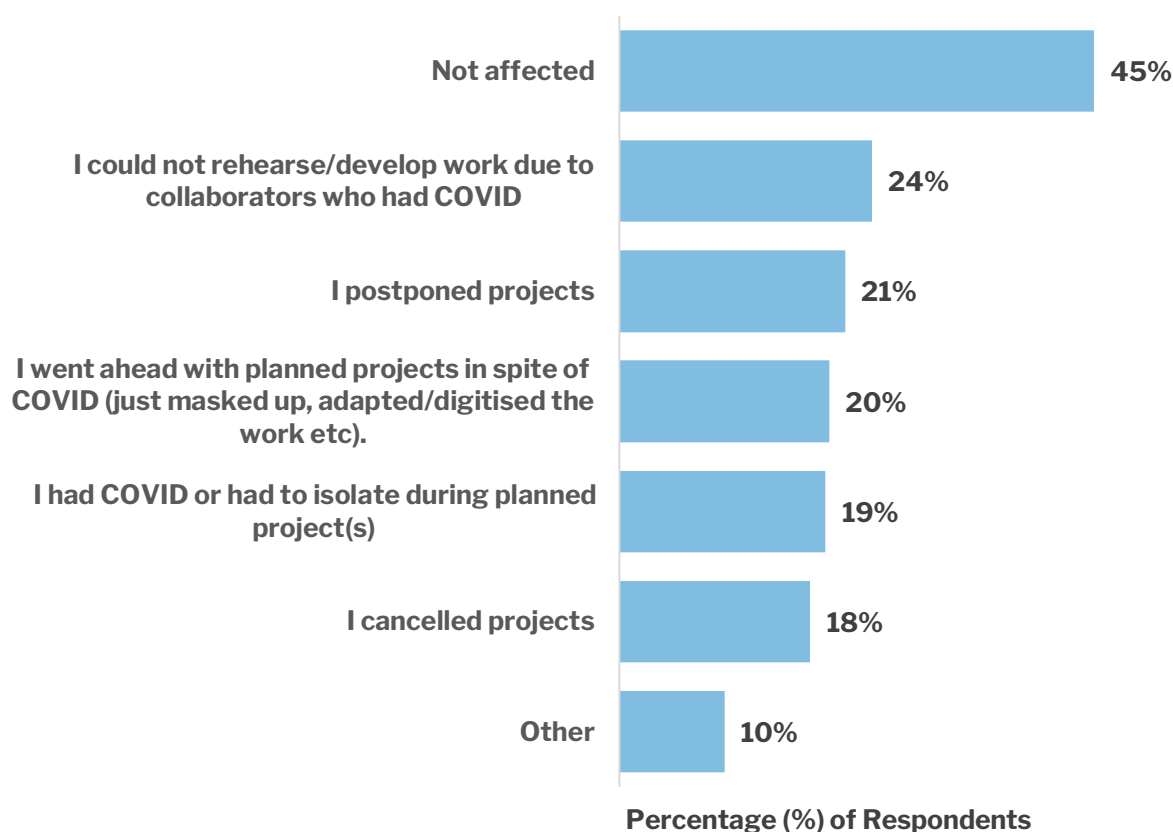


Figure 5.1: Impact of COVID-19 on creative projects, post pandemic

19% had COVID-19 or had to isolate during planned project(s), which is not much lower compared to the 25% in 2022. 18% cancelled projects (compared to the 30% in 2022) and 24% postponed projects (compared to 35% in 2022), which suggests that about a fifth to a quarter of respondents lost or deferred income.

Analysing qualitative responses to the impact of COVID-19, themes included:

- Lost income
- Subcontractors and collaborators cancelling due to illness
- Burnout due to pressure to produce work delayed during the pandemic
- Ongoing mental health problems resulting from the pandemic
- Mental and emotional health impacts
- Long COVID
- Unplanned venue closures
- Cancellations by producers and presenters
- Redesigning projects for immunocompromised collaborators
- Understudies
- Being asked to work while unwell
- Poor audience attendance levels
- Anxiety due to the threat of COVID-19.

While our sector has largely returned to ‘business as usual’ working conditions and expectations, the data shows that COVID-19 continues to impact our sector, with indies bearing the brunt of precarity and lost income due to factors beyond their control.

*“Presenters cancelled due to Covid impacting audiences –
STILL.”*

*“Covid is still a shadow over our work, impacting planning, ticket
sales, attendance.”*

*“Planned projects went ahead using understudies, due to
COVID in the cast. I also was asked to continue working on a
project despite having COVID - and so physically attended a
week of work while unwell, and masked up and isolated from
the rest of the crew during that week.’*

*‘The threat of any of our artists catching COVID at critical
moments of performance seasons or rehearsals added another
significant load of stress and anxiety when producing projects.’*

Financial Position

Respondents felt more positive about their financial position in 2024, compared to in 2022.

In 2024, more felt they were better off (37%) than worse off (28%) (see Figure 5.2). This is in contrast to the 2022 report where more felt worse off (35%) than better off (16%).

35% felt their financial position was about the same in 2024, which is exactly the same as in the 2022 report.

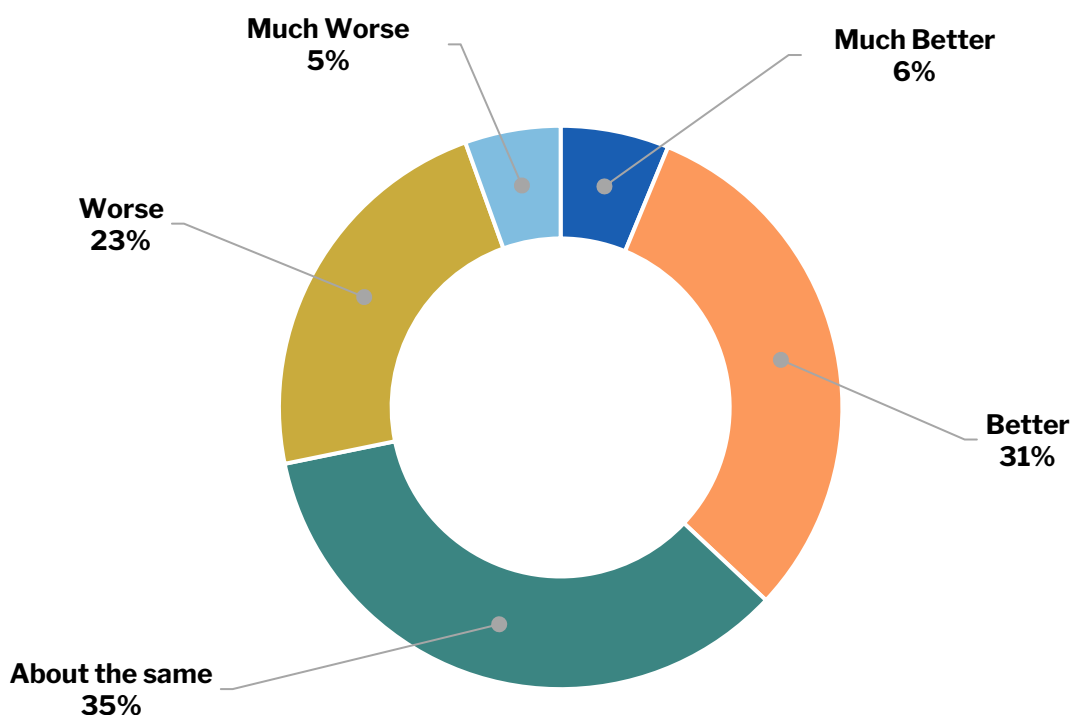


Figure 5.2: Financial position of respondents, comparing the calendar year 2023 to 2022.

In addition, 37% respondents feel financially better off, a further increase from the 17% in 2022 and 12% in 2020.

The percentage of respondents who feel they are financially worse off has further decreased to 28%, from 36% in 2022 and 49% in 2020.

This may be due to the continued trend of independents taking on part-time and full-time employment outside of their creative practice (Figure 3.1), and more also moving into non-arts work (Figure 3.2).

Insurance

Most respondents take out insurance to cover their creative activities, with Public Liability Insurance being the most common type of insurance held (see Figure 5.3). 'Other' types of insurance included travel insurance and home office insurance.

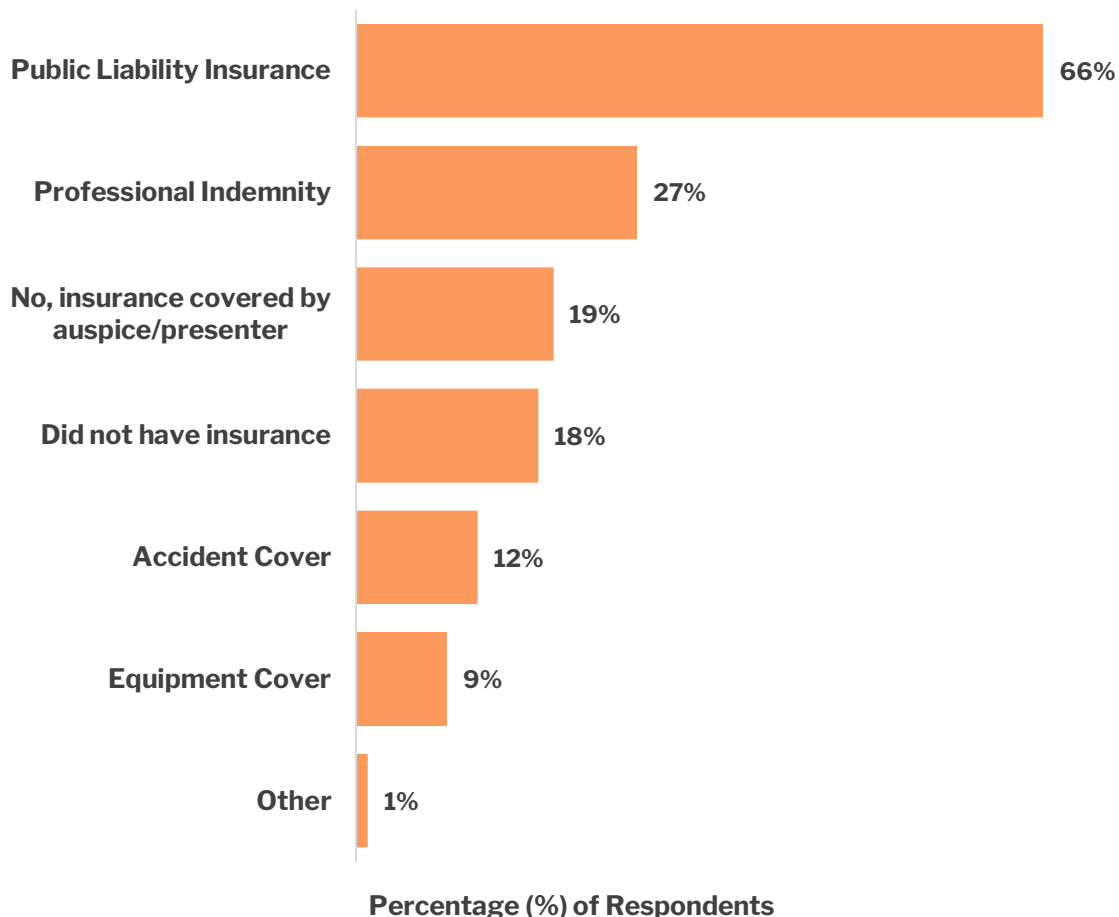


Figure 5.3: Types of insurance held by respondents

Rising insurance costs is impacting many independent creatives, posing a challenge to creative practice. Some respondents shared that it has not been possible to find insurance that will cover activities they undertake.

Popular options cited by respondents included Duck for Cover and Regional Arts Victoria, as well as being covered by Auspicious Arts through auspicing arrangements.

'I couldn't find anyone who would insure scent design for public works so I just got some generic insurance which probably won't cover me but I needed to show the organisation.'

'[It's] hard to find brokers that understand what we do.'

'I have noticed that venues have increasing strain and ask artists to bring their own PLI insurance, which transfers the strain and responsibility to an even more vulnerable part of the arts ecology.'

'Insurance is so costly now I can no longer afford to have my own and use [an auspice organisation].'

Relationships with Funders, Presenters and Companies

We surveyed respondents to get a sense of their relationships with various types of organisations – Funders, Festivals/Presenters/Venues, and Producing Companies. Producing Companies include those that make work, such as theatre companies, dance companies, youth arts companies, etc.

The general ease and understanding reported by respondents in 2022 during pandemic conditions has waned, with an increasing percentage of indies finding relationships with other parties more difficult to negotiate.

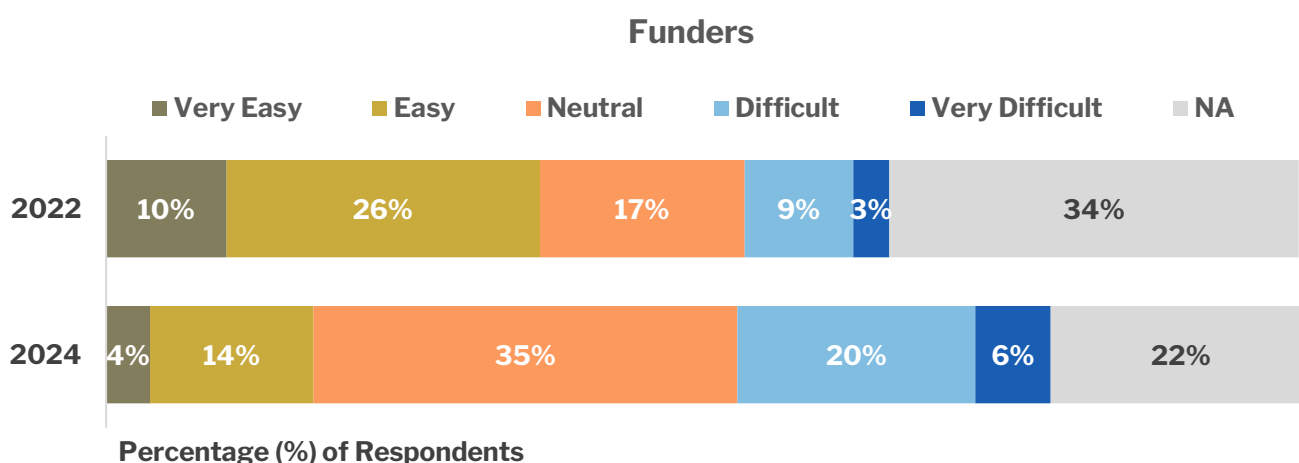


Figure 5.4: Relationships with Funders

More respondents found working with Funders to be difficult/very difficult at 26%, as opposed to being easy/very easy at 18% (Figure 5.4). This is in sharp contrast to our findings in the 2022 survey, where significantly more independents found working with funders to be easy/very easy.

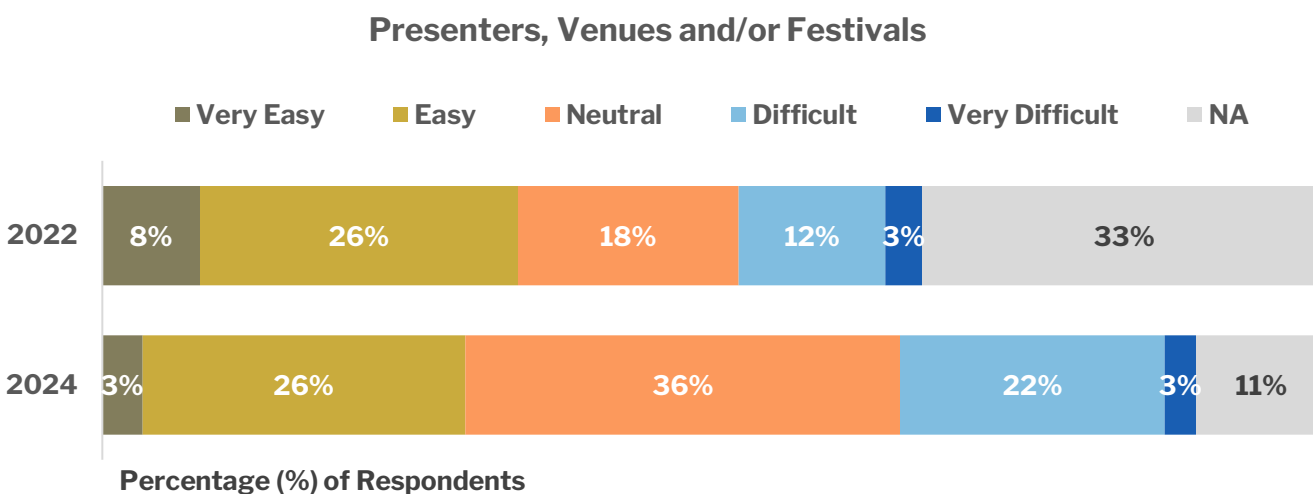


Figure 5.5: Relationships with Presenters, Venues and/or Festivals

Slightly more respondents found it easy/very easy to work with presenters/venues/festivals at 29%, as opposed to the 25% who found it difficult/very difficult (Figure 5.5).

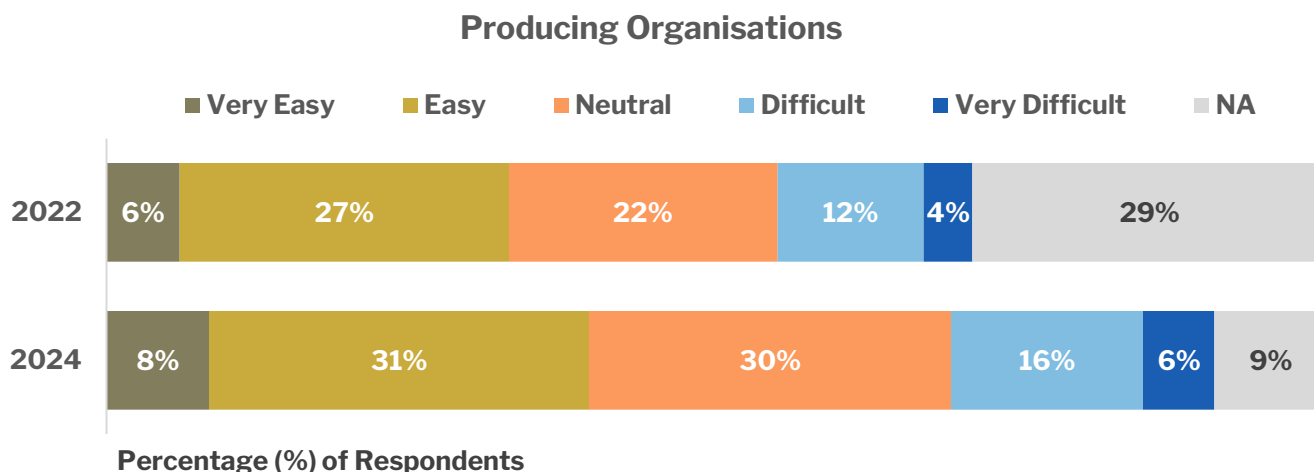


Figure 5.6: Relationships with Producing Organisations

39% of respondents found producing organisations easy/very easy to work with, as opposed to the 32% who found it difficult (Figure 5.6).

A higher percentage of respondents found producing organisations easier to work with compared to funders and presenters/venues/festivals.

A significant percentage of respondents selected ‘Neutral’ for all organisation types, with many explaining that their experiences were mixed and varied depending on the organisation and circumstances.

Across all organisation types, the data shows that relationships between indies and organisations are increasingly strained.

‘Arts organisations are so stretched and too many staff are expected to fulfil huge roles in a part-time and underpaid capacity. For this reason, both as an independent artist and someone who has worked in arts admin, I am looking to change careers and move into a more stable income situation e.g. education, health. 2023 felt like an extremely tough year in the arts.’

‘Presenters and producers in salaried positions show little signs of appreciating how hard artists must work to keep up with the costs of participation in the industry... Presenting organisations

are clearly also squeezed to their limits and struggling to program venues, so I also have empathy for how everyone is juggling challenges in their own fields.'

'The admin is a pain, when working for yourself and not getting paid for admin - but you know with orgs the person on the other end is getting an hourly rate (but then they are usually an artist too subsidising their practice).'

'[People in companies] try hard to make the process easy, but it is inherently difficult. 100 applications for 3 funding spots will never be 'easy' no matter how nice and clear the forms are.'

'There is a pretence of being open... there are many organisations that act outright antagonistic towards the idea of having to engage with artists they don't know. Further to this is the perennial problem of ghosting by organisations.'

'The better funded the company, the more difficult to work with.'

'There is still a significant power imbalance between independent artists and major orgs such as theatre companies which makes things like following up emails and correspondence often quite challenging.'

'There is a massive gap in workplace cultural understanding of what it means to be an independent practitioner and the amount of free labour that is expected by organisations.'

'Most organisations hire me and don't understand the importance of the culture I bring.'

Accessed Mental Health Services

Of the 273 respondents, 56% of respondents accessed mental health services, up from 50% in 2022 (Figure 5.7). Before the pandemic, only 30% accessed mental health services, as reported in the 2020 survey.

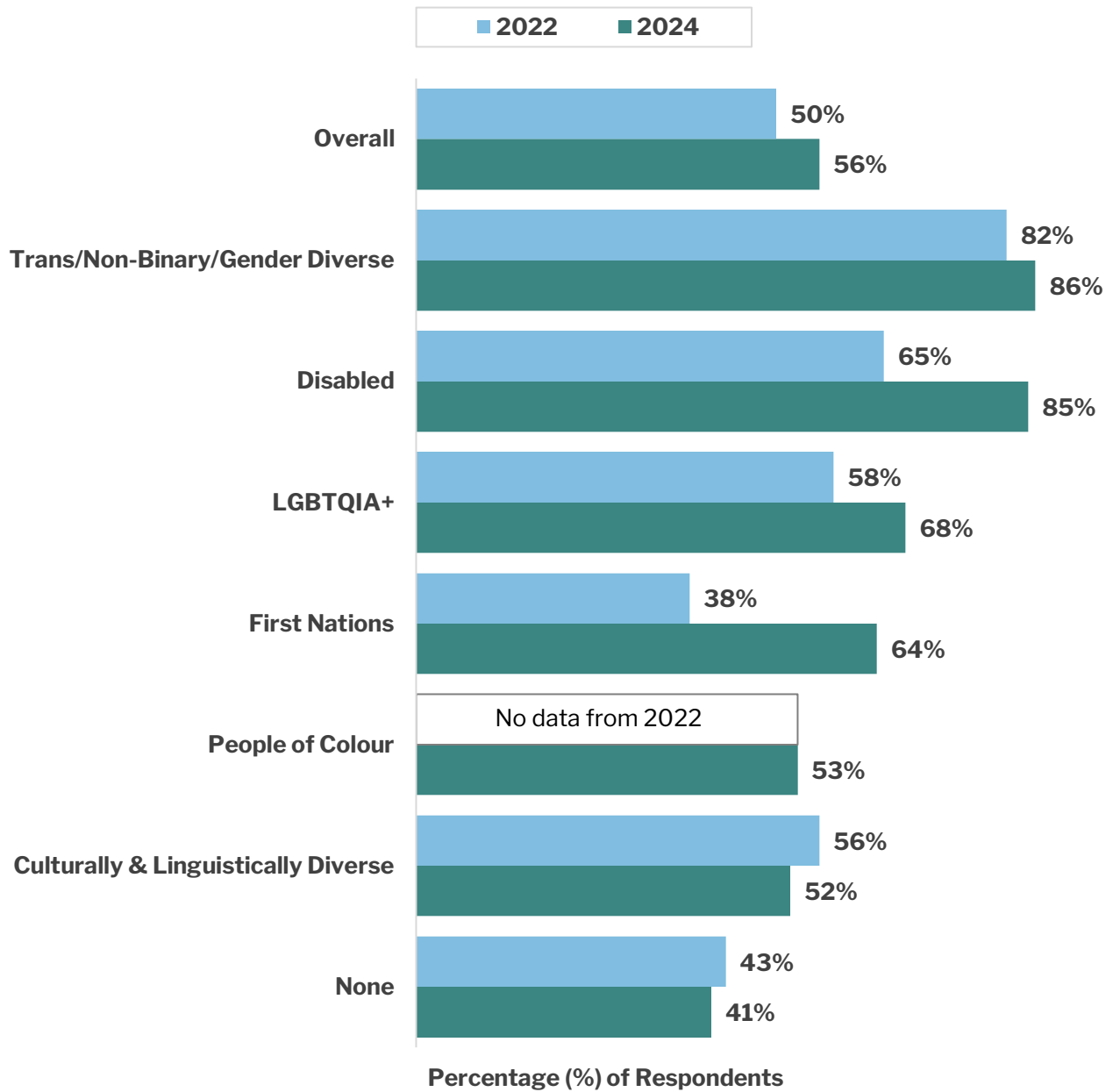


Figure 5.7: Accessed Mental Health Services, by identity

How respondents identified had an influence on whether they accessed mental health services. Trans/non-binary/gender diverse and disabled respondents were more likely to access mental health services than those from other groups (see Figure 5.7).

Emerging (64%) and mid-career (65%) respondents were also twice as likely to access mental health services compared to established (32%) respondents.

There is a noteworthy shift when we look at mental health by geographical location. In this 2024 survey, regional or remote respondents were more likely to access mental health services than their urban peers (Figure 5.8). This contrasts with the 2022 survey, where those who lived in urban areas were more likely to access mental health services than their regional or remote counterparts.

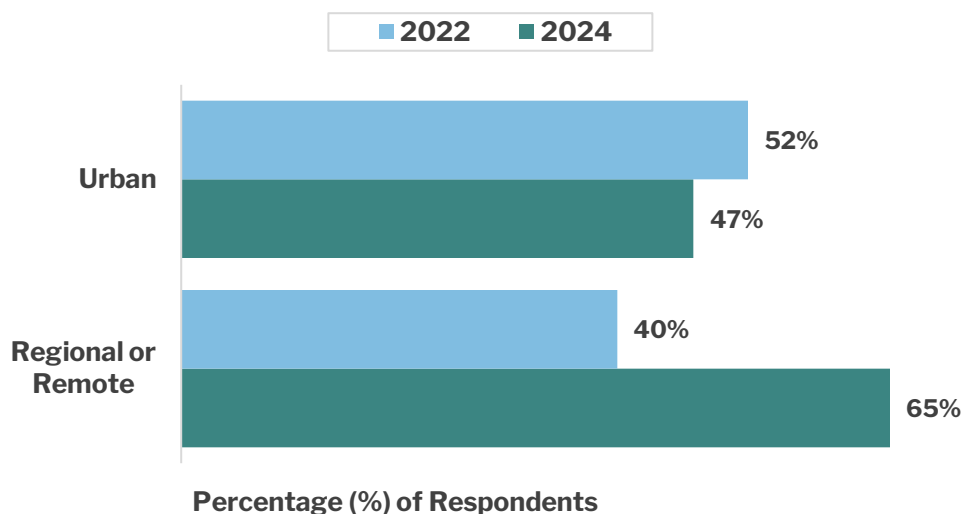


Figure 5.8: Accessed Mental Health Services, by geographical area

In addition, the percentage of urban respondents accessing mental health services has decreased, compared to the increased levels of regional/remote respondents accessing mental health services.

Neurodivergence, Chronic Illness and Mental Health

For the first time, we asked respondents if they:

- Have been diagnosed with a mental health condition
- Are neurodivergent (e.g. ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, etc.)
- Have a long-term health condition, injury or chronic illness
- Have been diagnosed with diverse and/or complex mental health

41% were none of the above and 6% preferred not to answer (see Figure 5.9), meaning the remaining majority (53%) selected at least one of the above options.

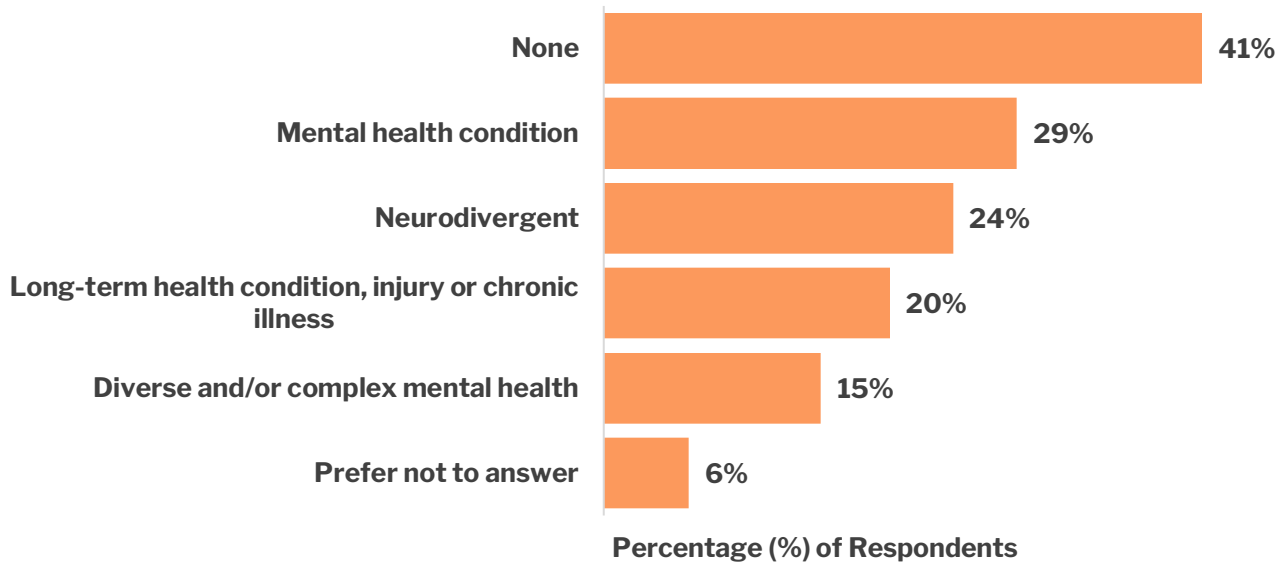


Figure 5.9: Demographics of Respondents relating to Mental Health

Of the 53% who selected at least one of the above options, most did not identify as disabled, even though the working conditions of being an independent in the performing arts may be disabling and inaccessible to their circumstances.

45% of those who identified as neurodivergent also identified as disabled. 36% of those with a long-term health condition, injury or chronic illness identified as disabled. 29% of those diagnosed with complex mental health issues identified as disabled. However, all respondents who identified as disabled identified with as at least one of the above demographics.

These demographics of respondents are much more likely to access mental health services:

- 83% of those diagnosed with diverse or complex mental health accessed mental health services;
- 83% of those diagnosed with a mental health condition accessed mental health services;
- 71% of neurodivergent respondents accessed mental health services;
- 64% of those with a long-term health condition, injury or chronic illness accessed mental health services;
- In comparison to 37% of those who are/with ‘none of the above’ accessing mental health services.

Health, Mental Health & Wellbeing Spend

Average health, mental health and wellbeing spend **\$2,191¹²**
 Down from \$2,467 in 2022

Emerging	\$1,990	Mid-Career	\$2,278	Established	\$2,994
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Table 5.1: Average health and wellbeing spend by career stage per year

The average spend on health, mental health and wellbeing has decreased slightly since 2022, despite an increase in respondents accessing mental health services – 56%, up from 50% in 2022. The maximum spend on health and wellbeing was \$27,000 and the minimum was \$50.

Those who identified as disabled spent the most on their health, mental health and wellbeing (Figure 5.10).

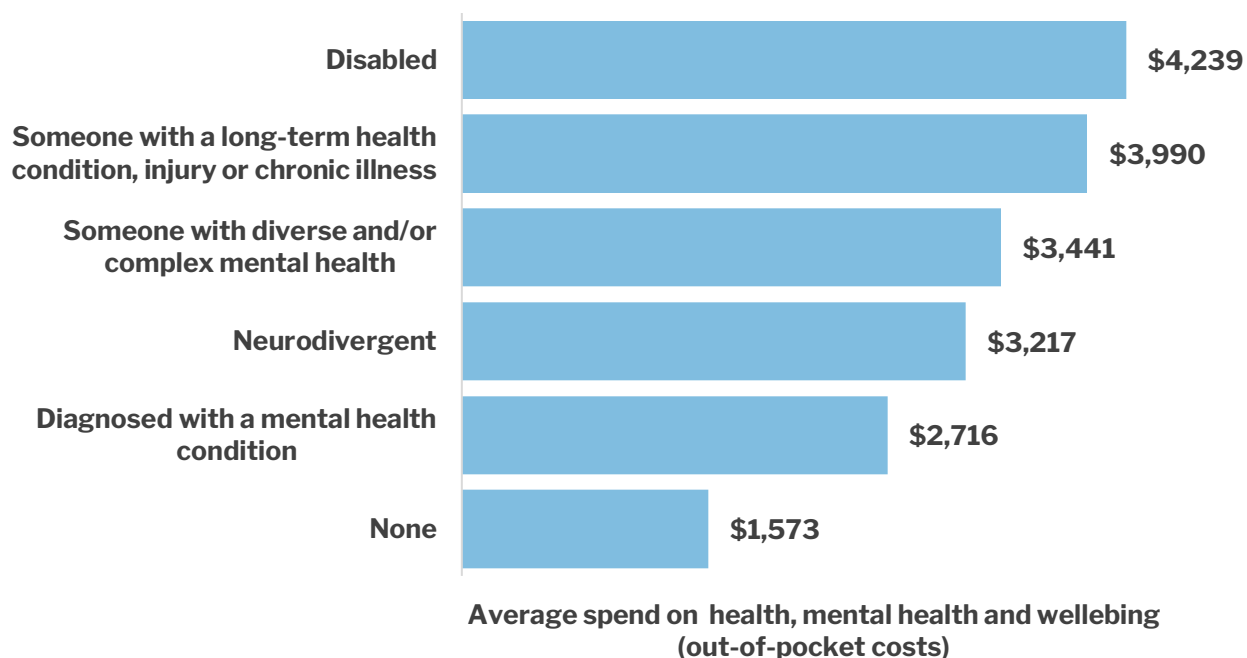


Figure 5.10: Average health and wellbeing spend per year

Similarly, all of those who have a long-term health condition, injury or chronic illness, live with diverse and/or complex mental health, are neurodivergent, and/or have a diagnosed mental health condition spent more on their health, mental health and wellbeing than those who are none of the above.

¹² Respondents were asked to only include out-of-pocket costs, and exclude costs subsidised or paid for by, Medicare, NDIS, etc.

'I have finally realised that an arts practice in Australia at this time is unsustainable. My body is breaking down, as is my mental health. The cost for maintaining those things on an artist's income without private health is huge, let alone the amount of last-minute cancellations for gigs or other work that don't qualify for insurance for work missed. I have no safety net.

Ironically in 2024 I have worked more full-time hours as a dancer than I ever have before, doing several short contracts back to back as well as having the largest presenting opportunity ever for our small arts partnership. I am constantly overwhelmed, balancing 20 things, taking shitty jobs that will allow me to be flexible for arts projects, and working many admin hours for free. I'm exhausted and am finally actively looking for a way out. I can't afford university because I am worried about accruing more debt without a guaranteed income, and that income needs to be high. I am upset about needing this change and the idea of leaving behind the arts, but I see no other option.

'I was only home for about 2 months out of 12 and it severely affected my mental health. I spent a lot of time thinking about how to shift my work so I could be home more or how I could leave the industry to find something that I wouldn't need to sacrifice so much of my personal life for.'

'The more I looked for jobs outside the industry and applied with the CV I have, the more I hit brick walls, and rejections. This caused depression and severe financial hardships.'

Attrition Rate

More independents are considering some kind of career change: 59% in 2024 up from 51% in 2022 (see Figure 5.11).

Less are considering leaving the industry altogether (15%, down from 19% in 2022), but more are recognising the need to work in a different field/profession and less on their practice/projects (44%, up from 32% in 2022). This matches the growing trend of independents taking on part-time and full-time jobs (Figure 3.1), and more independents spending an average of only 1-10 hours per week on their creative practice (Figure 2.7).

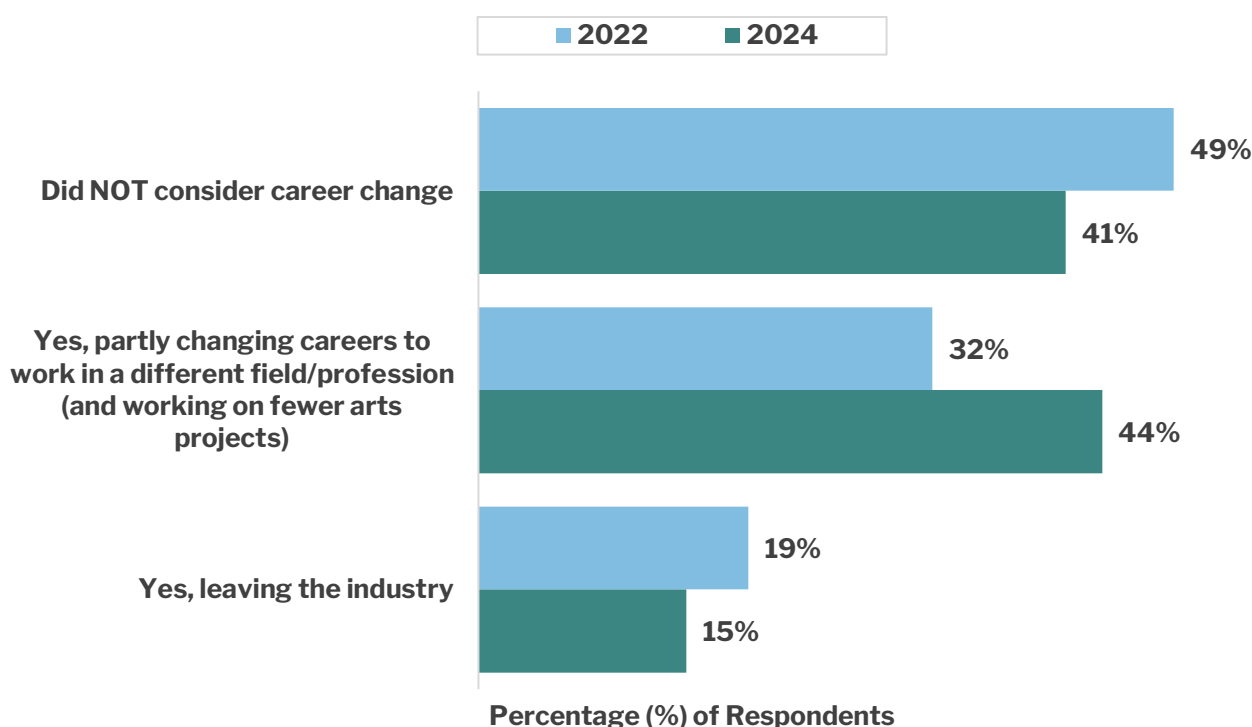


Figure 5.11: Percentage of respondents considering a career change

Looking at career stages, the 2022 and 2024 data is very similar for emerging creatives. However, the percentage of midcareer and established creatives considering a partial career change have increased significantly – 51% of midcareer creatives up from 33%; and 32% of established creatives up from 15%. As time wears on, and with increased responsibilities to care and provide for children, parents and other dependents, indies are less able to justify self-subsidised and financially unsustainable careers. In turn, the sector is at risk of losing knowledge and skills that more experienced creatives have to offer.

Mid-career creatives are most likely to consider some kind of career change (67%), compared to in 2022 when emerging creatives were most likely to consider some kind of career change (60%). Established artists continue to be least likely to consider some kind of career change (46%), although this has increased from 30% in 2022.

We went one step further in this 2024 survey to find out if respondents have taken action to leave the industry. Of the 59% who considered a career change, more than half (33%) reported taking action.

20% had actively job searched, 7% had commenced training or study, and 6% had taken other action (Figure 5.12). ‘Other’ actions included taking a break, working on other skills, researching other postgraduate pathways, and commencing a new job.

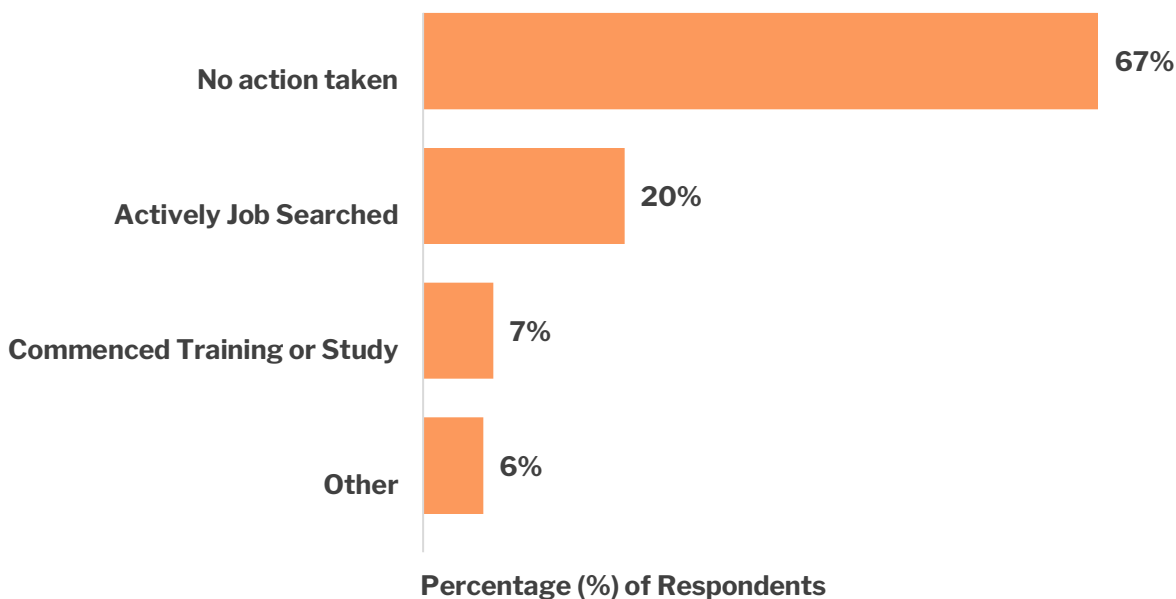


Figure 5.12: Percentage of respondents who have taken action to leave the industry

Mid-career creatives were most likely to take action – 41% of mid-career creatives, compared to 28% of emerging creatives and 27% of established creatives. This aligns with mid-career artists being most likely to consider some kind of career change.

Analysing qualitative responses, many respondents shared that they were re-evaluating the ways and conditions under which they could/would continue to practice as an independent. Some themes included:

- Accepting part-time work to stabilise income, while still setting aside time for creative projects
- Working full-time and getting paid well outside the arts, so that they can work only on arts projects they are passionate about
- Being more strategic and selective about the creative projects they take on
- Changing roles in the arts (e.g. more teaching and facilitating, less acting)
- Working on others’ projects instead of producing own work
- Considering backup plans for when projects dry up
- Taking a break to determine conditions and boundaries under which they can continue

'It's never been harder to be an independent artist, especially mid-career, regionally based and with a young family. The arts environment (city, precinct and festival centred) is hostile to so much. Theatre companies have no obligations to employ local artists, or hold open and fair job searches. Individual grants have all but disappeared and those that remain are woefully inadequate to compete with inflation, cost of living and the reality of making work. I'm actually functionally out of the industry - and that makes me incredibly sad. I am not alone, but basically nothing is being done to keep the deep knowledge, long-term care and skills of mid-career practitioners in the industry.'

'I'm trying to develop new skills to leave the arts industry, but the arts is so demanding of my time I'm finding it very difficult.'

*'I actually quit my job in academia in order to focus on working as a freelance artist. I'm the only person going this way!
Everyone's getting out!'*

'I didn't change career but did a big adjustment to work more independently, to no longer apply to government for funding and put more energy into privately funded show development and performance. '

'[I'm] sick of having to fight for every penny and have no supports when ill or injured. [I've] looked at moving to medicine, back into law, into mining. Anything with a guaranteed income at a high level of pay. [I'm] sick of working all day for free in a job most people scoff at, being unable to ever afford a house or have children.'

'I am independently wealthier than most of my compatriots, so have the luxury of being able to weather COVID and other implications, work on projects in my spare time and not worry about things like having to move house... Our relationship to making art and seeing art is deeply impacted by socio-economic factors [and class].'

TNA Observations

Rates & Fees

Many independents do not have set fees or established rates for their practice. They also lack agency in negotiating and setting their own fees for projects.

The rates provided by respondents shows the underpayment or non-payment of independents.

Looking at *hourly* rates when working on unfunded/minimally funded projects:

- 26% of respondents indicated 'zero'.¹³
- 10% indicated a fee lower than the Australian minimum wage of \$24.10/hour.

This equates to 36% of respondents not being paid a legal wage.

This underpayment or non-payment increases when we look at *weekly* rates on unfunded/minimally funded projects:

- 22% of respondents indicated 'zero'.¹⁴
- 45% indicated a fee lower than the Australian minimum wage of \$915.90/week.

This equates to 67% of respondents not receiving a legal weekly rate when working on unfunded/minimally funded projects.

Across projects, independents often receive a fee per person, yet fulfill multiple roles. Our industry is relying on a huge amount of unpaid labour from independents.

Independents receive \$1,504.94 as an average weekly fee when working for an established organisation. For comparison, the Australian full-time adult average weekly earnings increased to \$1,923.40 in May 2024.¹⁵ We must also keep in mind that the expenses required to continue practising between projects is not covered, and this weekly fee is not an ongoing wage.

High levels of expenditure by Deaf and/or Disabled respondents on health, mental health, and wellbeing is evident – and does not necessarily lead to higher fees. The average income of Deaf or Disabled respondents is \$20,552, below the overall average of \$21,608.

In publishing these rates, TNA emphasises that these are benchmarks derived from averages reported by respondents. These rates are by no means recommended, 'exemplary,' or award rates required to sustain an independent practice.

We continue to advocate for fairer remuneration that value arts work. Understanding the constant push and pull of lean arts budgets, we encourage those setting rates to think not

¹³ ¹⁴ Respondents' comments typically stated that 'zero' means no payment, profit-share, or unsure what to put as the amount is insignificant. TNA Independent Survey, 2024.

¹⁵ [Average Weekly Earnings Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024.](#)

only of short-term project outcomes but how they can enable independent practitioners to have more sustainable careers.

Access

Access costs look different for every person and include (but are not limited to) disability access costs, interpreters, transport costs, and childcare costs. Respondents who incur such costs report that they often have to pay for these out of their professional fee, inadvertently taking a pay cut.

TNA recommends that organisations make it policy to budget for access, transport, childcare, and any costs that may be a barrier to practising as an independent. Offering payment or reimbursements for such costs should be included in agreements/contracts. It takes the burden off independents having to ask, where there is often a power imbalance between the organisation and individual. Independent creatives should also include these costs in project budgets.

We hope that this will become common practice as we continue to advocate for a more equitable sector.

Superannuation

It is now a legal requirement to pay superannuation on top of contracts regardless of fee amount. We recommend that independents who do not know if they are entitled to superannuation seek financial advice to understand contributions and obligations, as this can improve their future financial outlook.

More importantly, the responsibility lies with organisations to understand their legal obligations to pay superannuation to contractors who are employees for superannuation purposes. The [Australian Tax Office \(ATO\) clearly outlines this requirement](#) to pay super directly into a fund for contractors in these instances:

“It doesn't matter if the independent contractor has an Australian business number (ABN). Make super contributions for independent contractors if you pay them:

- under a verbal or written contract that is mainly for their labour (more than half the dollar value of the contract is for their labour)
- for their personal labour and skills (payment isn't dependent on achieving a specified result)
- to perform the contract work (work cannot be delegated to someone else).”¹⁶

¹⁶ [Super for Independent Contractors, Australian Tax Office](#)

With such low rates of pay, is it not surprising that only 29% of independents make their own contributions to their superannuation, even though 68% are “Lead Creatives” and presumably largely self-employed. Self-employed independents working on their own projects are not required to make contributions to their own superannuation, but it is an important consideration for a financially secure future.

Financial Advice and Services

Fewer independents are engaging accountants for financial services compared to previous years. This may be due to a lack of financial literacy and awareness, or the affordability of such services in relation to income earned.

TNA recommends that independents get financial advice especially when it comes to tax time, as there are often financial benefits and savings from tax deductible expenses, income averaging and government co-contributions to super. Often, the amount of savings to be had outweighs the costs of engaging an accountant.

Governance

It is concerning that the percentage of respondents serving on boards have halved since our last survey. This is unsurprising however, given the amount of work, time and risk independents wear for no remuneration.

TNA recommends that organisations pay unsalaried independents on their boards a sitting fee to encourage diversity on boards. TNA now pays an honorarium to independent board members, and our [Independent Board Member Sitting Fee Policy](#) outlines our rationale and how we go about doing this.

Mental Health

There continues to be an upward trend of independents accessing mental health services, with 56% of respondents accessing mental health support.

For comparison, Support Act’s 2024 Mental Health and Wellbeing Survey results show that 53.5% of workers in the music and creative industries had high/very high levels of psychological distress.¹⁷

Support Act’s report focuses specifically on mental health and wellbeing issues; analyses responses to challenges including the rising cost of living, increased performing and production costs, loss of work, workplace safety and career concerns; and which services and supports individuals in our sector turn to for help.

¹⁷ [Mental Health and Wellbeing in Music and Live Performing Arts Survey Results 2024, Support Act](#)

The Next Generation of Creatives

The data from our survey shows that circumstances are not favourable for emerging creatives. We can assume that many trained or graduated during the pandemic (online and in lockdown), have experienced limited opportunities to practise or network, and are now wearing the impact.

Emerging respondents surveyed in 2024 have less work compared to emerging creatives before the pandemic (see Figure 2.4), are much less likely to earn an income solely from creative practice compared to before (see Figure 2.6), and are less financially savvy when it comes to superannuation and seeking financial advice.

As an established respondent put it:

*“It’s getting tougher for independent artists to keep making work... I can absorb the variables because I am older with other strings to my bow to generate income and/or have lower cost of living pressures (e.g. mortgage). **But for younger or newer artists**, there are fewer structures to partner with to make work happen, and this is incredibly frustrating and profoundly disillusioning.”*

The Future

The 2024 survey paints a picture of independent creative practice shaped by the pressures of our times: post-pandemic impacts, a cost-of-living crisis, and a sector that has been under-resourced for the past decade (Alison Croggon eloquently articulates this as the “attritional pressure of continuous funding cuts”).¹⁸

It is a sector desperately finding ways to keep going, but on the brink of burn out:

Independent creatives are working on fewer projects compared to pre-pandemic and are spending less time on average on their creative practice. More are moving into salaried part-time and full-time roles, with an increasing number working in non-arts industries to earn an income.

Fewer are serving on boards and paid panels (only about half compared to the 2022 report), which means less artists represented in governance and leadership.

Only a minority are provided access, transport and childcare support.

¹⁸ [Stage plight: The state of Australian theatre, 2024, Alison Croggon](#)

There is confusion about superannuation payments, with a sizable percentage likely not receiving super when entitled.

Relationships between indies and organisations are increasingly strained.

An increasing percentage of indies are accessing mental health support.

Mid-career indies are most likely to consider some kind of career change, which will mean loss of skills, experience and leadership in our sector.

While this picture is bleak, indies feel financially better off compared to 2022 – likely due to increased income security from taking on salaried part-time and full-time roles.

The data in this survey legitimises the notion that an independent creative who has decided to take on other work is no less a ‘professional artist’ – rather, the reality of our current climate increasingly necessitates this.

It is important for our sector to normalise conversations around income security and independent practice. We must have honest, hard conversations with each other, and with younger creatives, about what it takes to sustain an independent practice – financially, mentally, emotionally and timewise.

Our findings in this report may be a testament to the adaptability and resilience of independent artists, who find ways to create, practice and live while weathering an under-resourced sector and broken ecology. However, this reality is a precarious one that cannot be ignored.

The [National Cultural Policy](#) acknowledges artists as workers, and the newly established [Creative Workplaces](#) has opportunity to address the imbalances and inequities highlighted by this report. TNA invites arts organisations, companies, and festivals, as well as local, state, and federal funding bodies and governments to work together to implement actions to strengthen and support this fragile but essential part of our ecology.

We need to look not only to repair, but to regeneration. We need new models and systems that are conducive not only to making art, but ones that sustain the lives of independent artists and creatives.

Theatre Network Australia This Is How We Do It 2024 Report

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