

National Urban Policy

Creative Australia submission

1 August 2024

Creative Australia, the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body, welcomes the Australian Government's National Urban Policy.

Our arts and cultures are a vital expression of the human experience, and arts and cultural engagement underpin a healthy, resilient and productive society. Culture creates a sense of security and safety, provides connection and a sense of belonging, and plays an integral part in shaping how we feel and live our everyday lives.

17.4 million Australians recognise the positive impacts of arts and creativity on individuals, communities and broader society.¹ Our arts and cultural sector is substantial in size with cultural and creative activity contributing \$21.8 billion to Australia's Gross Domestic Product² and the creative industries employing nearly 500,000 people.³

Creative Australia welcomes the recognition of the value of culture throughout the National Urban Policy. In particular we support the inclusion of arts and culture as an area of focus under 'All people belong and are welcome', and explicit mention of creativity in the principle 'fostering innovation and creativity hubs enhance diversity and broadens opportunities'.

There is an opportunity to further strengthen the National Urban Policy by including arts and culture as an approach under the area of focus 'Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing'. There is robust evidence of the important role of arts, culture and creativity play in driving positive outcomes in preventative health, mental health and wellbeing.

Within this submission, Creative Australia provides a number of practical ways the National Urban Policy could be strengthened. These recommendations include approaches to ensure measurement and evaluation of the National Urban Policy; and approaches to ensure the positive benefits of arts and culture are maximised through strategic planning.

We trust this submission is useful to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, and look forward to working closely on building strong, resilient, cohesive and healthy communities.

Summary of recommendations:

- Update the area of focus 'Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing' to specifically reference the link between arts and culture and health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Clarify the intended scope of the policy, including the urban areas covered by the National Urban Policy, in order to measure, track and inform future policy.

Recommendation 1:

Update the area of focus ‘Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing’ to specifically reference the link between arts and culture and health and wellbeing outcomes.

- **Creative Australia supports the inclusion of arts and culture within the National Urban Policy.**
 - Arts and culture is particularly evident in ***Objective 3: All people belong and are welcome***, which highlights the opportunity to collaborate across all levels of government to foster **equitable access to dynamic arts and culture**.
 - We also recognise that arts and culture has been primarily positioned within the principle ***Fostering innovation and creativity hubs enhance diversity and broadens opportunities***, which includes actions to:
 - fully **integrate culture and creativity** into local development strategies and plans
 - ensure strategic **cultural planning** encourages local communities to respond to changing social, recreational, leisure and economic needs.
- **Creative Australia recommends extending beyond these inclusions and specifically referencing the link between arts and culture and health and wellbeing outcomes under the area of focus ‘Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing’.**
 - Particularly, the policy notes the importance of access to community spaces and infrastructure such as ‘community centres, sporting facilities, health hubs, libraries and parks’. However, it does not include discussion or actions on the role of arts and culture which is the lifeblood of certain community spaces, and the importance of integrating creativity and culture needs into planning and delivery of social infrastructure to maximise the health and wellbeing benefits for communities.
- **Creativity is a powerful resource to support cohesive, inclusive, productive and resilient communities.** Engagement in arts and cultural activities is proven to improve quality of life in myriad ways, including addressing loneliness, mental health and ageing,⁴ decreasing anxiety and depression and increasing wellbeing and social inclusion.⁵
 - **Culture is a foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.** It is essential to people’s everyday lives – helping to shape views on the world and supporting the creation of a meaningful life. Culture is a protective factor – it decreases the likelihood of negative health outcomes – and can positively influence other social aspects of our health.⁶
 - **First Nations arts and cultural participation can contribute to multiple areas across the National Urban Policy,** including improved physical and mental health and wellbeing; greater social inclusion and cohesion; more employment, economic opportunities and meaningful work; and safer communities with reductions in crime and improved rehabilitation.⁷

- **There is a growing body of evidence recognising the vital role that arts and creativity can play in promoting positive outcomes for mental health and wellbeing.**⁸
- **Australians strongly recognise the benefits of arts and creativity to our health and wellbeing.** Results from Creative Australia's recent National Arts Participation Survey show:
 - Over half of Australians say the arts have a 'big' or 'very big' impact on our sense of wellbeing and happiness (56%), and on our ability to deal with stress, anxiety or depression (56%).
 - Compared to before the pandemic, a greater proportion of Australians are attending arts and cultural events to improve their wellbeing (32% up from 25% in 2019).⁹
- Aligned with the action to fully integrate culture and creativity into local development planning, **there are a number of examples of local urban infrastructure strategies which embed arts and culture across all phases of development to drive better community outcomes.** For example:
 - The **Randwick Health and Innovation Precinct (RHIP)'s Creative Placemaking Program** places arts and cultural programming at the heart of the precinct.¹⁰ The program supports community connections and clinical outcomes through culture-led placemaking, including design and creative programs such as exhibitions, public workshops, talks and events within the precinct. Putting people at the centre of place, RHIP's Creative Placemaking Program supports the:
 - **Precinct:** shaping a vibrant place for staff and students - sparking dialogue, research and collaboration within the partnerships.
 - **Patients:** strengthening clinical outcomes and supporting visitor wellbeing and experience.
 - **Public:** providing high-quality creative programs for community health and wellbeing.
- **Creative Australia is keen to work with all levels of government on strategies to better align the planning and delivery of arts, cultural and recreation infrastructure, and to maximise the positive impacts that arts and cultural activity can have on social cohesion, cross-sectoral partnerships and local economies.**

Recommendation 2:

Clarify the intended scope of the policy, including the urban areas covered by National Urban Policy, in order to measure, track and inform future policy.

- **To better illustrate the intention of the policy, we recommend greater clarity on:**
 - **how the goals, principles and objectives/areas of focus intersect**
 - **how the policy will guide investment**
 - **how the policy intersects with other policies and frameworks**
 - **how the policy will flow through to measurement of impact.**
- **Creative Australia supports the principle *Improving the evidence base will underpin urban innovation*.** However, to be effective, the policy should include clear commitments that are measurable and that ensure accountability across government departments.
- There are a number of actions, policies and frameworks that are suggested as working in tandem with the policy. It would be helpful to **articulate the considered coverage of the National Urban Policy**; or state that the policy is intended to be fluid in its approach, if this is the case.
 - **For the purposes of this policy and its measurement, we recommend articulating how and which urban areas are included in the scope of the policy.** Two main classification systems are used to understand the experiences of living in regional, rural and remote Australia.¹¹ Articulating the policy's scope and criteria for defining urban areas included would help identify the cities covered under the National Urban Policy, and provide a coherent understanding for its application, implementation, reporting and measurement. In this way, it would also provide an indication of the policy's boundaries in relation to the Regional Investment Framework.
- In addition to evaluating progress and improving results against indicators in the *Measuring What Matters Framework*, **other frameworks should inform the evaluation of the National Urban Policy as it relates to arts and culture**, these are:
 - **The State of Australian Culture report.** As announced under the National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, the State of Australian Culture report will be a triennial report developed by Creative Australia in partnership with Screen Australia.
 - **The evaluation of *Revive*.** The National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, is slated for evaluation in 2026 and will inform future policy actions to intersect with the National Urban Policy.

About Creative Australia

Creative Australia is the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body.

In line with the functions set out in our establishing legislation, the *Creative Australia Act 2023*, and guided by the vision, pillars, and actions set out in the Australian Government's National Cultural Policy: *Revive, a place for every story, a story for every place*, Creative Australia champions arts and culture for all Australians.

With artists at the heart of what we do, Creative Australia invests in creative talent and stimulates the market for Australian stories to be told on a national and international scale, sharing our rich culture with the world. Our strategic activity includes multi-year investment, grants, targeted initiatives and research and advocacy to support, strengthen and sustain the arts and cultural sector for all audiences to benefit.

Endnotes

¹ Creative Australia 2023, [Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey](#).

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, [Australian Industry, 2021–22 financial year](#). This figure includes the following industry subdivisions: creative and performing arts; heritage activities; motion picture and sound recording; broadcasting; publishing; internet publishing and broadcasting; libraries; printing and recorded media.

³ Based on creative occupations within the creative industries and other occupations within creative industries, 2021 Census. Cunningham S and McCutcheon M 2022, [The Creative Economy in Australia: What Census 2021 Tells Us](#).

⁴ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017, [Creative Health: The arts for health and wellbeing](#).

⁵ Perkins R, Mason-Bertrand A, Tymoszyk U et al 2021, 'Arts Engagement Supports Social Connectedness in Adulthood: Findings from the HEartS Survey', *BMC Public Health*, 21:1208. 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.

⁶ Lowitja Institute 2021, [Culture is Key: Towards cultural determinants-driven health policy](#).

⁷ Office for the Arts 2012, [Culture and Closing the Gap](#), Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport.

⁸ See Australia Council 2023, [Connected Lives: Creative solutions to the mental health crisis](#).

⁹ Creative Australia 2023, [Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey](#).

¹⁰ Randwick Health and Innovation Precinct, [Creative Placemaking for Lifelong Health and Wellbeing](#).

¹¹ The Modified Monash Model (MMM) categorises different areas in Australia into seven remoteness categories according to geographic remoteness, as defined by the ABS, and town size. See Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care, [Modified Monash Model](#). The ABS uses the Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure to classify Australian into five classes of remoteness on the basis of access to services. The five remoteness classes are: Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote. See ABS, [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\) Edition 3](#).