



22 August 2022

Canberra Youth Theatre National Cultural Policy Submission

1. Are you submitting this submission (tick all that apply):

On behalf of a non-for-profit arts organisation

About Canberra Youth Theatre

Canberra Youth Theatre is one of the leading youth arts companies in Australia. We create opportunities for young people to collaborate, develop their artistic skills and create pathways to the professional arts sector. We advocate for and amplify the voices of young people, providing a space for them to discover and express their creative selves. We produce powerful theatre where young artists ignite urgent conversations, challenge the forces that shape them, and invite us to see the world from new perspectives. Canberra Youth Theatre is the voice of youth expressed through intelligent and challenging theatre.

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

A Place for Every Story and Strong Institutions

We refer to and endorse the submission from Theatre Network Australia and a cohort of leading national youth arts companies, to support the belief that “a place for every story” must include young people, and that the youth arts sector is the foundation for our “strong institutions”.

The Youth Arts sector has been overlooked, devalued, and systemically defunded in recent years. This sector sits at the intersection of Government portfolios including Young Australians, Education, Regional and Remote Communities, Mental Health, Youth Justice, and the Arts.

Youth Arts companies employ professional artists to share their skills and experience with young people to realise community goals. The outcomes of the Youth Arts industry have a demonstrable impact in areas including health, employment, learning and education, community-building, and resilience. An active engagement in the arts are powerful contributors to the development of young people, their education, and the workforce of the future.

Arts and cultural engagement have been shown to enhance social inclusion, reduce loneliness, increase confidence, and improve feelings of self-worth. In research by Headspace 74% of young people reported that their mental health was worse since the outbreak of COVID-19; 86% reported a negative impact on their mood, wellbeing, or sleep; and 50% reported an impact on their confidence to achieve future goals. This is why our work is more important now than ever, particularly for our young people's mental health and well-being.

Young people deserve dedicated arts opportunities that empower them to tell their stories and see themselves reflected in our culture through an increased engagement with the arts.

We need stronger youth arts institutions to support young people as artists and creators of culture, to create work that engages and appeals to them as audiences, and to improve their social well-being.

We support the recommendations that are being collectively advocated for by the national youth arts sector. They are:

1. Include “Young People's Engagement with the Arts” as a priority of the National Cultural Plan.
2. Establish an ongoing, dedicated funding stream for Young People's Engagement with the Arts for companies whose core business is young people's engagement, administered by the Australia Council for the Arts;
3. Establish targeted, cross-department streams of funding for Young People's Engagement to work with Health and Mental Health, Employment, Youth Justice, Regional Youth and Education – co-managed by the Australia Council;
4. Establish Advisory Boards that represent the diversity of young Australians, managed independently, as ongoing standing committees for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts.

Canberra Youth Theatre is one of the dozens of Australian youth arts organisations that have been defunded by the Australia Council over the past decade, due to restructuring that has seen the removal of a dedicated youth arts fund, and the repeated response that “there isn't enough money to go around.”

There is an opportunity and urgent need to strengthen the nation's institutions that specialise in connecting professional artists and creative practice with young people. We believe that the Federal Government, through the Australia Council, should introduce a dedicated stream of funding for arts organisations whose core business is working with young people.

This way we can ensure that youth arts funding is not capitalised by other major performing arts organisations, but instead prioritises organisations who make work with young people as part of their core activities.

The ACT Government has recently announced a new Arts, Culture and Creative Policy (2022-2026) with the vision for Canberra to be recognised as Australia’s arts capital. Our Minister for the Arts, Tara Cheyne MLA, made the following statement earlier this year about the work of our organisation:

“Canberra Youth Theatre makes an essential contribution to cultural vibrancy through the commission, creation, production and presentation of new and high-quality artistic experiences, and the opportunities this provides for young and emerging artists. Young people are brought together with professional artists to collaborate, learn new skills, create powerful performances, and build pathways to sustainable artistic careers. Now in its 50th year, Canberra Youth Theatre continues to both cement and build on its reputation as one of Australia’s leading youth arts companies and a destination for young people looking to explore theatrical experiences.”

Canberra Youth Theatre, like so many youth arts organisations all around the country, are helping to shape our national cultural identity, bringing young people together with inspiring creative leaders to collaborate, create new work, share stories, and find their own voice within their community.

The National Cultural Plan offers a unique opportunity to create meaningful change in the way Australians recognise and engage with the arts. The new vision for our Cultural Policy needs to have embedded within it the values, needs, and ambitions of our young Australians.

We urge the Federal Government to prioritise young people’s engagement in the arts as a priority of the National Cultural Plan.



Luke Rogers
Artistic Director & CEO

[Redacted]
(02) 6248 5057

Public Submission