



The peak body for arts & disability

Arts Access Australia

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National Cultural Policy Submission

Arts Access Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the identification of priorities for the development of a new National Cultural Policy.

Who we are

Arts Access Australia (**AAA**) is the peak national body for arts and disability. Established in 1992, AAA is a disability-led company limited by guarantee, registered under the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission Act 2012, and governed by a volunteer board. It is also recognised by the Australian Taxation Office as a “public benevolent institution”, and has “deductible gift recipient” status.

We act and speak on behalf of Australian artists, arts workers, participants and audiences with disability, at the national level, to increase opportunities to fully participate in, and contribute to, Australian arts and culture. We do this through systemic advocacy, sector development and representation, and information provision. It is an important part of our mission to lead on sustainable artistic practice, professional and career development, and leadership opportunities for artists and arts workers with disability who are forging professional careers or making art through creative community connections, to create space to share their own stories, or inform and challenge audiences.

We are unique because we work with people with disability in all areas of the arts, with all art forms, all age groups, and across all experiences of disabling barriers. We work in collaboration with our members throughout Australia.

Our members include the State and Territory arts and disability bodies, disability and mainstream arts organisations, disability services, and individual artists and arts-workers with disability (and more).

We have an inclusive approach to disability, and have adopted the social model of disability, which is a way of viewing the world and disability, developed by people with disability. The social model of disability says that people with disability are prevented from participating fully, and on an equal basis with others, because of systemic, attitudinal, environmental and other barriers in society, such as buildings not having accessible toilets, or people’s attitudes, like assuming people with disability can’t do certain things. The social model helps us

www.artsaccessaustralia.org

www.meetingplaceforum.org

AAA acknowledges Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of Australia and we pay our respects to elders past and present.

recognise barriers that make life harder for people with disability. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers people with disability more independence, choice and control.

When we say we work with 'people with disability', we mean anyone who is Deaf, with learning disabilities or sensory, physical, hidden or mental health conditions.

We also work with people without disability, arts and cultural organisations, and others within the wider arts and disability sectors.

Language used in this document

AAA uses "person-first" language - for example "people with disability". This is a deliberate decision taken by the AAA Board. This is the form of language used in the [United Nations Convention the Rights of People with Disability](#), and by government in Australia. Most peak bodies in the Australian disability sector also use "person-first" language.

AAA also uses this language because it puts the person before the disability. It emphasises the value and worth of the individual by recognising them as a person, instead of a medical condition.

Consistent with this position, AAA uses "person-first" language in this document. However, we also recognise that many people with disability prefer to use "identity-first" language because disability is an inherent part of their identity, and "identity-first" language shows connection to the disability community, demonstrates disability pride and emphasises that it is society that is disabling.

Different preferences about how language is used reflects the different ways people consider their identity, their experience of disability and attitudes of their community. AAA acknowledges and respects people's personal preferences and the individual right to choose how their identity and experiences are described.

When we say 'people with disability', we mean anyone who is d/Deaf, with learning disabilities or sensory, physical, hidden or mental health conditions.

Context of this submission

The context in Australia before the pandemic indicates that there is significant inequity in the arts for people with disability. Studies show that people with disability attend the arts as much as people without disability. People with disability are more likely to create art (61%) compared to people without disability (44%). In terms of volunteering, 24% of people with disability have given unpaid time to the arts, compared with 14% of people without disability. When it comes to employment in the arts, people with disability earn 42% less than people without disability and one third of artists with disability experience unemployment.¹

¹ [Australian National Arts and Participation Survey 2016](#), [Connecting Australians 2017](#), [CMC report 2018](#), [Making Art Work](#).

What these statistics show is a need for concerted effort to ensure that the disability community has what they need to survive and thrive in the arts and culture industry. We also know anecdotally that continual access barriers, many forms of ableism, emotional labour, forced intimacy and cultural safety issues also arise for people with disability in the arts in Australia.

This submission is framed by reference to AAA's vision and mission, and is also made in the context of:

1. the release by the Department of Social Services, on 3 December 2021, of:
 - a) Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 (Strategy)² and
 - b) Employ My Ability, the Disability Employment Strategy, an Associated Plan of the Strategy³
2. the continuing work by the Office for the Arts (OftA) in "developing a Commonwealth-only National Arts and Disability Associated Plan (the Associated Plan) under the (Strategy) to drive improved outcomes for people with disability in the arts at a Commonwealth level".⁴

The Strategy is focused on interrelated outcome areas with "tangible, achievable policy priorities" and inbuilt rigorous measuring, evaluation and reporting of outcomes. It represents the Government's commitment to enabling every Australian to meet their potential, to achieve, to have a fair go and to have real choices.⁵

Under the Strategy, Associated Plans are focused on improving aspects of Australian life (e.g., the arts sector) and provide a more coordinated, long-term approach to how governments work to improve outcomes for people with disability. An Associated Plan generally runs for three to ten years. All Associated Plans must clearly identify how they contribute to achieving the outcomes of the Strategy.⁶

It is not clear whether the Commonwealth Government intends to proceed with an arts and disability strategy, as an Associated Plan under the Strategy, or as part of the National Cultural Policy. The timing of the release of an arts and disability strategy is also not clear.

² See <https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/a-new-national-disability-strategy>, accessed 28 January 2022

³ See <https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/disability-employment-strategy>, accessed 28 January 2022

⁴ Email from M Gunnell, Assistant Secretary, Arts Access and Participation, Office for the Arts to M Hall, CEO, Arts Access Australia "Update on National Arts and Disability Strategy" dated 29 October 2021.

⁵ Department of Social Services, Summary of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, p.1, found at <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/ads>, accessed 14 January 2022.

⁶ ibid. p.11.

Clarity in relation to these important matters, and the extent to which the Government still intends to ensure closer alignment between the Strategy and the arts and disability strategy, is essential.

This approach is focused solely on actions by the Australian Government. Other jurisdictions remain responsible and have an important role to play in improving opportunities for people with disability to engage with and participate in the arts.

However, we are concerned that there is currently no coordination of policy (either in terms of arts or cultural policy or disability policy) or the development of separate Associated Plans under the Strategy, and no mechanisms for consistency, common goals, and accountability in development and implementation. Now that the Meeting of Cultural Ministers no longer occurs, any coordination only occurs at the level of Department officials.

Government will use public reporting, governance and evaluation to determine if the Strategy is changing the lives of people with disability.

The Australian government will publish an annual Targeted Action Plans Report covering implementation progress, successes, and overall status, and an annual Outcomes Framework (Dashboard), which will feature high-level data against the outcomes of the Strategy.⁷ However, there are currently no reporting obligations in respect of any Associated Plans, other than in the limited context of:

- (a) the biennial Implementation Report, on progress against disability initiatives at all levels of government, and
- (b) the two Major Evaluation Reports (produced in 2025 and 2029) informed by an independent review into the extent to which the Strategy is delivering improvements for people with disability.

Principle recommendation

It is within this context that we urge the Government to ensure:

1. the National Cultural Policy has diversity, including disability, access and equity embedded within all five pillars,
2. the National Cultural Policy maximises the opportunities for significant, sustainable improvements in disability access and inclusion in Australian arts and culture consistent with the with Guiding Principles and Outcome Areas of the Strategy and Employ My Ability,
3. the National Cultural Policy is aligned with the Australian Disability Strategy outcomes framework. This means that the Policy is consistent in its approach to removing barriers and supporting people with disability to gain equitable access to attend arts

⁷ ibid. p.12.

and culture events, participate in the arts through health and wellbeing, community making and as a professional practice, study and train in the arts, and work in the sector at all levels of employment, and

4. the development, implementation and monitoring of an arts and disability strategy that it is consistent with, and advances the objects of the Strategy and that complies with the Government's Evaluation Good Practice Guide Checklist⁸ (whether as an Associated Plan under the Strategy, or as a key element of the National Cultural Policy) occurs as a matter of priority, and that this is undertaken with the involvement of the arts and disability community and is sufficiently resourced, and funded, so as to maximise its potential to improve opportunities for people with disability to engage with and participate in the arts, as artists, arts workers and audiences.

A Place for Every Story

The consultation paper refers to diversity broadly. It is critical that the National Cultural Policy makes it very clear what is meant by “diversity”. Further, little is mentioned about people with disability or who are d/Deaf, including the differentiation of types of disability. Noticeably absent from the previous policy was an account of how artists and arts workers with disability have contributed to the arts and cultural sector.

It is essential that the National Cultural Policy specifically includes people with disability within the meaning of diversity, and the need for places for every story, including stories of people with disability, by people with disability, for people with disability.

There must be authentic, sustainable and meaningful places held by artists, arts workers and audiences with disability.

Further, in ensuring that the National Cultural Policy creates and holds space for people with disability, it must adhere to the principle of “Nothing about us without us”.

We recommend that, in ensuring a place for every story, the Government:

- (a) organisations that secure funding for arts and culture are required to demonstrate their commitment to accessibility and inclusion, outlining their plans for accessibility, including consultation with people with disability (including their Disability Action and Inclusion Plans, alternative career pathways programs, and access audits) and demonstrate their commitment to the Guiding Principles of Arts Access Australia's Australian Code of Conduct for Access in the Arts (see Annexure 1)
- (b) organisations that secure funding for arts and culture are required to demonstrate their commitment to accessibility and inclusion by outlining their plans for ensuring better representation of people with disability within their workforces and artistic programs through enhanced leadership opportunities for people with disability, implementation of improved employment practices for people with disability and

⁸ See <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/document/3131>, accessed 28 January 2022.

support for alternative pathways and professional development opportunities for artists and arts workers with disability.

- (c) establishes, and implements a process to coordinate arts and disability policy among the Commonwealth and the States and Territories and the development, implementation, and evaluation of the separate arts and disability policies or plans of each of the States and Territories, including practical, effective mechanisms for consistency, common goals, and accountability in development and implementation, and in data collection, analysis and reporting
- (d) establishes a formal process to engage with the arts sector and people with disability, to provide ways for people with disability and the sector to tell government what they think the Strategy and the disability focused components of the National Cultural Policy need to do, and to provide a mechanism to provide that feedback to the Advisory Council that will be established under the Strategy
- (e) establishes an independent service that will develop (with the involvement and agency of people with disability) and provide information, advice, education, training and supporting resources to the arts and cultural sector to provide practical assistance to arts organisations to better understand issues of disability access and inclusion, and the actions that can be taken to improve disability access and inclusion within their operations, programs, workforces, physical and digital infrastructure and disability arts projects
- (f) funds the Australia Council for the Arts and Screen Australia to establish specific funding programs to assist Australian arts organisations to improve disability access and inclusion within their operations, programs, workforces, physical and digital infrastructure and disability arts projects
- (g) funds each of
 - (i) Australian Film, Television and Radio School
 - (ii) Australian National Maritime Museum
 - (iii) National Film and Sound Archive of Australia
 - (iv) National Gallery Australia
 - (v) National Library Australia
 - (vi) National Museum Australia
 - (vii) National Portrait Gallery of Australia,to improve disability access and inclusion within their operations, programs, workforces, physical and digital infrastructure and disability arts projects
- (h) funds the Australia Council for the Arts and Screen Australia to establish specific funding programs to help artists and arts workers with disability to access their other funding programs for artists and arts workers
- (i) funds the Australia Council for the Arts and Screen Australia to investigate, and make recommendations to Government, on the establishment of a funding program

that exclusively funds arts and cultural activities and projects produced and presented by artists with disability, or that are disability-led

- (j) funds the Australia Australia Council for the Arts and Screen Australia to develop and implement a plan to increase the number of members of peer assessment panels who are artists with disability, and to help, and encourage, artists with disability to apply to become members of those peer assessment panels.

In relation to arts higher education and vocational training, the National Cultural Policy must do each of the following:

- (a) provide a more equitable higher education and vocational training system
- (b) ensure that any increased Federal Government fees for arts courses see funds make their way to departments delivering the curriculum
- (c) support the transition from secondary school to tertiary study or vocational training for young people with disability
- (d) support the transition from tertiary study or vocational training to employment pathways for people with disability
- (e) allocate specific funding within the higher education and vocational training funding to improve pathways and accessibility to further education and training in the arts for people with disability, and to increase opportunities for artists and arts workers with disability to participate in accessible and inclusive lifelong learning, and professional development, consistent with, and that will advance, the education and learning Outcome Area of the Strategy, and provide greater employment opportunities, consistent with the Disability Employment Strategy. This includes providing funding to arts organisations to provide clear career development pathways and professional development and “on the job” learning opportunities for artists and arts workers with disability.

ANNEXURE 1

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE AUSTRALIAN CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ACCESS IN THE ARTS

1. We follow and respect anti-discrimination laws. We understand and support the need to abolish ableism in everything we do
2. We embed the social model of disability in our policies and activities. Our policies and activities also recognise and ensure cultural safety for people with disability. This includes the right to authenticity and creative control for people with disability.
3. We provide meaningful employment and clear career pathways in the arts for people with disability. We also provide people with disability relevant professional training and development opportunities.
4. We recognise and reward people with disability who are leaders in our organisation. We extend this recognition to leaders in the community or arts sector.
5. We provide accurate and timely information in different accessible formats. This facilitates well informed decision-making and inclusive participation by everyone we engage with.
6. We remove barriers in our physical and digital spaces for people with disability. We do not create any further barriers. We provide safe and inclusive spaces for all
7. We recognise artists and arts workers with disability as important cultural assets. We work to increase their involvement in new creative projects.
8. We include authentic representation of artists with disability in all arts spaces. We also respect intersectionality and First People's protocols.
9. We are respectful allies of people with disability. We work to increase the choice and control of people with disability. We do this by developing respectful relationships that consider and meet the needs of people with disability. Where necessary, we organise appropriate support to meet these needs.