

Delivering quality care more efficiently

Creative Australia submission to the Productivity Commission

18 November 2025

Creative Australia welcomes the Productivity Commission's inquiry into enhancing productivity through delivering efficient quality care.

As the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body, Creative Australia invests in and champions creativity. We have a legislative mandate to promote the appreciation, knowledge and understanding of the arts; and to provide advice on matters connected with the arts.

Creative Australia welcomes the Productivity Commission's interim report on opportunities to deliver efficient care. We endorse the Productivity Commission's three recommendations. We are particularly supportive of the recommendation to develop a National Prevention Investment Framework and the recommendation to embed collaborative commissioning practices.

To support a stronger, more resilient care sector, we recommend the Productivity Commission include arts-based approaches as a core component of care reform, particularly of mental health and wellbeing care reform.

Arts and creativity can extend beyond traditional health services to address the social determinants of health. Arts approaches can be deployed to support the delivery of efficient quality care, reducing the burden on the health care system and acting as a preventative measure. Prevention is critical to supporting a healthy, happy and productive society.

Recommendations

1. Recognise arts approaches as a legitimate and evidence-based component of mental health care.
2. Include arts-based interventions in the National Prevention Investment Framework, including discussion of a national social prescribing scheme.
3. Support community-led, culturally safe arts programs, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
4. Invest in and evaluate arts-in-health initiatives as part of collaborative commissioning models.

Creative Australia has been working in this space for many years, including through support for community and cultural development practice and First Nations arts and culture.

We trust the evidence and perspectives outlined in this submission are useful to the Productivity Commission's inquiry. We would be delighted to provide additional insights directly to the Commission as it prepares its final report.

Creative Australia recommendation

1. **Recognise arts approaches as a legitimate and evidence-based component of mental health care.**

Alternative approaches are needed to address mental health

- **It is estimated that untreated mental ill-health and suicide in Australia directly costs the country up to \$220 billion per year.**¹ National recurrent spending on mental health and suicide prevention related services was estimated to be almost \$12.2 billion in 2021–22.²
- **Our young people are at risk and there will be long-term implications if there is no action.** The National Mental Health Survey, the nation's first comprehensive mental health survey in 15 years, found the prevalence of mental ill health in young people had increased by more than 50% from 26% in 2007 to 39% in 2020–21.³
- **There is an urgent need to develop new approaches to address mental health in Australia.** The Productivity Commission's 2020 Mental Health Inquiry report identified a disproportionate emphasis on clinical services, and lack of attention to the underlying determinants of mental health – including the important role played by family, kinship groups and carers, and providers of social support.⁴
- **Prevention, early intervention and an integrated policy response is needed to curb the rise of mental ill-health of young.**⁵ The Productivity Commission's 2020 *Mental Health Inquiry Report* recommended mental health reform to support a people-centred mental health system that can meet changing community need, particularly in a time of crisis.⁶
- **Growing demand for healthcare is putting the health and aged care sector under significant pressure.** Complementary approaches will be required to support this system adapt to address growing demand.

Arts and creativity can help to address health, mental health and wellbeing

- **Arts approaches to health and wellbeing play an important role in addressing the social determinants of health.** Research shows that simply taking part in a creative endeavour can help to reduce your feelings of anxiety or depression.⁷ Research has also found that people need at least two hours per week of arts engagement for good mental wellbeing.⁸
- **Artists and creative practitioners have long been working in health contexts,** recognising the vital role that arts and creativity can play in promoting positive outcomes for Australians' mental health and wellbeing. First Nations peoples are clear leaders when it comes to understanding the links between arts, culture and wellbeing.
- **Creative Australia has been working in this space for many years.** For more information, see the case study within this submission. See also Creative Australia's report *Connected Lives: Creative solutions to the mental health crisis*.⁹

Creative Australia recommendation

2. Include arts-based interventions in the National Prevention Investment Framework, including discussion of a national social prescribing scheme.

A national social prescribing scheme can complement clinical approaches to mental health

- **Social prescribing is an innovative practice that seeks to improve overall wellbeing in non-medical ways** in conjunction with healthcare workers by prescribing non-medical community based activity (for example prescribing community choirs, arts classes, walking groups and local gardening clubs).
- **A national social prescribing scheme could be integrated into general practice primary care health settings**, to connect people with mental and physical health challenges to arts activities and/or art therapy.

The Australian public are open to arts on prescription

- The Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Incorporated's (ACSPRI) 2021 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) examined attitudes towards arts and health. Findings show: ¹⁰
 - **Most respondents are open to arts on prescription.** Almost nine in ten respondents are either 'very open' or 'somewhat open' to arts on prescription for mental health conditions.
 - **Support for arts on prescription increases at the more extreme ends of the happiness spectrum.** Those who are 'very open' to arts on prescription are more likely to be either 'very happy' or 'unhappy'.
 - **People who participate in the arts tend to have higher confidence in, and more favourable attitudes towards, the healthcare system.** They are more likely to be willing to pay for higher taxes for improved healthcare, and to agree publicly funded healthcare should be available to all residents of Australia. They are also more likely to say the healthcare system is efficient.

Evidence shows a national social prescribing scheme could improve health outcomes and save costs for the care system

- **There is increasing support for a national social prescribing scheme in Australia.**
 - A 2019 survey conducted by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Consumer Health Forum (CHF) found more than 90% of general practitioners (GPs) and allied health professionals believe that referring patients to non-medical services in the community is extremely helpful for improving health outcomes.¹¹
 - Link worker social prescribing programs are gaining recognition for addressing healthcare system needs without clinical care. An evaluation of link worker social

prescribing programs indicate there are multiple opportunities for social prescribing.

- **An evaluation of social prescribing in the UK found cost savings to the health system**, through reductions in the number of GP appointments, secondary care use A&E attendances and other costs.¹²

Creative Australia recommendation

3. **Support community-led, culturally safe arts programs, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.**

Culture is the foundation for First Nations peoples' health and wellbeing

- **Culture is the foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.**¹³ Aboriginal health means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.¹⁴
- **Cultural determinants of health for First Nations people are well-established in academic literature** — including connection to Country; family, kinship and community; Indigenous beliefs and knowledge; intergenerational transfer of knowledge, capabilities in language and cultural practices; cultural expression and continuity; Indigenous language, and self-determination and leadership.¹⁵
- **First Nations-led approaches that centre culture within wellbeing and health are well progressed.** The cultural determinants of health and wellbeing are anchored in First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing. Culture is central to understanding health and wellbeing and shapes relationship between self to Country, kin, community and spirituality.
- **The Australian Government's National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, harnesses the vital contributions of culture to First Nations advancement**, economic development and trade; innovation and intellectual property; employment, skills and job security; foreign affairs and cultural diplomacy; infrastructure and regional development; energy transition, adaptability and resilience; social cohesion and community revitalisation.

Creative Australia recommendation

4. **Invest in and evaluate arts-in-health initiatives as part of collaborative commissioning models.**

Arts-health commissioning pathways can drive positive health impacts

- **There are currently no commissioning pathways for programs that operate in the social and cultural determinants of health domain.** There is an opportunity to remove the structural barriers arts-in-health initiatives face gaining health-specific investment.

Case study: Creative Australia's research and policy work on creative health

Mental health and wellbeing represent one of the greatest public policy challenges of our time. It is an issue relevant to our health ministry, as well as defence and veterans' affairs, disaster recovery, aged care, young people, disability services and Indigenous affairs.

Artists and creative practitioners have long been working in health contexts, recognising the vital role that arts and creativity can play in promoting positive outcomes for Australians' mental health and wellbeing.

Creative Australia has been working in this space for many years, including through support for community and cultural development practice and First Nations arts and culture. First Nations peoples are clear leaders when it comes to understanding the links between arts, culture and wellbeing.

Supporting this work is a strong and growing body of evidence recognising the key role that arts and creativity can play in addressing the social determinants of health and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes.¹⁶

Over the past few years, Creative Australia has progressed work supporting and advocating for arts, creativity and wellbeing.

In 2022, Creative Australia (then the Australia Council) convened the Arts, Creativity and Mental Wellbeing Policy Development Program. The four-month program brought together key stakeholders, researchers and policymakers to identify and address evolving and emerging challenges for practitioners in arts and health settings.

Published in 2022, *Connected Lives: Creative solutions to the mental health crisis* consolidated the findings from the program. The report outlined a number of policy recommendations, including the design and implementation of a national social prescribing scheme and training and accreditation for artists and arts workers working in mental health settings. In the 2023–24 year our work in this space has progressed significantly.

In late 2023, Creative Australia convened a roundtable co-hosted by Special Envoy for the Arts, Susan Templeman MP, at Parliament House, and presented insights from *Connected Lives*.

To explore the skills and training needs for creative workers working in mental health settings, Creative Australia supported a three-site research project delivered in partnership with the Big Anxiety Research Centre (UNSW), Wesley Arts (Wesley Mission Queensland) and Creative Recovery Network. Published in November 2023, *Creative Solutions: Training and sustaining the arts for mental health workforce* identifies the professional development and support needs, with a view to improving the safety and sustainability of this area of practice.

Also in November 2023, we published *Creating Wellbeing: Attitudes and engagement with arts, culture and health*. This research provides critical insights into who is accessing the arts to improve their wellbeing, and how people feel about the idea of 'arts on prescription'. The findings from this research adds to Creative Australia's growing evidence base for Australians' attitudes towards arts and culture and wellbeing.

The last few years have seen a groundswell of activity in the arts and health and wellbeing space. Momentum has been building within health and allied health contexts around the prospect of a national social prescribing scheme, with advocacy for such an initiative being led by Australian Social Prescribing Institute of Research (ASPIRE).

Looking to the future, Creative Australia has commissioned a mapping of community and cultural development activity. This work will have focus areas on arts and health activity, and First Nations programs for cultural wellbeing, and will give better visibility to the scale and range of these programs across Australia.

About Creative Australia

Creative Australia is the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body. We invest in and champion Australian creativity.

We invest in creative people and organisations and help build audiences and markets for Australian creative work, both in Australia and internationally. Our establishing legislation, the *Creative Australia Act 2023*, requires us to uphold and promote freedom of expression in the arts and to support Australian arts practice that reflects the diversity of Australia. As a result, we invest in artists and organisations that represent a range of voices, perspectives and stories.

About the cultural and creative industries

Australia's arts and cultural sector is substantial in size with cultural and creative activity contributing \$63.7 billion to Australia's economy¹⁷ and the creative industries employing nearly 500,000 people.¹⁸

Endnotes

¹ Productivity Commission 2020, [Mental Health Inquiry Report](#).

² Productivity Commission 2025, [Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review](#).

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022, [National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing](#).

⁴ Productivity Commission 2020, [Mental Health Inquiry Report](#).

⁵ OECD 2021, [Supporting young people's mental health through the COVID-19 crisis](#).

⁶ Productivity Commission 2020, [Mental Health Inquiry Report](#).

⁷ Stahl A 2018, '[Here's How Creativity Actually Improves Your Health](#)', Forbes, 25 July

⁸ Davies C, Knuiman M, Rosenberg M 2016, '[The Art of Being Mentally Healthy: A study to quantify the relationship between recreational arts engagement and mental well-being in the general population](#)', BMC Public Health 16:15.

⁹ Creative Australia 2022, [Connected Lives: Creative solutions to the mental health crisis](#).

¹⁰ Creative Australia 2023, [Creating Wellbeing: Attitudes and engagement with arts, culture and health](#).

¹¹ Consumers Health Forum 2022, '[Tackling loneliness with a social prescription](#)', Media Release 17 June 2022.

¹² O'Connell Francischetto E, Bradley J and Knight K 2024, '[The Impact of Social Prescribing on Health Service Use and Costs](#)'.

¹³ Salmon M, Doery K, Dance P, Chapman J, Gilbert R, Williams R and Lovett R 2019, '[Links Between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture and Wellbeing: What the evidence says](#)', Mayi Kuwayu. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health 2017, [My Life My Lead – Opportunities for strengthening approaches to the social determinants and cultural determinants of Indigenous health: Report on the national consultations](#).

¹⁴ This is an evolving definition. Lowitja Institute 2020, [Culture is Key: Towards cultural determinants-driven health policy Final Report](#).

¹⁵ Salmon M, Doery K, Dance P, Chapman J, Gilbert R, Williams R and Lovett R 2019, '[Links Between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture and Wellbeing: What the evidence says](#)', Mayi Kuwayu. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health 2017, [My Life My Lead – Opportunities for strengthening approaches to the social determinants and cultural determinants of Indigenous health: Report on the national consultations](#).

¹⁶ Macdonald, D, Gullotta, D, Conte, I and Boydell, K 2022, '[Culture Dose for Kids: Creating an arts engagement program for young people with mild anxiety](#)', *Nordic Journal of Arts, Culture and Health*. Parkinson C 2018, '[Weapons of Mass Happiness: Social justice and health equity in the context of the arts](#)', *Music, Health and Wellbeing*. Chandler M 2018, '[Cultural Wounds Demand Cultural Medicines](#)', *Determinants of Indigenous People's Health in Canada: Beyond the social*. Davies C, Knuiman M and Rosenberg M 2016 '[The art of being mentally healthy: a study to quantify the relationship between recreational arts engagement and mental well-being in the general population](#)', BMC Public Health.

¹⁷ BCARR 2024, [Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia, 2008–09 to 2022–23 \(Methodology Refresh\)—Statistical Working Paper](#).

¹⁸ 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](#).