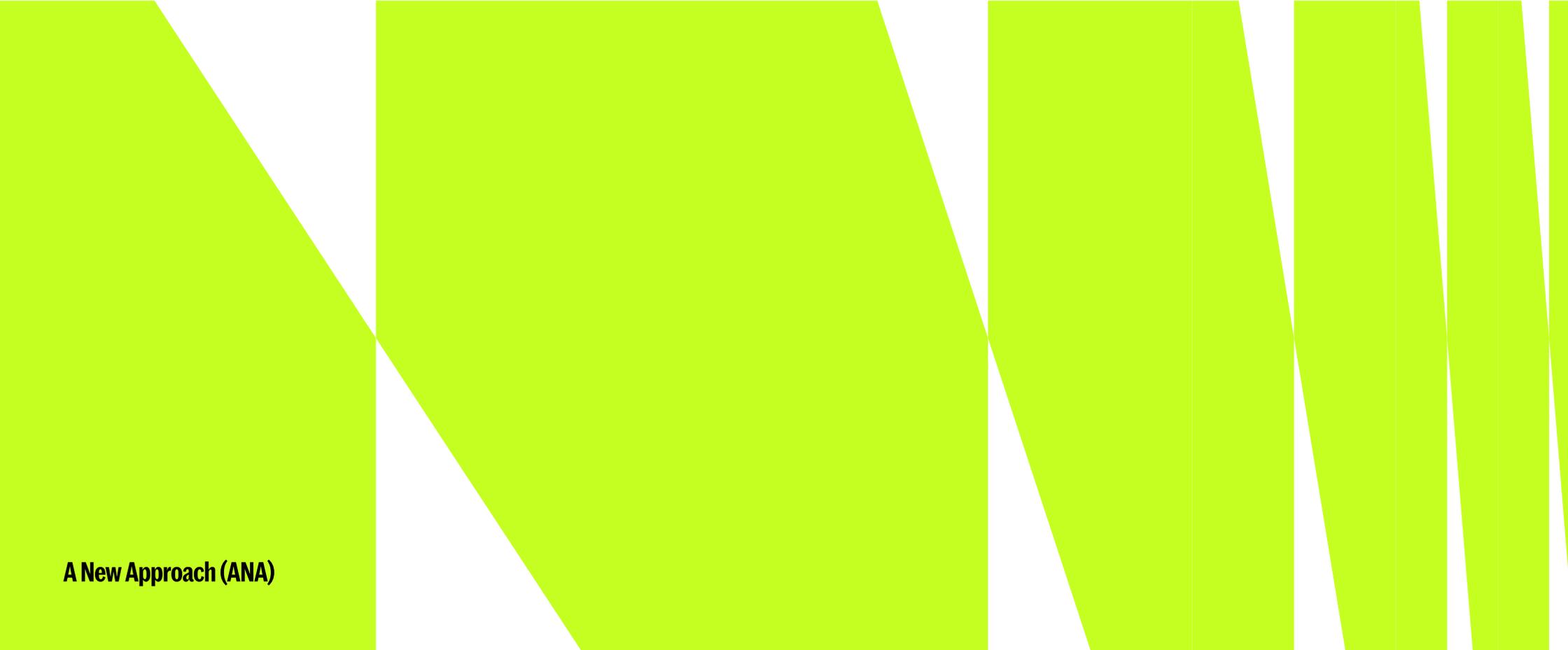


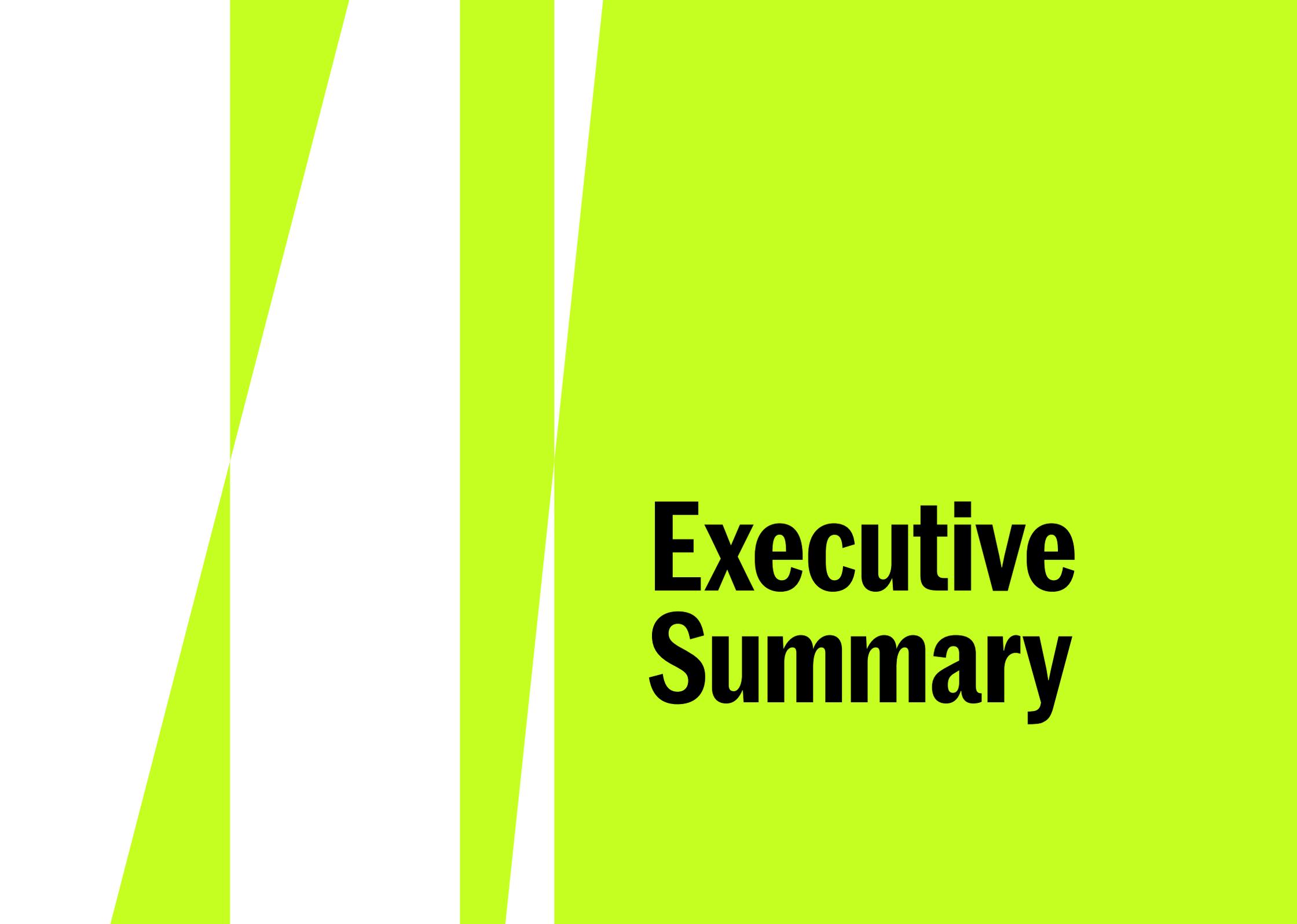
Lifelong

September 2022

Perceptions of Arts and Culture among Baby Boomer Middle Australians

A New Approach (ANA)

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consists of several overlapping, slanted rectangular shapes in a vibrant lime green color. The shapes are arranged in a way that they appear to be layered, with some partially obscuring others, creating a modern, abstract design.

The background features a series of overlapping, slanted rectangular shapes in a vibrant lime green color against a white background. The shapes create a dynamic, layered effect, with some appearing as thin vertical strips and others as larger, more prominent blocks.

Executive Summary

This report brings together published and unpublished data on the attitudes and beliefs towards arts and culture held by 'Baby Boomer middle Australians'. In presenting the findings of a third national focus group study on middle Australia, the aim is to ensure that Australia's policy settings and public investments remain relevant, targeted and effective for the 21st century. As an independent think tank, ANA's research informs conversations about arts, culture and creativity, including the current development of Australia's National Cultural Policy.

In a 2022 landmark report on the cultural and creative sectors, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states, 'cultural participation¹ underpins both the supply of and demand for cultural and creative goods and services and generates important social benefits'.² Against this backdrop, two questions arose for ANA regarding cultural participation: how well do we know Australians' views on arts and culture? And what are middle Australians' understandings and views of its value as an area for investment and social benefits?

ANA defines 'middle Australians' as people who are:

- from low- and middle-income households;
- living in outer suburban or regional locations; and
- politically unaligned (they have changed their vote to a different major party more than once, and at both state and federal elections).

Lifelong: Perceptions of Arts and Culture among Baby Boomer Middle Australians ('Lifelong') explores the views of middle Australians who are aged 58-75.³ ANA's interest in qualitative research involving this cohort arose in recognition of the political and cultural agenda-setting role of this group, as well as its relevance to broader public conversations about Australia's health, wellbeing, productivity, socio-economic inequality and changing demographics.

Our middle Australia series contains insights into the attitudes and behaviours of Australians across various age groups and some common - albeit not universal - life transitions. *Young middle Australians* reported that arts and culture are woven into the very fabric of that cohort's everyday life, while *Middle-aged middle Australians* describe arts and culture as being essential to the Australian way of life, providing inspiration and a sense of belonging. In listening to the views of Baby Boomer middle Australians, ANA learnt, most notably, that this cohort believes that art and culture are important for keeping them young and building connections across generations.

This cohort also told us that they want arts and cultural investments that strengthen communities and support better health and education outcomes across generations. Meanwhile, all three age groups believe that an arts-and-culture-less world would lack colour, expression and freedom.

Importantly, *Lifelong* shares these insights in the Baby Boomer middle Australians' own words.

The quotes in this report deepen our understanding of the national statistics on cultural participation, attendance and consumption. The quotes and supplementary data drawn from the *2021 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes* also bring to life the cultural and non-cultural policy problems we face today, highlighting three key areas of priority action:

1. *Deploying* cultural engagement to build cohesion across generations and different points of view
2. *Promoting* arts and culture for population wellbeing and as a preventive and potentially remedial health measure
3. *Removing* any barriers to accessing arts and culture for Australians

Based on this research, targeted actions in these areas could both benefit and receive the support of a growing number of Australians. The group demographically described as 'Baby Boomers' (55-74 years old as of 2021) remains the largest generational group in Australia, though the Millennials group (25-39 years old as of 2021) has almost caught up.⁴ Various demographic analyses also show the following:

- Australia's population is ageing. In 2016, the first Australian Baby Boomers turned 70; increasing numbers are nearing or are already in their late 60s.⁵
- Life expectancy in Australia continues to rise, with a baby boy expected to live to 81.2 years and a girl to 85.3 years.⁶
- There are also an increasing number of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁷
- In 2021, half a million Australians (581,139) had served or were currently serving in the Australian Defence Force (ADF), with more than one quarter of former serving members (26.1%) in the 65-74 age bracket.⁸

Thus far, ANA's middle Australia series has been both thought-provoking and action-provoking. The first two reports allowed voices from middle Australia to be included in national conversations about arts and culture during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and during the extended periods of lockdowns and travel restrictions. The voices and the findings were referenced in submissions, hearings and in the final report of the 2021 Parliamentary Inquiry into Cultural and Creative Industries and Institutions.

ANA is confident that similar and continuing impacts on the conversations about the arts and cultural sector will emerge from this third report in the series, as the focus shifts towards developing and implementing Australia's new National Cultural Policy.

Summary of findings

Finding 1

Baby Boomer middle
Australians value arts and culture. They say a world without arts and culture would be 'colourless', 'depressing', 'uninspiring' and 'like a totalitarian state'.

Finding 2

Baby Boomer middle
Australians say that cultural experiences create lifelong memories, provide opportunities for intergenerational dialogue and help them 'stay young'.

Finding 3

This cohort believes that cultural participation helps us test opinions, negotiate, listen, compromise, see others' points of view and have healthy disagreements - in other words, it encourages 'pro-social' behaviours and skills.

Finding 4

During the discussions on mental ill-health and thriving communities (particularly in terms of COVID-19 pandemic recovery), the view of public investment in arts and culture shifted from 'nice to have' to 'essential' for the Baby Boomer middle Australians.

Finding 5

Baby Boomer middle
Australians believe arts and culture play a valuable role in shaping and expressing our diverse identity, locally and abroad.

Finding 6

This cohort takes a broad view of 'arts and culture', ranging from traditional cultural activities to 'graffiti in an alley', 'music in the car' and 'even tattoos'.

Finding 7

For this cohort, online and digital platforms such as YouTube or Tik-Tok are accepted - but not always preferred - means of accessing and sharing arts and culture.

Finding 8

Baby Boomer middle
Australians say age and life stage influence their participation in arts and culture, with the participation playing an important role both early on and later in life.

Summary of opportunities

Opportunity 1

Adopt an intentionally cross-portfolio approach to cultural policies and programs, noting community support for the claims that arts and culture strengthen communities, positively influence Australian health and may help in treating a mental health condition.

Opportunity 2

Capitalise on the support for cultural investments on the basis of monetary and non-monetary returns in health services and social care, measuring and communicating these gains from Australia-specific interventions.

Opportunity 3

Prioritise programs and policies that deliberately harness and celebrate the pro-social behaviours and skills generated through cultural participation (in both cultural and non-cultural sectors).

Opportunity 4

Better leverage the recognised role for arts and culture in building connections across generations and in Australia-specific responses to the ageing population, ageist attitudes and any perceptions of intergenerational conflict.

Opportunity 5

Continue to reduce barriers to engagement with arts and culture, including time, cost, class and safety concerns. However, beware talking about arts and culture 'helping you age well' — the language may be off-putting.

Opportunity 6

Redress cultural participation barriers, including digital infrastructure and skills limitations, to help ensure Australian products and experiences are both globally competitive and locally accessible.

Opportunity 7

Use 'arts' and 'culture' together, rather than separately since this is more effective in evoking the range of activities this cohort values.

Opportunity 8

Tailor definitions of 'arts and culture' to a given policy audience, national or state economy, community or individual. Consider adapting [ANA's inclusive definition of arts and culture](#).