

Art and Culture: The case for inclusion when measuring what matters

Submission: 'Measuring What Matters' consultation

About A New Approach (ANA)

About ANA

A New Approach (ANA), Australia's leading arts and culture think tank, has shown through independent research and analysis, that Australians from every walk of life participate in and benefit from arts, culture and creativity.

ANA's staff, board, expert advisory group and philanthropic partners are driven by a shared vision of a cultural life that emboldens Australia.

ANA's work informs discussion, shifts beliefs, inspires public policy and brings together decision makers and industry leaders around evidence-led ideas and pathways for pragmatic action.

ANA acknowledges the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and their continuing cultural and creative practices in this land.

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Australian Government

The Treasury

Measuring What Matters consultation

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Art and Culture: The case for inclusion in 'measuring what matters'

Art and culture is a fundamental part of living in a vibrant democracy like Australia. This submission outlines the rationale for measuring cultural participation in the development of a wellbeing and progress framework for measuring what matters.

Australians demonstrably value cultural participation. We have globally high rates of cultural attendance and direct creative participation is growing, especially among young people.

A growing body of research shows creative engagement has wide-ranging social benefits, from improving health and mitigating loneliness to forging social cohesion and helping to break down social inequities.

Many Australians enjoy a rich cultural life but not always equally. There remain barriers for some associated primarily with access and relevance due to factors including geography, costs and social issues such as exposure, language barriers and physical access.

Annual collection of cultural attendance and participation data – already collected by the ABS on an ad-hoc basis – would improve understanding of how all Australians from cities, the suburbs and regional and remote communities are accessing and participating in arts and culture.

The Federal Government has acknowledged the importance of art and culture in contemporary Australia with its launch of a new National Cultural Policy. In a broader conversation about quality of life, arts and culture justify inclusion: they are part of a 'good' life and contribute to the things that matter – enrichment, belonging, meaning, prosperity, health and well-being.

In our role as a philanthropically-funded, independent think tank, ANA is available to provide further information about the recommendations outlined in this submission and would welcome the opportunity to discuss them.

Warm regards,



Kate Fielding, CEO, A New Approach (ANA)

Contact

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Introduction

Why measure arts and culture in developing a well-being and progress framework?

We need a vibrant arts and culture sector because it enriches our lives, improves our community and defines us as a people and a nation. Additional arts and culture funding will improve our wellbeing. There will be an impressive return on any additional investment.

- Rod Sims, Chair, Opera Australia, and former Chair, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission¹

Arts and culture is a fundamental part of living in a vibrant democracy like Australia.

Research and analysis from arts and culture think tank A New Approach (ANA) shows Australians from every walk of life participate in and benefit from arts, culture and creativity. In focus groups right across the country, 'middle' Australians aged 18 to 75 have identified wide-ranging positive outcomes for individuals and communities, including benefits to the economy, health, social cohesion and productivity.²

Building a dynamic creative environment that benefits all Australians requires effort and input from many different people, groups and institutions – from individuals and their communities to governing authorities, businesses and philanthropists to public and private institutions.

Australians take part in arts and culture across demography and geography; from people living in inner cities to outer suburbs to regional Australia, of different ages, genders, cultural groups, political views and life experiences.

The arts and culture sector is complex and highly diverse; it exists across the nation and all forms of arts and culture —commercial, elite, popular and community— are underpinned by the power of participation.

Data shows Australia has globally high rates of cultural attendance and direct creative participation is growing, especially among young people.

Participation takes many different forms. In line with international practice, ANA takes a broad definition of culture, one which includes but is not limited to: galleries, libraries, archives and museums, music, screen, radio, video gaming and digital arts, performance, literature, visual art, community-engaged practice, hybrid and experimental artforms, language, festivals, craft, heritage, design, and live art.

In considering issues to be examined when widening the conversation about quality of life, art and culture justify inclusion; they are part of a 'good' life for most Australians and contribute to the things that matter – enrichment, belonging, meaning, prosperity, health and well-being.

Part 1: A rich cultural life for all Australians

Why should Australia aspire to a rich cultural life for its citizens? Research shows a rich cultural life generates positive impacts for individuals, communities, societies and economies. A strong creative ecosystem provides people and communities with opportunities for sharing cultures and values, accessing existing and new forms of artistic and cultural expression, experiencing diverse voices and perspectives, and developing and maintaining national and local cultural heritage. These are all elements of “a person’s substantive freedom to lead a life they have reason to value”³ as well as an essential expression and ongoing renewal of Australia’s status as a multicultural liberal democracy.

Australians value cultural participation – many take part in artistic, creative and cultural activities in their everyday lives. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that in 2017-18 more than four out of five Australians attended cultural venues and events.⁴ In the same year, almost a third of Australians aged 15 years and over actively participated (rather than just attending or observing) in artistic and cultural creation or performance.⁵

Research from ANA’s three-year, national study of ‘middle’ Australians – everyday people from the low to middle income households in outer suburbs and regional Australia – show they believe art and cultural experiences are fundamental to a good life.

What do middle Australians think about having a rich cultural life?

Arts and culture really brings people and whole communities together. Without it, we’d be much more isolated as individuals. That’s never a good outcome. (Male, Townsville)

Without Australian arts, we would lose our sense of identity. You would lose your heritage as well, lose the connection to your country. You want to have something to be proud of, to pass it on [to] the future generations. (Female, Brisbane)

It’s about Australia’s identity. Our experiences are quite different to someone who may have lived in England or America; even though culturally we may have some connections with language, there are some distinct differences and I think it’s important to celebrate those and express them. (Female, Sydney)

What does a rich cultural life look like⁶?

- significant engagement with arts and cultural activities across the population
- recognition that Australia's arts and cultural terrain is enriched by diversity, particularly the contribution of First Nations people
- minimal barriers to arts and cultural participation
- access to a wide range of arts and cultural activities, including options relevant to diverse audiences
- supportive economic environments that successfully sustain arts and culture practitioners and producers

By certain measures, many Australians enjoy a rich cultural life but it is not a universal benefit.

Obstacles to achieving a strong creative culture are largely based on access and relevance. While research indicates most Australians appreciate some form of arts and culture, access to specific arts and cultural experiences can often be connected to location, economic costs and social issues, including lack of exposure, cultural and language barriers, and physical access and socioeconomic background.

These barriers can also compound each other, further inhibiting access. For example, the cost of in-person, mainstream cultural consumption can be 200%-500% higher in the regions and up to 1300% higher in remote locations compared to cities.⁷

Creativity and culture for all Australians also requires art and cultural experiences to be delivered by a sector, and available to an audience, that reflects the breadth and diversity of contemporary Australia.

A first step to removing existing impediments to a rich cultural life could begin with regular, accurate data on how many people are attending or participating in cultural experiences, who they are and where they come from.

Part 2: How a rich cultural life contributes to well-being and progress

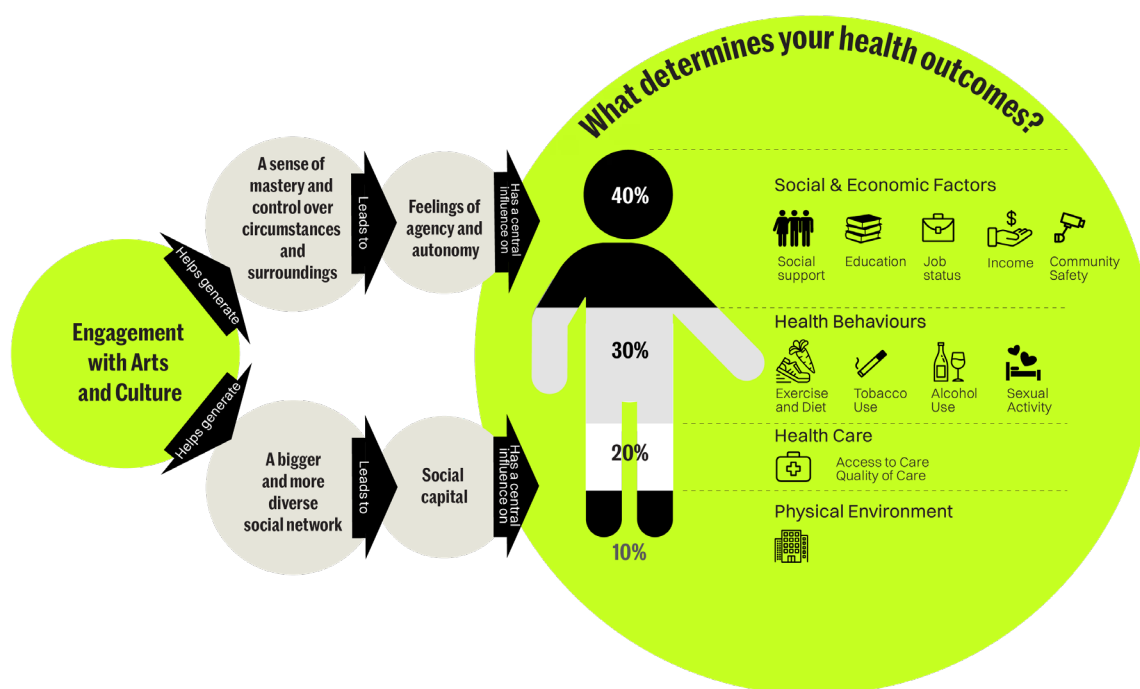


Figure 1: How engagement with arts and culture affects the social determinants of health.

Artists, people, and government all believe that arts and culture can improve well-being directly by making audiences happier, more understanding, and more together...In a fractured world with declining trust in institutions, arts and culture can play a lead role in promoting a shared identity that helps communities to hold together.⁸

- John Daley in *Performing Arts Advocacy in Australia* (A discussion paper commissioned by the Australian Major Performing Arts Group)

Through ANA's three year middle Australia study we know many everyday Australians think life wouldn't be worth living without arts and culture. People are moved by a film or novel, uplifted by attending a concert with friends and seeing a sculpture or art installation can ignite their curiosity. But the contribution arts and culture makes to our lives extends beyond this intrinsic value.

International and Australian research has demonstrated art and cultural experiences help to:

- improve health
- mitigate loneliness
- develop a sense of belonging
- forge social cohesion
- stimulate curiosity and
- learn to engage with different perspectives.

In addition to these positive social impacts, cultural and creative industries, institutions and individuals are important contributors to the economy and employment, as well as helping spur innovation.

Research also shows ensuring all Australians have opportunities to access a broad variety of arts and cultural experiences from a young age, irrespective of their family's location or financial position, can help to break down social inequities.⁹

Connecting Individuals and Communities

Arts and culture brings people together. At a time when Australians feel increasingly isolated, arts and cultural activities connect people and communities.

Access to art and cultural experiences has been shown to be instrumental in helping social cohesion¹⁰. In Australia - with its unique 65,000 plus-year history anchored by its First Peoples long and continuing connection to Country, and a migrant-majority nation home to the stories of new citizens from every country on the planet - art and cultural experiences offer a nuanced and accessible way for Australians to better understand each other.

Creative experiences can "act as a 'catalyst' for empathy and understanding across national divides", reducing bias by enabling people to see and imagine themselves in the shoes of "the stereotypical 'other'"¹¹.

Health and Ageing

Australia has an ageing population and more people are dealing with physical and mental health problems. Conditions like dementia are becoming increasingly common and putting a strain on public funds with estimated costs of more than AUD\$1 trillion over the next 40 years¹².

Research shows¹³:

- Arts-based interventions have been found to reduce the risk of dementia
- Arts engagement reduces depression and stress, and improves self-worth in the elderly
- Celebrations, festivals and other public arts and cultural activities bring people together and bridge social barriers, which decreases loneliness
- Arts and culture can influence the social determinants of health, such as strength of social networks and our psychological state, and have a flow on positive impact on health
- Arts-based interventions have been found to help in recovery from a range of conditions, including addiction and stroke

First Nations

Research also provides strong evidence for the positive role that arts and culture have and can play in raising the quality of life for First Nations peoples.

For example, Australian Indigenous people who participated in or attended First Nations art festivals were more likely to be engaged in study, or intended to study in the future. These participants were also more likely to feel capable of voicing their opinions within their communities, and to report feelings of happiness. These findings indicate that engagement with First Nations arts and cultural expression is closely related to measures of subjective wellbeing associated with a sense of empowerment and community connectedness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.¹⁴

Part 3: Measuring cultural participation

Comparative Countries

Australia is not alone among its OECD peers in extending the range of social and environmental factors it considers when measuring the progress and well-being of its people. Some of the countries including cultural indicators in their evolving frameworks are Scotland, New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom. A survey of their latest reports suggest the commonality in these indicators is a measure of cultural participation.

In Australia, ad hoc ABS surveys already measure cultural attendance and cultural participation. This existing data collection could be used as a foundation to measure cultural participation more regularly.

The current OECD Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress does not include any direct cultural indicators. However OECD research acknowledges the health and well-being impacts of the cultural and creative sectors: "The connections culture has with health and well-being are increasingly recognised at the research, clinical and policy levels. Evidence suggests that cultural participation positively affects both life expectancy and quality of life, even after controlling for factors such as income, education, or health status."¹⁵

Cultural Participation: What other countries measure

Scotland

In 2018, Scotland introduced its [National Performance Framework](#), which includes four cultural metrics:

- *Attendance at cultural events or places of culture*
- *Participation in a cultural activity*
- *Growth in the cultural economy*
- *People working in arts and culture*

New Zealand

New Zealand's [Living Standards Framework](#), which reported for the first time in 2022, assesses Cultural capability and belonging, which includes an indicator measuring level of participation in at least one art form over the last 12 months

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's [Measures of National Well-being](#) has a single indicator of Art and Culture Participation. Through a web survey, it measures 'People who engaged with the arts in person in the last 12 months (in England'

Canada

Canada's [Quality of Life Framework](#) includes an indicator measuring 'Participation in cultural or religious practice, recreation or sport'

How to assess cultural participation in Australia

Budget Statement 4 acknowledges the OECD Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress has limitations within an Australian context; it has limited recognition of arts and culture in its social indicators, except indirectly through metrics such as social interactions, social support and life satisfaction. The OECD Framework contains no direct measure of cultural participation.

We can see from the overseas experience that countries similar to Australia see value in measuring cultural participation – and to some degree Australia has already been doing this.

Australia has capacity to build on existing research on current rates of cultural participation and attendance from two existing ABS data sets:

- Cultural Participation Survey
- Cultural Attendance Survey

These data sets are a supplement to the monthly Labour Force Survey and are conducted on an ad hoc basis. The most recent Cultural Participation and Cultural Attendance surveys, for the 2017-18 period, were released in March 2019. Prior to that release, similar data was collected at four-year intervals.

To provide a meaningful contribution for a Framework measuring wellbeing and progress, an annual collection of cultural participation and cultural attendance would be required. As a metric, they fit Treasury's guidelines for what make good progress and well-being indicators – relevant, complete, measurable, comparable, reliable and understandable.

Part 4: Conclusion

Why include art and culture in a framework to measure wellbeing and progress?

- A rich cultural life is vital to all Australians
- Research shows participating in arts and culture has diverse social and economic benefits across contemporary Australian society
- There is value in including cultural participation and attendance indicators in a well-being and progress framework; the evidence is clear cultural engagement has positive social benefits for people
- Other comparative OECD countries are measuring cultural participation and attendance
- Australia is already collecting this data on an ad hoc basis
- Investing in annual collection of this data would enable cultural participation and attendance to be part of a new Framework
- Arts and culture is an investment in our communities and our nation
- The Federal Government's new National Cultural Policy is intended to "place arts at the centre of modern Australian life"¹⁶
- Data to better understand Australians' access to and participation in arts and cultural experiences can help drive systematic and coordinated investment in the sector
- Research shows without strategic and coordinated effort, Australia risks deterioration in our cultural fabric and loss of the benefits it provides¹⁷

Endnotes

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- 9 A New Approach, Transformative: Impacts of Culture and Creativity (Canberra: Produced by A New Approach (ANA) think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2019), 75, <https://newapproach.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2-ANA-InsightReportTwo-FullReport.pdf>
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