A New Approach (ANA)

October 2024

Transformative Edge 2024

How arts, culture and creativity impact our prosperity, cohesion, security, health and sustainability.

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About A New Approach

A New Approach (ANA) is Australia's national arts and culture think tank. We believe Australia can become a cultural powerhouse whose creativity is locally loved, nationally valued and globally influential.

Through credible and independent public leadership, ANA helps build an ambitious and innovative policy and investment environment for arts, culture and creativity. We work to ensure Australia can be a great place for creators and audiences, whoever they are and wherever they live.

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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ANA is supported by a unique collaboration of 14 philanthropic organisations across the country. This national coalition comprises:

About This Insight Report

This report is the 14th in ANA's Insight series. Our Insight Reports provide a deep dive into the research and analysis of a particular arts and cultural policy topic or other area of interest. Find all of our work at www.newapproach.org.au.

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The opinions in this Insight Report do not necessarily represent the views of ANA's philanthropic partners, the individual members involved in governance or advisory groups, or others who have provided input.

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Executive Summary

ANA's new report, *Transformative Edge 2024*, reveals that creating and encouraging opportunities for people to experience arts, culture, and creativity assists populations to live *well* – with prosperity, cohesion, security, health and sustainability.

Using widely accepted metric tools, *Transformative Edge 2024* shows that creative and cultural engagement provides an unexpected edge to tackle Australia's deepest challenges. These challenges include reduced social cohesion, mounting ill health, slowing productivity growth, increasingly frequent climate-related disruptions, strains on democracy and economic hardships restricting what people in Australia can afford to do.

Global and domestic pressures are bringing new urgency to developing effective, innovative and accessible strategies to secure Australia's future. *Transformative Edge 2024* includes the latest evidence of the impacts of creative and cultural engagement for these key public policy discussions.

ANA is publishing this summary of new studies to support evidence-led investments of time and money to benefit people in Australia.

We explored 2 main questions:

1. What are the demonstrated impacts of arts, culture and creativity on prosperity, cohesion, security, health and sustainability?
2. What are the opportunities for stakeholders to scale up, enhance and harness the benefits across Australia?

The findings in *Transformative Edge* 2024 build on ANA's 2019 review of international and Australian evidence.

The findings are presented using ANA's 'Prosperity Cohesion Security Health and Sustainability Wellbeing' (PCSHS Wellbeing) research framework. This study is the first to consider how time use in arts, culture and creativity influences all 5 broad wellbeing themes of *Measuring What Matters:* Australia's First Wellbeing Framework (hereafter *Measuring What Matters*).[1]

People spend time and money engaging with cultural and creative industries for varied reasons – enjoyment, inspiration, expression, entertainment and connection.

The personal benefits of culture are well recognised. Industries, governments and the public 'all believe that arts and culture make people happy, increase their understanding of each other and the world, and connect them together'.[2] However, it is clear that people also believe there are *broader* impacts of the time and money spent on arts and culture – and the current evidence supports this.

There have been few attempts in Australia to move beyond listing isolated benefits, and no single source summarises potential drawbacks. Explaining all the evidence can be time-consuming and complex, as can understanding the broad policy environment.

Transformative Edge 2024 bridges these gaps and paints a very clear picture: a rich cultural life delivers significant economic and social benefits to the Australian community.

Creative and cultural engagement here and around the world could help Australia tackle complex challenges facing future generations. Numerous new informational resources outlined in this report may help industries and stakeholders drive other public benefit objectives, such as inclusion, fairness and equity.

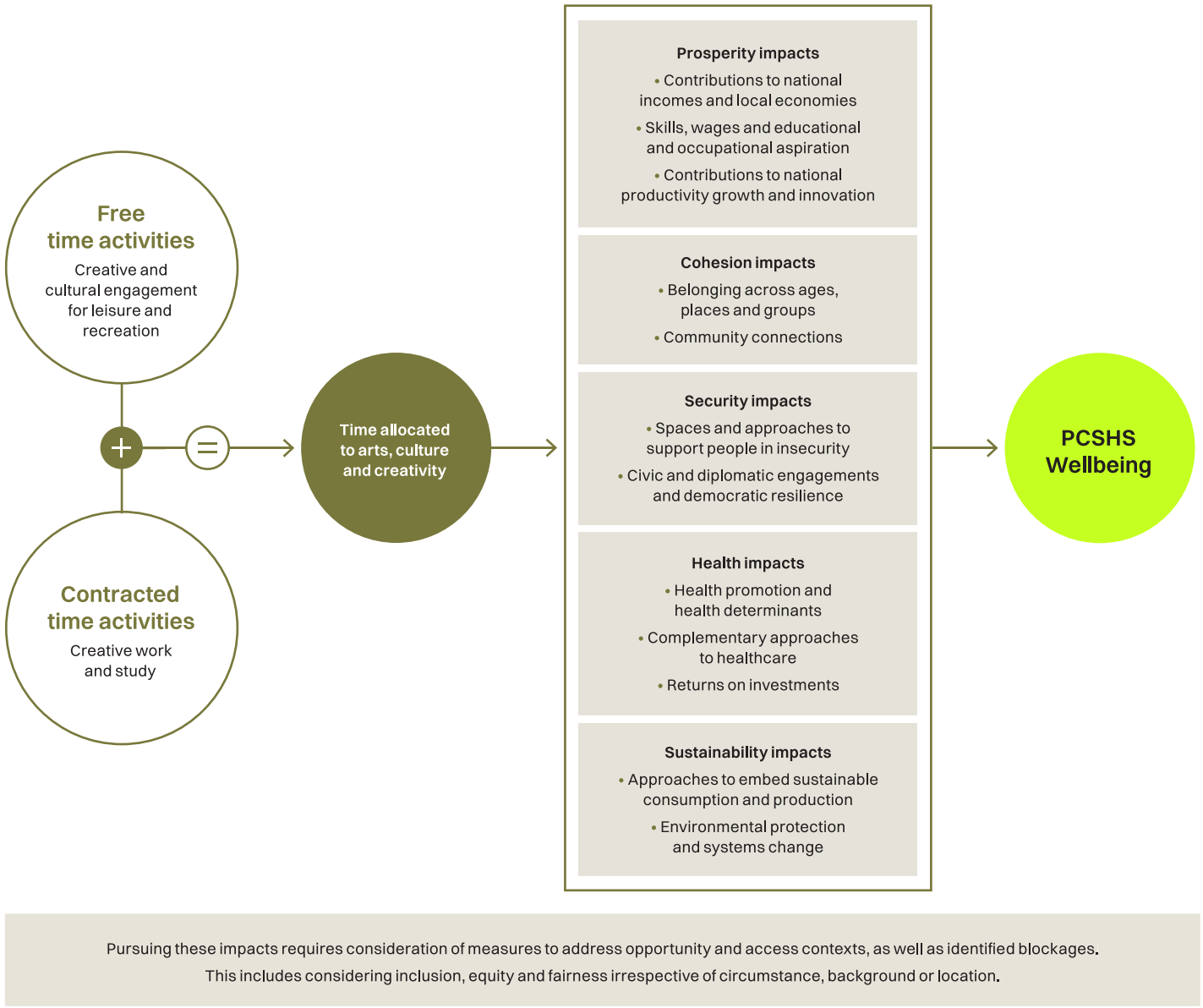
Where we looked for the evidence

Transformative Edge 2024 is an overview of hundreds of published sources. We located the evidence through expert advice and multidisciplinary research databases.

This evidence includes peer-reviewed quantitative, mixed-methods and qualitative evidence, alongside information from systematic and other types of literature reviews (e.g. rapid reviews, scoping reviews and meta-analyses). It is a large and interdisciplinary body of evidence from Australia and around the world.

We have also included information from evaluation reports by government departments, international organisations and other research entities.

Figure 1 displays ANA's PCSHS Wellbeing research framework.



What has stayed the same since 2019, what has changed and what comes next

Since ANA first explored the impacts of cultural participation and investment – in our 2019 Insight Report, *Transformative: Impacts of Culture and Creativity* – there has been substantial acknowledgement and understanding of the benefits of cultural activities for individuals, communities and the world. Three items stand out:

- **The OECD assessed creative thinking globally**, revealing that it is a comparative strength for Australia. The nation's teenagers ranked fourth for creative thinking, defined as the competence to engage in the generation, evaluation and improvement of original and diverse ideas.[3]
- **The international community formally declared that culture is a global public good** alongside other declared global public goods, such as peace, health, science and economy.[4]
- **The** COVID-19 **pandemic raised public awareness** about the role of culture in mental wellbeing in the global population.

In Australia, new acknowledgements of arts and culture's roles in people's lives include:

- local governments adopting their first national policy position on arts and culture (2020)
- multipartisan recognition of the 'proven benefits [of creative and cultural engagement] for mental and physical health, social cohesion and community building, creative thinking, problem-solving skills and more'[5] (2021)
- cultural infrastructure in the National Infrastructure Plan (2021)
- creative and cultural engagement as an indicator in *Measuring What Matters* (2023)
- an unprecedented policy environment, with new arts and cultural policies in place or under development in all jurisdictions (2024)
- three generations of middle Australians describing arts, culture and creativity as a 'bedrock of society', crucial to a healthy and thriving community and the fostering of imagination, adaptability and innovation[6] (2020-2023).

Policy, practice and culture have also evolved since 2019. New voucher programs extend people's access to creative experiences. Governments have established mechanisms to consult the cultural and creative industries, for instance about artificial intelligence. People increasingly expect cultural experiences to occur where they live, woven into their everyday lives.[7]

Acknowledging this, *Transformative Edge 2024* recommends that Australia consider a range of new approaches that are demonstrating progress towards beneficial impacts. At a high level:

- **People and entities in the cultural and creative industries** could describe and deliver the diverse benefits of their services to a wider range of stakeholders.
- **Public and private investing entities** could consider the performance of grants and donations through a broader range of desired impacts.
- **Civil society organisations** could seek to understand the value of creative practices for the people using their services, including in healthcare, justice and education.
- **Governments in Australia** could (re)invest in arts, culture and creativity to strengthen health promotion, skills for the future and democracy and to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

An enduring question is how Australia could better distribute the demonstrated public benefits of creative and cultural engagement. The overriding recommendation in *Transformative Edge 2024* is to ensure availability and access to such engagement for all people in Australia, wherever they live and whoever they are.

Known blockages to the access to and availability of creative and cultural engagement include:

- lack of joined-up co-investment focused on access
- location and cost factors
- the volatility of legislative, regulatory and investment environments hampering the industry's investment in its own success and unsettling other investors, including private and philanthropic sources
- outsized COVID-19-related disruption of both workforce capacity and new project pipelines
- outdated knowledge among key decision-makers of the mainstream relevance of arts, culture and creativity
- lack of understanding among key decision-makers of the economic and social benefits of creative and cultural engagement.

Addressing these blockages will be a key factor in Australia becoming a cultural powerhouse and harnessing the benefits of creative and cultural engagement for our country.

Summary of findings

This table provides a summary of the key insights of this research. The body of this Insight Report describes the empirical evidence for these statements.

Please refer to the *Measuring What Matters* Framework for a more detailed explanation of its themes, national indicators and structure.

Please refer to the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Measuring What Matters* dashboard for updated data and national reporting about each theme.

PCSHS Wellbeing theme and brief definition	Contexts, challenges and projections for future generations	Relevant impacts of arts, culture and creativity
Prosperity *Experiences in and access to employment, education and innovation*	• Australia's teenagers rank fourth in the world for creative thinking (i.e. the generation, evaluation and improvement of original and diverse ideas).[8] • Slow productivity growth could negatively affect future quality of life and wages.[9,10,11] • The future workforce will require a mixture of skills. It will need to adapt and adjust to new processes and products, changes in work and shifts in the economy.[12] • The educational aspirations of disadvantaged students have declined since this item was last measured.[13] This has consequences for future equity, workforce participation and success.[14]	Cultural and creative activities benefit the prosperity of children and teenagers, students, workers and the public via • productivity growth • national and local incomes • job satisfaction • creative and critical thinking • educational or occupational aspirations.
Cohesion *Willingness of members of society to cooperate with each other to survive and prosper*	• Australia had its worst social cohesion results on record in 2023.[15] • Loneliness and social isolation have worsened since COVID-19.[16] People's sense of belonging and pride in Australian culture declined between 2007 and 2022.[17] Students' sense of belonging has not changed in a meaningful way since 2018.[18] • In 2023, Australians voted in a referendum about whether to change the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing a body called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. The proposal was not carried, with 39.94% of votes in favour and 60.06% of votes not in favour nationally.[19]	Arts, culture and creativity build cohesion through promoting social connection and a sense of belonging to a place, a group or a cultural activity itself. However, experiences of disinterest, disengagement or exclusion may limit this social cohesion benefit.

PCSHS Wellbeing theme and brief definition	Contexts, challenges and projections for future generations	Relevant impacts of arts, culture and creativity
Security *Experiences of peace and safety at home, online, at work, in the community and in the world*	• 91.5% of people report feeling 'safe' or 'very safe' walking alone during the day, and 53.8% report feeling safe at night in 2021-22.[20] Feelings of security and safety at home, in the workplace, in communities and online still vary across the population. • The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer rated Australia as 'moderately polarised' – but straddling the boundary between moderate polarisation and 'in danger of severe polarisation'.[21] • Anti-authority protests have posed risks to community safety and resulted in violent clashes with law enforcement.[22] • In 2024, Australia's terror level threat was raised to 'probable' due to a rising mix of ideologies whereby more people think violence is permissible.[23] • Expenditure on diplomacy and defence across the region and globally is expected to trend upwards across major economies.[24] However, underinvestment is still considered a challenge for Australia's diplomatic engagement and influence.[25]	Creative and cultural engagement provides opportunities for active citizenship and democratic resilience. It contributes to security through fostering feelings and spaces of safety and international cultural relations and offering alternatives to violent protest.
Health *Individuals' and groups' physical and mental wellbeing and their access to health services*	• In the future, more Australians will have multiple chronic conditions.[26] • In 2024, Australia was the top global wellbeing burnout zone. Compared with people in 14 other countries, people in Australia reported experiencing the highest levels of burnout when thinking about their physical, mental, or social wellbeing.[27] • Government spending on healthcare is projected to grow.[28] • The population in rural and remote Australia faces unique geographic challenges in accessing healthcare.[29]	Arts, culture and creativity support health and health determinants (e.g. social and economic environments) and provide a cost-effective complement to health services. Like any activity, creative and cultural engagement has positive and negative outcomes to consider when implementing policy and practice.
Sustainability *Individuals' and groups' use of natural resources and protection of the environment*	• All governments (federal, state and territory) are committed to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 or sooner.30 Per capita greenhouse gas emissions are higher in Australia than the OECD average.[31] • Extreme weather events, such as floods, cyclones, bushfires and heatwaves, are risks to the built environment and the people who live in it.[32] • Australia's top tourist attractions are in regions that are becoming increasingly susceptible to natural disasters.[33]	Culture influences environmental sustainability through its associated skills, practices and behaviours. This includes helping people and places to recover from natural disasters, adapt and develop future solutions. That said, related negative environmental impacts include emissions of the value chain – from the design and production to the distribution, consumption and disposal of creative goods and services.

Summary of opportunities

The evidence of the impacts detailed in this report presents an overriding opportunity to ensure all people in Australia have continued access to creative and cultural engagement.

The proven benefits of access to arts, culture and creativity should be available to everyone, wherever they live and whoever they are.

Practical steps to pursue this aim now include the following:

1. The Commonwealth – in concert with the 2 other levels of government – should develop a national cultural plan or strategy modelled on the successive national sports plans and strategies. To facilitate an integrated whole-of-government approach to cultural policy, the plan should directly address the 5 themes of *Measuring What Matters*. Doing so would build the foundation for the Commonwealth's long-term, strategic collaboration with government, industry, philanthropy and business.
2. Governments should pursue a national partnership agreement focused on equitable provision of arts and culture opportunity, access and infrastructure. The agreement should be formalised by a Ministerial Council as part of National Cabinet.
3. Governments at all levels should review investment in – and blockages to – culture and creativity across portfolios. They should publish the results of this cross-portfolio expenditure on an ongoing basis, as overseas jurisdictions have.

Below is a summary of the key opportunities arising from this research, presented against the 5 PCSHS Wellbeing themes. These opportunities are based on a non-exhaustive stocktake of policies and practices.

Our aim here is to provide concrete examples that could support stakeholders to harness the positive impacts of arts, culture and creativity.

PCSHS Wellbeing theme	Examples of progress towards impacts since 2019
Prosperity	**Public and private investing entities** could scale out the prosperity benefits of creative and cultural engagement through: • Co-investing in children and young people's creative and cultural engagement through voucher programs (e.g. the Active and Creative Kids Voucher Program [NSW] and the Future of Education Equity Fund [ACT]). Nationally, investing entities could support diverse arts and cultural organisations and dedicated children's spaces (e.g. in museums, galleries and libraries). • Planning approaches that recognise a place's unique assets, challenges and social infrastructure as economic infrastructure per the 2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan recommendations. A practical example is The Art House at Wyong. • Sustaining the cultural and creative industries during economic crises and volatility: This may involve providing temporary assistance, as exemplified in the NSW Government's Dine and Discover vouchers or the targeted and economy-wide COVID-19 expenditures of governments in the cultural and creative industries (e.g. Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund, COVID-19 Arts Sustainability Fund, JobKeeper payments). • Consulting and engaging with creative industries on reforms through established mechanisms: These may include the reference group on artificial intelligence and copyright; the Creative Industries Youth Advisory Group; First Nations-led Board within Creative Australia; and the NSW Cultural Front Door concierge.
Cohesion	**Governments at all levels** could maximise the cohesion benefits of creative and cultural engagement through: • facilitating access to arts and culture, as committed to in the National Urban Policy and liveability target of the Regionalisation Ambition 2032: A Framework to Rebalance the Nation • investing in community organisations and cultural programs to drive social change, as recommended by the Multicultural Framework Review • providing ongoing monitoring of creative and cultural engagement in *Measuring What Matters* and the Closing the Gap targets 15 and 16. **Public and private investing entities** could maximise the impacts of partnerships and investments towards enhancing cohesion through creative and cultural engagement. One investment model for long-term change is the Investment Dialogue on Australia's Children. **Entities in the cultural and creative industries** may reduce the risk of audiences experiencing exclusion – and may attract new audiences – by using new audience-centric resources, knowledge and communities of practice for their service delivery in Australia. **Civil society organisations** could seek to understand the value of creative practices for those who use their services. This could involve using the new resources aimed at partnerships that support creative and cultural engagement across sectors. The new resources provide guidance for partnerships in health, justice and education systems, and across operating environments.

PCSHS Wellbeing theme	Examples of progress towards impacts since 2019
Security	**Entities in the cultural and creative industries** could target their services and programming choices towards improving the public's subjective feelings of safety and confidence in person, online and in virtual environments. For workers in public-facing roles there are professional development opportunities in media literacy support, guidelines about supporting women's safety and resources about culturally safe service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. **Governments** could take a practical approach to harnessing the benefits of arts, culture and creativity for democratic participation, public engagement and diplomatic objectives via: • facilitating art competitions as civic engagement, as seen in the federal government's Multicultural Framework Review • involving cultural institutions in civic awareness campaigns • involving Australian creativity in diplomacy at different scales, as exemplified in the Australian Embassy in Washington by Australian architectural studio Bates Smart, participation in the Eurovision song contest and the decision to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Brisbane in 2032.
Health	**Public and private investing entities** could co-invest in creative and cultural engagement as health promotion. Approaches to consider include the award-winning example of Good Arts Good Mental Health [WA] and new voucher programs that adopt a health lens, such as the Get Active Kids Voucher Program [Victoria], which now includes dance as an approved activity. **Entities in the cultural and creative industries, in collaboration with researchers,** could support investment decision-making that maximises impacts. They could continue to grow the evidence base about the cost-effectiveness of their services. Examples of economic evaluation already exist at the community and jurisdiction levels.
Sustainability	**Entities in the cultural and creative industries** could support public behaviour change towards environmental sustainability through their programming choices. They could conduct their reporting consistent with new investor priorities (e.g. sustainable procurement policy for federal government officials) and using the examples of measurable impact targets and indicators for organisations (e.g. the Australian Museum and the National Gallery of Australia) and for cultural events. **Governments, together with the cultural and creative industries and civil society,** could collaborate on and invest in the following activities: • Creative recovery from disaster through the National Taskforce for Creative Recovery. • The sustainable urban design and housing commitments of the forthcoming National Urban Policy. • Creative and cultural engagement in the adaptation of and transition to net-zero emissions and sustainable practices as a foundation to advance the Sustainable Development Goals[34] by 2030 and in longer-term systems change that draws on best practices. • Cultural policies that spotlight existing efforts to leverage arts and culture to gather, inspire, educate and connect Australians with climate resilience and adaptation strategies. The Climate Solutions Centre is an example the policies could highlight. The policies could identify future opportunities to replicate or extend such efforts.

Introduction

Introducing this report

ANA recognises the substantial evidence of the direct and positive impacts of culture and creativity on people and communities across Australia. All Australians – no matter where they live or who they are – should have access to cultural and creative activities and experiences which are meaningful to them.

Background

ANA works to improve policy settings, investment environments, industry knowledge and cultural opportunities. We work to ensure that culture and creativity will continue to drive social and economic benefits for all.

Since inception, ANA has worked to raise awareness about the role that arts, culture and creativity play in the lives of people in Australia. In 2019, ANA's second Insight Report – *Transformative: Impacts of Culture and Creativity* (hereinafter *Transformative 2019*) – explored the impacts of cultural participation and investment on society and place, the economy, innovation, health and wellbeing, education and learning, and international engagement and culture.

Transformative 2019 was referenced in Australia's National Cultural Policy in 2020.[35]

The current research

Transformative Edge 2024 is a new summary of the evidence about the impacts of arts, culture and creativity. It focuses on information published since 2019, explored through 5 areas of wellbeing, namely prosperity, cohesion, security, health and sustainability. These are the themes of *Measuring What Matters.*

As its title suggests, *Measuring What Matters* will assist the federal government in measuring the progress of wellbeing in Australia. Alongside its 5 themes, it uses trusted national datasets. Various people and organisations in Australia contributed to its development. Therefore, we chose *Measuring What Matters* over other public benefit and wellbeing frameworks currently available. See **Appendix** for more details.

Through published sources, we examined the positive impacts and considered any potential negative influences of creative and cultural engagement. We also explored opportunities, examples and insights of harnessing and scaling out the benefits of arts, culture and creativity through policy and practice.

We embarked on this research for 2 main reasons. First, ANA wanted to draw on Australia's national framework of public benefit measurement to build an understanding of the relevance of arts, culture and creativity in people's lives. Second, ANA wanted to broaden and deepen the understanding of arts, culture and creativity's foreseeable impacts against a backdrop of developments that have occurred since 2019, including:

- new challenges requiring a national approach
- progress and changes in cultural policy and practice
- widespread recognition of the positive impacts of arts and culture.

This research was undertaken iteratively through evidence gathering and report drafting. We retrieved and reviewed published sources by performing keyword searches in multidisciplinary databases. We also manually searched individual sources' reference lists.

Many experts helped ANA with this research by identifying additional evidence and suggesting improvements based on their expertise.

For more information, including the search terms we used and the databases we visited, please refer to the **Appendix**.

Creative and cultural engagement in Australia

The OECD notes that cultural participation is central to understanding the direct and indirect impacts of culture. Often, this participation is overlooked in policy as an important variable.[36]

Measuring What Matters and *Transformative Edge 2024* refer to cultural participation as 'creative and cultural engagement'.

Australia has globally high creative and cultural engagement rates. A steady average of 85% of the population has attended cultural venues and events since the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) began collecting this data in 1995.[37]

During the peak of the pandemic, creative and cultural engagement declined among certain activity types. However, one-third of adults (32%) participated in at least one cultural activity in 2021-22, up from 31% in 2017-18.[38]

All generations in the population allocate significant time to arts and cultural activities.[39]

Employing national time-use data, ANA has estimated that in 2021-22, each person spent an average of 2 hours and 55 minutes per day on selected arts, culture and creativity activities (or 43 minutes if excluding watching television and videos).[40] That said, this is just an average. There are several creative and cultural activities that many Australians do not engage in, and some people's time use is much lower or higher than the total population average.[41,42]

Other known characteristics of creative and cultural engagement in Australia include the following:

- It may be undertaken during people's free time and contracted time (e.g. at work or school).
- It may be active, contributing directly and explicitly to the activity's production (e.g. playing a musical instrument, singing in a choir, drawing or painting, writing a text or performing in a play).
- It may be passive, involving accessing and enjoying the experiences and content that someone else created (e.g. listening to music or reading a book).
- It may be commercial (whereby a price or fee must be paid), free to access or involve a mutual exchange of content.
- It may be in person, online or virtual.

Recent national research highlights several barriers to creative and cultural engagement in Australia. That is, there are people who would like to engage in creative and cultural activities more than they currently do.

That research indicates the following factors:

- Cost and location are the main barriers to arts attendance.[43]
- Vulnerability to illness and concerns about large crowds have prevented some people from in-person engagement, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.[44]
- Despite Australians increasingly engaging with the arts online, some people miss the atmosphere of live arts events.[45]
- The likelihood of creating art using digital platforms varies across population groups.[46]

Glossary of terms

This brief glossary clarifies key terms and concepts as they are understood and referred to in this report.

Arts, culture and creativity

In this report, ANA adopts the umbrella term 'arts, culture and creativity' with a definition that is inclusive and broad.

The definition includes activities such as attending cultural events, visiting cultural venues, creating or performing something, and engaging with arts, culture and creative content in your home.

It also comprises activities performed in industries and occupations that may be less obvious, such as advertising, design and architecture.

ANA's definition is informed by input from Australia's Cultural Funding by Government data series, the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics and UNCTAD's Creative Economy Program.[47]

Creative and critical thinking

In this report, 'creative and critical thinking' are approaches that lead to the generation of valuable and original ideas.

The OECD has highlighted commonalities among the cognitive processes involved in creativity and critical thinking.[48]

First Nations

In this report, ANA primarily uses the terms 'First Nations' and the broader collective, 'First Nations peoples'.

This report interchanges this phrase with 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal', and 'Torres Strait Islander' where relevant in the primary sources.

Greenhouse gas emissions

This report uses the umbrella term 'greenhouse gases' to refer to carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), nitrous oxide (N_2O), sulphur hexafluoride (SF_6), and specified kinds of hydrofluorocarbons and perfluorocarbons. This is informed by the gases listed by the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Scheme.[49]

Impacts

In this report, 'impact' is used as an umbrella term to refer to a change, influence or effect that is reasonably foreseeable based on evidence.

ANA adopts this definition to encompass the varied measurements, timespans and terminology of the various disciplines and fields of practice and policy.

ANA's ROI framework provides another way to differentiate impacts from outcomes and outputs, where the effects and value are created and accrued over time.

In health disciplines and some research works, the term 'outcomes' is more commonly used than 'impacts'. Typically, outcomes refer to 'a change in the health status (positive or negative) of a person, a target group or population related to a planned or unplanned activity, event, service, program, intervention, policy, regulation or law'.[50]

Middle Australians

The middle Australia series was an intergenerational national focus group study, conducted by ANA, that examined the attitudes of young, middle-aged and Baby Boomer Australians between 2020 and 2022. The people we listened to:

- lived in outer suburbs and regional areas
- were politically unaligned (i.e. had changed their vote to a different major party more than once, and at both state and federal elections)
- were from low- or middle-income households in predominantly marginal federal electorates.

The 3 age groups were:

- young, aged 19-29 at the time of the focus group (born between 1992 and 2003)
- middle-aged, aged 35-60 at the time of the focus group (born between 1960 and 1985)
- Baby Boomer, aged 58-75 at the time of the focus group (born between 1947 and 1964).

PCSHS Wellbeing

'Prosperity Cohesion Security Health and Sustainability Wellbeing' is ANA's research framework for exploring and presenting demonstrated impacts of creative and cultural engagement identified in the evidence.

The framework uses all 5 *Measuring What Matters* wellbeing themes – the 'aspects and resources that are important to Australians' individual and collective wellbeing across all phases of life [...]: healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive, prosperous'.[51] It acknowledges that there are intersections among the themes.

Productivity growth

'Productivity growth occurs when more output is generated per unit of input [...]'. In reality, the change in productivity – productivity growth – reflects not only the quantity of goods and services produced but also changes in their quality over time. It also reflects the invention and introduction of entirely new products'.[52]

Sustainability

Sustainability means different things to different people. For some, it can mean being financially viable, environmentally friendly, taking a long-term view and something 'which can be continued indefinitely'.

This report uses the term sustainability to refer to individuals' and groups' use of natural resources and protection of the environment. In short, we refer to the following constellation of sustainability indicators and factors used within *Measuring What Matters:*

- emissions reduction
- air quality
- protected areas
- biological diversity
- resource use
- climate resilience.

The report also uses related terms from primary sources, including the following:

- 'Sustainable consumption' – the 'use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and lead to a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources, toxic materials, and waste and pollutant emissions over the life cycle'.[53]
- 'Sustainable development goals' – the 17 goals agreed to by all states of the United Nations agenda.[54]

How to use this report

We recommend using this report to understand the multidimensional impacts of arts and culture participation and investment. By reading this report, you will gain insights into the broad scope of arts, culture and creativity and the roles that its varied activities and industries could play in addressing Australia's present and future challenges.

For elected members and policy advisors

Use this report to better understand the impacts of public engagements in arts, culture and creativity. This may assist you in considering the benefits and trade-offs and where to target investments and partnerships for evidenced return, value and relevance regarding the Australian population.

For philanthropists and sponsors of arts, culture and creativity

Use this report to understand evidence about the impacts of arts, culture and creativity, which may help inform your investments and donations. It may also assist you in discussions about how to strategically partner with other investors based on aligned interests.

For the media, content creators and platforms for creative content

Use this report to better understand the industries, activities and benefits of Australian arts, culture and creativity. Contact ANA about media opportunities using the details on page 2.

For cultural and creative organisations and individuals

Use this report to understand leading, up-to-date evidence on the impacts of your work in areas known to influence people's wellbeing. It may also assist you in addressing national challenges.

This information may assist you in preparing grant applications and advocacy documents. It may also help you identify opportunities for cross-sector partnerships and to discuss investment with your peers and political representatives.

For researchers and educators

Use this report as a resource for impacts relevant to some of Australia's most pressing challenges. This information may provide you with data and references to add to reports, peer-reviewed research and presentations, and assist you in identifying productive areas for further enquiry. It may also be valuable as an accessible introduction to the sector in Australia for students in cultural and creative industries courses.

For international audiences

Use this report to understand how wellbeing is assessed in Australia compared with your own country and to identify Australian examples of impact assessment along with references to a substantial body of international and Australian work.

Part 1

Prosperity impacts

Finding:

Cultural and creative activities benefit the prosperity of children and teenagers, students, workers and the public via productivity growth and national and local incomes, job satisfaction, creative and critical thinking, and educational or occupational aspirations.

Prosperity commonly refers to the economic wellbeing of individuals, communities and nations. According to *Measuring What Matters*, a prosperous society has 'a dynamic, strong economy, invests in people's skills and education, and provides broad opportunities for employment and well-paid, secure jobs'.[55]

Relevant findings of *Transformative 2019* were as follows:

- Cultural and creative activities already significantly contribute to Australia's gross domestic product and gross value added as well as the employment figures of the total workforce.
- Creative capability is demonstrably the driving force behind innovation-driven, economically diversified economies.
- In global studies, engagement in creative and cultural activities has been found to help build the skills needed for rapid changes.
- Arts and culture-based education has been observed to help mitigate disadvantage, particularly with 'at-risk' students – that is, those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, at risk of prematurely disengaging from schooling and/or expressing anti-social or non-coping behaviours.

We found new evidence showing how arts, culture and creativity contribute to prosperity in 3 distinct ways:

1. Supporting national and local incomes

- Cultural and creative activities attract income and investment that measurably contribute to national income.
- Cultural and creative activities support the economic wellbeing of people in regional, suburban and city-centre locations.

2. Building skills, wages and educational aspirations

- Arts, culture and creativity generate foundational skills, such as creative and critical thinking and literacy.
- Creative approaches could support educational aspirations through the experiences of safety they foster.
- Creativity and creative study can generate employment opportunities, but it is difficult to generalise whether these opportunities are well paid, secure and equitable to access.
- The non-financial benefits of creative study and work include educational attainment, participation in the community, transition into work or further study, and job satisfaction.

3. Accelerating productivity growth

- The cultural and creative industries contribute to growth in labour productivity.
- Arts, culture and creativity could boost future productivity through national productivity enablers.

1.1 Supporting national incomes and local economies

Cultural and creative activities attract income and investment that measurably contribute to national income.

To track Australia's overall prosperity, *Measuring What Matters* includes the indicator of national income per capita. Other themes of the framework include indicators for fiscal sustainability and economic resilience.

This section provides new data underscoring the contributions of arts and culture towards these different economic aspects of our wellbeing. This includes outlining the new evidence in Australia about contributions to the economy through First Nations arts and crafts.

Based on all sources of income and investment, Australian cultural and creative industries attracted $160 billion in 2020-21. In the comparison year of ANA's analysis (2017-18), these industries attracted an estimated $141 billion, indicating 13% growth. The largest proportion of this income was from sales and services, at 87% in 2020-21. This research dispelled the view that Australian cultural and creative industries are predominantly financed through government assistance.[56]

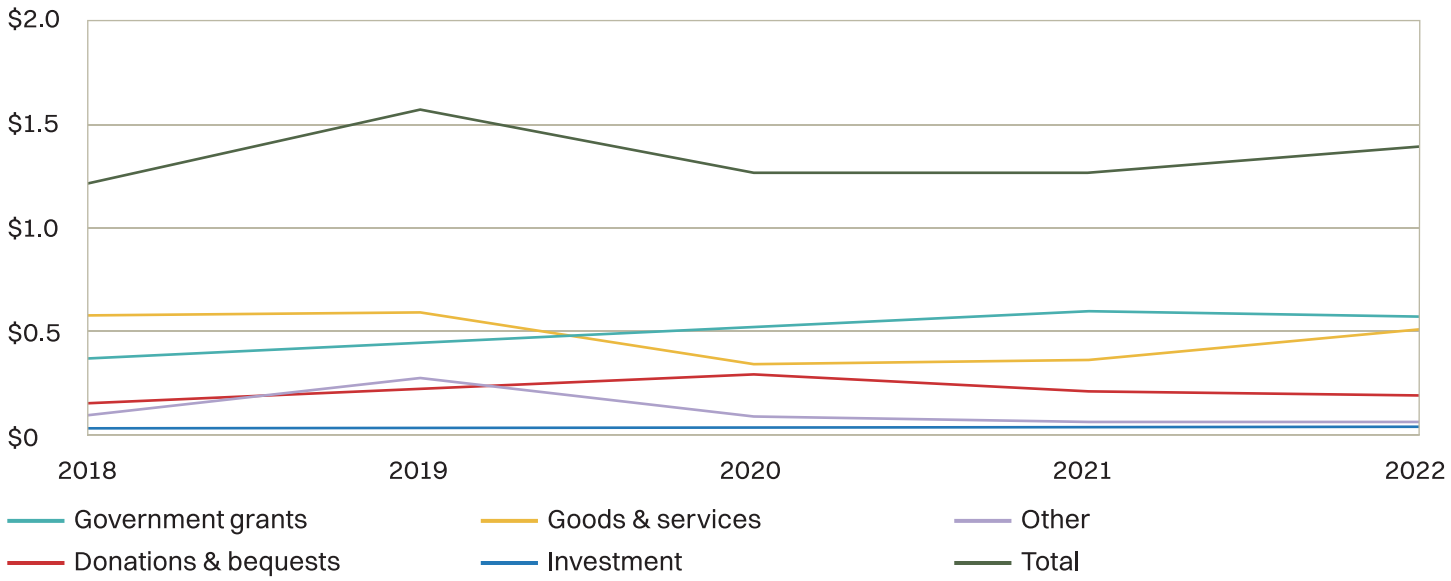
The importance of sales and services revenue is also evident in certain key sub-sectors. For example, the sales value of First Nations arts and crafts was at least $250 million in 2019-20, including $74-$90 million in commercial gallery sales.[57]

Likewise, the largest source of revenue for not-for-profits of the culture sub-type is also goods and services.

As shown in **Figure 2,** prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, goods and services for not-for-profits of the culture sub-type sat at 47%, with the second largest source of income being from government grants at 30%. However, this did change during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when government grants became a larger proportion of revenue.

As per more recent data, goods and services revenue is increasing in proportion again but has not yet reached the pre-pandemic mix (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2 – The change in revenue streams for not-for-profits (advancing culture sub-type), 2018-2022.



Source/notes: ANA estimates using ACNC Australian Charities reports[58] and interactive datasets; adjusted to the 2022 wage price index. All $ figures in billions.

Government investment plays a critical, enabling role in this economic activity. A total of 110 agencies across the 3 levels of government directed $7.7 billion into arts and culture in 2021-22. They invested across a diverse range of arts and cultural activities that contribute to Australia's cultural life, including museums, libraries, archives, heritage, arts, film, radio and television.[59]

With all levels of government in Australia contributing to cultural expenditure across a range of activities that contribute to these prosperity benefits, there is an opportunity to target national investment at industry spillovers and to maximise multiple public benefits.[60]

Many of the opportunities to maximise the benefits of investment are outlined in this Insight Report. Governments could also maximise impact by facilitating and supporting partnerships across entities, portfolios and different sectors. For this purpose, ANA's past research has provided insights about establishing or improving an arts, culture and creativity partnership.[61]

Additionally, previous research by ANA has recommended improving reporting about the performance of this government investment. This endeavour may include stating policy objectives and aligning different statistical data collections (e.g. Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA) and the Cultural and Creative Satellite Accounts). The reporting may include releasing evaluations and, where possible, releasing the data behind this reporting on a consistent, regular basis.[62] It could include experimenting with deeper granularity regarding the data collection and reporting instruments (e.g. 'by portfolio' and 'by postcode').[63]

Cultural and creative activities contribute to the economic wellbeing of people in regional, suburban and city-centre locations.

New studies have outlined evidence of the economic benefits of the cultural and creative industries in different geographic contexts, both in Australia and overseas.

An international study across 5 continents has explored the total impact of the cultural and creative industries on GDP per capita at the national, regional and local levels. The total per capita income effects of the industries are positive in the 3 territorial scales (i.e. national, regional and local) and in both low- and high-income locations.[64]

In Australia, from 2010-11 to 2019-20, the economic value produced by the cultural and creative industries increased by $18.7 billion to reach $93.4 billion in 2019-20 (25%).[65]

Compared with other industries, the cultural and creative industries have higher spillover effects into other industries in terms of total output, value added, and employment multipliers, as established in ANA's analysis of the creative economy in Australia.[66]

Some contributions to economic wellbeing through cultural and creative activities in Australia are temporary. Others are regular or ongoing. Exemplifying the temporary type of contributions, music events in 2024 – specifically, the concerts of Taylor Swift and Pink – coincided with increased tourism and travel services.[67] The Taylor Swift concerts also coincided with temporarily increased spending on clothing, merchandise, accessories and dining out in both Sydney and Melbourne.[68]

The regular prosperity benefits of a cluster of suburbs have been outlined through new research about Western Sydney's 'creative sprawl' ('a distinctive geography that challenges inner-city precincts as the loci of creativity').[69]

This creative sprawl has a burgeoning design sector, with 471 designers represented in all 13 local government areas (LGAs) that constitute the region. The research identified 4 related yet distinct spatial features of the sprawl, as follows:

1. dispersed according to patterns of economic, cultural and demographic growth
2. embedded in the community
3. independent small business and sole operators
4. online platforms.
5. Research also demonstrates positive contributions of arts, culture and creativity to economic wellbeing in creative hotspots and outside the larger cities of Australia.[70] For instance, cultural heritage infrastructure supported income diversification in Central West Queensland when that region was affected by long-term drought. Locals were 'looking to diversify income from outside sources, including tourism, online markets for local goods and the attraction of film production to the region and the growth of film-related events'.[71]

This creative hotspot research series has also identified creative migration occurring within Australia's capital cities – and then from capital cities to regional areas. That research suggests this is 'part of Australia's creative economic growth cycle', as are structural business relationships, interconnectedness and networked relationships between and within creative sectors, and a volunteer workforce that contributes their personal time and skills .[72]

According to a recent national study, the cultural and creative industries also make distinct economic contributions in remote areas:

- In remote areas, arts and crafts activities provide economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists through artwork sales and the teaching of culture through art.
- Also in remote areas, 10% of working-age Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples earn an income from arts and crafts sales.[73]

Just as these findings evidenced a pathway of increased economic opportunities, the same research highlighted a need for shared decision-making in this area under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Since the research was undertaken, the First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy has been initiated.[74]

Illustrating the contributions of festivals in remote regions, another study stated:

> *Desert Harmony [festival] does make a significant economic contribution in the broadest sense because of the people it employs, the audiences it attracts, the buildings, facilities, and equipment it uses, and the service provision it both requires and supplies [...] the procurement of local services such as plumbing, electrical work, waste management, food trucks, buses and transportation, marquee construction, garden supplies, event and site security services, and accommodation for touring artists, festival volunteers, and attendees. For certain inputs, such as staffing, catering, staging, and public address systems, it sources these services from the local economy.*[75]

The varied cohesion impacts observed in the updated evidence about arts and culture in regional Australia are described in **Part 2**.

Nations could use diverse policy levers to foster cultural and creative industries' economic activity. In the European Union's outermost regions, the OECD-recommended levers are as follows:

- place-based approaches to promote the creative sectors (i.e. approaches which recognise the specific assets and challenges of each location)
- coordinated strategies between places (e.g. common policy agendas across regions and places and formal arrangements for joint initiatives)
- strategic partnerships between places (e.g. networks that pool their resources)
- stronger linkages between tourism and the cultural and creative sectors (e.g. coordinated cultural tourism policies as well as supply chain linkages between tourism and cultural and creative small to medium enterprises).[76]

The OECD-recommended levers also include French and European Union funding instruments. In Australia, new funding instruments fostering economic activity included government voucher schemes that support consumer spending, such as the schemes created in response to COVID-19 impacts. For example, the NSW Government's Dine and Discover vouchers offered NSW residents $100 worth of vouchers to use for dining and entertainment.[77]

1.2. Building skills, wages and educational aspirations

Arts, culture and creativity generate foundational skills that drive and sustain prosperity, such as creative and critical thinking and literacy.

Creative thinking is a foundational skill for future work in Australia.[78] Individuals could apply this skill to contexts where idea generation is needed for problem-solving and society-wide concerns, as well as to creative writing and other artistic activities. Therefore, ensuring children and adults have opportunities to learn and strengthen this key skill is essential.

Australia's teenagers rank fourth in the world for creative thinking. The OECD's first-ever assessment of creative thinking has revealed that this is an area of comparative strength for Australia.[79]

To continue leveraging this skill across all nations' populations and equitably across groups, the OECD recommends embedding related activities within national curriculums. It recommends engaging students in tasks that require creative thinking on a 'regular but considered basis' (e.g. as part of lessons taken once or twice a week).[80]

While it may be difficult to draw strong conclusions about what factors are directly contributing to Australia's strong creative thinking results, new evidence indicates that children's and teenagers' creative and cultural engagement could play a role.

In 2021-22, most Australian children aged 5 to 14 years participated in a cultural activity outside of school hours. That is, 94% engaged outside of school hours of 9 am to 3 pm in screen-based activities, drama, singing or playing a musical instrument, dancing, creative writing and more.[81] A further 8 in 10 children (80%) aged 5 to 14 years attended at least one cultural venue or event outside of school hours.[82]

There is new evidence that specific arts and cultural activities – both within and outside educational environments – could contribute to improved creative and critical thinking. For instance, novel research has uncovered the following insights:

- Reading fiction plays a unique role in developing people's capacities for critical thought, as distinct from reading non-fiction.[83]
- Creativity and arts – including speculative fiction[84] – open new educational experiences and enquiries around climate change problems and the future.[85]
- Creative activities undertaken in early childhood settings and at home could contribute to increasing children's mental function and metacognitive capacity.[86]
- STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) lessons could increase students' critical and creative thinking (including collaboration).[87]

Regarding the evidence on the relevance of arts and culture to other skills and competencies of children and young people, the following new evidence has been found:

- A longitudinal study in Tamworth, Australia, discovered that shared book reading encourages sustained reading practices. This can develop emerging literacy skills.[88]
- A study of cultural field trips and programming (e.g. to theatres, orchestras and museums) in the United States established that these excursions lead to higher levels of school engagement, better end-of-grade standardised tests and higher course grades.[89]
- On the negative side, a randomised controlled trial reported that exposure to fantastical content within television programs impairs executive functions in children of early primary school age.[90]

Overall, these studies reflect a view that cultural activities that are 'multimodal and transactive'[91] across settings could contribute to enhancing skills that support the employment and prosperity of people, communities and nations. However, the content and frequency of engagement matters, according to the current evidence.

Such findings reinforce the belief among middle Australians that experiencing arts and cultural activities inside and outside the classroom led them to become creative and adaptable adults. They also considered these to be the skills and experiences that help them get along with different types of people (e.g. via learning appropriate ways to express emotions).[92]

There are 2 main policy implications of this new evidence. First, the updated information reinforces the recognition in Australia of creative and critical thinking as an interdisciplinary competence in the curriculum (intersecting with the 8 subjects or learning areas). The Assessment and Reporting Authority has developed a critical and creative thinking learning continuum to map progression in creative thinking according to different levels of proficiency.[93]

Second, the evidence of the PCSHS Wellbeing impacts of arts and culture outlined throughout this report could inform state and territory education ministers' decision-making as they consider adding a fourth cross-curriculum priority of 'the Arts' in addition to (and not a replacement for) the arts as a key learning area. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts recommended this in 2021.[94]

Creative approaches could support educational aspirations through the experiences of safety they foster.

When students feel safe and comfortable in their learning environment, they are more likely to engage in active learning, take risks and learn from their mistakes.[95]

Australian researchers have also found that 'to value education, students need to perceive that they are welcome, express their ideas and engage meaningfully in each educational space they enter'.[96]

More broadly, the National Child Safety Principles and the agenda of Child Safe Organisations in Australia proscribe the following:

- Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.
- Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.[97]

Select new studies demonstrate a link between creative and cultural engagement and feelings of safety among children. This impact emerges in the settings of museums and galleries, mental health services and early childhood education.[98]

To illustrate this, one new study has revealed that music serves as a personal resource for children experiencing homelessness and family violence. It provides an opportunity for 'an escape from what [is] happening in their lives and hope for a better future'.[99]

In another study, children aged 4 to 11 who attended an exhibition in Australia felt agency to be creative and explore the complexity of their emotions, hopes and fears in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic.[100]

Practical resources exist for establishing arts, culture and creativity partnerships within Australian educational settings to scale out these benefits. For instance, there are established 'dos and don'ts' regarding successful arts and education projects in primary and secondary schools. [101]

The federal government and universities are considering how to pursue a shared prosperity objective of increasing educational aspirations and lifelong learning.[102] For this audience, the updated evidence highlights the importance of relevant expertise and partnerships in facilitating creative activities for children. For example, in the context of mental health settings:

> *The role of the art therapist within family art therapy is to create a safe, boundaried space within which both the child and their parent/carer can recognise, understand and regulate their own feelings.[103]*

In **Part 3**, under the security theme, we revisit the potential contribution of creative and cultural activities in building a culture of safety in Australia (including for children) and other operational insights found in the new studies.

Creativity and creative study can generate employment opportunities, but it is difficult to generalise whether these opportunities are well paid, secure and equitable to access.

Having a job and income are common indicators of individual wellbeing and the wellbeing of families and communities. In health disciplines, these factors and outcomes may be referred to as people's economic environment. There is extensive new evidence on the demonstrated impacts of creative and cultural engagement on these measurements of wellbeing in Australia and worldwide.

In 2021, ABS data revealed that 524,117 people were employed in select 'cultural and creative occupations', while 712,348 people were employed in select 'cultural and creative industries'.[104] For further context on the various measurements of these impacts of creative and cultural engagement:

- There were 47,100 practising professional artists working in Australia.[105]
- UNCTAD found that the creative economy employs between 0.5% and 12.5% of the workforce across countries.[106]

It is difficult to generalise the distributional effect of this employment benefit, as the wage setting will differ across the cultural and creative workforce. However, there is a broad view in Australia that the wages in areas such as advertising, marketing, architecture and design, software and digital content are higher than those in the arts areas.[107]

From other studies about creative incomes, we learn the following information:

- Employees in cultural and creative occupations outside the cultural and creative industries are in high demand. In 2019-20, these 'embedded' creative workers received $24.1 billion in compensation.[108]
- The average person receives monetary returns after participating in creative arts degrees in Australia. Nonetheless, these financial gains are – on average – lower than those of other degrees.[109]
- In the 2021-22 financial year, practising professional artists in Australia earned an average gross income of $54,500, comprising $23,200 from creative work, $15,300 from arts-related activities and $16,000 from non-arts sources.[110] The same research identified a pay gap between female and male artists.[111]
- The average income for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists who sold art through an art centre in 2019-20 was just over $3,200. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists not working through art centres, their average income was approximately $6,000.[112]

Broadening paid employment opportunities in arts, culture and creativity regardless of circumstance, background or location would drive the *Measuring What Matters* aims of inclusion, fairness and equity. This endeavour could include national initiatives to improve digital equity across Australia.[113]

Several arts and culture-specific initiatives are also already underway, including the First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy and the establishment of Creative Workplaces within Creative Australia. As free-time creative and cultural engagement may inspire people to seek creative employment opportunities and to study in such industries, there is a related opportunity to address the known, national barriers to access. As noted in the introduction to this report, the key barriers to arts attendance nationally are cost and location.

The non-financial benefits of creative study and work include educational attainment, participation in the community, transition into work or further study, and job satisfaction.

Beyond classic economic indicators, the prosperity measures included in *Measuring What Matters* include job satisfaction, education and skill attainment, and work participation. These factors provide additional perspectives on the relevance of creative study and work to prosperity.

Two new studies have demonstrated the non-financial impacts of creative study in tertiary institutions, as follows:

- A substantial study of arts alumni in the United States found that creative coursework exposure during one's time at their institution is linked with positive educational, career and community outcomes, even when controlling for other factors.[114]
- A study at one Australian university found that its 2016 creative arts graduates had 'similar career outcomes as other degree holders in terms of unemployment and labour force participation'.[115]

Naturally, the non-financial benefits of work and study will vary from person to person. However, the themes of personal job satisfaction across studies concerning these work opportunities also include:

- vocational interests and pro-social motives (altruism and intrinsic and social motives)[116]
- the concepts of 'Keeping my culture strong', 'Sharing my culture with others' and 'Keeping me and others positive',[117] along with the recognition of winning an art award or prize or receiving a grant or funding to continue artistic work[118]
- therapy, recreation, community cultural development and professional career development[119]
- opportunities and role models for young women and women of marginalised groups[120]
- a positive sense of self, increased self-efficacy and professional recognition.[121]

The benefits of working and studying in the fields of arts, culture and creativity exist along the continuum of amateur, semi-professional and professional engagements in these areas. Given this, the proposed nationally consistent framework for careers advice throughout life may be a useful mechanism to scale out the demonstrated prosperity benefits of these work and study opportunities. Specifically, a review of the Australian Universities Accord recently recommended a careers advice framework for Australia, better career pathways advice for secondary schools and communication campaigns about the benefits of tertiary education.[122]

Other specific considerations to scale out benefits of creative work and study were found in the following sources:

- A NSW case study about educational aspiration and the creative industries recommended that careers advice replace identifiers like 'artists' with the term 'creatives'. It suggested broadening public discussion and advice about creative careers to go beyond traditional art forms, such as painting and drawing, and include those that embrace technologies, communications and the sciences.[123]
- A significant UK study described 'What Works' to support diversity and inclusion in creative education and the talent pipeline. The focus was on people aged 16 and above. The report identified critical points for intervention for the creative industries, education providers and policymakers to assist these industries in becoming more inclusive and equitable.[124]

1.3. Accelerating productivity growth

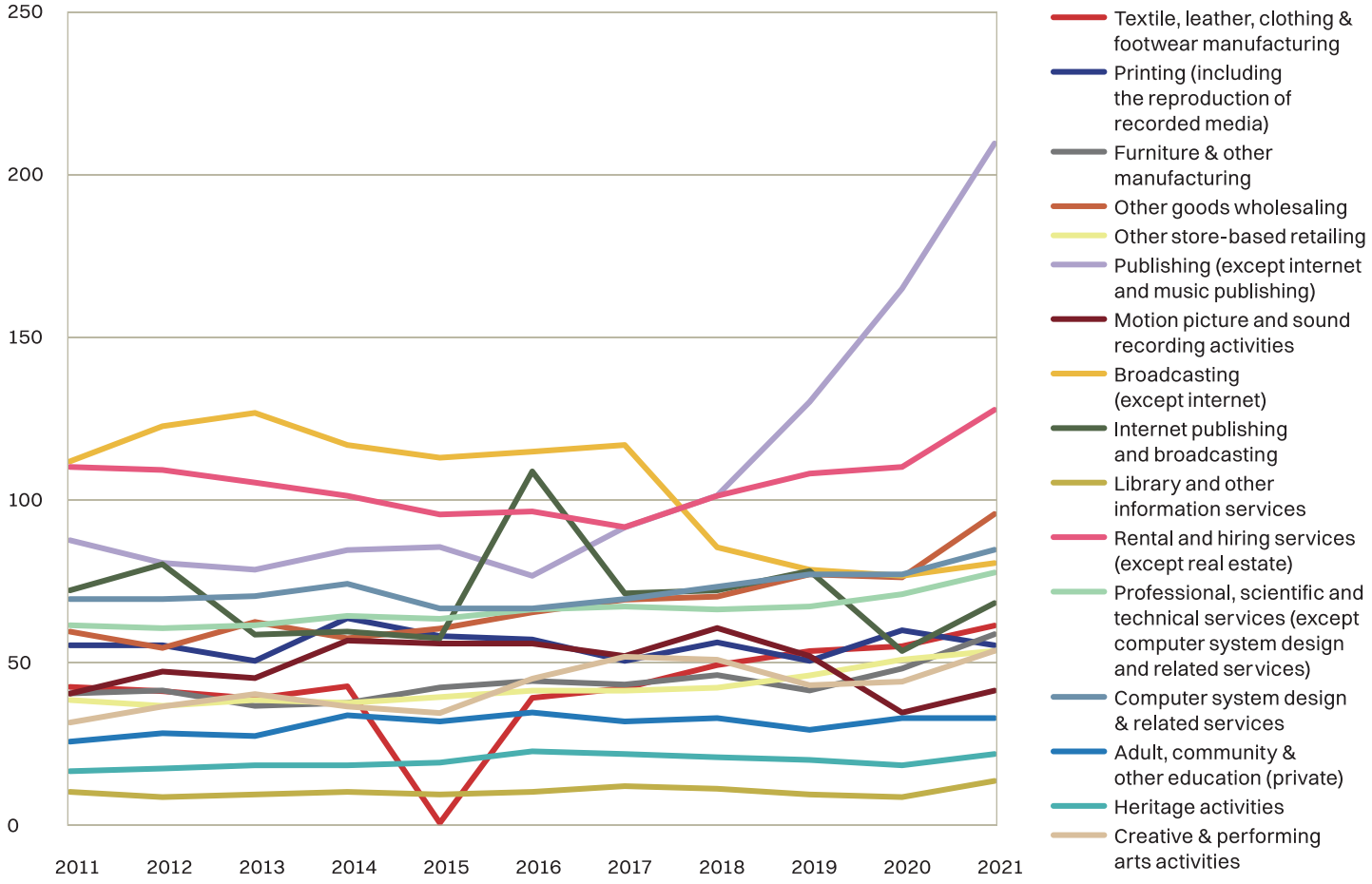
The cultural and creative industries contribute to growth in labour productivity.

Measuring What Matters includes labour productivity to measure prosperity and improved living standards in the longer term. Productivity receives such strong focus in the framework and within policy discussion in Australia in part because it 'has ensured that modern life is richer in potentially every sense compared with any time in the past'.[125]

The available data on arts, culture and creativity productivity growth has typically remained underexamined – until recently.

ANA's preliminary estimates of the labour productivity growth of the cultural and creative industries have shown that this growth was broadly consistent with the labour productivity of all industries across the 10 years leading up to 2022.[126] Moreover, 'publishing (except internet and music publishing)' and 'creative and performing arts activities' experienced the largest growth of the cultural and creative industries' labour productivity in this timeframe, as shown in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3 – Labour productivity growth varies across the cultural and creative industries, with publishing demonstrating notable productivity growth.[127]



Notes: IVA per hour, $real, financial year; ABS, Australian Industry 2021–22; ABS, Labour Account Australia

Arts, culture and creativity could boost future productivity through national productivity enablers.

Australia's measured productivity is growing at its lowest rate in 60 years. National research suggests that the key enablers of future productivity growth are an adaptable workforce, a dynamic business environment, innovation diffusion, and the use of data and digital technology.[128]

In 2023, ANA summarised evidence of the contributions to these national productivity enablers through arts, culture and creativity under the following 4 themes:

1. creative skills and cultural organisations in innovation diffusion
2. trade and investment in cultural and creative goods and services
3. cultural and creative employment, workplaces and labour supply
4. cultural and creative engagement by the public.[129]

For example, in the area of innovation diffusion – specifically, 'no-cost or low-cost access to ideas that have large public good value' – this previous ANA research suggested that engagements with cultural institutions are diffusing ideas within the general population, as are industry associations within the cultural and creative industries.

A further example within a university setting is the Creativity in Research, Engaging the Arts and Transforming Education, Health and Wellbeing (CREATE) Centre. As noted on its website, the centre is seeking to foster 'innovative, arts-informed and creative research methods, integrated with more traditional methods across the University'. The focus of its creative and cultural experiences and research is to develop new professional practices for the education and health sectors.[130]

The cultural and creative industries could consider known economy-wide approaches to drive productivity in their operations. For instance, new technologies have historically driven productivity gains. Artificial intelligence (AI) is, therefore, of particular interest in discussions of productivity policy.

ANA has shown that applications of AI are already impacting Australian arts and cultural life. Some applications, such as chatbots, are more obvious than others, but regardless of the artform, content platform or community, the opportunities and risks of AI are real.[131]

Suggested productivity-boosting approaches for non-market services (e.g. the programs and services of government-funded or operated cultural institutions) noted in ANA research about national productivity enablers also include:

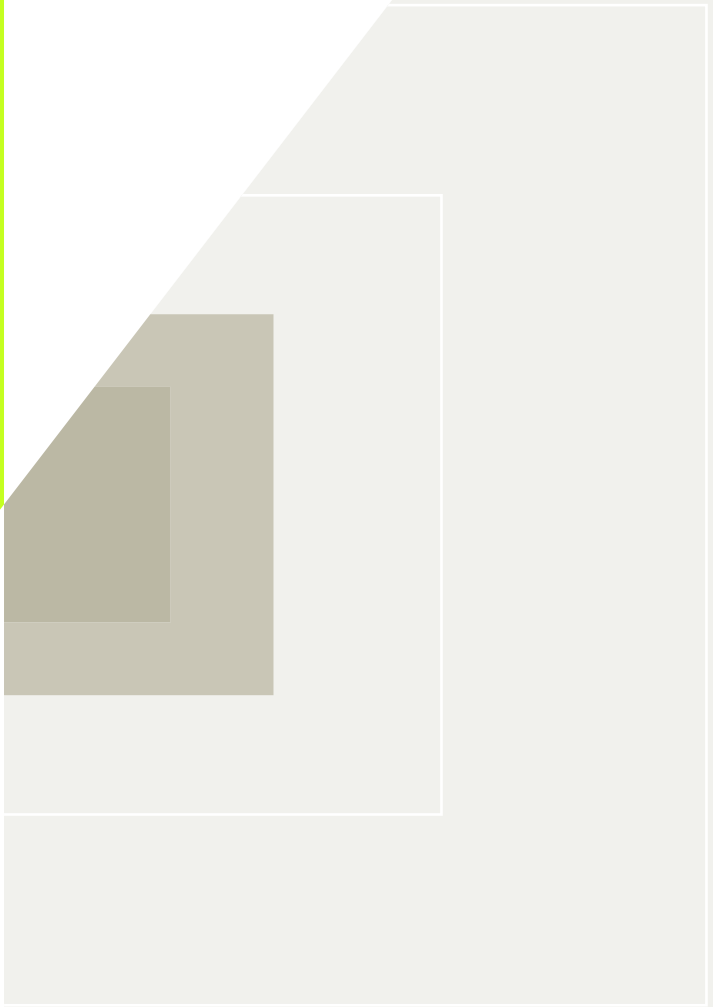
- shared and flexible investment approaches
- benchmarking approaches
- approaches focused on improving the quality and variety of goods/services (notably through the better use of data in operations).[132]

Another recent study focused on the utility of innovation precincts to harness South Australia's creative industries' outputs, including fostering design thinking in research and development and STEM.[133] Forthcoming productivity and innovation research by the OECD will also take a global look at the options of R&D tax credits, creative voucher schemes and creative hubs/incubators in productivity and innovation.[134]

Productivity growth foreshadows a promise of more free time for future generations, who may choose to allocate this time to activities that contribute to a more cohesive society. Therefore, cohesion is the second theme of PCSHS Wellbeing and is discussed next.

Part 2

Cohesion impacts



Finding:

Arts, culture and creativity build cohesion through social connection and a sense of belonging to a place, a group or a cultural activity, while experiences of disinterest, disengagement or exclusion may limit this social cohesion benefit.

Cohesion is 'the willingness of members of society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper'.[135] In Australian research, the term has also been defined as 'the field of forces acting on group members and motivating them to stay within the group'.[136] Health disciplines commonly refer to cohesion as the social health outcomes of creative and cultural engagement.

Australia had its worst social cohesion results on record in 2023.[137,138] Historically, the country's high social cohesion and successful multicultural society have been the envy of other nations. In the context of a concerning decline, the need to foster community connection, inclusion and belonging could not be more urgent.

Transformative 2019 showed that cultural and creative activities help to build community, belonging and trust; enhance empathy and inclusion; help combat the growing issues of loneliness and isolation; help individuals and communities to recover from disasters and trauma; and make cities, suburbs and regions more liveable.

Relatedly, *Transformative 2019* also showed that involvement with arts and culture – from active production through to passive consumption – helps build social and cultural capital in urban, regional and remote areas.

We have found new evidence illustrating that arts, culture and creativity contribute to cohesion in 2 distinct ways:

1. **Building belonging across ages, places and people**
   - Cultural and creative experiences foster 2 cornerstones of cohesion: a sense of belonging and trust.
   - Cultural activities, practices and expressions can prompt experiences of disinterest, disengagement and exclusion – negative belonging or 'unbelonging'.

2. **Connecting communities**
   - Arts and cultural activities provide opportunities to connect with others and socialise.
   - Cultural and creative activities counteract cohesion challenges, such as loneliness and isolation or disrupted connections.

2.1. Belonging across ages, places and people

Cultural and creative experiences foster 2 cornerstones of cohesion: a sense of belonging and trust.

Belonging is 'being a part of something: social groups, physical places, or collective experiences', according to the Scanlon Foundation.[139] However, people's sense of belonging – which is also one of *Measuring What Matters'* 12 social cohesion indicators – deteriorated in Australia between 2007 and 2022.[140]

The contributions of diverse arts and cultural activities to fostering belonging emerge in the following research findings:

- Music can create and strengthen belonging 'not to specific people, but to humanity, nature or to the music itself'.[141]
- Engaging in the arts can strengthen neurodivergent people's identity in regional Australia.[142]
- Culturally and linguistically diverse survey respondents in Australia have reported feeling a sense of belonging through participation in arts activities connected to their cultural background.[143]
- Fans of the Australian television series *Neighbours* developed feelings of belonging, including self-identification, as fans of the series and through connection to the fandom.[144]
- An evaluated dance program in the ACT describes friendship, family and belonging as integral to the program's experience.[145]
- Group art-based activities can produce a sense of belonging among members of the Australian Defence Force. The activities have helped bridge a gap in belonging for those separated from their previous military unit and transitioning to civilian life.[146]
- Middle Australians believe that cultural and creative engagement helps build a sense of belonging and connection at the individual, community and national identity levels.[147]

A study conducted in the UK linked arts participation with belonging through being part of an event or activity, being close to others, and experiencing shared interests and connections with like-minded people.[148] A recent evaluation of 9 arts and cultural projects in NSW also described belonging as a key social impact of the projects. It described belonging directly alongside other social impact themes of cultural identity, welcome and sense of place.[149]

Measuring What Matters notes that 'a cohesive society values diversity and equity, supports belonging, and protects its unique cultural heritage'.[150] For this understanding of cohesion, examples of arts, culture and creativity from the updated evidence included the following: rock art;[151] language use;[152] corporate art collections;[153] cultural events, objects and materials;[154] virtual music tours;[155] festivals involving performing arts, storytelling, protocol and rites;[156] and artistic methods used in partnership with religious congregations.[157]

Measuring What Matters includes 5 national indicators of trust. Like a sense of belonging, a sense of trust fostered in the population is viewed as a cornerstone of social cohesion.

Three studies stood out regarding arts and culture's relevance to trust. They compared public trust in museums with public trust in other institutions to reveal a transformative edge:

- A population-representative survey (n = 1,070) in Germany discovered that '[m]useums enjoy the highest level of trust in the personal and institutional environment, after family and friends and ahead of scientists and the media. They are the most trusted of all public institutions, well ahead of political organisations, for which trust ratings were also collected'.[158]
- A survey by the Council of Australasian Museum Directors (n = 1,184) revealed that public trust in museums is at 78%. Museums received one of the highest ratings of the 17 organisations surveyed, which included universities and the media.[159]
- A general population survey (n = 1,206) in the United States found museums are the most trusted source of information among museum-goers. For the 'non-visitors' surveyed, museums were the second most trusted source of information, behind friends and family, but more trusthworthy than researchers and/or scientists, non-profit organisations, local news agencies, national news organisations, the government, corporations and businesses, and social media.[160]

The above evidence about a sense of belonging and trust reinforces the decision to include creative and cultural engagement in *Measuring What Matters* as a metric tool to track social cohesion progress in Australia.

In policy, this information also reinforces:

- the objective of promoting equitable access to arts and cultural facilities in the National Urban Policy (under consultation at the time of writing)[161]
- the liveability target in Regionalisation Ambition 2032: A Framework to Rebalance the Nation to '[s]trengthen access and opportunities for engagement in arts, cultural, community, and recreational experiences in Regional Australia'.[162]

At a practical level, to counter the nationally declining sense of belonging, this evidence on social cohesion impacts indicates a need to (re)invest in organisations and people that enable the population's access to creative and cultural experiences. The investment could involve a wide range of organisations and individuals and be supported and sustained through varied partnerships.

Queensland Theatre's Traction Youth Theatre Ensemble provides a deliberate and targeted investment example. The evaluation of this project falls outside the scope of the timeframe of published sources for *Transformative Edge 2024* but warrants mention, as it was delivered with a grant from the federal government's Department of Social Services under the Diversity and Social Cohesion Program.[163]

More broadly, to maximise the benefits of existing investments, Australia could focus on addressing any barriers to creative and cultural engagement in general populations due to circumstance, location or background. As mentioned in the introduction, the research suggests that cost and location are the greatest barriers to more creative and cultural engagement, at a national level.[164]

Cultural activities, practices and expressions could also prompt experiences of disinterest, disengagement and exclusion – negative belonging or 'unbelonging'.

Alongside proven declines in people's sense of belonging, the concerns about belonging are captured in the Scanlon Foundation's statement that '[b]elonging can [...] be aggressively asserted in political projects of nationalism, racism or the defence of territory from real or imagined intruders'.[165]

Research focused on refugee experiences in Australia has also highlighted the importance of considering such 'states of unbelonging, that is, who is being excluded; against whom do we draw borders'.[166]

The following findings about arts, culture and creativity in Australia illustrate experiences of negative belonging:

- In total, 3 in 10 Australians agree that cultural and creative experiences are not really for people like them.[167]
- First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse survey respondents in Australia are more likely to report that 'cultural and creative experiences are not really for people like me'.[168]
- There are still unequal representations in screen content in Australia. In particular, disability representation in such content remains critically low.[169]
- A stocktake of national data – including ABS data, grant application data and data provided by organisations receiving multi-year investments – identified equity issues in arts and culture related to representation, payment and access and suggested a need to diversify. This includes diversifying access for audiences and participants, artists, the cultural and creative workforce, and cultural leaders, as well as among government investments and staff. [170]
- In focus groups with middle Australians, the word 'arts' alone prompts imagery of the high arts, which are seen as elitist and more for other (wealthier) people, not them.[171]
- Research has identified instances of online harassment and abuse from members of the public among journalists and media workers from minority backgrounds.[172]
- A recent Australian study found that some Buddhists in Australia have reported experiences of exclusion from attending temples.[173]

Faced with these findings, the national evidence of a declining sense of belonging and a policy intent to increase the breadth of stories and portrayals through arts and culture,[174] the cultural and creative industries could play a direct role in addressing this cohesion challenge as well.

These entities could consider adopting leading practices of broadening/diversifying their governance, workforce, programming and audience. Investors – including governments – could consider how to incentivise, pursue and financially support these outcomes, such as through expanding how, where and in whom they invest.

In practice, research describes the 8 tasks of organisations considered audience centric as follows:

1. Recognise the need for change.
2. Identify the target audience.
3. Research the audience and their barriers to participation.
4. Program responsive to the target audience.
5. Develop relationships and multiple connections with the target audience.
6. Gain broad organisational commitment to audience diversification.
7. Undertake evaluation and reflective practice.
8. Change the organisation's usual way of operating.[175]

2.2. Connecting communities

Arts and cultural activities provide opportunities to connect with others and socialise.

A measurably cohesive society has strong social connections and allocates time for recreation and social interaction. *Measuring What Matters* notes that a cohesive society also values equity.

Health disciplines may also refer to this area of benefits as social health outcomes (see **Part 4** for an overview of updated evidence in the health theme). In this section, we summarise evidence from national survey results, focus group research, case studies, a systematic review and project evaluations.

The 2022 National Arts Participation **survey** revealed that just under half of Australians attend arts events to socialise and connect with others (46%, up from 41% in 2019).[176]

Another group of respondents in a national survey agreed that engaging with art, cultural and creative activities can have a positive impact on *families'* (70%) or the *community's* (72%) quality of life.[177]

According to ANA's **focus group** research, Baby Boomer middle Australians believe that arts and culture build connections across generations.[178] Middle Australians also believe that arts and culture help bring communities together, break down barriers between different groups within society and encourage greater communication and social cohesion. The benefits of such activities as the 'building blocks of place' emerge through valued local activities, jobs and tourism.[179]

Case studies in regional Australia demonstrate that creative arts play a positive role in community connections and cohesion. The positive social impacts for the local communities include the following:

1. collective wellbeing – the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community
2. thriving community – liveability factors associated with a city or town, including notions of community regeneration
3. amplified place – a social construct as much as a geographic location
4. creative ecology – embracing local skills and knowledge as fundamental local assets and amplifying these through arts, culture and creativity.[180]

The arts and cultural projects in these cases varied from wearable art initiatives and events to large-scale performative work and an art competition. However, all projects were described to 1) reflect each region's creative capacities, 2) amplify local assets and 3) were designed and delivered to address locally identified challenges.

That case study research also found:

> *The historic binary [in research] between intrinsic and instrumental impacts may be a false binary. The inextricability of the social and economic outcomes of engagement with arts, culture and creativity in rural, regional and remote communities is reflected in the project findings.*[181]

A **systematic review** of 38 studies about place-based arts and cultural activities specifically studied social equity and addressing social disadvantage. Overall, it illustrated that the impacts of creative and cultural engagement by individuals reach *beyond* the individual. Suggesting that more evaluation frameworks on equity and disadvantage are needed, the review concluded that the individual impacts of place-based activities clearly extend to population and place and may shift the power relations, assumptions and norms that lie at the heart of inequity.[182]

Another, related evaluation of 3 arts and culture projects in the United States shared a practical insight about driving social equity through place-based arts and cultural activities. It stated that 'social cohesion must be nurtured. Small gains feed back into, amplify, and grow more cohesion, and can translate into even better outcomes'.[183]

Measuring What Matters describes an Australian model for impact and coordination in a long-term vision of change, cohesion and social equity. Specifically, the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children and its place-based partnerships is 'a cross-sector collaboration to improve the wellbeing of children, young people, and their families by working with Australian communities to reduce intergenerational disadvantage'.[184]

As well as deepening our understanding of how arts and culture can support cohesion through community connections, the updated evidence in this section demonstrates alignments of the activities' foreseeable impacts with existing objectives of this national Investment Dialogue.

Cultural and creative activities counteract cohesion challenges – loneliness and isolation or disrupted connections.

Addressing loneliness and isolation was a key theme of the 2019 edition of *Transformative*. The COVID-19 pandemic experience deepened public awareness of arts and culture's role in countering isolation and connecting people in contexts of societal disruption and crisis.

Even more recently, the Mapping Social Cohesion 2023 report highlighted social isolation as a factor in the overall 'precarious and uncertain social environment of Australia'.[185]

The pandemic prompted new and useful lines of interdisciplinary empirical enquiry. For example, research in the UK has established that 'community-level interventions that enhance community identification and peer support can promote a potential Social Cure for loneliness'.[186] That study broke new empirical ground, clarifying the complex relationships between enhancing community belonging, reducing loneliness and supporting wellbeing. It did not focus specifically on arts and culture interventions.

In addition, a parliamentary inquiry in Australia has recognised the role played by arts, culture and creativity in supporting communities during COVID-19. Under its enhancing social cohesion theme, the parliamentary inquiry's examples included:

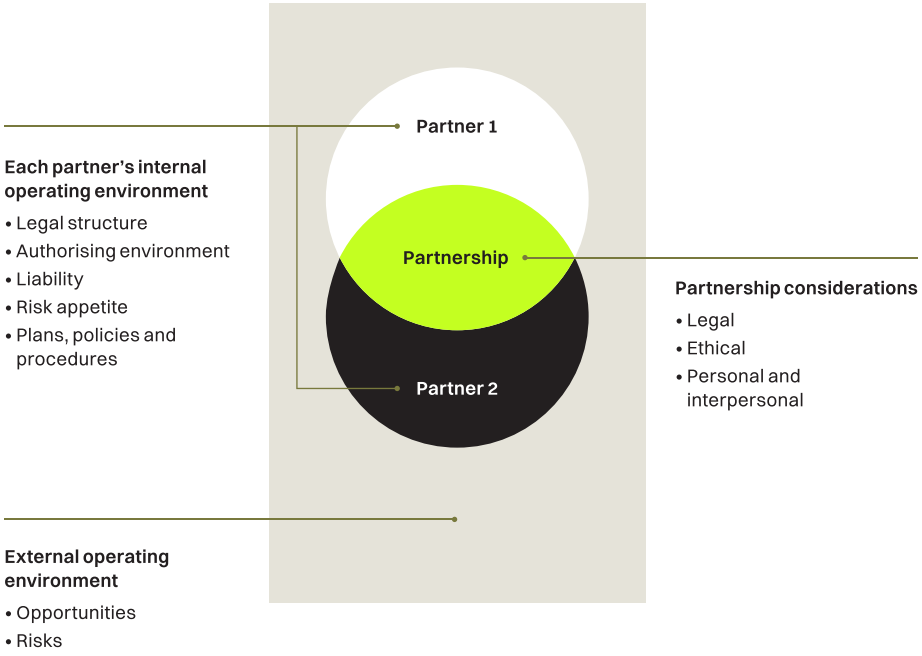
- the SBS programming and broadcasting of content in languages other than English (LOTE)
- the SBS coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content delivered by National Indigenous Television
- the Lake Macquarie City Council's schedule of annual cultural programs (e.g. visual arts classes for children and adults; early literacy programming; artist, author and illustrator talks and workshops; and a range of creative festivals)
- cultural and creative organisations and activities in the Fairfield LGA in Western Sydney
- folk festivals
- documentary films.[187]

Other relevant examples not specifically mentioned in the inquiry include acceptance in media of Aboriginal English[188,189] and the commissioning of language content in television programs, especially for young people.[190]

In academic research on general populations, the demonstrated social connection impacts of arts and culture have involved group singing,[191] live music performance, live theatre performance and film or drama showings at the cinema or other venues.[192] A small study of 2020's London lockdown identified street music and street art as accessible means of developing new connections in distanced conditions.[193]

Alignments clearly exist between this array of evidence about foreseeable impacts and other Australian programming that aims to reduce loneliness in the general population (e.g. South Australia's Community Connections).[194]

Figure 4 – Partnership operating environments and considerations.



Other organisations in Australia from the cultural sector and beyond that are looking to harness arts and culture's benefits to support social environments – and address these cohesion challenges – could use ANA's framework of leading questions for partnerships. These questions could help entities discuss complex legal, ethical, and personal and interpersonal considerations of a partnership and the multiple operating environments this may involve, as illustrated in **Figure 4**.[195]

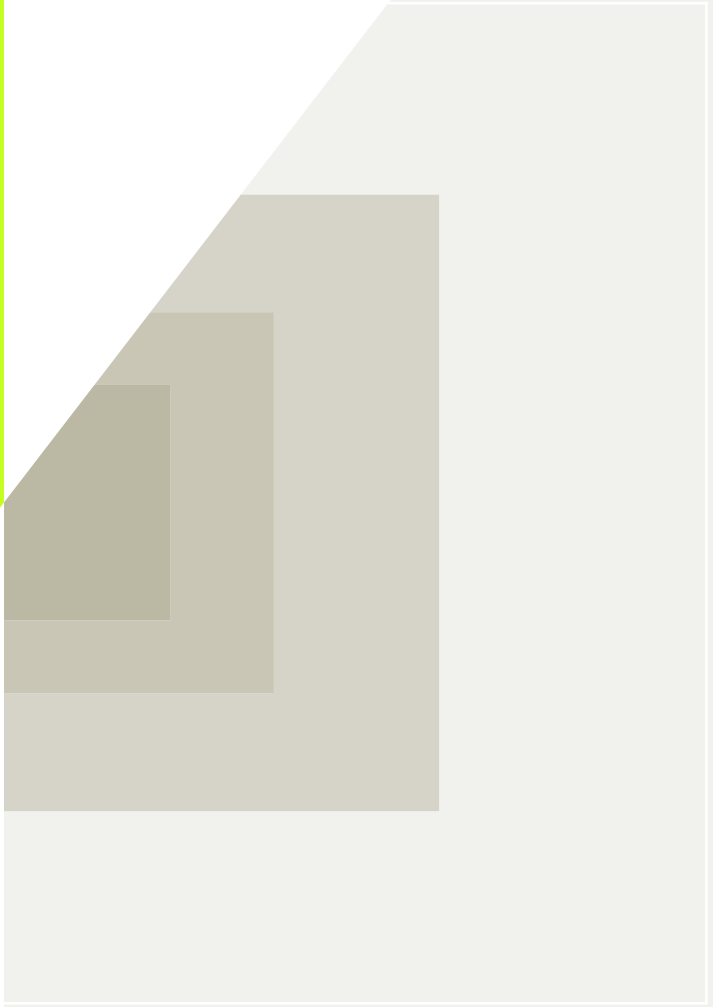
Beyond general populations, guidance for extending arts, culture and creativity in criminal justice settings offers insights for Australia to consider.[196] Adapting this partnership approach, developed in the UK, would align with the new evidence about harnessing arts and culture's benefits in disrupted social environments such as prisons.

For instance, a scoping review of research about prison arts programs found that 'the strongest and most consistent evidence links participating in prison arts programs to a constellation of social-emotional outcomes, including self-efficacy and self-esteem, social connection and relationships, and mental health and well-being'.[197] Similarly, a new study found that prisoners have developed camaraderie and relationships through creative activities delivered via the Royal New Zealand Ballet's partnership with New Zealand Corrections in 5 prisons.[198]

In Australia, specific programs have already begun leveraging these benefits for wellbeing and cohesion by providing prisoners with opportunities for creative and cultural engagement. Notably, Paperchained is a journal of writing and artistic expression from individuals affected by incarceration.[199] Additionally, the Boom Gate Gallery at the Long Bay correctional complex enables prisoners to make, exhibit and sell art.[200]

Part 3

Security impacts



Finding:

Creative and cultural engagement provides opportunities for active citizenship and democratic resilience. It contributes to security through fostering feelings and spaces of safety and international cultural relations and offering alternatives to violent protest.

In *Measuring What Matters,* the theme of security and its role in wellbeing is defined in 2 ways: 1) living peacefully and feeling safe and 2) having financial security and access to housing. The new evidence of the impacts of arts, culture and creativity located through our various searches falls under the former definition.

Relevant findings in *Transformative 2019* were that arts and culture have successfully been used by other countries to achieve diplomatic soft power objectives, improve relations and trust between nations, and assist individuals and communities to recover from trauma and mediate conflict.

Transformative 2019 also reported that arts and culture enhance empathy and increase civic participation.

We found new evidence illustrating how arts, culture and creativity contribute to security in 2 distinct ways:

1. Helping people to cope in times of adversity and insecurity

- Arts, culture and creativity provide opportunities for people to feel safe in diverse circumstances.
- Cultural and creative experiences and institutions provide spaces for people to build confidence, including in person, online and virtually.
- There is mixed evidence of the capacity for creative and cultural engagement to reduce violence.

2. Fostering civic and diplomatic engagement

- Arts, culture and creativity are practical approaches for strengthening democracy, driving democratic participation and supporting peaceful, active citizenship.
- Cultural relations advance peace and security alongside commercial, trade and other diplomatic objectives.

3.1. Helping people to cope in times of adversity and insecurity

Arts, culture and creativity provide new opportunities for people to feel safe in diverse circumstances.

Feelings of security and safety vary across groups in the Australian population. This section summarises the updated evidence of security impacts for 4 main groups:

1. children and young people
2. people experiencing or vulnerable to domestic, sexual or gender-based violence
3. members and former members of the defence force
4. First Nations peoples accessing services.

In **Part 1**, we discussed how **children and young people** may feel safe through creative expression and engagement in museums and galleries, health settings, early childhood education settings and other community organisational settings.

Based on evidence from Australia and abroad, cultural and creative activities may also offer opportunities for people to:

- address and respond to **gender-based violence** without creating an imperative for them to speak publicly[201]
- raise social consciousness of **domestic violence** in ways that feel safe for audiences[202]
- address **sexual harassment** through new approaches to negotiate consent and self-determination.[203]

Members of the Australian Defence Force have reported 'significantly improved' wellbeing from participating in the Arts for Recovery, Resilience, Teamwork and Skills program. This includes increased self-confidence, an enhanced ability to move on with their lives and improved communication.[204] However, the benefits may be short term, according to a new longitudinal evaluation of the program.[205]

Other new studies and evaluations suggest:

- Art exhibitions in Melbourne helped sustain meaningful connections among veterans when commemorations such as Anzac Day were cancelled and gatherings were prohibited.[206]
- The art-therapy intervention of mask-making helped veterans and service members experiencing post-traumatic stress symptoms to gain a safe psychological distance from their negative emotions.[207]
- A long-term art therapy program at a military hospital outpatient facility in the United States helped service members to be aware of their symptoms and communicate effectively with others. Participants highlighted the role of the art therapist in creating a 'non-judgmental and safe environment in which to process and communicate previously unexpressed and misunderstood experiences'.[208]

Research has provided 3 new insights into the influences of arts and culture on the subjective feelings of safety of **First Nations peoples** accessing services, as follows:

- The introduction of Indigenous art-themed personalised theatre caps for operating theatre staff at Royal Darwin Hospital improved perceived staff communication and the patient perioperative experience.[209]
- The delivery of a writing program supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in prison to open up in ways they normally would not. The program evaluation found that it helped the men to process and release their feelings and contributed to a trusting relationship with program facilitators.[210]
- In healthcare settings, a sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in regional Australia reported preferring Indigenous art in waiting rooms, particularly when the art contained cultural references related to the place.[211]

This evidence highlights an opportunity for organisations operating in the community and these diverse settings – healthcare, criminal justice and a broader range of child safety organisations. These entities could seek to better understand the relevance of arts, culture and creativity's benefits for the people using their services.

Organisations in the cultural and creative industries could draw on new informational resources, knowledge and practical insights about creating a safer environment for these groups.[212] New insights from this body of evidence about arts, culture and creativity also suggest to:

- partner with organisations that have an existing relationship with the community
- take care with the choice of facilitator to generate trust
- harness the creative expertise of a facilitator in listening and employing different tools and materials
- consider the design of settings for the services and activities taking place.

Cultural and creative experiences and institutions provide spaces for people to build confidence, including in person, online and virtually.

A satisfying and secure life involves feeling protected from harm. *Measuring What Matters* therefore includes 2 subjective measures of safety in the general population, as follows: 1) 'the proportion of people who felt "safe" or "very safe" walking alone during the day and night' and 2) 'the proportion of people who have experienced online harm or negative content in the last 12 months'.

New findings illuminate both negative *and* positive influences on people's experiences of safety through creative and cultural engagement in person, online and virtually:

- Arts and cultural experiences provide 'third places'. Just like cafes, parks and weekend markets, third places are neutral ground and involve some level of engagement with others. People can go there alone or in a group and feel equally comfortable and safe.[213]
- As drawbacks for safety, Baby Boomer middle Australians have expressed safety concerns about large crowds at cultural events and about their vulnerability to illness, particularly during the pandemic.[214]
- Group singing participants report feeling safe in these activities due to the absence of judgement from other members of their choir and the opportunity to make 'imperfect contributions'.[215]
- As drawbacks for the safety of their engagement, many people in Australia feel they lack the ability to safely navigate online environments. In a national survey, less than half (45%) knew how to change privacy settings on social media, and only 39% felt confident that they could take steps to identify misinformation.[216]

The COVID-19 experience showed online cultural and creative experiences have accessibility benefits.[217] Alongside this welcome opportunity to engage with cultural industries via online platforms and virtually, security risks have continued to surround people's media engagement. The acknowledged risks include misinformation, disinformation and privacy issues. In this context, the updated evidence provides new insights into the valuable role cultural institutions could continue to play.

In particular, a study revealed that media literacy is 'incidental education' of the public's engagement with libraries. That is, people visit libraries for technical help, and library staff thereby have an opportunity to share information about issues such as privacy and misinformation.[218]

Libraries in Australia offer a range of other formal and informal media literacy services,[219] as do other cultural institutions. For example, the National Film and Sound Archive is offering Media and Me – a facilitated media literacy program that supports young people to make safe choices by examining a range of media services, including animation, advertising, gaming, social media, film and music.[220]

To maximise cultural institutions' ability to advance security in an evolving media landscape, this Australian research highlights an opportunity for professional development of the workforces involved in providing the public with media literacy support.[221]

There is mixed evidence of the capacity for creative and cultural engagement to reduce violence.

Measuring What Matters states: 'A counterpart to feeling safe is being free from violence'.[222] Using this specific definition of 'freedom from violence', we identified mixed evidence of creative and cultural engagement in reducing violence.

At a broad population level, a recent study related a 1% increase in cultural consumption to a 20% reduction in hate crime events in one Italian region. There were reduced offences and incidents – including threats, property damage, assault and murder – that were motivated by bias or prejudice towards certain groups of people.[223]

Hate speech can escalate to harassment and violence. Therefore, it is also worth noting that European governments have recognised a role for culture in the challenge of combating hate speech through the Council Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026.[224]

Focusing on a specific population group, one systematic review considered the effectiveness of arts interventions on keeping children and young people safe from involvement in violence and crime. The study highlighted the weakness of the evidence of impacts on behavioural (actions), psychosocial (emotional and cultural), cognitive (logic/thought) and offending outcomes. It included 4 previous Australian studies in scope.[225]

Another scoping review of arts interventions in prison highlighted the limited evidence of the effectiveness of such programs on recidivism and reoffending objectives across an evidence base that included 2 Australian studies.[226]

The observational evidence from Italy, along with the information given in **Part 2** regarding the cohesion benefits of arts and culture, highlight a pathway for Australia to deliberately promote creative and cultural engagement as a protection for national security, complementing the nation's other policies aimed at its security challenges (e.g. legislation and penalties).

Relatedly, Australia has recognised the contributions of arts and culture to its practical agenda for democratic resilience and in civic and diplomatic engagements. *Transformative Edge 2024* describes examples and evidence that reinforce these decisions in the next section.

3.2. Fostering civic and diplomatic engagement

Arts, culture and creativity are practical approaches to strengthen democracy, drive democratic participation and support peaceful, active citizenship.

The Australian Strengthening Democracy Taskforce states that 'Australia's democracy today is strong but vulnerable'.[227] Moreover, at the time of writing, the terror level threat is 'probable', increasing due to a rising mix of ideologies whereby more people think violence is permissible.[228] Other research by the Australian Institute of Criminology suggests that anti-authority protests driven by a range of motives and ideologies have posed a threat to community safety, as they have resulted in violent clashes with law enforcement.[229]

In this evolving area of security policymaking and investment, investors – including governments – could consider the social connection benefits of arts and culture. We described these benefits at length in **Part 2,** including how they provide opportunities to connect with others and socialise and address the challenges of loneliness, isolation and disrupted connection. Considering these benefits of arts and culture would align with the broader evidence that social support is a protective factor from attitudes that justify the use of violence (i.e. 'radical attitudes'). [230]

Australian research on this topic specifically recommends increasing opportunities for people to express dissent and opposition to government authority without 'labelling anti-authority protesters as extremists, so as not to push more moderate protesters towards the extremes'.[231]

Here, the government and non-government creative and cultural services already being recognised as playing a role in strengthening democracy include:

- cultural groups, including neighbourhood choirs
- free, independent media through the ABC and SBS
- the creation, sharing and preserving of stories
- civic awareness, digital campaigns and exhibitions by cultural institutions (e.g. MoAD).[232]

Other updated evidence indicates that people already value many and varied artistic practices and creative engagement for democratic ends and possibilities of peaceful resistance including:

- performance art where street protest collective actions have not been allowed to proceed[233]
- transit art to challenge and critique urban citizenship[234]
- educational programs that employ art and creativity to explore citizenship that crosses national borders[235,236]
- cultural assets, architecture and festivals to make political statements about housing security[237]
- the Eurovision Song Contest as a participatory democracy 'wherein the audience actively participates in its cultural platform to shape its political message and meaning, with the outcome of the contest providing a tangible measure of public sentiment'[238]
- independent theatre companies as mediums to engage young people with local government[239]
- the public's concrete bollard decoration, activism, humour and art in Melbourne, Australia, 'taking back these visible reminders of fear and danger'.[240]

This evidence deepens understanding of the civic benefits of arts and culture. It illustrates the common usage of arts and culture as non-violent political action and democratic participation in general populations. Government institutions with a remit to protect and facilitate democratic participation and resilience could thereby include culture-based strategies in their methods.

A formalised example of a culture-based strategy from recent years is the Department of Home Affairs' art competition, held as part of its Multicultural Framework Review consultation. In the competition, children and young people were invited to design the front cover of the Multicultural Framework Review report and address 3 themes: 'I feel seen, I feel heard, I feel safe'; 'Where I feel welcomed and I belong'; and 'Australia looks like this to me'.[241,242]

Cultural relations contribute to peace and security alongside commercial, trade and other diplomatic and reputational objectives.

Cultural relations have been defined as 'reciprocal transnational interactions between cultures'.[243] These international engagements may include, for example:

- Nations hosting or participating in large-scale mega-events with international audiences
- Smaller-scale diplomacy programs
- The trade of creative goods and services (i.e. imports and exports).

A concrete example of cultural relations is the new Embassy of Australia building in Washington, DC. As noted on the embassy's website, it showcases 'the very best in Australian design, materials and architectural excellence', 'embodies the spirit of Australia' and 'demonstrates Australia's global leadership in sustainable design, construction and products'.[244]

Several new studies have been conducted on the impacts of these diverse international engagements involving culture.

At the larger end of the cultural relations scale, the UK's hosting of Eurovision in 2023 brought reputational uplift and sustained the country's already-strong reputation with other nations. A study by the British Council noted that 'as an international TV coproduction in which 40 countries or more frequently take part, Eurovision is intrinsically a cultural relations activity'.[245]

Examining Australia's engagement in Eurovision since 1956, the significant public benefits for strengthening the nation's image abroad have been described as follows:

> *For Australia, participation in the Eurovision Song Contest has been an opportunity to re-brand itself in European eyes (and for an even broader international television audience) as diverse and creative [...] the Song Contest is deployed as an opportunity to present a contemporary image of multicultural postcolonialism and to foster new international relations on shared values of twenty-first century liberal democracy.*[246]

South Korea's, France's and Brazil's hosting of the Olympic and Paralympic Games have also achieved enduring cultural, social and economic benefits for these nations' people and communities. Drawing on case studies of these 3 countries, ANA has described Australia's upcoming hosting of the Olympics in Brisbane 2032 as an opportunity for deliberate and long-term engagement in international cultural relations.[247]

Two new studies focus on impacts of **smaller-scale cultural diplomacy programs.** One of the programs was hosted by Festivals Edinburgh, the British Council and Creative Scotland. From this program, the research established that cultural relations – similar to networks – have 'a curvilinear effect where an investment is required but more years of investment do not gain better outcomes' in the following areas:

- cultural exposure
- exchanges of cultural goods
- exchanges of people
- other.[248]

The second of these studies documented the outcomes of a cultural diplomacy initiative which sought to increase positive associations for Chinese culture with the Australian public through a theatrical production. The reported benefits were:

- positive diplomatic encounters
- a safe setting for public consideration of international tensions
- increased sensitivity to the complexity and diversity within Australia's different ethnic minority cultures.

The study nonetheless identified controversies and ambivalence about the production among some stakeholders. For this reason, the authors highlighted a 'need to consider the multiple and competing objectives, diverse publics and controversial receptions that cultural, diplomatic initiatives may bring to light'.[249]

A historical study examined the late Cold War period outcomes of Australia's peace engagements with Sri Lanka, which included trade, aid donations, cultural exchanges and diplomatic missions. Through archival materials and secondary sources, one of the study's conclusions was that 'Australian relations with Sri Lanka were further bolstered by social and cultural exchanges, including an Aboriginal art exhibition held in Colombo that was well received by the public'.[250]

This research illustrated the documented possibilities of integrating art into a peace-building dynamic and providing a resource for 'peacebuilders'.[251] The findings align with the academic evidence and global examples of cultural programs supporting reconciliation and recovery in post-conflict contexts, as recently reviewed by the British Council.[252]

Lastly, nations' cultural relations can clearly include **trade in creative goods and services through imports and exports**, resulting in export revenues. After the COVID-19 pandemic and since 2021, global data has revealed that the creative goods and creative services trade has experienced growth. Additionally, 25 out of the 36 countries that participated in a UNCTAD survey in 2024 on the topic of trade exchanges indicated that they had export promotion priorities and initiatives in place for creative goods and services.[253]

The most recent trade statistics compiled by UNCTAD provide a useful update on Australia's deficit in creative goods trade – a trend ANA first reported on in *Transformative 2019*. Using UNCTAD's most recent statistics, ANA estimates that for every $1 that Australia exports in creative goods, the nation imports $9.20.[254]

In addition:

- Australia does not feature in UNCTAD's top 10 creative economy exporters. These 10 exporters currently capture 70% of creative goods exports and 69% of creative services exports. [255]
- Based on UNCTAD statistics, the balance of Australia's creative goods trade declined from 2015 to 2022, as shown in **Table 1**.

A smaller study examined Australia's trade data through the lens of women's intercultural performance (1990s-2003). It found that the vast majority of international productions (77.4%) were still sourced from the UK and Western Europe, followed by the United States and Canada.[256]

The evidence in this section showcases how cultural relations deliver benefits for national reputations, diplomatic encounters and export earnings. These activities form part of the toolkit for Australia's diplomatic influence and engagement. However, the statistics indicate that imbalances remain in Australia's cultural relations. The new statistics reinforce ANA's previous policy recommendations for a better cultural relations future through planning, reporting and evaluating for impact as well as considering the establishment of an Australian international cultural relations institute.[257]

Table 1: Australia's creative goods trade performance, 2015-2022.

Australia	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Exports	1.05	1.15	1.33	1.31	1.34	1.07	1.28	1.26
Imports	8.53	8.44	9.04	9.51	9.01	8.73	10.80	11.57
Balance of trade	**-7.48**	**-7.29**	**-7.71**	**-8.20**	**-7.67**	**-7.65**	**-9.51**	**-10.31**

Data source/notes: Values in billions (US$). Adapted from the UNCTADstat creative goods matrix.[258]

Part 4

Health impacts

Finding:

Arts, culture and creativity support health and health determinants (e.g. social and economic environments) and provide a cost-effective complement to health services. Like any activity, creative and cultural engagement has positive and negative outcomes to consider when implementing policy and practice.

Measuring What Matters defines a healthy life as 'one that supports longevity, and physical and mental wellbeing'.[259] The framework includes indicators of life expectancy and the prevalence of mental health and chronic conditions, along with indicators for people's access to health services.

The COVID-19 pandemic sharply increased interest in mental health of the Australian population for good reason. In the early acute phase of the pandemic, a study of a representative sample of Australians indicated elevated depression and anxiety symptoms along with decreased psychological wellbeing.[260]

Transformative 2019 found that when used in both clinical and wellbeing settings, arts and culture deliver positive health and wellbeing impacts. That pre-pandemic review of impacts also showed the following factors:

- Arts and culture help with the prevention of ill health and the promotion of positive health outcomes via the social determinants of health.
- Incorporating arts and creative programs along with innovative and creative design solutions and aesthetics within health settings improves a wide range of patient outcomes, particularly in in-patient hospital contexts.
- Arts-based interventions help in recovery from a range of conditions, including addiction and stroke.
- Arts-based interventions have been found to reduce the risk of dementia.
- Arts engagement reduces depression and stress and improves self-worth in older Australians.

We have uncovered new evidence illustrating how arts, culture and creativity contribute to health in 2 ways, as follows:

1. **Promoting health and health determinants**
   - Creative and cultural engagement leads to positive health outcomes, with the strongest evidence being for mental wellbeing outcomes.
   - Like any recreational activity or occupation, creative and cultural engagement involves positive and negative outcomes, and emerging evidence illuminates these risks.

2. **Targeting returns on health investments**
   - Cultural activities can generate positive returns on investments at the state, community and workplace levels.

4.1. Promoting health and health determinants

Creative and cultural engagement leads to positive health outcomes, with the strongest evidence for health policy and practice being for mental wellbeing benefits.

A 2021 parliamentary inquiry highlighted a role for arts and culture in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as 'supporting the mental health and wellbeing of many Australians'.[261]

Similarly, when specifically asked to imagine life *without* arts and culture, middle Australians have described the far-reaching negative impacts as including effects on mental health. They have stated that a world without arts and culture would be 'colourless', depressing', 'uninspiring' and 'like a totalitarian state', comparing it to an 'authoritarian' or 'war-torn nation' or even something completely alien.[262]

Volumes of new studies describe beneficial health outcomes of arts engagement.[263] However, since ANA last reported on these impacts, academics have strongly argued that 'future progress [in health practice and policy development] should be guided by rigorous, systematic and transparent methods that ensure that [research] review results are trustworthy'.[264]

The following studies and outcomes stand out through this lens and threshold in the updated evidence base:

- Regarding the benefit of arts engagement, a rapid review found 'strong evidence' on mental wellbeing, 'moderate to strong evidence' on social health and 'emerging/low evidence' on healthy eating, physical activity, preventing tobacco use and preventing harm from alcohol.[265]
- A different rapid review uncovered 'emerging evidence' of positive mental health and wellbeing impacts of arts-inclusive programs related to music, artmaking and storytelling/drama for 0-to-6-year-olds.[266]
- A systematic review and meta-analysis discovered that the use of multiple art forms in interventions improves behaviour towards people with mental health problems ('mental-health-related stigma') to a small extent.[267]
- A systematic review found that choral singing and visual arts interventions have positive psychosocial outcomes for people with dementia and their informal caregivers.[268]

Australian approaches that closely align with – or were informed by – the growing body of evidence include:

- the statewide implementation of the Good Arts Good Mental Health initiative in Western Australia (e.g. via media campaigns, demonstration programs, and the delivery of multi-sector courses and professional development)[269]
- the formal recognition of alternate leisure settings such as dance studios and entertainment centres to increase physical activity and social connection.[270]

Jurisdictions, health portfolios and new partnerships could transpose these Australian examples. They can continue to use the results of such rigorous evidence reviews to inform their work and describe its impacts.

Another interesting investment example for all levels of government to consider that may widen access to the health benefits of creative and cultural engagement is the establishment of voucher programs with a health lens. In NSW, vouchers with a combined value of $100 were made available to eligible families with school-aged children to participate in sport, recreational, creative or cultural activities.[271] Victoria's Get Active Kids Program includes dance as an approved activity.[272]

Like any recreational activity or occupation, creative and cultural engagement involves both positive and negative outcomes.

Most new research in the health area has focused on the positive health outcome themes of creative and cultural engagement. In devising strategies through a health lens, it is critical to consider both positive and negative outcomes.

Only a small number of new studies have investigated the potential harms or risks to people's health of specific creative and cultural engagements. One of them identified 7 areas of potential harm:[273]

1. physical (e.g. musicogenic epilepsy or seizures)
2. affective (e.g. mood worsening and anxiety)
3. behavioural (e.g. maladaptive coping strategies, such as denial or disengagement)
4. cognitive (e.g. impaired focus of attention)
5. identity (e.g. intimidation)
6. interpersonal (e.g. isolation)
7. spiritual (e.g. impaired ability to experience meaning in life).[274]

We found only a single new study that empirically explores these harms. It used qualitative methods to understand the negative influences of music for a specific group of adults with autism:

> *According to our results, [the negative experiences] can either stem from the music itself (like its characteristics or the emotions it might spur) or from the context of music engagement (such as an uncomfortable setting or the fear of being evaluated by others).*[275]

To the best of ANA's knowledge, no new evidence published since 2019 links creative and cultural engagement with negative health outcomes in general populations in Australia. However, the findings of 'unbelonging' described in **Part 2** are certainly relevant to the discussion of social determinants of health.

Measuring What Matters notes: 'Other determinants of health – not currently captured in [the health] theme – include the social, environmental, structural, economic, cultural, biomedical, commercial and digital environments in which we live'. Similarly, health determinants may include occupational risks among the 'midstream factors' affecting individual and population health and wellbeing.[276] Here, a new International Labor Organisation report on the health and safety risks for arts and entertainment workers is relevant.[277]

Based on the International Labor Organisation consultations with the arts and entertainment industry, the health and safety risks to consider include:

- occupational risks of fall or injury in the dance sub-sector
- hazards of live performances in the layout of premises, the stage, scenic environments, sound levels and rehearsal spaces
- the requirement to work in remote locations, particularly in the film sector, and safety hazards experienced by workers during work in isolation
- violence and harassment aimed at online workers (and consumers)
- occupational safety and health risks facing computer programmers due to the number of hours they work and the ergonomics of their workspace
- the level of sound for sound programmers
- risks to children in the entertainment sector from digital exploitation and for 'kidfluencers' (children with large social media followings).[278]

4.2. Targeting returns on health investments

Cultural activities could generate positive returns on investments in health.

In Australia, the health system is funded by federal and state and territory governments as well as non-government funders such as private health insurers and individuals.

Health services are commonly provided by privately owned businesses, including general practice surgeries, specialist clinics, pharmacies, dental clinics and private hospitals. As noted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, they are delivered and supported by a range of health professionals, such as doctors, nurses, dentists, allied health workers and administrative staff.[279]

The following findings indicate that investing in arts, culture and creativity has been a cost-effective complement to Australia's health system:

- In Pinnaroo, Australia, a 3-year-long study found that the net benefits of an arts and cultural program for the community was $2.30 for every $1 invested in the project. This comprised 20% direct health system benefits, 20%-25% indirect health system benefits and the balance through broader economic benefits linked to cultural activity.[280]
- A study in Western Australia equated the total health benefits of government expenditure on artistic and cultural organisations to $28 million.[281]
- Research on a verbatim theatre play – *Grace Under Pressure* – in NSW hospitals showed that this engagement raised awareness about difficult workplace behaviour. The study's authors concluded that creative approaches can improve healthcare workplace culture, which in turn may improve cost-effectiveness and assist with retaining the workforce.[282]

These new economic understandings highlight the possibility for positive returns on investment at the community, state and workplace levels. The positive economic evaluations of these creative approaches follow the evidence of good outcomes for general populations in different facets of their health – for example, the strong evidence of the benefit of arts engagement on mental wellbeing, mentioned in **Part 4.1**.

In the context of projected national increases in health spending, researchers and entities could help governmental decision-making by continuing to grow this economic evidence base. This may inform governments as they consider the Productivity Commission's 5-year inquiry recommendation to help people remain active in the community and workplaces, in order to prevent strain on Australia's future health system.[283]

Finally, the evidence from these new economic evaluations coincides with the evidence of positive attitudes towards creative approaches and arts on prescription among some healthcare workers and the public (**Box 1**).

Box 1: Arts and culture on prescription – more research or private funding?

Arts on prescription is a form of social prescribing. According to the *Arts and Health Glossary*, social prescribing enables health practitioners to refer patients to local, non-clinical programs and services to address a range of psychosocial and socioeconomic issues.[284]

Social prescribing already occurs in Australia for sport activities and through particular programs. Typically, arts on prescription is intended not to replace conventional medical treatment but rather to act as an adjunct or complement to promote wellbeing, creativity and social engagement, as also noted in the *Arts and Health Glossary*.[285]

New evidence shows positive attitudes among some stakeholders about these potentially varied prescription programs. For example, survey respondents in Australia support socially prescribed arts and culture when asked about it. In one survey, 80% of respondents (n = 1,060) said they were 'very open or somewhat open to a cultural or creative activity in the prescribed treatment for a mental health condition they were experiencing'.[286]

Other new evidence illustrates healthcare practitioners reporting that they could value creative methods, including as part of a holistic or complementary healthcare approach.[287,288]

According to one study, several questions must be answered to trial the impact of such interventions as effective for anxiety and depression, including the following:

- 'Do community interventions work regardless of the severity of an individual's mental illness?'
- 'Are they most effective as an early intervention, primary prevention or rehabilitation?'
- 'Do we need to match the intervention to the population for it to be effective?'
- 'Which [interventions] are suited to social prescribing?'[289]

In this context, one of the Productivity Commission's suggestions to achieve 'incremental gains in productivity' is by 'progressing greater flexibility for life insurers to fund (on a discretionary basis) some approved health-like services'. It is seen as particularly crucial in areas such as mental health. This suggestion would first involve commencing a broader review of Australia's risk protection and social insurance arrangements, focusing on removing barriers to innovative service models by insurers.[290]

This broader reform recommendation is relevant to understanding the potential of scaling out arts on prescription in Australia and increasing access to creative and cultural engagement, with all its benefits.

Part 5

Sustainability impacts

Finding:

Culture influences environmental sustainability through its associated skills, practices and behaviours. This includes helping people and places to recover from natural disasters, adapt and develop future solutions. That said, related negative environmental impacts include emissions of the value chain – from the design and production to the distribution, consumption and disposal of creative goods and services.

Measuring What Matters defines a sustainable society in the following 2 ways: 1) a society that protects, repairs and manages the environment and 2) a resilient and sustainable nation.

The new evidence of impacts explored in this section falls within these 2 understandings of sustainability. For the purpose of this section, sustainability refers to individuals' and groups' use of natural resources and protection of the environment. That is, *Transformative Edge 2024* explores evidence on fiscal sustainability and economic resilience – 2 additional indicators of sustainability in *Measuring What Matters* – under the prosperity theme, in **Part 1**.

Transformative 2019 described the evidence that arts and cultural activities could help communities in both urban and rural Australia move towards environmentally sustainable development solutions and cope with a more volatile climate. For example, we reported the findings of creative activities helping:

- children to re-engage with learning and expected behaviours
- Aboriginal Elders to come to terms with their own healing from the disasters
- individuals who found themselves isolated following the disasters to find networks and connect with communities
- participants to gain new skills they felt were transferable outside the arts sector.

We uncovered new evidence illustrating how arts, culture and creativity contribute to sustainability in 2 ways:

1. Embedding more sustainable consumption and production

— Consumer awareness of an object's creation context and viewing artworks could influence sustainable consumption.

— Artistic outputs and objects diffuse knowledge about sustainability topics, such as resource use, the declining numbers of threatened species and the physical impacts of climate change – a tool of climate communication.

2. Mitigating, adapting and responding to climate change

— Culture helps communities to preserve natural and built environments and recover from climate-related disasters.

— Culture could assist the transition to net-zero emissions by helping people to move beyond symptomatic solutions towards developing adaptable solutions, structures and systems.

— Creative and cultural activities are having environmentally damaging impacts upstream and downstream, with these challenges increasingly coming into focus for people and companies operating in the creative economy.

5.1. Embedding more sustainable consumption and production

Consumer awareness of an object's creation context and viewing artworks can influence sustainable consumption.

Behaviour and attitude change is a theme in the updated evidence. This area of research seeks to understand how cultural and creative engagement could influence how people feel and act in relation to environment-related issues. In other words, the studies explore the complex psychology of sustainable consumption.[291]

One research work compared people's responses to manufactured objects with their responses to art and craft objects. The arts and craft object category produced greater distress at the prospect of their destruction and elicited the intent to preserve the objects if damaged. People also rated the art and craft objects as more environmentally sustainable than manufactured objects. This study concluded that 'framing the same object as produced in an art, craft, or manufacturing context results in different evaluative and behavioral consequences'.[292]

A different study illustrated that people's support for climate change policies may increase in response to artworks. When hundreds of people were confronted with 37 climate-related artworks presented during the 21st UN climate summit in Paris, their climate policy support increased, at least in the short term.[293]

The OECD has recognised that cultural events – with their significant audiences and potential scale – could also help inform behavioural changes that support sustainability.[294] To improve reporting about these types of impacts, the OECD suggests using the environmental impact indicator of 'percentage of target groups reporting a change towards more sustainable behaviours'. The specific changes that the OECD indicates could be measured include the following: reduced food waste; more efficient energy use in the home; decreased car use; decreased flying; increased recycling; reduced plastic use; and reduced buying of new things.[295]

Another study offered a taxonomy for further examination of the aesthetic impacts of visual arts, with 'testable hypotheses about how art advances understanding'.[296] It highlighted several emotional states that engaging with artwork can evoke, as follows:

1. angry/enraged
2. calm
3. challenged
4. compassionate/empathetic
5. edified
6. enlightened
7. enraptured
8. inspired
9. interested
10. pleased
11. upset.[297]

Using this taxonomy in practice in Australia may involve adapting its terms. For example, entertainment is one of the most common motivations to attend arts and cultural events.[298] Therefore, the term 'entertained' also warrants consideration if the taxonomy is to be taken forward in research, policy or practice.

Collectively, these impacts and improved measurements may be harnessed to help shift Australia's economy from a linear to a circular mode, uplift the nation's circularity rating and, ultimately, reduce environmental impacts.[299]

Artistic outputs and objects diffuse knowledge about sustainability topics, such as resource use, the declining numbers of threatened species and the physical impacts of climate change – a tool of climate communication.

Measuring What Matters' indicators of a sustainable society include air quality, biological diversity, resource use and waste generation. Other technical indicators of a sustainable society are collated on the government website of Environment Information Australia and in the 2021 State of the Environment (SOE) report.

The 2021 SOE climate-related findings were as follows:

- Australia's climate varies widely.
- Our overall climate is changing.
- Global greenhouse gas concentrations continue to increase.

Together, these new sources in Australia are seeking to bridge informational gaps in public awareness, as well as supporting decisions about public wellbeing, environmental protection and climate action.

In this same vein, arts, culture and creativity are used to diffuse knowledge on diverse environmental sustainability topics. New studies highlight:

- Marine mammal paleo-art in museums, public art landscape installations, botanical street art and art addressing the topic of anthropogenic environmental destruction are *platforms* to introduce, communicate and provide context for the ongoing biodiversity crisis,[300] flooding due to sea level rises,[301] plant awareness[302] and habitat destruction.[303]
- Drama, journal making and craft are *media* through which children talk and learn together. They share this learning with families and the local community and deepen their situated knowledge in an ecosystem.[304]
- Studio production practices could be a *means* of experimentation and transformation for plastic waste pollution in communities to achieve outcomes in Sustainable Development Goals 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 14 (Life Below Water) and 15 (Life on Land). In this case, the practices involve recycling plastic bags into textiles.[305]

Scientists and governments could harness creative mediums, platforms and means in their public engagements to maximise their knowledge diffusion objective and inspire non-scientific audiences to take action. This is commonly referred to as climate communication.

Additionally, this research indicates that arts and cultural organisations could adopt a sustainability lens in their programming choices if they are not already doing so. For example, Australia has a new National Centre for Environmental Art.[306] A global study of the creative economy has highlighted Australia's visual arts sector in embracing sustainable development topics, referring to the 'Big Weather' exhibition of the National Gallery of Victoria.[307]

5.2. Mitigating, adapting and responding to climate change

Culture helps communities to preserve natural and built environments and recover from climate-related disasters.

In *Measuring What Matters*, the sustainability theme includes indicators and estimates to measure Australia's protection of landmass and marine areas and disaster resilience. More broadly, we know that extreme weather events, such as floods, cyclones, bushfires and heatwaves, are among the largest risks to the nation's built environment and the people who live in it. [308]

The dynamic relationship between culture and environmental protection through a sustainability lens received attention in Australia with the World Heritage Register listing of the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape in southwestern Victoria in 2019. According to one study, the listing 'undermines a longstanding distinction made in heritage assessment between tangible (material) and intangible (immaterial) categories by instead seeing these as interdependent and 'constitutive entanglements' of everyday life'.[309]

ANA's middle Australia series noted that cultural icons that commonly come to mind include Uluru, the Great Barrier Reef and the Sydney Opera House. Young middle Australians see environmental heritage protection and cultural heritage protection as being closely related and sometimes even synonymous.[310]

This section seeks to explore the updated evidence of impacts on sustainability, cognisant of these connections.

Cultural heritage around the world helps protect and conserve nature – **landmasses and marine areas**. For instance, one study examined the effect of cultural practices on protecting environments and people from biodiversity loss, drinking water scarcity and global warming. It suggested that the local karst heritage could be used to address these issues.[311]

In Australia, a study by CSIRO demonstrated that cultural burning[312] is the best fire management for conserving the Backwater Grevillea, a threatened species of low spreading shrub.[313]

The co-benefits of cultural ecosystem services in coastal areas include 'a mutual connection between: 'doing' (undertaking an activity), environmental awareness and appreciation, the formation of attachment to place, and having positive experiences'. The cultural practices identified include the pursuit of interests such as photography. The region of the study – the South Australian coastline from Torrens Island to Thompson Beach – also serves as a meeting place and a site for spiritual and traditional activities. [314]

Researchers in this South Australia case study proposed that planners and policymakers enhance these co-benefits by increasing access to the relevant coastal areas for recreation and tourism. In considering the access, however, the study described possible trade-offs as being the human impacts of pollution, off-road vehicle use and development.[315]

A larger cross-country comparison associated public sustainable transport use with cultural environments in the **built environments** of cities and neighbourhoods. The cultural environments are characterised by the presence of arts amenities[316] and artists. The research linked the presence of such amenities in Chicago, Paris and Seoul with sustainable transport uses by the population of walking, bicycling and public transit use, even after controlling for the density and demographic factors of these cities.[317]

The policy and planning options recommended in this study to maximise this impact include:

- arts and culture in transit (e.g. incorporating art and music at bike, bus and subway stations; repainting crosswalks; and widening sidewalks with decorated outdoor seating to artistically reflect the sub-culture of a neighbourhood)
- consideration of the proximity of arts and culture for people (e.g. where people live and work in relation to entertainment and transit services)
- arts and culture in existing streets and public spaces (e.g. actively using public areas in cultural programs)
- the broader design of urban environments (e.g. to accommodate walking between places and arts amenities).

In addition to environmental protection, it is becoming increasingly clear that Australia is going to need 'disaster-resilient' communities to face events such as floods, cyclones, bushfires and heatwaves. Research shows that the hazards extend to include UNESCO World Heritage listed cultural properties.[318] Typically, disaster-resilient communities are those which function well under stress, are successful at adaptation and have social capacity.[319]

The following outcomes of a disaster preparation, recovery and resilience initiative in NSW with creative activities are particularly relevant. The initiative led to:

- feelings that participants could cope with emergencies
- feelings that participants could adjust to changing circumstances.[320]

Post-disaster recovery initiatives have included a collaborative metal sculpture, a series of workshops, exhibitions and live performance events in wildfire-prone Victoria.[321] Service providers have used arts and creativity to effectively support community resilience in rural Queensland communities.[322] The 2021 theatre production *Kick off ya Boots* was repeated due to its success in 2022 and demonstrated to audiences 'several practical ways that farmers could use to effectively manage in difficult circumstances'.[323]

Another publicly available output of these cultural activities in Australia is *In the Time of Refuge,* a collection of writings and reflections on art, disaster and communities. The book offers a unique operational insight into the approach of Arts House at the time – to 'build a community around the problem [...] through a years-long inquiry into the nexus of art, community and emergency services'.[324]

These seemingly disparate initiatives all involve creativity and have strong community involvement, as did the process of achieving the World Heritage Register listing of the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. They reinforce the ongoing work and coordination by cross-industry experts, entrepreneurs and civil society to highlight the role of arts and culture in recovery and resilience, including through the National Taskforce for Creative Recovery.[325]

In policy discussions about protecting landmasses and marine areas with cultural value, other significant heritage reforms have been recommended. These include the recommendations of the 2020 inquiry into the destruction of 46,000-year-old caves at the Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara region of Western Australia covering:

- an overarching Commonwealth legislative framework
- implementation of *Dhawura Ngilan: A Vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage in Australia*
- a model for a cultural heritage truth-telling process
- a review of related governance arrangements.[326]

Culture could assist transitions – including to net-zero emissions – by helping people move beyond symptomatic solutions towards addressing the basic causes of unsustainability.

Climate change is predicted to have negative, cascading consequences on the wellbeing of current and future generations. As new problems emerge, 'collective adaptation can take very different and sometimes unanticipated trajectories'.[327]

This adaptation challenge is proving complex to navigate for governments and stakeholders, both through policy and in practice. The future of regional and remote Australian communities is the central focus of adaptation, as are industries facing pronounced climate-related risks because they depend directly upon the natural environment as a key input (e.g. tourism).[328] On this topic, the Productivity Commission recommends:

> *Adaptation policy should support individual, household and business decisions about what regions, sectors, and occupations they are best placed to transition into. Governments have a role in helping people make informed adaptation decisions and should avoid policy settings that inadvertently constrain them.*[329]

More recently, the Regional Institute of Australia has projected that the net-zero transition for regional Australia will be a 'social, economic, technological, environmental and cultural transition'.[330]

Many benefits of arts, culture and creativity relevant to tackling this transition have already been laid out by *Transformative Edge 2024*. In sum, these include the impacts of:

- diversified incomes, job satisfaction, and future-oriented and creative thinking skills
- belonging and connection
- civic engagement
- mental wellbeing
- coping and adjusting to new circumstances.

Middle Australians believe that creative and cultural engagement offers these multidimensional benefits.[331]

In engaging different communities and industries in Australia with complex transitions, the following additional insights from the evidence are also relevant:

- Songwriting could facilitate interdisciplinary engagement with communities in Australia on the topic of their changing environment.[332]
- The use of arts methods in research reveals unexpected synergies, mutual learning towards change, and citizenly roles and responsibilities.[333]
- Culture could play 'a strong role in creating, sustaining and breaking [underlying structures and mental models that fuel un-sustainability] and should therefore be [the] first point of intervention if wanting to change these'.[334]
- Comedy is being used to 'meet people where they are' and could be a method of improving awareness, efficacy, feeling/emotion/affect, engagement/problem solving, learning and new knowledge formation in relation to climate change.[335]

Researchers are using arts methods to produce new knowledge and to help make meaning in data collection across academic disciplines.[336] Specifically, such approaches could support the empowerment of – and research participants' control in – the conduct of research. They could also enable discussions on complex and sensitive issues between participants and researchers and support empathy with others in diverse research contexts.[337]

In the context of global sustainability targets, a study has also described creativity as the 'routine activities of working with concrete things together' and as 'low-hanging fruit' in global challenge research.[338]

In this varied and somewhat disjointed body of evidence, arts, culture and creativity are increasingly positioned to aid in systems thinking, systems change and longer-term action on climate or sustainability. Broadly speaking, systems thinking recognises that individual components or events are 'part of larger, interconnected systems' and may help society to move beyond 'end-of-pipe' solutions.[339]

A related possibility and gap in current cultural policy has been articulated as follows:

> *As our natural environment is arguably the realm that is most cogently contextualising our sense of global belonging and survival today, it can form the bedrock for this renewed sense of belonging, shared human responsibility, and citizenship, with international cultural policy embracing this foundation and cultivating its development. To date – and to the best of [their] knowledge – this principle has not found its place in actual policy strategies.*[340]

In a policy context, the cultural and creative industries could collaborate with governments on policies that spotlight existing efforts to leverage arts and culture to gather, inspire, educate and connect Australians with climate resilience and adaptation strategies. Australia's Climate Solutions Centre is a museum-based example that such policies could highlight.[341]

Investors seeking systems changes through arts and culture might draw on the following practical recommendations of the British Council in this space:

- **Process-focused design, implementation and evaluation approaches**: This opportunity largely involves investors and others shifting or extending their understandings of the objectives of their investments. The broad shift is from investing in the outcomes of arts and culture to investing in how the funded program is providing space and processes for community-driven experimentation. Arts-based methods (see descriptions above) are recommended for doing so.
- **Leveraging culture's benefits in sustainable development through cross-sectoral partnerships**: This opportunity refers to establishing new alliances and partnerships with entities that do not necessarily identify as cultural actors. These relationships may be established through the whole process of designing, implementing and evaluating programs aimed at addressing global challenges.[342]

The cultural and creative industries could also play a part in driving impacts in this area. This may include considering the newly published informational resources about trends in best practices, opportunities and barriers of using culture to support systems change objectives.[343] It could also involve considering any opportunities to work *within* government, such as through initiatives to embed artists/arts and cultural workers in government agencies.[344,345]

All stakeholders facing the pressing, complex environmental challenge of transitioning to net zero and adapting to a changing climate could seek to understand how arts and culture may be both 'part of the problem and key to the solution'.[346] This reality appears in the context of tourism and employment through the following new insights of national studies:

- First Nations artists may view cultural tourism as culturally insensitive or even damaging, notwithstanding the economic wellbeing benefits.[347]
- One-third of museums, galleries and manufactured outdoor sites (e.g. stadiums) face risks that fall into the high-climate-risk categories of the Zurich-Mandala Climate Risk Index.[348]
- However, a majority of museums/galleries and manufactured outdoor sites fall into the 'lower risk' category of the Zurich-Mandala Climate Risk Index. For context, all vineyards, national parks, scenic roads and railroads face significant climate risk.[349]

Regarding some arts and cultural tourism assets facing the diverse and varying climate change risks and impacts described, the following recommendations provide practical options:

- overall, more emphasis on site planning for manufactured sites, such as airports, railways, roads and museums
- in museums and galleries, flood risk management plans and use of flood-resistant materials in construction; and ensuring contents of particular importance are stored in moisture-controlled environments and not in basements
- in arenas and stadiums, extreme heat adaptation measures incorporated into building design (e.g. reflective paints to roof surfaces, retractable roofs); and natural ventilation and shading through green spaces and trees.[350]

The next section discusses a separate category of sustainability challenges for the creative industries in the updated evidence: their direct and indirect contributions to greenhouse gas emissions.

Creative and cultural activities are having environmentally damaging impacts upstream and downstream, with these challenges increasingly coming into focus for the people and companies operating in the creative economy.

Government and non-government investors in Australia have a focus on sustainability and net-zero transitions. For example, Australia now has an internal policy requirement for high-value procurements to address environmental impacts.[351] People looking to engage with cultural and creative industries may begin to demand greater environmental sustainability from creative businesses' operations (e.g. within visual arts sectors).[352]

Two new quantitative analyses provide useful context on negative environmental impacts of arts, culture and creativity:

- A majority of the global **visual arts sector's** carbon footprint – which is in the order of 70 million tonnes of CO_2 per annum – is due to visitor travel emissions.[353]
- The **fashion industry** accounts for 'around 4% of emissions globally, equivalent to the combined annual GHG emissions of France, Germany and the United Kingdom'.[354]

In addition, UNCTAD has thematically grouped together the direct and indirect environmental impacts[355] of the creative industries. To summarise, this includes:

- **advertising** production processes and printed materials
- **architectural** office and computer-based work
- **craft** material use across the value chain
- **film and television** transportation
- **music** manufacturing, streaming, touring, venues and festival activities
- **performing arts** premises and the travel of companies and audiences
- **publishing** printing processes
- **video game** manufacturing.

More broadly, UNCTAD has recommended that creative economy businesses pay attention to the entirety of their value chains, including the design and production, distribution, consumption and disposal of their products.[356]

To help Australia meet international obligations for net-zero emissions, and as these challenges increasingly come into focus, new informational resources are available to assist Australian cultural and creative industries and governments. They include:

- the European Commission's review of creative programming contributions to climate and biodiversity mainstreaming[357]
- best practice approaches that businesses in Australia are using to set (and report on) net-zero commitments and targets[358]
- a new global roadmap to help the textile sector, which is struggling to address its impacts, including its significant natural resource use and pollution.[359]

Concluding thoughts

Transformative Edge 2024 has described evidence of the impacts of creative and cultural activities in 5 intersecting areas of people's wellbeing.

We established that arts, culture and creativity contribute to prosperous, cohesive, secure, healthy and sustainable societies. New evidence expresses these 5 areas of co-benefit as economic wellbeing, social health, feelings and experiences of safety, mental wellbeing and community resilience in a changing climate.

The multidimensional impacts of people's time use in arts and culture are benefitting populations in Australia, worldwide, in person, online and virtually. The newest evidence demonstrates benefits across varied settings, including at home, work and school and in hospitals, prisons, communities, cultural institutions and leisure environments, such as dance studios and entertainment centres.

We also established that a rich cultural life may provide Australia with an unexpected edge. That is, creative and cultural engagement – here and around the world – could help Australia tackle the complex challenges facing future generations.

In addition to positively influencing PCSHS Wellbeing, creative and cultural engagement could have negative impacts, which policy and practice may need to consider and manage. Such effects include the following: 1) experiences of disinterest, disengagement or exclusion from the activities among certain groups and people under the **social cohesion** theme; 2) risks to health and safety in selected professional and public engagements under the **health** theme; and 3) environmental harms under the **sustainability** theme.

As a non-partisan, evidence-based think tank, ANA's Insight Reports provide research and analysis into arts and cultural policy topics. Therefore, *Transformative Edge 2024* has highlighted various cultural policy and practice examples that illustrate the research insights in practice.

To ensure continued creative and cultural engagement for all people in Australia, wherever they live and whoever they are, *Transformative Edge 2024* has also suggested 3 strategic actions for governments:

- a national cultural plan or strategy
- a national partnership agreement
- a review of the investments in – and blockages to – culture and creativity across portfolios.

Overall, this research has reinforced our confidence in the direct and positive impacts of culture and creativity on people and communities. All Australians – no matter where they live – should have access to cultural and creative activities and experiences which are meaningful to them.

Appendix: methods and limitations

How was this research conducted?

We began this research by keyword searching multidisciplinary online journals, notably through the following databases:

- Australia New Zealand Reference Centre Plus
- Informit e-Library: humanities & social sciences
- Academic Search Complete.

The search terms and their synonyms were selected based on the *Measuring What Matters* themes, indicators and synonyms (**Figure 5**).

We read the publications and identified additional records by manually searching the reference lists of the articles. We located over 250 relevant articles, documents and evaluations. We also sought advice from experts on additional relevant materials and bodies of research literature.

These methods returned peer-reviewed quantitative, mixed-method and qualitative articles, along with systematic and other types of literature reviews (e.g. rapid and scoping reviews). Evaluation reports by government departments, international organisations and other institutions were also located.

Figure 5 – Preliminary search terms used in this research.

Arts OR Cultur* OR Creativ*	AND	Impact OR Outcome OR Effect OR Benefit	AND	Prosperity OR economi* OR income OR productivity OR innovation Cohesion OR trust OR belonging OR connection Security OR peace OR violence OR justice OR safety OR homeless Health OR life expectancy OR chronic Sustainability OR emission OR waste OR 'air quality'

We did not limit inclusion by methodology. Therefore, for interested readers, it may be helpful to become familiar with the different typologies and hierarchies of evidence and their translation into different spaces.

Resources for this include:

- the BetterEvaluation Resource Library, which provides information about the array of evaluation methods and approaches[360]
- the National Health and Medical Research framework ranking matrix, which includes 'level of evidence' as an indicator of the degree to which bias has been eliminated by the study design[361]
- the typology of methods for answering specific questions and conceptualising a study's strengths and weaknesses given in **Table 2**.

Table 2 – Questions for considering types of academic evidence for different research questions (symbol '+' indicates the relative contribution of different methods)

Research question	Qualitative research	Survey	Case control studies	Cohort studies	Randomised controlled trials	Quasi-experimental studies	Non-experimental studies	Systematic reviews
Effectiveness Does this work? Does doing this work better than doing that?				+	++	+		+++
Process of service delivery How does it work?	++	+					+	+++
Salience Does it matter?	++	++						+++
Safety Will it do more good than harm?	+		+	+	++	+	+	+++
Acceptabilty Will people be willing to or want to take up the service offered?	++	+			+	+	+	+++
Cost effectiveness Is it worth buying this service?								+++
Appropriateness Is this the right service for these people?	++	++						++
Satisfaction with the service Are users, providers, and other stakeholders satisfied with the service?	++	++	+	+				+

Sources/notes: ANA adapted this table of questions from an example designed to help health care practitioners. The authors note it may have wider applicability and suggest the use of a typology rather than a hierarchy to indicate relative contributions that different kinds of methods can make to different kinds of research questions.[362]

What are the limitations of this research?

There are 3 limitations of this research.

First, the scope of this summary of evidence is limited to sources published since 2019.

This decision to focus on the updated evidence was driven by the desire to avoid duplicating the research undertaken for *Transformative 2019*. This meant we were unable to comment on examples or impacts that were published in sources outside this scope, activities and initiatives yet to be evaluated, and evaluations yet to be published. It also meant we were unable to comment on the significant unpublished knowledge about the impacts of arts, culture and creativity.

However, we included the key findings of several systematic reviews summarising older evidence. In addition, the key findings of *Transformative 2019* are included in *Transformative Edge 2024* to situate this new information.

Second, in reviewing this complex body of research and evidence, it is likely that certain studies, evaluations and sources were missed. ANA took care to retrieve the maximum number of relevant studies, using multiple methods to locate evidence and findings across primary sources.

Third, while ANA used the 5 central themes of *Measuring What Matters* in this report, consistent with the aims of the research, it is important to note that other wellbeing frameworks exist in Australia and abroad.

Readers may therefore also wish to complement their understandings of other wellbeing and impact frameworks, such as the Cultural Development Network's Cultural Development Planning Framework,[363] individual jurisdictions' frameworks (e.g. that of the Australian Capital Territory)[364] or the OECD's wellbeing framework.[365]

Readers should also note that *Measuring What Matters* and its underpinning indicators may change over time.

Notes and references

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The specifically engaged First Nations respondents were people living in regional and remote communities across the following 4 locations: Dubbo in NSW, Cairns and Yarrabah in QLD and Katherine in the NT. Creative Australia, "Creating Value," 19.

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