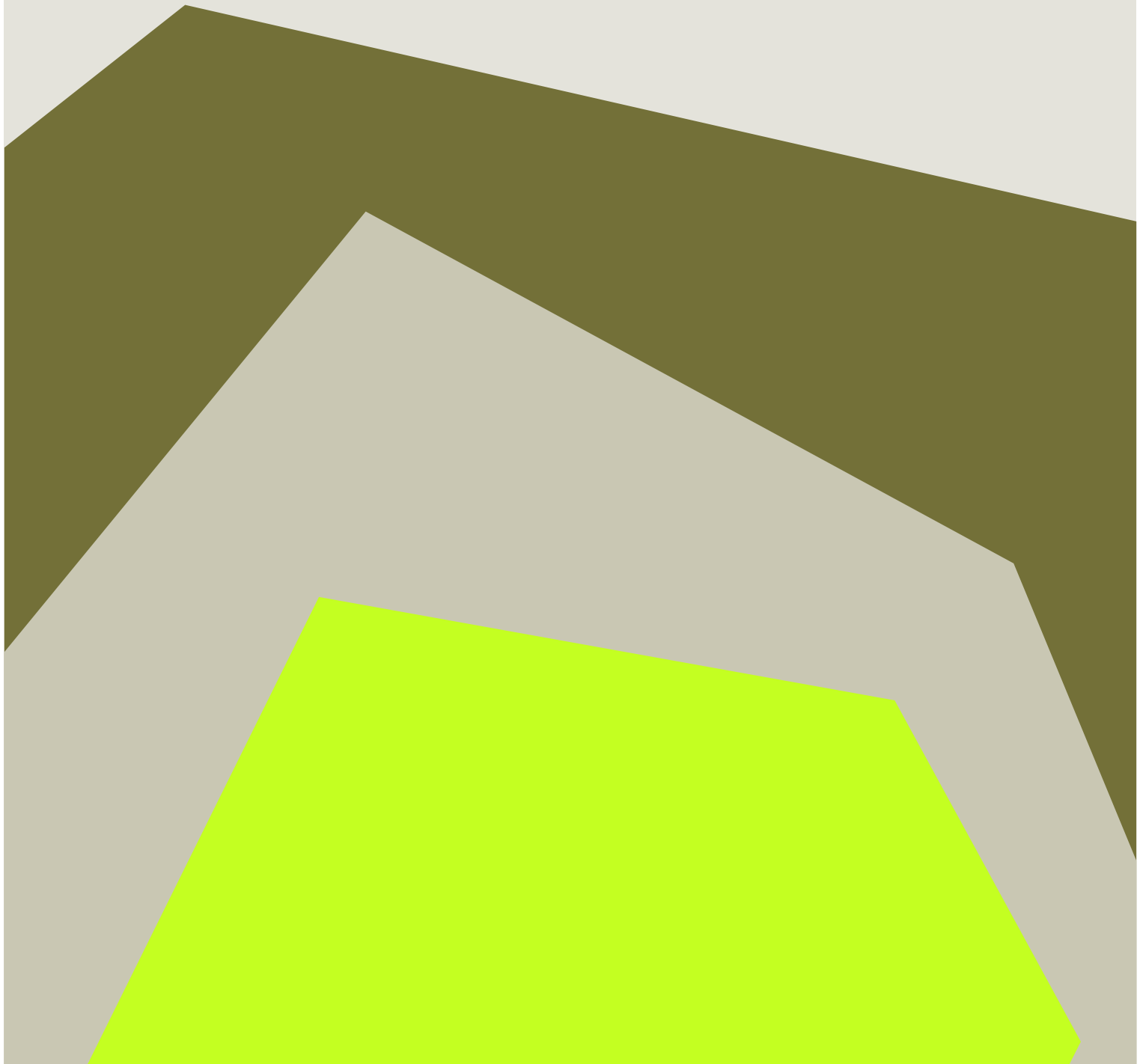


Opportunity to action: The Big Picture

April 2026



What should Australian governments be doing now to make the most of their cultural investment?

Government investment in arts and culture increased in 2023–24.¹

Funding by the three levels of government – federal, state and territory, and local – for arts and cultural activities totalled \$8.6 billion in 2023–24. This is the highest level of investment recorded in 17 years of data, and a 4% increase from the immediately preceding data in 2021–22.

But this headline does not tell the whole story.

Government, organisation and household budgets continue to be under strain. Media reports and other anecdotal evidence of current financial pressures within the arts, culture and creativity system² sit alongside the reality that Australians still want to enjoy cultural and creative experiences, and expect federal, state and territory, and local governments to help make these accessible.

The most recent Cultural Funding by Governments (CFG) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data show us that:

- **Government investment in arts and culture is not keeping pace with population growth.**³ Australia's population increased by 27% between 2007–08 and 2023–24 to 27 million, while expenditure on arts and culture increased by 19%.
- **Capital expenditure consumes an increasing share of government investment in arts and culture.**⁴ Capital expenditure accounted for 18% of arts and culture expenditure in 2023–24. This is up from 11% in 2007–08. From 2007–08 to 2023–24 there was a steady 14% decrease in per capita recurrent expenditure, which includes funding for the running of organisations and programs. Over the same period, per capita capital expenditure increased by 50%.
- **On a GDP basis, Australia is spending around one-quarter less than its OECD peers on 'recreation, culture and religion'.**⁵ In 2023, Australia ranked 25 out of 31 OECD countries for government investment in this category.

In a fiscally challenging environment, this data indicates that governments should pursue **strategic and structural change to maximise government investment in Australia's arts and culture system.**

Now is the time to act. ANA research shows that arts, culture and creativity is a core driver of flourishing people, cohesive communities, resilient economies, productive nations and connected regions.⁶ Australian governments can leverage significant momentum for action on the role of culture and creativity in driving wellbeing and productivity, galvanised by Brisbane 2032 and its potential for generational cultural, social and economic impacts.

Action: Stronger collaboration for enabling action

Direct funding from all three levels of government is a crucial source of revenue for Australia's cultural and creative industries.

All levels of government in Australia invest across a diverse range of arts and cultural activities that contribute to the cultural life of the nation.⁷

- Federal and state and territory governments each invest in all categories of arts and culture, but the focus of their expenditure varies.⁸ The federal government has typically accounted for more than 90% of government expenditure in the Film, Radio and Television category. State and territory governments have typically contributed more than 60% of government investment in the Museums, Archives, Libraries and Heritage category and, since 2019–20, more than 70% into the Arts category.⁹
- The scale of state and territory governments' annual investment in arts and culture now surpasses that of the federal government, contributing 39% of government funding to the federal government's 36% in 2023–24.¹⁰
- Local governments contributed \$2.2 billion (25%) to arts and culture investment in 2023–24.¹¹

Governments should work together to make the most of their cultural investment.

Creating the right conditions for collaboration

The Big Picture Opportunity 1

Australian governments should create the right conditions for collaboration with a 10-year National Arts and Culture Strategy, and a Ministerial Council focused on cultural access and the cultural and creative industries.

Governments can act now to establish a long-term approach to cultural policy that is **multi-partisan and multi-government**. This will facilitate enduring cooperation between governments and establish a foundation for the collaboration of government with industry, philanthropy, and business over the next decade.¹²

- **A 10-year National Arts and Culture Strategy** with shared outcomes and measurements will allow all Australian governments to align their efforts and use their resources in a way that complements (but does not replace) arts and culture policies at national, state and territory, and local government levels. Importantly, having a shared goal or vision for Australia's arts and culture system is one of the most powerful levers for system change available to government.¹³
- **A Ministerial Council focused on cultural access and the cultural and creative industries** will provide a powerful intergovernmental forum for resolving priorities and making decisions across all three levels of government. It will provide a consistent forum to support structural reform and maximise cultural investment.

Utilising the full suite of government enabling actions

The Big Picture Opportunity 2

All levels of government should utilise the full suite of government enabling actions to complement and enhance current direct funding by government.

With long-term trends showing that government investment in Australia's arts and culture system continues to lag behind OECD peers¹⁴ and is not keeping pace with population growth,¹⁵ it is critical that all levels of government make the most of their power to help the arts and culture system thrive.

There is a broad range of actions that governments can take to strengthen equitable cultural access and foster robust cultural industries that **complement and enhance direct funding**.¹⁶

These enabling actions can **facilitate financial inflows, facilitate operations and increase engagement opportunities**.¹⁷ They include:¹⁸

- fit-for-purpose and streamlined initiatives
- legislation, regulations and standards
- measures to develop skills, career pathways and knowledge sharing
- measures that facilitate co-investment and collaboration
- non-commercial rates
- indirect industry assistance
- accessible information, promotion and marketing
- special consideration for eligibility and exemptions.

When using these actions, governments should:¹⁹

- use systems thinking to understand the full suite of powers and associated enabling actions available to them
- prioritise opportunities where they are uniquely equipped to act and where they will have the greatest benefit
- use everyday settings like schools, homes and online as entry points for generating cultural and creative skills across Australia's population.

Action: Better data for confident decision-making

A thriving arts and culture system that delivers for all Australians depends on high-quality data

The Big Picture Opportunity 3

All levels of government should deliver better data for confident decision-making by improving data collection and analysis, sharing more granular Cultural Funding by Government (CFG) data, expanding the CFG survey to ask jurisdictions about enablers beyond currently reported expenditure, and experimenting with reporting about returns on government investment in arts and culture.

The CFG dataset is Australia's most comprehensive dataset on cultural funding by all three levels of government. More can be done to ensure policy, industry and investment leaders have the data they need to make confident decisions.

Governments should:

- **Improve data collection and analysis** to help system stewards understand perspectives, harmonise statistics, connect data and solve problems, supporting new or improved cross-jurisdictional and cross-portfolio ways of working.
- **Share more granular CFG data**, including greater detail on the government agencies participating in the dataset and disaggregated data on the distribution of federal investment to states and territories.²⁰
- **Expand the CFG survey to ask jurisdictions about enablers beyond currently reported expenditure** to increase awareness of enabler prevalence and options across jurisdictions.²¹
- **Experiment with reporting on the returns of government investment in arts and culture**, such as aligning reporting with the benefits these investments deliver for cultural organisations, creative individuals and communities in Australia. More broadly, it could include articulating policy objectives and aligning different statistical data collections and estimates (such as '[Australia's Cultural and Creative Workforce](#)' and '[Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia](#)') with evaluation and, where possible, releasing underlying data for this reporting on a regular basis.

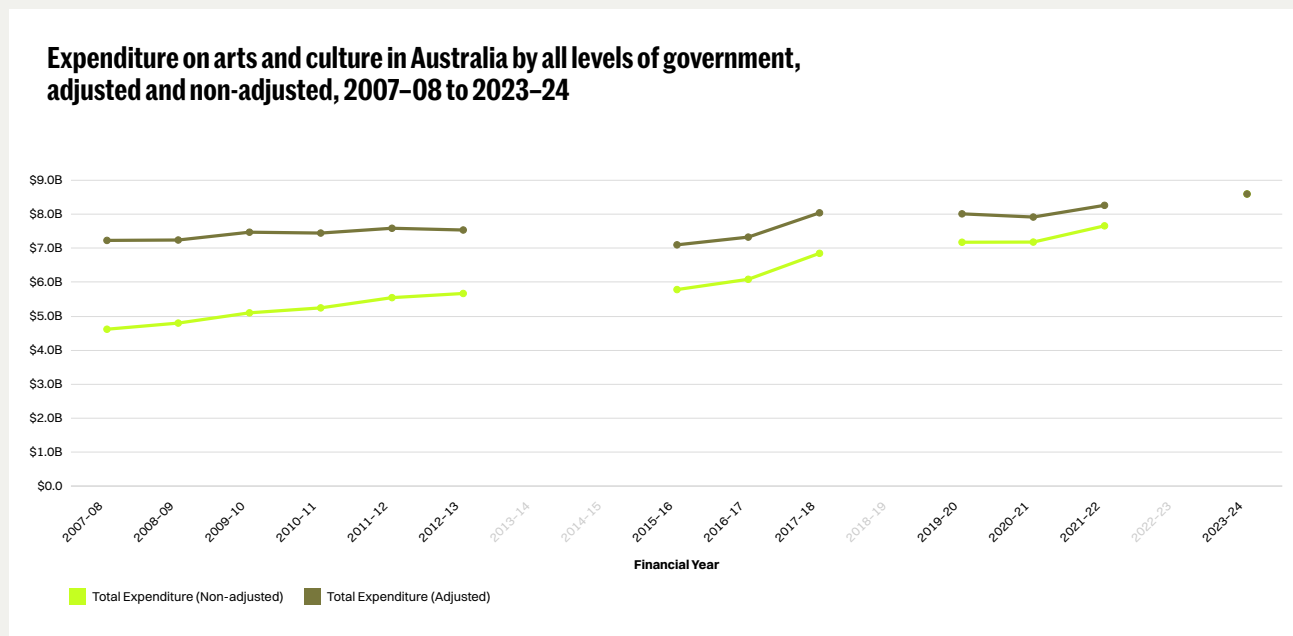
Pursuing these opportunities will enable confident decisions that leverage arts and culture to address Australia's cultural, social and economic challenges, including declining cohesion, stagnating productivity and the unpredictable risks posed by new technologies. The scale of the opportunity of arts and culture is immense – it is a core driver of flourishing people, cohesive communities, resilient economies, productive nations and connected regions. It is time for purpose-driven policy action on arts and culture that delivers cultural, economic and social returns for all Australians.

Appendix: Key findings

The following findings summarise ANA's analysis of government investment in arts and culture in Australia between 2007-08 and 2023-24, including how the investment has changed over time and how Australia compares with other nations. ANA's full detailed analysis and accompanying interactive figures are available in the [Big Picture portal](#) on the ANA website.

Finding 1: Government investment in arts and culture increased in 2023-24.

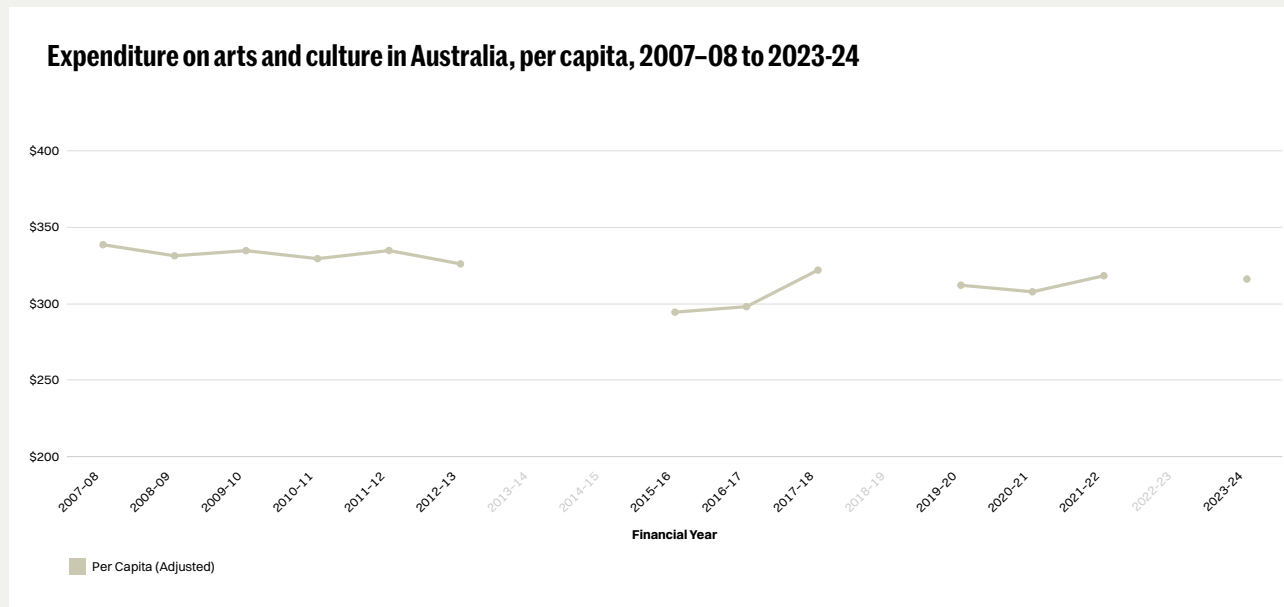
In total, 127 agencies across the three levels of government directed \$8.6 billion into arts and culture in 2023-24. This represents a 4% increase from 2021-22 when adjusted for inflation, totalling \$333.2 million.



Note: sourced from Figure 1 in The Big Picture

Finding 2: Government investment in arts and culture is not keeping pace with population growth.

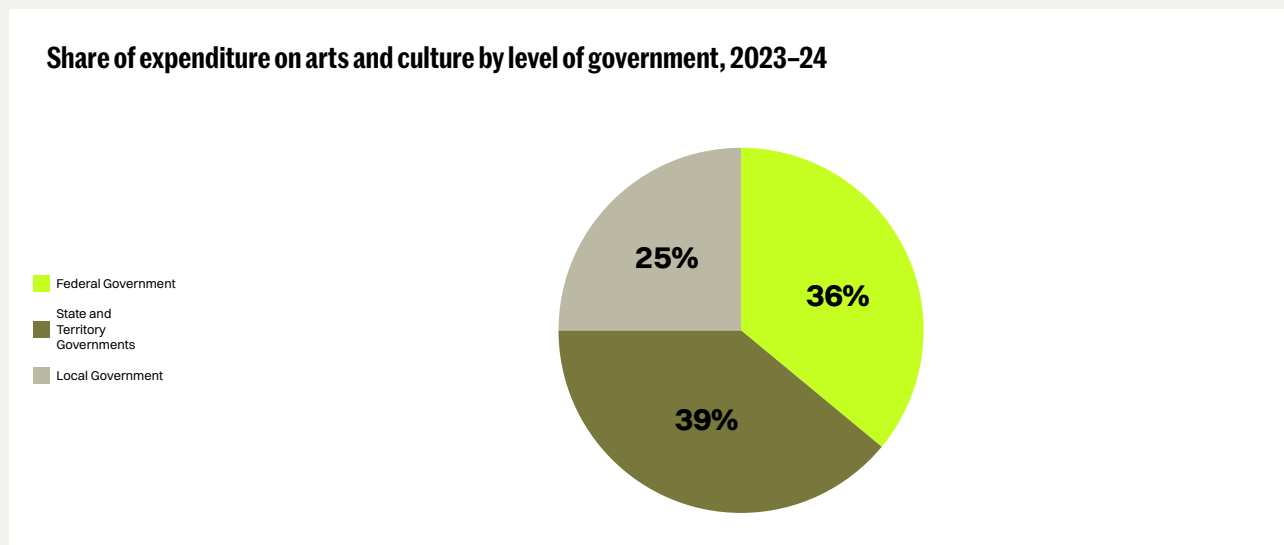
Australia's population increased by 27% between 2007-08 and 2023-24 to 27 million, while expenditure on arts and culture increased by 19%. Per capita government expenditure on arts and culture was \$316 in 2023-24. For comparison, the figure in 2007-08 was \$339 per person when adjusted for inflation, which represents the highest expenditure in the last 17 years. The lowest was \$295 per person in 2015-16.



Note: sourced from [Figure 9 in The Big Picture](#)

Finding 3: The scale of state and territory governments' annual investment in arts and culture now surpasses that of the federal government.

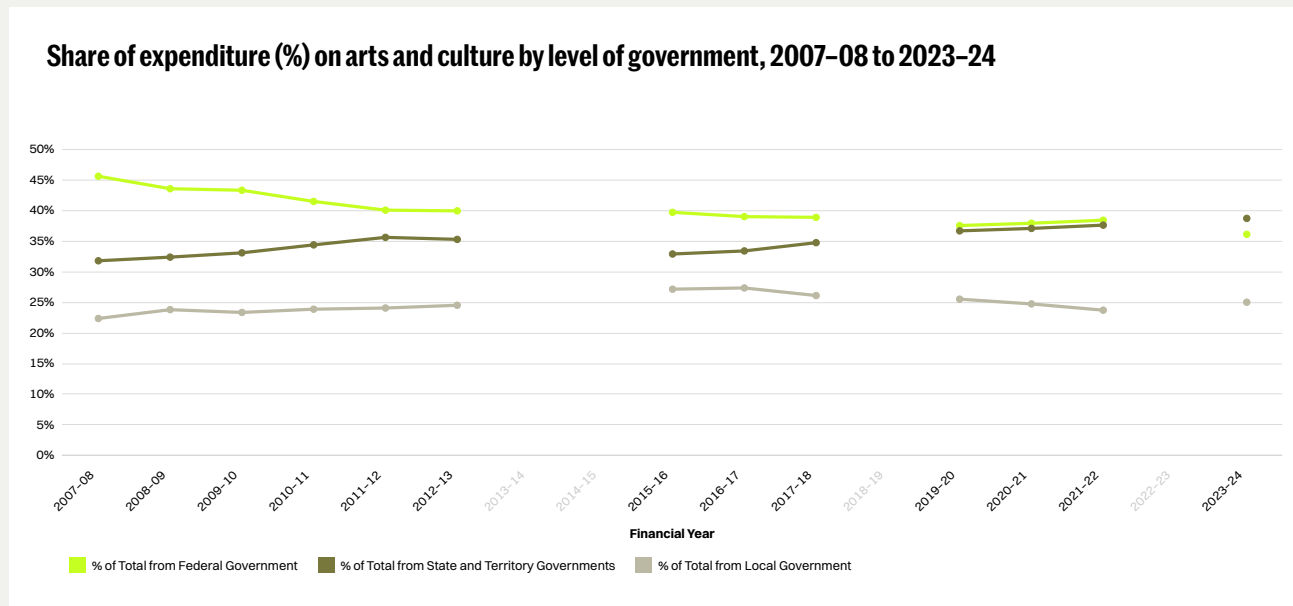
State and territory governments' contribution of \$3.3 billion to cultural expenditure has reached a record level, and for the first time has surpassed the federal government's contribution. In 2023-24, 39% of expenditure came from state and territory governments and 36% from the federal government.



Note: sourced from [Figure 12 in The Big Picture](#)

Finding 4: Local governments contributed \$2.2 billion to arts and culture investment.

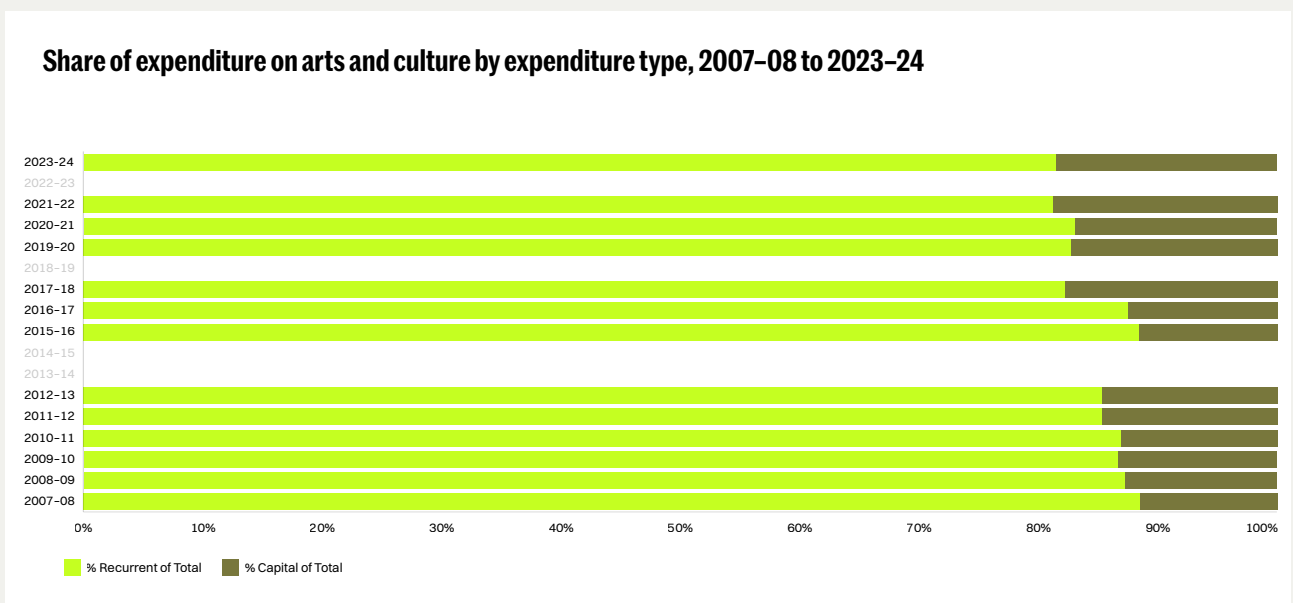
The local government share increased from 24% in 2021-22, to 25% in 2023-24, reversing a trend of steady decline since peaking at over 27% in 2016-17.



Note: sourced from Figure 13 in The Big Picture

Finding 5: Capital expenditure consumes an increasing share of government investment in arts and culture.

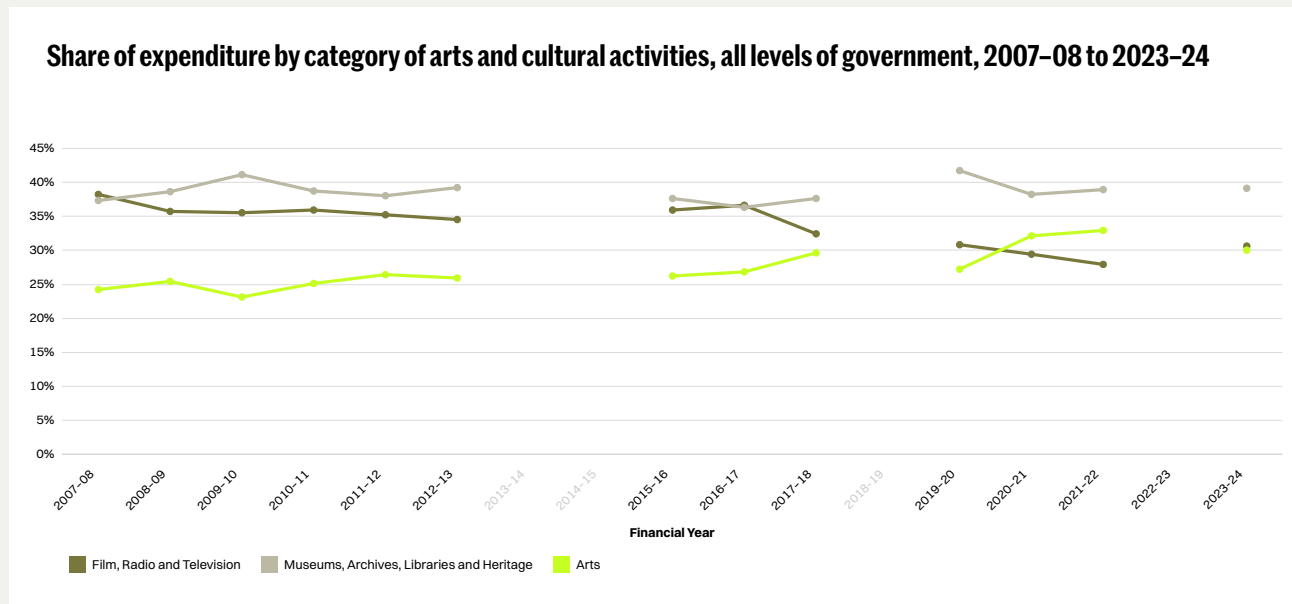
Capital expenditure, such as additions, renovations and restorations, has steadily increased as a share of arts and culture expenditure in Australia. Capital expenditure accounted for 18% of arts and culture expenditure in 2023-24. This is up from 11% in 2007-08.



Note: sourced from Figure 15 in The Big Picture

Finding 6: All levels of government invest across a diverse range of arts and cultural activities that contribute to Australia’s cultural life.

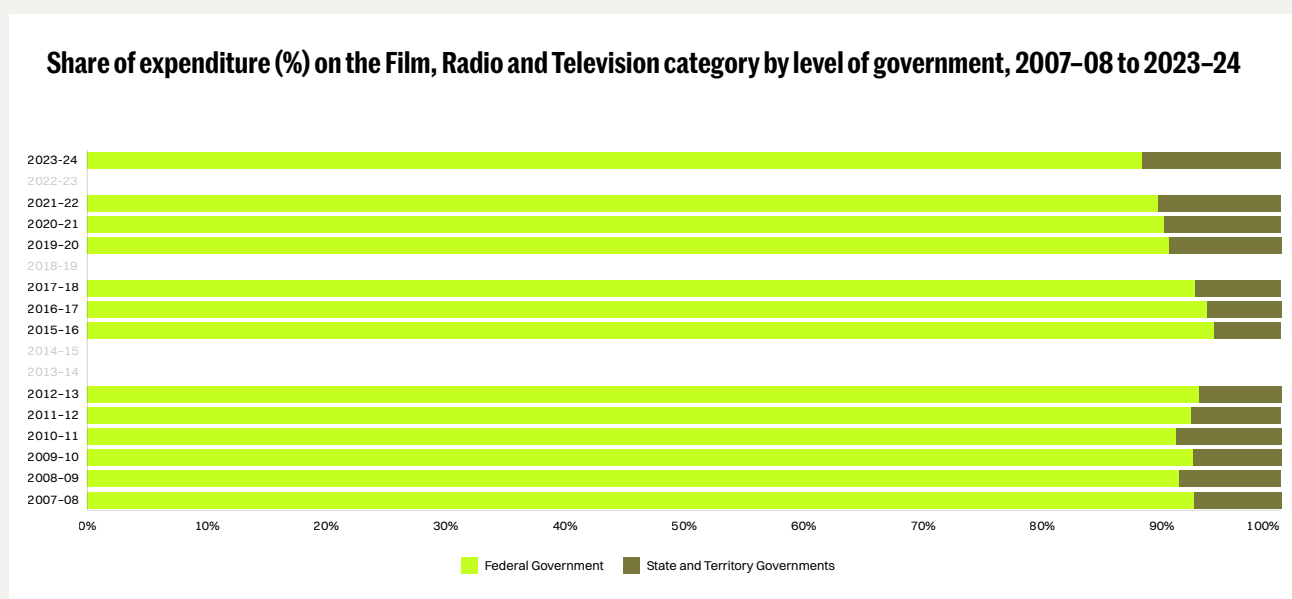
Museums, Libraries, Archives and Heritage accounted for 39% of government expenditure on arts and culture in 2023–24 (excluding local government spending), Arts accounted for 30%, and Film, Radio and Television accounted for 31%. The long-term decline in the share of expenditure in the Film, Radio and Television category has been partially reversed, with a 2% increase since 2021–22. Conversely, the Arts category has decreased its share by 3% compared to 2021–22.



Note: sourced from Figure 3 in The Big Picture

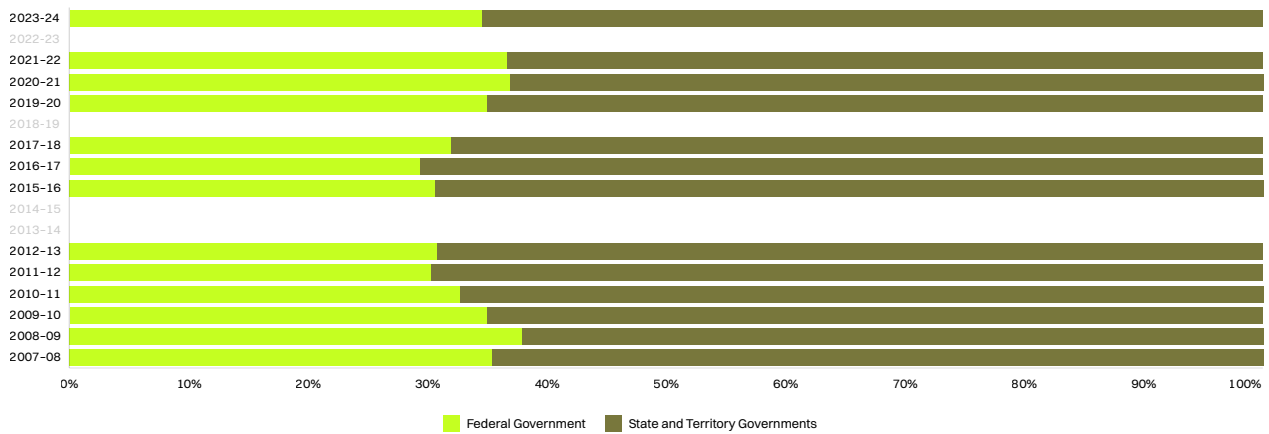
Finding 7: Federal and state and territory governments each invest in all categories of arts and culture, but the focus of their expenditure varies.

The federal government has typically accounted for more than 90% of government expenditure in the Film, Radio and Television category. State and territory governments have typically contributed more than 60% of government investment in the Museums, Archives, Libraries and Heritage category and, since 2019–20, more than 70% into the Arts category. These figures include targeted COVID-19 support for relevant years and exclude local government spending.



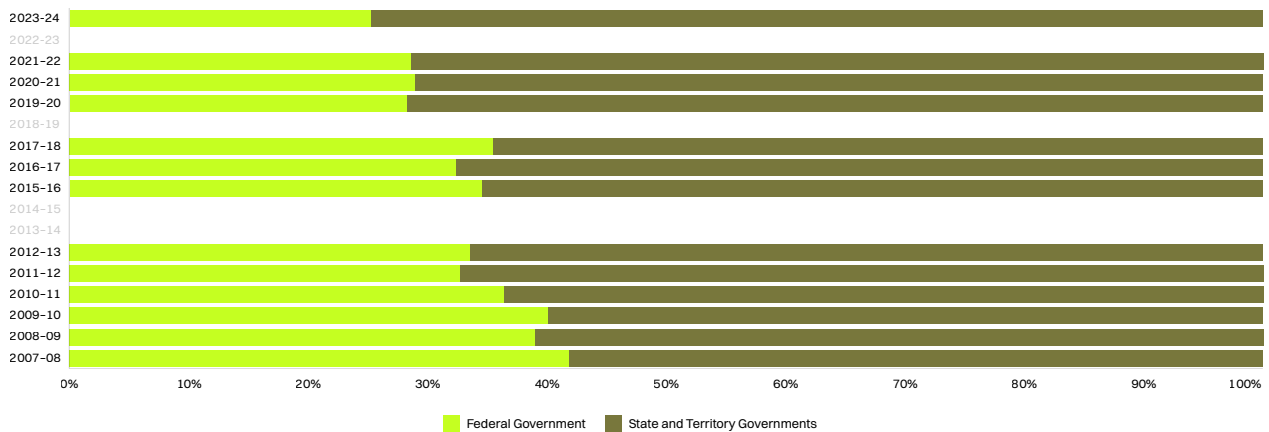
Note: sourced from Figure 6 in The Big Picture

Share of expenditure (%) on the Museums, Archives, Libraries and Heritage category by level of government, 2007-08 to 2023-24



Note: sourced from [Figure 7 in The Big Picture](#)

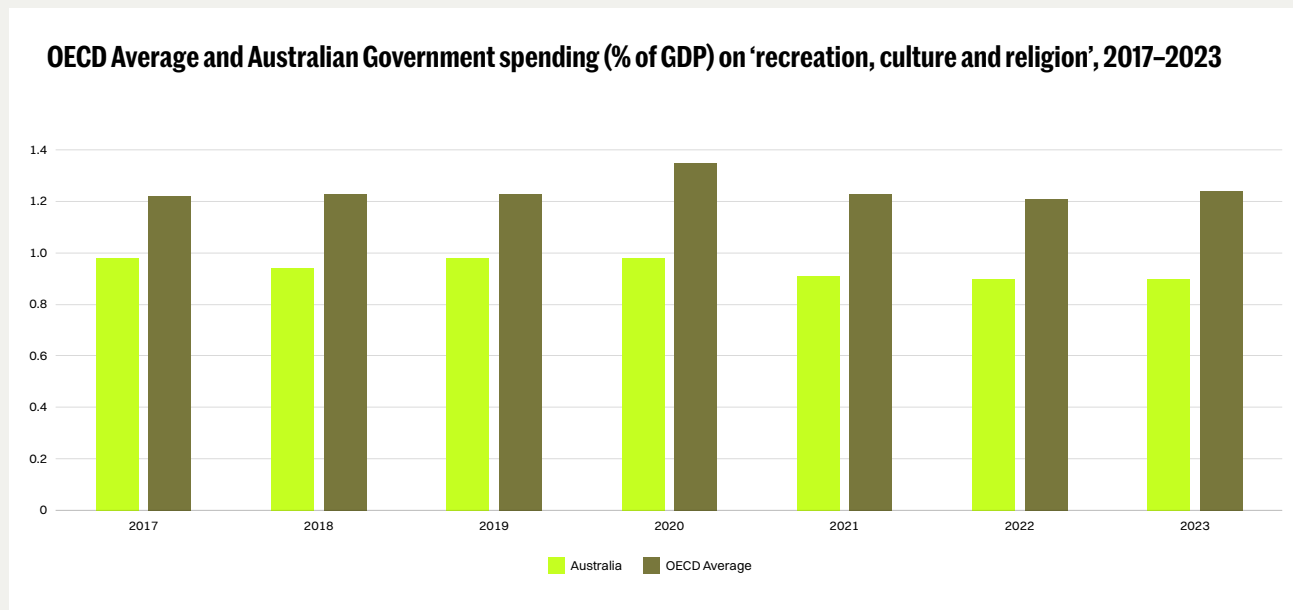
Share of expenditure (%) on the Arts category by level of government, 2007-08 to 2023-24



Note: sourced from [Figure 8 in The Big Picture](#)

Finding 8: On a GDP basis, Australia is spending around one-quarter less than its OECD peers on 'recreation, culture and religion'.

OECD countries, on average, spent 1.2% of total GDP, while Australia spent 0.9%. Australia has remained below the OECD average from 2017 to 2023. Australia ranked 25 out of 31 OECD countries for government investment in 'recreation, culture and religion' in 2023.



Note: sourced from [Figure 10 in The Big Picture](#)

About ANA

ANA is Australia's national arts and culture think tank. Through independent public leadership, ANA helps build an ambitious and innovative policy, legislative, regulatory and investment environment for Australia's arts, culture and creativity. We do this because the evidence shows that culture and creativity have a direct transformative impact on people and communities. We believe that Australia can secure its place as a cultural powerhouse whose creativity is locally loved, nationally valued and globally influential.

ANA is currently supported by a unique collaboration of 14 Philanthropic Partners from across Australia: The Myer Foundation; Sidney Myer Fund; Tim Fairfax Family Foundation; Minderoo Foundation; Colonial Foundation; Wright Burt Foundation; Lansdowne Foundation; Dennis Osbourne Clarke Charitable Trust; Besen Family Foundation; Aranday Foundation; The Yulgilbar Foundation; Bowness Family Foundation; Wesfarmers Arts; and Spinifex Trust.

Explore our previous work at www.newapproach.org.au.

Contact us about this work via hello@newapproach.org.au.

About the Big Picture series

ANA's **Big Picture series** is about understanding what Australian governments spend on arts and culture, and finding strategic and structural opportunities for change by looking at the long-term trends.

The series provides evidence-based contributions to debates about financing arts and culture in Australia. But we also know that government financial investment is both only one part of the wide range of financial inflows for the system, and only one way that governments use their power and reach in the arts and culture system.

Endnotes

- 1 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 1](#).
- 2 See, for example, Gina Fairley, 'The year that was: 9 arts luminaries share their views on 2025', ArtsHub, 15 December 2025, <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/aggregations/the-year-that-was-9-arts-luminaries-share-their-views-on-2025-2834194/>.
- 3 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 2](#).
- 4 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 5](#).
- 5 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 8](#).
- 6 See: Angela Vivian, Kate Fielding, and Sari Rossi, 'Transformative Edge 2024: How arts, culture and creativity impact our prosperity, cohesion, security, health and sustainability', Insight Report 2024-03 (Canberra: A New Approach, October 2024), <https://newapproach.org.au/publication/transformative-edge-2024-how-arts-culture-and-creativity-impact-our-prosperity-cohesion-security-health-and-sustainability/>. See also: Kate Fielding, Angela Vivian, Sari Rossi, 'Accelerate: Reframing culture's role in productivity', Insight report 2023-03 (Canberra: A New Approach, November 2023), <https://newapproach.org.au/publication/accelerate-reframing-cultures-role-in-productivity/>.
- 7 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 6](#).
- 8 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 7](#).
- 9 These figures include targeted COVID-19 support for relevant years and exclude local government spending.
- 10 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 3](#).
- 11 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 4](#).
- 12 On the critical role of partnerships between these different players in making cultural activity and access possible in Australia, see Angela Vivian, Sari Rossi, and Kate Fielding, 'Thriving through Thick and Thin: Partnerships for Our Cultural Life', Insight Report 2024-02 (Canberra: A New Approach, June 2024), <https://newapproach.org.au/publication/thriving-through-thick-andthin-partnerships-for-our-cultural-life/>.
- 13 Angela Vivian and Kate Fielding, 'The Arts, Culture and Creativity System in Australia: How It Ticks', Insight Report no. 2025-02 (Canberra: A New Approach, November 2025), 19.
- 14 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 8](#).
- 15 The Big Picture (2026), [Finding 2](#).
- 16 Sari Rossi, Angela Vivian, and Kate Fielding, 'Government, Culture and Creativity: It's about More Than Just Funding', Insight Report no. 2025-01 (Canberra: A New Approach, June 2025).
- 17 Rossi, Vivian, and Fielding, 'Government, Culture and Creativity', 8.
- 18 Rossi, Vivian, and Fielding, 'Government, Culture and Creativity', 7.
- 19 A New Approach, 'Opportunity to Action: Enabling Australia's Arts and Culture System', Policy Action Brief (Canberra: A New Approach, November 2025), 7.
- 20 Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, *Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria Inquiry* (June 2025), 56, 59, <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/49eafb/contentassets/303bc6816a0f43068227fd9ae79b59/lceic-60-06-cultural-and-creative-industries-vic.pdf>.
- 21 Rossi, Vivian, and Fielding, 'Government, Culture and Creativity', 9.

A New Approach (ANA)

