



Australian Government

Australia
Council
for the Arts 

Executive Summary

Creating Our Future

Results of the National Arts
Participation Survey

August 2020



Executive summary

The arts are vital expressions of human experience, through which we celebrate, commemorate and commune. Arts and creativity can unite us and delight us, make us happier and healthier. They uplift and entertain us, giving us moments of joy or escape from the challenges of our daily lives.

Arts and creativity also connect us with each other and with our past and present, and help us to imagine our future. They provide a mirror of the human experience in all its struggles and triumphs. **Experiencing the arts connects us with ideas, emotions and stories, and sparks pleasure, meaning, imagination and empathy.** The arts can inspire us, educate us, enrich us and transform us.

The National Arts Participation Survey asks how Australians are engaging with arts and creativity in our daily lives. How do Australians feel about arts and creativity? How is our arts engagement changing? Do we recognise the impacts of arts and creativity in our lives and communities? How do Australians feel about public funding for the arts?

These questions, and more, are explored through *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*. The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey is the fourth in a landmark research series, following editions in 2016, 2013 and 2009. The 2019 results are based on a nationally representative sample of 8,928 Australians.

This series provides a comprehensive picture of Australians' evolving relationship with the arts. It encompasses engagement with the broad gamut of arts offerings across Australia, including from both commercial and not-for-profit organisations; engagement with free accessible public art; creative participation at all levels from the hobbyist to the arts professional; and the impact of digitisation on the ways we create, experience and engage with arts and creativity.

Tracking trends in arts engagement enables insight into growth opportunities and barriers to access. It arms the arts sector with information on participants, audiences and markets and **builds the evidence base about the value of the arts to Australians and to our nation's future.** It helps to ensure there is an informed conversation about the arts.

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey was conducted in November–December 2019, not long before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our world, lives and the cultural and creative industries. The survey results provide **a benchmark of Australians' arts engagement before the impacts of the pandemic**, providing much needed information as doors reopen, audiences are rebuilt and the cultural and creative industries are re-ignited.

The survey also provides **vital insights on the connections of arts and creativity in health, tourism and education** – areas that will be critical as our nation recovers and looks to the future. It points to the power of the arts to build social cohesion, and to create a genuinely inclusive cultural landscape in which First Nations arts are central and all Australians feel part of our national story.

Evolving with the times, the National Arts Participation Survey went online in 2019 after being conducted through a mix of telephone and online surveys in 2016. Due to this change, the results that are most comparable for showing us trends over time are the results from the surveys conducted online in 2016, with results from the telephone surveys excluded. While the ‘2016 online only’ results presented in figures and trends throughout this report appear lower than the 2016 results published in the previous report, *Connecting Australians*, this is because of the change in methodology rather than decreases in the real world. In fact, the comparable trends indicate that across the board, Australians’ arts engagement and recognition of the value of the arts increased between 2016 and 2019.

As well as moving the 2019 National Arts Participation Survey online, targeted methods were used to ensure better representation of young Australians, regional and remote First Nations communities, communities for whom language might be a barrier to participation in the survey, and Australians with intellectual disability. We continue to capture and grow our understanding of how people from diverse backgrounds understand, participate in and value the arts.

For a deeper understanding of the survey findings, *Creating Our Future* also incorporates data from focus group discussions and additional research sources are drawn in throughout the report to provide context and paint a richer picture. Stories from the industry about Australians and the arts are shared to bring this picture to life.

Creating Our Future ‘spotlight’ sections bring together findings on key themes from across the survey results. These themes highlight the value of arts and creativity to Australians and to our nation’s future by:

- **delivering economic value and future success** through their role in child development, education, local economies, tourism and skills for the future
- **building social cohesion** through their power to shape our sense of national identity, celebrate our diversity and promote empathy and connection that can bridge social divides
- **supporting our health and wellbeing**, including meeting major challenges such as ageing, social isolation, loneliness and mental health.

Arts and creativity also connect us with each other and with our past and present, and help us to imagine our future

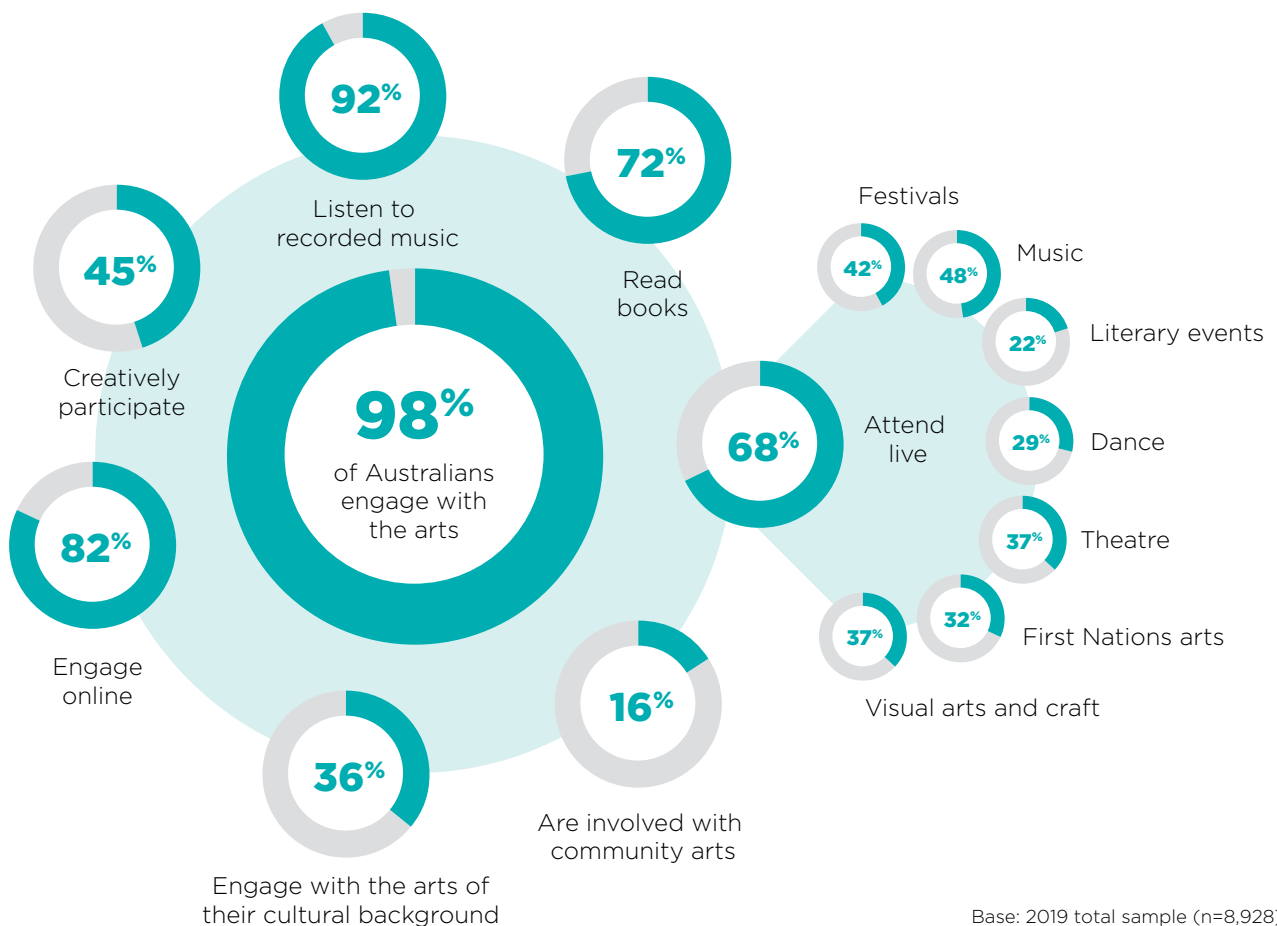
Ensuring **equal access to the benefits of arts and creativity for all Australians** is also a spotlight theme, and inequality will be the focus of further research by the Australia Council. Now, more than ever, arts and creativity have a significant role in helping Australians navigate rapid economic, social and cultural change and in building the health of our civil society.

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey results show that Australians increasingly recognise the positive impacts of the arts. Nearly every Australian – 98% of us – engage with the arts in some way, whether it be through listening to music, reading, engaging online, creatively participating, attending arts in person or engaging with the arts of our cultural background or community (figure 1). The arts are not a luxury; they are embedded in the very fabric of our lives.

More Australians now agree First Nations arts are an important part of Australia’s culture and interest in First Nations arts is growing. Prior to COVID-19, Australians’ appetite for both online and live engagement with the arts was increasing too – rather than replacing the live experience, digital platforms provide complementary experiences and ways of engaging that can translate to growth in live audiences and greater access to the arts for all Australians.

Live attendance at arts events was thriving prior to COVID-19. The power of arts and creativity to connect us, and Australians’ strong and growing engagement with arts events, experiences and festivals, highlight the critical role for the arts in reinvigorating tourism, our economy and our wellbeing, and in creating our future for generations to come.

Figure 1: Australians’ arts engagement 2019



Base: 2019 total sample (n=8,928)




Executive Summary

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child first preview audience, 19 January 2019. Credit: Tim Carrafa.
Find out more about *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* on page 103.

Chapter

one

The value of arts and creativity to Australians



Colossus by Stephanie Lake Company, Arts Centre Melbourne, 2018. Credit: Mark Gambino.

Impacts of the arts and creativity

Significantly more Australians now recognise the range of positive impacts of arts and creativity in our lives and communities. In 2019, 84% of Australians acknowledged positive impacts, up from 75% in 2016.⁷ Since 2016, agreement has increased across all the 'impact' areas explored by the National Arts Participation Survey.

This includes increasing recognition of the impacts of arts and creativity on:

- **child development** (63%, up 13 percentage points)
- **our sense of wellbeing and happiness** (56%, up 11 percentage points)
- **dealing with stress, anxiety or depression** (56%, up 11 percentage points)
- **understanding other people and cultures** (60%, up eight percentage points)
- **bringing customers to local businesses** (41%, up nine percentage points).

Additionally, one in two Australians believe the arts **build creative skills that will be necessary for the future workforce** (47%, new in 2019).

Footnote numbers correspond to those in the full *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey 2019 Report*.

⁷ For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous National Arts Participation Survey report, *Connecting Australians*.

Australians' attitudes about the arts

Following a shift in some attitudes towards ambivalence in 2016 (respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing with attitude statements), Australians' attitudes about the arts are now less ambivalent and increasingly positive.

Since 2016, the most significant attitude shifts among Australians have been greater agreement that **artists should have freedom of expression** (76%, up 15 percentage points), **the arts allow us to connect with others** (53%, up 15 percentage points), **the arts should receive public funding** (63%, up 12 percentage points) and **the arts should be an important part of education** (73%, up 12 percentage points).

Investment in the arts and creativity

As well as strong and growing support for public funding for the arts in Australia, Australians have clear priorities for investment. The top two priorities are **ensuring young people have access to art and creative experiences to support their learning and development** (74% ranked this in their top three priorities for public or private investment), and **ensuring free or low-cost events are available** (68%).

More than half of Australians think funding should ensure **art and creative experiences are available to support our health and wellbeing** (55% ranked this in their top three priorities for public or private investment). One in four prioritise investment in **art that pushes boundaries and drives innovation** (26%).

The high value that Australians place on the arts is reflected in the time and money they give to support artists, arts organisations and arts projects. Australians are increasingly **giving to the arts** (26%, up from 18% in 2016), including **donating money** (10%, up from 6%), **volunteering** (9%, up from 6%) and supporting **crowdfunding** (8%, up from 5%).

Creating Our Future:

Spotlight on economic value and future success

Young Australians value the arts and are highly engaged. There is a reciprocal relationship between young people and the arts: a connection with the arts sets them up for success and in turn, they play a critical role in the future of the nation.

Results from the National Arts Participation Survey highlight the importance of arts and creativity to child development, education, local businesses and skills for the future. This is in line with the growing body of evidence about the value of arts and creativity in education and the essential role of creative skills in future workforces.

Previous research has shown the arts to be powerful drivers for regional, domestic and international tourism.⁸ Australians' strong and growing engagement with arts festivals and events prior to COVID-19 highlights the vital role for arts in reinvigorating tourism and our economy.

⁸ Australia Council 2020, *Domestic Arts Tourism: Connecting the country*. Australia Council 2018, *International Arts Tourism: Connecting cultures*. Tourism Research Australia 2014, *Events: Drivers of Regional Tourism*. Australian Government: Austrade, Canberra.

Chapter

two

Our cultural identity and diversity

Jessica Mauboy performs during the Fire Fight Australia bushfire relief concert at ANZ Stadium in Sydney, Sunday 16 February 2020.
Credit: AAP Image/Joel Carrett.

First Nations arts

First Nations arts are central to understanding who we are as Australians. More Australians now agree **First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture** (75%, up from 70% in 2016).⁹ However, only half of Australians believe **First Nations arts are well represented** (51%, up from 48% in 2016), showing there is still work to be done to build the representation and profile of First Nations arts in Australia.

Both attendance and interest in First Nations arts were strong and growing prior to COVID-19. One in three Australians were **attending First Nations arts** (32%, up from 26% in 2016) and four in ten were **interested in First Nations arts** (40%). Among those interested, nearly half reported a **growing interest** (45%).

Attendance was increasing across First Nations art forms prior to COVID-19 and one in five Australians attended **First Nations festivals** (19% in 2019). Concerns that programming could be safer and more conservative in future due to the financial impacts of COVID-19 highlight a need to ensure First Nations arts do not lose hard-won visibility, and that the availability of First Nations arts for Australian audiences is not reduced.

⁹ For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous National Arts Participation Survey report, *Connecting Australians*.

Cultural diversity and arts engagement

Whether in First Nations, Anglo-Celtic and/or diasporic communities,¹⁰ the arts are a key way that Australians connect with, and share, our cultural backgrounds, identities and heritages. All Australians are enriched and benefit from the tapestry of our people and cultural landscape. More than one in three Australians **connect with, and share, their cultural background through arts and creativity** (36%), including by **attending arts events** (31%).

More than half of CALD respondents attend arts events focused on their cultural background or community (55%) and more than eight in ten attend arts events overall (82%), including significant **cross-cultural arts engagement** and strong **engagement with First Nations arts**. This is a positive indicator for social cohesion and intercultural empathy.

Australians attend a range of live events to engage with their cultural background or community, including **live music** (17%) and **festivals or celebrations** (11%). They attend at a variety of places including **concert halls or theatres** (36%), **community centres** (28%) and **local parks** (28%) – local community infrastructure is vital to cultural participation, particularly among CALD communities. Australians who attend particularly benefit from **spending time with family or friends** (51%) and **getting to know people in the community** (39%).

Many Australians also **participate in creating art themselves to connect with their cultural background or community** (22%, including 46% of CALD respondents), particularly by **making music** (9% of Australians, including 20% of CALD respondents).

Creating Our Future: Spotlight on social cohesion

Australia's national identity springs from the stories we tell – to ourselves, to each other, to the wider world and to our future generations. Australians increasingly agree that **the arts shape and express Australian identity** and that **First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture**. Constructively addressing our past is vital for a coherent national identity in which we can all feel a sense of belonging, and artistic expressions can be a vital bridge to mutual understanding.

Arts and creativity have a unique capacity to connect us all, irrespective of our life circumstances and experiences. The shared stories of millions of diverse peoples who now call Australia home promote respect and empathy, and powerfully connect us to a global community. While we know there is still work to be done to ensure the arts fully reflect the diversity of Australia's people, more Australians now agree that **the arts in Australia reflect our cultural diversity**. There is also increasing recognition that the arts **allow us to connect with others, help us understand perspectives that are different to our own** and **impact our understanding of other people and cultures**.

In an environment of increasing polarisation and heightened global attention on injustice, racism and inequality, the arts provide opportunities to navigate multiple viewpoints, helping rebuild trust in our institutions and in each other. They enable a plurality of voices to be heard, including those who feel they are being left behind by rapid social change; helping us understand and live with our fellow citizens and guarding against social divisions and threats. At this point in time and as we look to the future, our artists have a significant role in helping Australians navigate rapid economic, social and cultural change and in building the health of our civil society.

¹⁰ Diasporic is used to describe a community of people who live outside their shared country of origin or ancestry but maintain active connections with it. A diaspora includes both emigrants and their descendants.

Chapter

three

Australians' arts attendance prior to COVID-19

Bendigo Groovin the Moo – crowd shot. Credit: Mackenzie Sweetnam.

Live attendance at arts events

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey results are a **benchmark of Australians' live attendance before the impacts of COVID-19** and can provide vital insights as the live performance industry and our venues and galleries reopen doors and rebuild their audiences. Prior to COVID-19, live attendance at arts events was thriving. More than two in three Australians **attended the arts in person** in 2019 (68%), up nearly ten percentage points since 2016.¹¹

Attendance increased across all types of arts events including **live music, theatre, visual arts and craft, dance, literature events, festivals** and **First Nations arts**.

Younger Australians and parents with young children have particularly strong attendance, highlighting the importance of the arts to both the wellbeing of our younger generations and the future of Australia's culture.

¹¹ For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous National Arts Participation Survey report, *Connecting Australians*.

Spotlight on live attendance by art form

Half of Australians attend **live music** and attendance was increasing prior to COVID-19 (48%, up from 43% in 2016). On average, those who attend went to 10.9 music events in 2019, or 4.2 live music events for every Australian.¹² More than one in four Australians attend **contemporary music** (28%) and 8% attend **classical music**. Australians attend live music at a range of places including **concert halls or theatres** (19%), **pubs, clubs or bars** (16%), **outdoor spaces** (16%), **stadiums or arenas** (15%) and **places of worship** (4%).

Live theatre was connecting an increasing number of Australians prior to COVID-19 (37%, up from 30% in 2016). On average, those who attend went to 8.8 theatre performances in 2019. One in five Australians attend **musical theatre or cabaret** (19%), 16% attend **traditional or contemporary theatre**, 7% attend **circus** and 6% attend **children's theatre**.

More than one in three Australians attend **visual arts and craft events** (37%, up from 33% in 2016). The equivalent of three visual arts and craft events were attended for every Australian in 2019. One in five Australians attend **painting, drawing, printmaking or street art** (19%), 13% attend **photography**, 12% attend **sculpture, installation or light projections** and 12% attend **craft**.

Three in ten Australians attend **dance** (29%, up from 24% in 2016). Those who attend dance are the most frequent attendees, attending on average 16.3 dance events in 2019. Australians attend various types of dance including **contemporary** (7%), **ballet** (6%), **street dance or hip hop** (6%), **social or competitive dance** (5%) and **classical/traditional/folk** (5%).

Australians are increasingly connecting through **book or literary events** (22%, up from 15% in 2016). On average, those who attend book or literary events went to 15.6 events in 2019. Australians connect with literature and with each other through **writer talks or book launches** (8%), **book clubs** (6%), **readings** (6%) and **writers festivals** (6%).

The festival audience

Festivals bring people and communities together and play a pivotal role in tourism in Australia. Festivals are a part of life for many Australians (42%) and were growing in popularity prior to COVID-19 (up by 9 percentage points since 2016). Parents with children aged under 16 years are the most likely to attend (54%). Festivals connect families as well as communities.

Australians attend a range of festivals including **music festivals** (23%), **multi-art form festivals** (18%), **visual arts festivals or fairs** (14%) and **performing arts festivals** (12%). One quarter of Australians attend **festivals related to particular cultural groups or communities** (24%), including **First Nations festivals** (19%).

¹² Aged 15 years and over. Frequency of attendance does not include attendance at festivals.

Motivations and barriers for live attendance

Entertainment, social connection and wellbeing are the main drivers of arts attendance. Australians are motivated to attend the arts **to have fun and to be entertained** (63%), **to socialise and connect with others** (41%), **to understand other perspectives and cultures** (33%) and **to improve their wellbeing** (25%). One in eight Australians attend the arts to develop skills for education, training or work (13%).

Four in ten Australians would like to attend more arts events (42%). Prior to COVID-19, cost and location were the main barriers to increased attendance: **cost of tickets or entry** prevented one in three Australians from attending as many events as they would like (34%) and one in four said there were **no arts events near where they live** (25%).

While location of events and difficulty getting to them are more significant barriers for those living in remote locations, and to some extent those in regional areas, this does not impact overall attendance at arts events and festivals as much as may be expected: 68% of respondents in remote areas were attending the arts prior to COVID-19, compared to 64% of those in regional areas and 70% of those in metropolitan areas. Those living in remote areas are the most likely to say they would like to attend more.

Creating Our Future:

Spotlight on equal access to arts and creativity for all Australians

All Australians should feel invited to connect and immerse themselves in exceptional arts experiences. The arts are not a luxury but rather a public good, with a role in addressing complex social issues and promoting inclusion across a range of areas of civic life. It is essential that these benefits are distributed where they are most needed.

While 98% of Australians engage with the arts in some way, the National Arts Participation Survey results highlight socio-economic inequalities in how Australians engage. Further, **ensuring free or low-cost events are available** is one of the top arts funding priorities among Australians.

When it comes to Australians' online engagement with arts and creativity, household income does not appear to play a significant role. Prior to COVID-19, both digital and live engagement with the arts were increasing and research on arts engagement during COVID-19 has found digital offerings are enabling some Australians to experience arts they could not normally see or afford. The majority of arts audiences want digital to remain an option as venues re-open, particularly vulnerable groups and those with access limitations.¹³ Rather than replacing the live experience, digital platforms provide complementary experiences and ways of engaging that can translate to growth in live audiences as well as greater access for all Australians.

Cultural inclusion is vital to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of Australian communities and for generations to come. Inequality will be a focus of further research for the Australia Council.

¹³ Patternmakers 2020, 'Fact Sheet: Online engagement,' *COVID-19 Audience Outlook Monitor*.



World class Ethiopian saxophonist Solomon Sisay launched his debut album *Sitota* to a sold out crowd at Footscray Community Arts Centre in November 2019. Credit: Raphael Recht Photography. Find out more about Solomon Sisay on page 86.

Chapter

four

Australians' creative participation

MADE Ensemble, Ballet Barre class. Credit: Sandi Sissell.

Creative participation

Creative participation can take many forms – from artistic photography to playing an instrument; and from singing in a community choir or taking a community arts class, to more professional forms of arts creation. Australia is an increasingly creative nation.

The proportion of Australians who **creatively participate in the arts** (45%) has increased by 13 percentage points since 2016. This includes increased participation in **visual arts and craft, music, creative writing, dance and theatre**.¹⁴

Creative participation is particularly strong among young people, parents of children under 16 years, First Nations respondents, CALD respondents and respondents with disability.

In addition, one in three Australians were **creative using a digital platform** in 2019 (32%) – from creating TikTok videos or memes to creating music, digital visual art or poetry.

¹⁴ For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous National Arts Participation Survey report, *Connecting Australians*.

Spotlight on creative participation by art form

An increasing proportion of Australians **create visual arts and craft** (23%, up from 20% in 2016), including **painting, drawing, printmaking or street art** (11%), **photography** (10%), **craft** (10%), **digital or video art** (5%) and **sculpture, installations or light projections** (3%).

More than three million Australians **create music** (15%, up from 12%), including **playing a musical instrument** (10%), **singing** (6%) and **writing songs, mixing or composing music** (6%).

An increasing proportion of Australians are **creative writers** (14%, up from 9%), including **writing novels or short stories** (6%), **poetry** (5%), **creative non-fiction** such as biography or history (4%), **instructional non-fiction** (3%) and **plays or graphic novels** (2% each).

Almost one in ten Australians **participate in dance** (8%, up from 6%), including **contemporary dance** (3%), **street dance or hip hop** (3%), **social or competitive dance** (3%), **ballet** (2%) and **classical, traditional or folk dance** (2%).

Australians increasingly **creatively participate in theatre** (6%, up from 5%), including **musical theatre or cabaret** (3%), **traditional or contemporary theatre** (3%), **children's theatre** (2%) and **circus** (2%).

In addition, one in six Australians participate in **community arts** (16%). This includes community choirs and community theatre, which have demonstrated benefits for wellbeing and community cohesion. It may also include community arts and cultural development (CACD), which is a specific type of arts practice where as a group, community members and professional artists collaborate to create art that is reflective of that place and community.

Creating Our Future: **Spotlight on health and wellbeing**

Wellbeing is a policy consideration growing in currency internationally. The arts can provide savings and returns on investment across health services and social care, helping meet major challenges such as ageing, loneliness, chronic conditions and mental health.

Australians increasingly recognise the positive impact of arts and creativity on **our sense of wellbeing and happiness** and on **helping us deal with stress, anxiety or depression**. When it comes to public and private investment in the arts, more than half of Australians think funding should ensure that **arts and creative experiences are available to support people's health and wellbeing**.

Connection and wellbeing are two of the main drivers of arts attendance. They are also key benefits reported by Australians who attend arts events focused on their cultural background or community, particularly younger generations in CALD communities.

New research has shown that supporting wellbeing has been a key motivator for audiences participating in the arts online during COVID-19 and that online arts engagement has enabled Australians to feel connected, transcending isolation.¹⁵ As we look to the future, in all its uncertainty, the ability of creativity to uplift and connect us meets an increasingly pressing societal need.

15 Patternmakers 2020, 'Fact Sheet: Online engagement,' *COVID-19 Audience Outlook Monitor*.

Chapter

five

Listening to recorded music,
reading and digital engagement

Children presenting Rumba Radio, *First On The Ladder*.
Credit: Simone Ruggiero, Polyglot Theatre, 2019.



Listening to recorded music

Recorded music is infused throughout the lives of almost every Australian, providing a soundtrack to our lives and helping us through the day. In 2019, 19 million Australians chose to **listen to recorded music** (92%).

Fewer Australians are listening to music they own or on radio or TV than they were in 2016. The proportion using **online streaming (either paid or free)** (67%) is now on par with the proportion **listening on radio or TV** (68%). Half of Australians aged under 45 years stream music through paid subscriptions (52%), providing vital income for the music industry.

On a daily basis, one in three Australians listen to music on the radio or TV (34%), and around one in five Australians use a paid service to stream music (18%).

Reading

Despite busy lives and digital distractions, reading remains a fundamental activity for Australians and provides a lifetime of enjoyment. The proportion of Australians who **read for pleasure** (72%) has increased by 17 percentage points since 2016.¹⁶ The most popular types of reading material are **novels or short stories** (47%), **instructional non-fiction** such as guidebooks or cookbooks (32%) and **creative non-fiction** such as biography or history (31%).

Print books remain the most popular format, read by seven in ten Australians (69%), including one in four Australians aged over 55 who read print books daily (23%). Two in five Australians read **e-books** (41%) and almost one in three listen to **audiobooks** (31%).

Digital engagement with the arts

Most Australians **engage with the arts online** (82%, up from 76% in 2016). In the digital age, the arts are more accessible than ever. Listening to streamed music remains the most popular way to engage (67%).

Two in three Australians **use digital platforms to engage with the arts** (64%), including **Facebook** (38%), **YouTube** (38%) and **Instagram** (25%).

One in three Australians **express themselves creatively on digital platforms** (32%), including through **image galleries** (9%), **memes** (8%) and **music or songs** (7%). But from video games to creative blogs, Australians have differing views of which digital creations can be considered art.

¹⁶ For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous National Arts Participation Survey report, *Connecting Australians*.



Chapter SIX

Spotlight on arts engagement among targeted groups in our community

Juk Yuang and Ngor Atem, participants in Akolkol Dastan Gesa. Image courtesy of Poppy van Oorde-Grainger. Credit: Matsu.

Connecting with Generation Z

Young people are vital to the future of Australia's culture and our nation's future success. Almost all young Australians aged 15–24 years recognise the **positive impacts of arts and creativity** in our lives and communities (91%).

Four in ten young Australians **give time or money** to the arts (40%), including one in two 18–19 year olds (49%). Support for public funding for the arts is strong among young Australians and their top priority for investment is **ensuring young people have access to art and creative experiences to support their learning and development**.

Young Australians aged 15–24 years are highly engaged – four in five **attend arts events** (83%), including **live music** (66%) and **festivals** (61%). More than a third attend the arts **to understand other perspectives and cultures** (35%) and more than a quarter **to improve their wellbeing** (27%). One in two young Australians **connect with their culture and community** through arts and creativity (53%) and two in three **creatively participate in the arts** (66%). The majority of young Australians agree **First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture** (76%) and 47% attend **First Nations arts or festivals**. The vast majority of young Australians **read for pleasure** (73%); **stream music**, either paid (60%) or for free (70%); and **use digital platforms to explore** (84%) or **express creativity** (62%).

Regional and remote First Nations communities

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey was expanded to ensure greater representation of First Nations people in regional and remote communities, with 150 face-to-face interviews conducted by First Nations interviewers in Lismore (NSW), Woorabinda (Qld), Humpty Doo (NT) and Darwin (NT).

Almost all First Nations respondents interviewed believe the arts provide social, cultural and economic value, including by **bringing customers to local businesses** (85%) and **building creative skills necessary for the future workforce** (90%).

Targeted regional and remote First Nations respondents have stronger engagement with the arts than Australians overall, except theatre and literature events, and would like to attend the arts more than they do. They are less likely to agree ***First Nations arts are well represented*** than Australians overall (35% compared to 51%).

Targeted regional and remote First Nations respondents are more likely to **engage with the arts online** than Australians overall, with three quarters **using digital platforms** to engage (74%). But despite strong digital engagement, targeted regional and remote First Nations respondents are less likely to view digital creations as art.

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey was expanded to ensure greater representation of culturally and linguistically diverse Australians in the results. The survey was translated into six languages encompassing emerging and established communities: Arabic, Dinka, Mandarin, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese.

The targeted CALD respondents surveyed are more likely to **attend arts events** than Australians overall, particularly **book and literary events** (45%), **dance** (45%) and **First Nations arts** (82%). They are more likely to be motivated to attend the arts **to express themselves** (24%) and **to develop skills for education, training or work** (21%). In line with Australians overall and other CALD respondents, two in five targeted CALD respondents would like to attend the arts more than they currently do (42%).

Compared to other groups, targeted CALD respondents are *less* likely to agree that ***the arts reflect the diversity of cultures present in Australia*** (59%, compared to 71% of Australians overall and 77% of other CALD respondents).

Compared to Australians overall, targeted CALD respondents are more likely **to creatively participate in the arts** (78%), especially **theatre** (22%), and are more **engaged with the arts online** (79%) and via **digital platforms** (82%). Targeted CALD respondents value engaging with arts of their cultural background to maintain their culture and share it with the wider Australian community.

Australians with intellectual disability

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey was expanded to ensure greater representation of Australians with intellectual disability, with 68 targeted easy read surveys undertaken.

Respondents with intellectual disability hold positive attitudes about the arts, with more than half agreeing ***art helps me understand things*** (59%), ***the government should fund arts*** (57%) and ***arts help me connect with people*** (56%).

Overall, almost all respondents with intellectual disability **attend the arts** (92%). They attend the arts to **have fun** (84%), **understand culture** (74%), **be social** (70%) and **learn skills** (52%). Compared to Australians overall, they are more than twice as likely to be **interested in First Nations arts** (87%) but are less than half as likely to attend (13%).

Nearly all targeted respondents with intellectual disability **read a book** in 2019 (95%). They are more likely to **listen to music on the radio or TV** or **music they own** but are less likely to stream music. Respondents with intellectual disability are more creative than Australians overall, with almost all **creatively participating in the arts** in some way.

Creating Our Future: economic value and future success

Australia's arts and creativity are among our nation's most powerful assets and will play a critical role in Australia's future success. Results from the National Arts Participation Survey highlight the importance of arts and creativity to child development, education, local businesses and skills for the future. Previous research has shown the arts to be powerful drivers for regional, domestic and international tourism. Australians' strong and growing engagement with arts festivals and events prior to COVID-19 highlights the critical role for arts in reinvigorating tourism and our economy.

Arts and creativity in child development, education and young people's lives

Young Australians value the arts and are highly engaged – four in five of those aged 15–24 attend, two in three creatively participate and four in ten give time or money to the arts. There is a reciprocal relationship between young people and the arts: a connection with the arts sets them up for success and in turn, they play a critical role in the future of the nation.

There is a substantial body of evidence about the value of arts and creativity in education, including the power of arts activities to help students develop personal, social and cognitive skills that transfer to and improve performance in a wide range of academic and social situations.³²

32 This includes: Australia Council (forthcoming), *Creative Leadership in Learning: Cultivating creativity in schools*; Dunn J, Bundy P, Jones A, Stinson M, Hassall L, Penton J, Lazaroo N, and Le L 2019, *Creating Critical Connections through the Arts: The Y Connect Report. Examining the impact of arts-based pedagogies and artist/teacher partnerships on learning and teaching in one Australian secondary school*, Griffith Institute for Educational Research; A New Approach 2019, *Transformative: Impacts of Cultural and Creativity*, Insight Series, Report No. 2; Ewing R 2010, *The Arts and Australian Education: Realising Potential*; Martin BH and Calvert A 2018, 'Socially Empowered Learning in the Classroom: Effects of Arts Integration and Social Enterprise in Schools', *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 11, No. 2; Jefferson M and Anderson M 2017, *Transforming schools: Creativity, critical reflection, communication, collaboration*.

The National Arts Participation Survey results show that Australians increasingly recognise the value of arts and creativity in the lives and education of children and young people. While Australians increasingly recognise positive impacts of arts and creativity in a range of areas, the most substantial increase since 2016 is the proportion of Australians who agree ***the arts and creativity impact child development*** (63%) – up 13 percentage points from 2016.³³ Additionally, the proportion of Australians who agree ***the arts should be an important part of education*** (73%) is up by 12 percentage points.

When it comes to public and private investment in the arts, the priority with the highest level of support among Australians is access to ***arts and creativity in the lives of children and young people to support their learning and development*** – 74% ranked this in their top three investment priorities.

Creative skills for the future workforce

Australians also increasingly agree that ***the arts stimulate our minds*** (64%, up nine percentage points from 55% in 2016) and ***impact our ability to think creatively and develop new ideas*** (62%, up from 54% in 2016). One in two Australians agree that the arts have a big or very big impact on ***building creative skills that will be necessary for the future workforce*** (47%, new in 2019). Further, one in eight Australians are motivated to attend the arts ***to develop skills for education, training or work*** (13%), including more than one in five young Australians aged 15–24 (22%).

This is in line with the growing body of evidence that identifies creative skills as essential to workforces of the future. In recent years, multiple predictions about workforces of the future – both Australian and international studies – have identified increasing need for creative thinking and skills.³⁴ Creativity enables adaptability, experimentation and innovation. Creative skills have been integral to the fast-growing industries in Australia over the past decade³⁵ and prior to COVID-19, the creative economy was growing at a rate nearly twice that of the Australian workforce.³⁶

As well as fuelling our talent pipeline and job growth, investment in arts and creativity can cultivate new ideas, technologies and cutting edge innovation. One in four Australians rank investment in ***art that pushes boundaries and drives innovation*** in their top three priorities for public or private investment in the arts (26%).

33 For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous National Arts Participation Survey report, *Connecting Australians*.

34 For example: World Economic Forum 2016, *The future of jobs: Employment, skills and workforce strategy for the fourth industrial revolution*, World Economic Forum, Switzerland; Bakshi H, Downing J, Osborne M and Scheider P 2017, *The Future of Skills: Employment in 2030*, Pearson and Nesta, UK; Pratchett L, Hu R, Walsh M and Tuli S 2017, *The Knowledge City Index: A tale of 25 cities in Australia*, University of Canberra, Faculty of Business, Government and Law; Foundation for Young Australians 2017, *The new work smarts: Thriving in the new work order*, Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne.

35 Australian Bureau of Communications and Arts Research (BCAR) 2019, *Creative skills for the Future Economy*.

36 Cunningham and McCutcheon 2018, *The Creative Economy in Australia: Cultural production, creative services and income*.

The value of arts to local businesses and their vital role in reinvigorating the economy

Arts events boost tourism and hospitality. Australians increasingly recognise the impacts of the arts on **bringing customers to local businesses** (41%, up nine percentage points from 32% in 2016).

Live attendance at arts events and festivals was booming prior to COVID-19, up nearly ten percentage points since 2016 (to 68%). This included 8.7 million Australians who **attended an arts festival** in 2019 (42%, also up by ten percentage points). Attending arts festivals and events is a way of life for many Australians.

Arts festivals and events are powerful drivers for regional, domestic and international tourism.³⁷ For example, the 2019 Adelaide Festival generated an estimated \$76.8 million in associated spending for the state with 19,046 visitors coming from interstate or overseas for 141,258 bed nights.³⁸ Both domestic and international arts tourism were growing prior to COVID-19 and arts tourists are high value tourists who tend to stay longer and spend more. From large scale festivals and events, to visits to artist workshops and studios, the arts draw domestic tourists to both metropolitan and regional locations and to unique offerings in different parts of Australia.³⁹

Arts and creativity will be critical as we seek to bring life back into our cities, regions, culture and economy. Creativity connects us and will be vital to our recovery from this pandemic and our nation's future success.

37 Australia Council 2020, Domestic Arts Tourism: Connecting the country. Australia Council 2018, *International Arts Tourism: Connecting cultures*. Tourism Research Australia 2014, *Events: Drivers of Regional Tourism*. Australian Government: Austrade, Canberra.

38 'Festival stages a big spend,' *Adelaide Advertiser*, 16 May 2019, p.14.

39 Australia Council 2020, Domestic Arts Tourism: Connecting the country. Australia Council 2018, *International Arts Tourism: Connecting cultures*.

Such events are absolutely essential for kids as it provides them a platform to experience different ideas and concepts in a playful manner.

Focus group participant

Arts and creativity provide value to our individual lives and our economy and help to build more cohesive communities. It's important to support the role of the arts and creativity in Australian public life and policy making.

Focus group participant

Creating Our Future: social cohesion

Our arts and creativity reflect who we are as a nation and are crucial in understanding and shaping our sense of national identity. Arts and creativity have a unique capacity to connect us all, irrespective of our life circumstances and experiences. The shared stories of millions of diverse peoples who now call Australia home promote mutual understanding, respect and empathy, and powerfully connect us to a global community – all Australians are enriched by the tapestry of our people. Now, more than ever, our artists have a significant role in helping Australians navigate rapid economic, social and cultural change and in building the health of our civil society.

Our arts shape and communicate our cultural identity

The many and varied stories and perspectives brought to life through literature, music, performance and visual arts construct a sense of who we are as individuals, as a society, and as a nation. Australia's national identity springs from the stories we tell – to ourselves, to each other, to the wider world and to our future generations.

There is enormous potential to harness our arts and creativity to forge and promote a more inclusive cultural identity for Australia in these rapidly changing and divided times: a contemporary national identity that brings together the many strands that make up the Australian community.

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey results show that an increasing proportion of Australians now agree that ***the arts shape and express Australian identity*** (52%, up seven percentage points from 45% in 2016).⁵⁴

This includes middle-aged, middle income swing voters from suburban and regional Australia, who were the focus of a research report from independent think tank A New Approach. One of the four most common reasons this group gave for why arts matter is that ***Australian arts and culture give us a sense of identity and help us represent Australia to the world***. The most common reason given was that ***arts and cultural activities bring us together and help build community***.⁵⁵

54 For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous National Arts Participation Survey report, *Connecting Australians*.

55 Fielding K, Trembath JL 2020, *A view from middle Australia: Perceptions of arts, culture and creativity*. Produced by A New Approach think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra.

First Nations arts are central to understanding who we are as Australians

Australia is home to the world's longest continuing living culture with a rich artistic context. This is a unique strength, unsurpassed globally, of which all Australians can be proud.

Understanding and respecting First Nations cultures is essential to Australia's social wellbeing and benefits both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Constructively addressing our past is vital for a coherent national identity and artistic expressions can be a vital bridge to mutual understanding.

“I would say those moments where [First Nations] arts are showcased, where they have a platform to actually exist and be recognised is important and taking that away is erasure. It's really, really important we lift those communities.”

Focus group participant

“That's the only way that our community is going to get better. To get knowledge and inclusivity and looking out for each other.”

Focus group participant

More Australians than ever are engaging with First Nations arts for their beauty, strength and power, and to understand who we are as a nation. The results of the National Arts Participation Survey show that an increasing proportion of Australians agree **First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture** (75%, up from 70% in 2016) and attendance at First Nations arts was increasing across art forms prior to COVID-19.

Our diverse artistic expression can reshape our contemporary national identity

Australia has one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse populations in the world. We also have more than three million people living below the poverty line and there are diverse experiences among Australians living in regional, remote and peri-urban communities.

A diverse sweep of artists is interpreting this multiplicity of 'Australias' for us, providing unique opportunities that go beyond day-to-day encounters – for insights into the cultures and communities of others and deep connections with one's own cultural and community roots. Seeing, feeling and hearing one's own experience expressed and reflected in creative expression is inherently powerful. Equally, there is power in seeing, hearing and feeling this experience reflected and valued in our cultural landscape.

While we know there is still work to be done to ensure the arts fully reflect the diversity of Australia's people, an increasing proportion of Australians agree **the arts in Australia reflect our cultural diversity** (71%, up from 65% in 2016). In addition, more than one in three Australians connect with, and share, their cultural background through arts and creativity (36%) including more than half of CALD Australians (62%) and significant cross-cultural arts engagement. This is a positive indicator for social cohesion and intercultural empathy in Australia.⁵⁶ Australians value these opportunities to connect with family and friends and to get to know others, as creativity connects people and communities.

⁵⁶ Migliorino P 2017, 'The arts and cultural diversity – commentary by Pino Migliorino,' in Australia Council 2017, *Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*, p.50.

The 2019 National Arts Participation Survey was expanded to ensure greater representation of CALD Australians, with the survey translated into six languages encompassing languages of both established and emerging communities in Australia: Arabic, Dinka, Mandarin, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese. The results show that these targeted communities are highly engaged with arts and creativity – they are more likely to engage with arts and creativity than Australians overall, whether it is attending arts events, participating in arts activities or engaging online. This includes engaging with arts of their own background, which provides valued opportunities to celebrate and share their culture with the wider Australian community.

Our creative expressions can be an antidote to declining public trust and social divisions

Globally, and in Australia, there is growing evidence of pessimism about the future and cynicism about institutions of all kinds, private and public.⁵⁷ This coincides with rising concerns about inequality, job security and the cost of living – particularly in the wake of COVID-19 – and increasing divisions in society. The arts have a particularly powerful role to play at this moment in time: in generating empathy that can bridge social divides, and in creating a future where diversity is celebrated.

In an environment of increasing polarisation and heightened global attention on injustice, racism and inequality, the arts can provide vital space and opportunity to navigate multiple viewpoints and perspectives, and to engage with complexity and challenging ideas from a safe space. In this way our arts and artists provide invaluable conduits to helping rebuild trust in our institutions and in each other. They enable a plurality of voices to be heard, including those who feel they are being left behind by rapid social change.

The results of the National Arts Participation Survey show an increasing proportion of Australians feel that the arts enable us to **connect with others** (53%, up 15 percentage points from 38% in 2016), **understand perspectives that are different to our own**⁵⁸ (71%, up from 60% in 2016), and that the arts **impact our understanding of other people and cultures** (60%, up from 52% in 2016). Connection with others is one of the main drivers of arts attendance and one in three Australians are motivated to attend the arts **to understand other perspectives and cultures** (33%).

“**Art is a way to share... It's an experience with others' cultures that allows you to experience without talking. You bond.**”

Focus group participant

Through their ability to inspire our collective imagination, engage and connect us and challenge our assumptions, the arts help us understand and live with our fellow citizens, guarding against social divisions and threats and building the health of our civil society.

57 Cameron S and McAllister I 2016, *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian election study 1987-2016*, Australian National University, Canberra. Ipsos 2020, *Global Trends: Understanding complexity*.

58 Reworded from 2016: *The arts are an important way to get different perspectives on a topic or issue*.

Art is a way to share...
It's an experience
with others' cultures
that allows you to
experience without
talking. You bond.

Focus group participant

Creating Our Future: equal access to arts and creativity for all Australians

All Australians, regardless of social, physical, geographic or personal circumstances, should feel invited to connect and immerse themselves in exceptional arts experiences. The National Arts Participation Survey highlights work still to be done in Australia to ensure that all Australians can participate fully and equitably in Australia's cultural and creative life through the arts. Cultural inclusion is vital to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of Australian communities and for generations to come. Inequality will be a focus of further research for the Australia Council.

The arts are not a luxury, they are a public good

Everyone benefits from investment in the arts. Arts and creativity have a role in addressing complex social issues and promoting inclusion across a range of areas of civic life, from education and child development to neighbourhood revitalisation, health, wellbeing, and economic development. It is essential that these benefits are distributed where they are most needed.

Nearly every Australian – 98% of us – engages with the arts in some way, whether it be through listening to music, reading, engaging online, attending arts events or engaging with the arts of our cultural background. The arts are not a luxury; they are embedded in the very fabric of our lives. However, the National Arts Participation Survey results also highlight that socio-economic inequalities remain in Australians' engagement with the arts.

Arts engagement decreases with lower household income and education

Despite Australia enjoying consistent economic growth over the last three decades prior to COVID-19, poverty rates have remained high. More than three million Australians live below the poverty line and there is a stark division in our community between those getting ahead and those being left behind.⁷⁴ There are also disparities in our arts engagement.

Four in five Australians in the highest household income bracket (more than \$200,000) attend the arts (79%). Attendance decreases with lower income to three in five of those on a household income of under \$40,000 (57%). Both attendance and creative participation in the arts decreases with household income across each art form, with the only exception being attendance at arts festivals, reflecting the free festival offerings in Australia. Respondents in the lowest household income bracket are also the least likely to agree that ***the arts allow me to connect with others*** and ***there are plenty of opportunities for me to get involved in the arts***.

As well as household income, arts attendance is related to employment status and education. Three quarters of employed Australians attend the arts (76%), compared to 53% of those receiving a carer or parenting payment, 51% of those who are unemployed for medical reasons, and 40% of those on disability benefit. Most current students attend the arts (81%) and over three quarters of those with a university degree or post-graduate qualification (78%), compared to less than two thirds of those with a lower level of education (63%).

Overall, more Australians agreed in 2019 that ***there are plenty of opportunities for me to get involved in the arts*** (47%, up ten percentage points from 37% in 2016). However, there has also been a slight increase in the proportion of Australians who are feeling disconnected with the arts, with almost three in ten agreeing that ***the arts are not really for people like me*** (29%, up from 26% in 2016), which is a continuing trend. Interestingly, some of those who hold the most positive attitudes towards the arts and public funding, such as First Nations respondents and those living with disability, are also feeling the most disconnected – a finding which warrants further investigation.

While respondents with disability are *more* likely to creatively participate in the arts compared to respondents without disability (57%, compared to 42%), they were *less* likely to attend arts events and festivals in 2019 (64%, compared to 69%). An exception to this is respondents with intellectual disability, who were a targeted group in the expanded 2019 National Arts Participation Survey: targeted respondents with disability have both higher arts participation and attendance rates than the Australian population overall. The arts have the potential to generate a sense of belonging for people with an intellectual disability, enabling them to build self-confidence and strengthen social networks (see page 200).

74 ACOSS and UNSW 2020, *Poverty in Australia 2020. Part One: Overview*. ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 3, Sydney: ACOSS.

Cost and location are the main barriers to arts attendance

Prior to COVID-19, four in ten Australians said they would like to attend more arts events than they were currently (42%). The **cost of tickets or entry** was preventing one in three Australians from attending more (34%), one in four said there were **no arts events near where they live** (25%) and one in five found **difficulty getting to arts events** a barrier (19%).

Australians with a household income of under \$40,000 are more likely to experience a number of barriers to attending arts events compared to Australians overall, including **cost of tickets or entry** (39%, compared to 34%), physical or mental health concerns (17%, compared to 9%), **difficulty getting to arts events** (25%, compared to 9%) and **no arts events near where they live** (30%, compared to 25%).

While location of events and difficulty getting to them are more significant barriers for those living in remote locations, and to some extent those in regional areas, this does not impact overall attendance at arts events and festivals as much as may be expected: 68% of respondents in remote areas were attending the arts prior to COVID-19, compared to 64% of those in regional areas and 70% of those in metropolitan areas. Those living in remote areas are the most likely to say they would like to attend more.

While digital technology has made the arts more accessible, access to free or low-cost arts experiences remains a priority

With new ways of making, sharing and experiencing arts and creativity emerging all the time, technological and social change has meant creative expression is more plentiful and accessible than ever before. When it comes to Australians' online engagement with arts and creativity, household income does not appear to play a significant role in levels of engagement.

Many Australian artists and arts organisations have pivoted to digital content during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research on engagement with the arts during COVID-19 has found that digital offerings are enabling some Australians to experience arts they would not normally have the opportunity to see or afford. Digital arts offerings are particularly valued by those who face barriers to arts engagement, including due to disability, caring responsibilities and/or living remotely. While internet accessibility and connectivity has been a barrier to engagement for some, the majority of arts audiences want digital to remain an option as venues re-open, particularly vulnerable groups and those with access limitations.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Patternmakers 2020, 'Fact Sheet: Online engagement,' *COVID-19 Audience Outlook Monitor*.

The National Arts Participation Survey results show that prior to COVID-19, both digital and live engagement with the arts were increasing. Rather than replacing the live experience, digital platforms provide complementary experiences and ways of engaging that can translate to growth in live audiences as well as greater access for all Australians. They can diversify access by providing new points of entry, new ways of discovering artists and works and by promoting greater awareness of Australian arts, culture and creativity. When venues re-open there is an opportunity to harness the increased online engagement occurring during the pandemic in ensuring more Australians can experience the transformative power of the arts.

In 2019, live attendance at the arts was a part of life for 68% of Australians. The same proportion of Australians ranked **ensuring free or low-cost events are available** in their top three priorities for public or private investment in arts and creativity (68%). Agreement was particularly high among those aged 45 plus or with a low household income. Ensuring **availability of arts and creative experiences for children and young people** was the only priority Australians ranked higher.

Arts experiences can provide a great leveller through their ability to touch and connect people equally and simultaneously. Ensuring all individuals and communities can participate fully and equitably in Australia's cultural and creative life through the arts – both online and in person – will improve the long-term health and vitality of our nation.

Access to the arts —
that should be a right
for everyone, not just a
privilege. If you have four
kids, you shouldn't be
taking them to the park
because the museum is
too expensive.

Focus group participant

Creating Our Future: health and wellbeing

Wellbeing is a policy consideration growing in currency internationally, and Australians increasingly recognise the positive impact of arts and creativity on our wellbeing. The arts can save expenditure and provide returns on investment across health services and social care, helping meet major challenges such as ageing, loneliness, chronic conditions and mental health.

Arts and creativity can meet pressing challenges to our nation's health and wellbeing

The arts make our individual lives better and build stronger and more cohesive communities. The arts have been shown to improve quality of life in myriad ways, including: increasing mental wellbeing;⁸⁰ addressing loneliness, mental health and ageing;⁸¹ decreasing anxiety and depression; increasing wellbeing and social inclusion;⁸² positive wellbeing impacts for young people;⁸³ and treating PTSD and helping communities recover from trauma.⁸⁴

The creative arts and health sectors have significant and growing connections, covering primary care, acute and chronic hospital care, rehabilitation, respite care and general wellbeing. Techniques are used across art forms, including visual arts, music, dance and drama.⁸⁵

The arts can save future expenditure across health services and social care. In the UK doctors are literally prescribing arts experiences, providing up to £11 return on investment for every £1 invested, as well as employment and income for artists.⁸⁶

80 Davies et al. 2015, 'The art of being mentally healthy: a study to quantify the relationship between recreational arts engagement and mental well-being in the general population.' *BMC Public Health* (16)15.

81 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts 2017, *Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*.

82 First reported in: Slawson N 2017, 'It's time to recognise the contribution arts can make to health and wellbeing,' *The Guardian*, 11 October 2017.

83 Patternmakers 2017, *ATYP Impact Evaluation*.

84 Baker et al. 2017, 'A systematic review of the efficacy of creative arts therapies in the treatment of adults with PTSD,' *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 10(6), 643–651, 2018.

85 For example, see Putland C 2012, *Arts and Health - A guide to the evidence, Background document prepared for the Institute for Creative Health Australia*; Fenner P, Rumbold B, Rumbold J, Robinson P, Harpur S 2012, *Is there compelling evidence for using the arts in healthcare? Health policy evidence brief*, Deeble Institute, Australian Healthcare and Hospitals' Association; and the National Arts and Health Framework 2014, Commonwealth Government, available at www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au

86 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts 2017, *Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*.

Australians increasingly recognise the impact of arts and creativity on our wellbeing

Results of the National Arts Participation Survey show that the proportion of Australians who agree that arts and creativity have a 'big' or 'very big' impact on **our sense of wellbeing and happiness** has increased 11 percentage points since 2016 (up to 56%),⁸⁷ as has the proportion of Australians who agree **the arts help us deal with stress, anxiety or depression** (up to 56%).

“I suffer from mental illness, when I'm making I'm outside of my own thoughts, I have something to look forward to. I'm being creative, I'm relaxed, so therapeutic.”

Focus group participant

Connection and wellbeing are two of the main drivers of arts attendance. More than four in ten Australians attend **to socialise and connect with others** (41%); and one in four attend **to improve their wellbeing** (25%). Compared to Australians overall, respondents with disability and respondents in remote areas are more likely to attend the arts specifically to improve their wellbeing.

Connection and wellbeing are also key benefits reported by Australians who attend arts events focused on their cultural background or community. More than half benefit from **spending time with family and/or friends** (51%, including 47% of CALD respondents) and four in ten benefit from **getting to know people in the community** (39%, including 41% of CALD respondents). One in three Australians who attend arts events to engage with their cultural background or community report **improved health and wellbeing** as a benefit (33%), particularly younger generations in CALD communities.

When it comes to public and private investment in the arts, more than half of Australians think funding should ensure that **arts and creative experiences are available to support people's health and wellbeing** (55% ranked this in their top three investment priorities).

⁸⁷ For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous *National Arts Participation Survey* report, *Connecting Australians*.

As well as enhancing social connections, arts activities such as music and dance have a demonstrable impact on quality of life as people age by enhancing memory, movement and mood, and by alleviating diseases and conditions of ageing such as Alzheimer's and dementia.⁸⁸ Many Australian museums and galleries run arts and craft programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of ageing Australians.⁸⁹ With an ageing population, arts can play an increasingly valuable role in supporting our national wellbeing.

In the months that followed the 2019 National Arts Participation Survey, Australia faced a devastating summer of bushfires and the momentous disruption, isolation and anxiety wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Arts and creativity have played an invaluable role in supporting the wellbeing of Australians during this unprecedented time, including relief concerts that united Australians while raising both spirits and funds.

While necessary distancing measures kept us away from theatres, galleries and venues, many Australians increased their online arts engagement.⁹⁰ Supporting wellbeing has been a key motivator for audiences participating in the arts online during COVID-19. Audiences who have engaged in online activities also report achieving a sense of connection during the pandemic – online arts have enabled Australians to transcend isolation.⁹¹

Further, three of the five most popular activities Australians did to stay connected and support their wellbeing during the April 2020 lockdown relied on the cultural and creative industries and the skills of artists: 'watching films/television programs or listening to the radio/podcasts' (72%), 'listening to music' (55%) and 'reading for pleasure or relaxation' (54%).⁹²

We have also witnessed impromptu choirs on balconies and seen the growth of online dance parties, gallery tours, creative classes and performances. And as we look to the future, in all its uncertainty, the ability of creativity to uplift and connect us seems now more important than ever.

Focus groups particularly highlighted the value of the arts in lives of older Australians, to connect them to their communities and support their wellbeing.

88 Rhea et al. 2016, The impact of community-based arts and health interventions on cognition in people with dementia: a systematic literature review, *Ageing & Mental Health*, 20:4, 337-351. Ting Choo et al. 2009, 'The effect of intuitive movement reembodyment on the Quality of Life of older adults with dementia: A pilot study,' *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias*. Staricoff L 2006, *Arts in health: a review of the medical literature*, Arts Council England.

89 For example, the Museum of Contemporary Art's *Artful: Art and Dementia* program, which has been found to enhance wellbeing for sufferers of dementia. See: MCA 2020, *Artful: Art and Dementia Report*.

90 Australia Council 2020, *Arts Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, based on Lonergan Research's Omnibus Survey, April 2020. Patternmakers 2020, *Audience Outlook Monitor: Australia Snapshot Report*, May 2020.

91 Patternmakers 2020, 'Fact Sheet: Online engagement,' *COVID-19 Audience Outlook Monitor*.

92 Australia Council 2020, *Arts Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, based on Lonergan Research's Omnibus Survey, April 2020. The other two most popular activities were 'keeping in touch with family and friends via phone or videoconferencing' and 'exercise/backyard activities'.

People that are older... they become isolated from the rest of the community... There's not a lot to do, you fade away and in the end you have to create your own little environment...

Focus group participant

Older Australians miss out a lot and mental health is becoming a big thing. If we had events for my age group, it's really great to be inclusive, to learn about other cultures.

Focus group participant

[Arts activities] connect people from different backgrounds and walks of life, like older people and younger people.

Focus group participant



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The logo for the Australia Council for the Arts, which is a stylized white figure with a circular head and a long, thin neck, resembling a person or a creature.

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