

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).

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

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