



Australian Government



# Building Strong Foundations:

Research on arts and disability needs and opportunities

## Acknowledgements

Creative Australia proudly acknowledges all First Nations peoples and their rich culture of the country we now call Australia. We pay respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge First Nations peoples as Australia's First Peoples and as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we live.

We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of First Nations peoples and communities to Australian life, and how this continuation of 75,000 years of unbroken storytelling enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards ensuring an equal voice and the equality of outcomes in all aspects of our society.

This report is a high-level summary of an arts and disability needs analysis and audit conducted for Creative Australia by Morwenna Collett and Gill Nicol in 2023. This summary has been prepared by Mandy Whitford, Impact Words Consulting and Creative Australia.

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**Note on terminology:** Terminology is constantly evolving. See page 19 for key terms used in this report.

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# Foreword

**For our cultural and creative industries to be at their best and most relevant to contemporary Australia, they need to enable full participation of d/Deaf and disabled artists, creative workers and audiences. We all benefit from accessible, inclusive and diverse arts and culture.**

At Creative Australia, and previously the Australia Council for the Arts, there has been a longstanding commitment to access and inclusion. But while progress has been made in ensuring our cultural and creative industries reflect the diversity of our society, there is still much work to be done, by all of us.

Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have shown the speed at which accessibility measures – advocated for by the disability sector for many years – can be deployed. However, the pandemic has further disadvantaged and isolated many d/Deaf and disabled artists and creative workers. It has highlighted that, more than ever, we need to support sustainable creative practice and equity in our industries.

In 2023, Creative Australia commissioned a needs analysis and audit of services for Australia’s arts and disability ecology as part of a body of work on accessibility and disability. The needs analysis included in-depth consultation with d/Deaf and disabled stakeholders and peak bodies, and it built on existing research and discussion.

The following report is a summary of findings from the detailed work done for the needs analysis. We want to communicate these findings back to everyone who participated as well as the wider arts and cultural sector.

Highlighting a range of views and priorities, this research is part of a growing evidence base contributing to decision-making at Creative Australia and beyond, at a time of pivotal change and momentum. *Revive*, the Australian Government’s national cultural policy launched in early 2023 recognises the importance of removing barriers and supporting all Australian stories to be shared.

Importantly, Creative Australia has drawn on this research as we provide input to the Australian Government's Arts and Disability Associated Plan (Associated Plan), led by the Office for the Arts, under *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–31*. The Associated Plan is part of a \$5 million *Revive* commitment to support people with disability to participate fully in the cultural and creative life of Australia. We look forward to the release of the Associated Plan and to supporting its implementation.

As the centrepiece of *Revive*, Creative Australia recognises the actions we take have significant impact. Creative Australia is carefully considering our actions in response to this research, other work in progress and contribution to the Associated Plan as we develop our new Disability Action Plan (DAP).

I am pleased to share that our commitments include new investment of \$200,000 per annum from 2025–28 through our Delivery Partners multi-year investment program. This will be for national arts and disability services identified through this research: supporting industry standards, advocacy, connecting practitioners across the country, and providing sector leadership to respond to high priority issues as they emerge.

Our commitments will also include continued investment in d/Deaf and disabled artists, creative workers and organisations through our core investment and targeted arts and disability programs, and in industry development programs to build individual and sector capability. We are progressing work on the accessibility of our programs and systems, and on evaluation and research to better understand disability representation, impacts and pathways. Additionally, we will provide self-determined investment in First Nations disability arts through the new First Nations-led Board, and we will build access and inclusion for d/Deaf and disabled artists and creative workers into the core work of Creative Workplaces.

On behalf of Creative Australia, I sincerely thank Morwenna Collett and Gill Nicol for their hard work on this research and the rich insights it has provided to inform support for arts and disability in Australia. I would also like to extend my deep gratitude and appreciation to the many people who offered time and expertise to participate in this research. We value and acknowledge the effort and impact of sharing these stories and experiences.

At Creative Australia, we want to provide impactful support and investment where it is most needed, continually informed by the experiences of d/Deaf and disabled artists and creative workers. We recognise the importance of your contributions to this research and to arts and culture in Australia.

**Adrian Collette AM**

Chief Executive Officer, Creative Australia

# Executive summary

This report is a summary of an arts and disability needs analysis and audit conducted by Morwenna Collett and Gill Nicol in 2023 for Creative Australia. Through desktop research and consultation with d/Deaf and disabled artists and creative workers, peak bodies and arts and cultural organisations, this research provides insights on needs and opportunities in the arts and disability ecology in Australia.

Approximately 200 people were consulted as part of this project, including conversations with over 70 d/Deaf and disabled artists and survey responses from 56 d/Deaf and disabled artists. The desktop research included analysis of existing arts and disability programs and services across Australia.

Consultation participants highlighted a range of needs and opportunities to strengthen support for d/Deaf and disabled artists, creative workers and audiences. These included:

- **service needs** such as resourcing for arts and disability peak bodies, and a national arts and disability service provider to enable better collaboration and national coverage
- **investment** that is self-determined, long-term and disability-specific; support for creative practice and new work; and devolved investment to support emerging artists
- **access and inclusion support** for arts and cultural organisations, and incentives to improve their accessibility
- **capacity building** to support career progression and leadership for d/Deaf and disabled people in the sector, such as inclusive residencies and training pathways, accessible networking opportunities and development of business skills
- **advocacy** around access and inclusion, development of national industry standards, and a national arts and disability service provider to respond to emerging advocacy needs

- **sector engagement opportunities** that enable visibility, connections between practitioners and supportive collaborations and partnerships.

Overall, the research pointed to a need for a **cultural shift** around disability and accessibility, and for education and awareness to address ableism in the arts and cultural sector.

This research is part of a body of work informing policies, initiatives and investment to strengthen and grow Australia's arts and disability ecology, which include:

- new Creative Australia investment in national arts and disability service needs identified through this research
- Creative Australia input into the development of the Australian Government's Arts and Disability Associated Plan (Associated Plan) under *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–31*
- our actions and commitments set out in a new Disability Action Plan (DAP) for Creative Australia.

# Introduction: National research into arts and disability needs

All Australians should have equal access to participate in arts and culture, regardless of their location, circumstances or background. However, inequities remain for d/Deaf and disabled artists, creative workers and audiences.

In mid-2023, Creative Australia commissioned an arts and disability needs analysis and audit to find out what could be done to grow access and inclusion in Australian arts and culture nationally.

Through desktop research and consultation with d/Deaf and disabled artists, creative workers and the broader sector, this research explored three main questions:

- What are the **critical service needs**?
- What targeted **capacity building** programs and initiatives should be prioritised?
- What **sector engagement and advocacy** should be prioritised?

The method included:

- **co-design** with d/Deaf and disabled artists and sector leaders
- **a desktop review** of publicly available information, published reports and research relating to arts and disability over the past five years (2018–23)
- **22 interviews and 9 focus groups** with organisations (including peak bodies and government agencies) and d/Deaf and disabled artists and creative workers
- **an organisation survey** targeting a range of arts organisations and peak bodies
- **an artist survey** targeting d/Deaf and disabled artists, creative workers, program participants and potentially audiences.

## About this research

**49**

**documents** captured in the desktop review



**131**

**websites** visited in the desktop review



**6**

**open focus groups** with d/Deaf and disabled artists, arts organisations, peak bodies and government agencies

**3**

**closed focus groups** for First Nations people, People of Colour and the d/Deaf community

**103**

**focus group participants, with over half (59) being d/Deaf and disabled artists**

**10**

**national organisations** and arts and disability peak bodies interviewed

**12**

**individual d/Deaf and disabled artists** interviewed

**10**

**researchers** involved, including 5 disabled creative workers, 2 allies and 3 d/Deaf and disabled facilitators



**All states and territories** represented across the consultation



**All art forms** represented across the consultation, including the screen industry



All focus groups and interviews offered **Auslan and captioning**



All independent artists **paid \$100 to participate** in the consultation

**92**

additional d/Deaf and disabled people interested in participating were on our **focus group waiting list**

**56**

responses received from the **d/Deaf and disabled artist** survey

**26**

responses received from the **arts organisation** survey



# What we found

## 1. Current activity

Arts and disability peak bodies currently operate in six out of eight states and territories across Australia.<sup>1</sup> Desktop mapping highlighted that they offer a range of services and support. Some work in partnership with other cultural organisations to deliver training, leadership development, mentoring, professional development workshops and community gatherings.

However, some states and territories have more resources than others, so the services provided vary across the country. This impacts how d/Deaf and disabled artists and creative workers in different jurisdictions can operate and access opportunities, and how engaged arts and cultural organisations feel in their access, equity and inclusion efforts.

As well as inconsistency between states and territories, there is inconsistency *within* states and territories (between regional and other areas). There are also gaps in service provision, advocacy and collaboration at the national level.

‘There’s massive disparity from state to state... What this has created is an uneven policy environment, uneven strategy and uneven investment.’

– Peak body CEO interview

‘Because of the vastness of our state, a lot of the offerings can be quite metropolitan focused. I think one of our key challenges is broadening that reach across the state.’

– Peak bodies focus group

<sup>1</sup> Access2Arts (SA), Accessible Arts (NSW), Access Arts (QLD), Arts Access Australia (national, under review), Arts Access Darwin (NT), Arts Access Victoria (VIC) and DADAA (WA). There is currently no formalised network or peak body in ACT or Tasmania.

## 2. Service needs

Consultation participants called for a range of actions to address **arts and disability service needs**, including:

- more resourcing for arts and disability peak bodies
- a balancing of the inequity between services across states and territories
- work to improve accessibility and offerings for regional and remote d/Deaf and disabled communities
- localised expertise recognising regional differences
- improvements in and alignment between disability support services delivered by government departments to better recognise d/Deaf and disabled artists.

‘...if you ever went to a provider and said “I want to work in an arts job” they will tell you it is not a real job...’

– Focus group for People of Colour

Consultation participants felt that **a national arts and disability service provider** (peak body, arm or chapter) is needed to:

- provide national advocacy and information
- facilitate collaboration and connection between other peak bodies
- service regions without a state/territory peak body.

‘Until we can put our hands on our hearts and say: there are enough leaders with disability in the arts sector, that d/Deaf and disabled artists are visible enough, that tertiary qualifications are accessible, etc., we need a national body.’

– Artist interview

### 3. Investment

Consultation participants suggested a range of ways to **improve investment** in d/Deaf and disabled artists, creative workers and audiences, including through:

- long-term disability-specific investment assessed by d/Deaf and disabled people
- commissions and large-scale opportunities to make new work
- investment in creative practice and creative development (process over outcome)
- having a variety of grant amounts available
- devolved investment (for example, administered by arts and disability peak bodies) to support emerging d/Deaf and disabled artists
- targeted investment to support people facing compounding barriers due to intersecting aspects of their identity.

‘I would like to see [Creative Australia] make a strong commitment for the next five years’

– **Peak body CEO interview**

‘I think we're at a great disadvantage when we have to include access costs in our arts projects both for our artists and often for our audiences... This limits the amount of resourcing we can put towards the art making.’

– **Organisations focus group**

‘I'm very actively advocating for arts investment beyond the government grants system...’

– **Artist focus group**

## 4. First Nations and disability

**Further self-determined work is needed to identify and support the needs of d/Deaf and disabled First Nations artists, creative workers and audiences.**

The research included interviews and a closed focus group with **d/Deaf and disabled First Nations artists and creative workers.**

First Nations participants highlighted unique challenges, aspirations and opportunities, including challenges around communication, cultural load and securing dedicated disability funding.

They highlighted a range of **ways to strengthen support**, including through:

- mentoring programs that enable d/Deaf and disabled First Nations artists to learn cultural skills and build cultural resilience
- opportunities to gather together, in person or online
- return to Country residencies
- infrastructure such as buildings and spaces
- targeted investment, including in new work
- grant writing support
- slower application processes and relationship building
- self-determined advocacy and representation.

‘The fact there is no word “disability” in our language, sometimes people get left out.’

– **First Nations focus group**

‘Targeted disability investment places all d/Deaf and disabled creatives into a single cultural pool. This approach fails to acknowledge the diversity within First Nations culture.’

– **First Nations focus group**

## 5. Access and inclusion

Consultation participants recommended ways to **improve access and inclusion** across the arts and cultural sector, including through:

- more accessible grant application systems and processes
- stronger expectations or incentives for organisations receiving government investment to make significant access and inclusion improvements
- assistance and education for arts organisations around access and inclusion
- greater visibility of creative uses of access strategies
- creation of more inclusive workplaces and accessible arts spaces
- development of Disability Inclusion Action Plans by arts organisations.

Consultation participants felt **Creative Australia must lead the way** internally around disability inclusion, including through disability employment, disability policy and procedures, peer assessment and grants processes, training and budget lines.

‘No investment in organisations who continue to use inaccessible venues, refuse to train in disability awareness.’

– **Artist survey**

‘All the funders should put in a mandatory access budget... say that 5% needs to be spent on access and inclusion.’

– **Peak body CEO interview**

‘[Creative Australia need to] get their own house in order... that process will help them in moving forward...’

– **Peak body CEO interview**

## 6. Capacity building

The research and consultation highlighted opportunities for capacity building to support **career progression and leadership** for d/Deaf and disabled people in the arts and cultural sector. This included through:

- more inclusive residency opportunities and training pathways
- development of business and administrative skills, such as budgeting, marketing, project management and digital skills
- grant writing services and workshops
- pipeline programs and initiatives in arts organisations to collaboratively build career pathways for emerging artists
- disability-specific leadership, career and skills development programs to provide sustained long-term scaffolding for d/Deaf and disabled artists' careers to advance through different stages.

‘Artists would like more support in accessing grants... Our processes are not particularly accessible.’

– Arts funder interview

‘We need to fill that next step. Capacity building, other people aren’t doing that. Where do the graduates go next?’

– Peak body CEO interview

‘Mainstream arts schools and training programs should need to meet a quota of d/Deaf and disabled students. These schools should be providing the industry with the talent it needs...’

– Artist interview

‘We have a real lack of people with the admin skills, a real need to develop arts admin.’

– Peak body CEO interview

Participants said **they want to see:**

- more d/Deaf and disabled people in leadership and decision-making roles
- new inclusive leadership and operational models that consider issues like burnout, health concerns and sustainability (for example, CEO job share)
- artist management agents that are d/Deaf and disabled friendly
- active building of audiences for disabled-led stories.

‘It’s not just that there are blocks, also people with disability don’t want to take on those roles because it would be bad for their health. We don’t have good examples of other leadership models.’

– **Peak body CEO interview**

‘We need agents, like actors have agents. People who know what to do, so we can get on with making the art.’

– **Artist survey**

‘If we’re going to affect social change, it’s people seeing the grocer on TV with disability that’s going to make a difference.’

– **Peak body CEO interview**

Participants also called for accessible and inclusive **networking opportunities and mentoring programs**, including ones specifically for d/Deaf and disabled artists from culturally and racially marginalised groups and for First Nations artists. But they also wanted to address misconceptions that all d/Deaf and disabled artists want or need mentoring.

‘I just would not attend gallery openings anymore... all this mental stress of preparing myself to go... So, I'd just not turn up.’

– **Focus group for d/Deaf artists**

‘Networking is a fundamental part of our lives. It would be so easy for the bigger companies... to convene quarterly gatherings for disabled artists and arts workers.’

– **Artist focus group**

## 7. Advocacy

The research highlighted a range of **advocacy** needs and opportunities. Participants called for:

- advocacy for increased accessibility in the arts and cultural sector
- work to upskill the broader sector in working with d/Deaf and disabled groups
- national industry standards for access and inclusion in the arts
- national arts and disability services to ensure consistent advocacy efforts
- self-advocacy resources to enable self-determination
- advocacy for policies and investment addressing disability and access
- advocacy around policies that disproportionately impact d/Deaf and disabled artists of colour.

‘A push for the sector to make accessible websites, documents and online content and everyone using Plain English.’

– **Artist survey**

‘We don’t have a national voice or body that's strong enough to advocate...’

– **Peak body CEO interview**

‘More support for migrants who would be super new to the grants system!’

– **Focus group for People of Colour**



## 8. Sector engagement

Consultation participants suggested various ways to **improve sector engagement** for d/Deaf and disabled artists and creative workers, including through:

- a range of national gatherings/forums to provide connection opportunities
- strengthened allyship and supportive collaborations
- participation in networks, alliances and groups
- early involvement of d/Deaf and disabled people in project and program planning
- building of long-term partnerships at all levels
- recognition of ongoing impacts of COVID-19
- festivals that increase the visibility of work by d/Deaf and disabled artists.

‘I think any initiatives that are bringing groups together, disabled and non-disabled with a vision of the industry being more accessible would be your best way to get change happening.’

– **Artist management interview**

‘I would love more ways to openly pitch projects and look for collaborators.’

– **Focus group for People of Colour**

‘[We] need allies and a sense of collaboration...’

– **Peak bodies focus group**

## 9. A cultural shift

Overall, the research pointed to a need for **a cultural shift** around disability and accessibility, as well as education and awareness to address ableism in the arts and cultural sector. Participants called for:

- increased and meaningful representation of d/Deaf and disabled artists and leaders across all parts of our industry, reflecting their diverse identities and range of experience
- an arts and disability marketing rebrand to help build the profile of d/Deaf and disabled artists and creative workers
- communication strategies that respect the nuances of disability terminology
- more inclusive workplaces including increased acknowledgment of ‘crip time’ – the extra time needed to accomplish something or get somewhere<sup>2</sup>
- self-determination for First Nations d/Deaf and disabled artists and communities to identify their needs and priorities
- work to improve accessibility and offerings for regional and remote d/Deaf and disabled communities
- cultivation of a community that actively addresses lateral violence and celebrates everyone.

‘...for a long time when we discussed inclusion and representation and diversity, disability was just not included in that at all.’

– Artist focus group

‘There should be a disability-led awareness campaign for mainstream non-disabled people in the arts to better understand how to interact with disabled people in a way that is positive and not offensive, disempowering or silencing.’

– Artist survey

‘It would be great to see more publicity, articles, reviews about people like us and our works.’

– Artist focus group

<sup>2</sup> See Stimpunks Foundation 2022, *Glossary: Crip time*; and Laura Pettenuzzo 2022, ‘#CripTime’, *Women With Disabilities Australia*, 14 September.

## 10. Opportunities for future sector support

Consultation participants identified the following programs or activities as **models that could be considered** to support the arts and disability ecology in the future:

### Agents for Change

- d/Deaf and disabled consultants embedded inside arts organisations to act as an 'Agents for Change' by keeping disability and accessibility at the top of the organisation's agenda (based on a program of the same name from the United Kingdom).

### Commissioning fund

- A commissioning fund to support the creation of major new works by d/Deaf and disabled artists, including for touring.

### Professional showcasing of disability-led work

- Support for existing and new showcasing platforms that profile work by d/Deaf and disabled artists.

### d/Deaf and disabled artist agents

- Agents who provide management and support services to d/Deaf and disabled artists.

### Accessible venues

- Support to increase accessibility of physical and online arts spaces.

### National marketing campaign

- A disability-led campaign to raise public and arts and cultural sector awareness of the quality and impact of work by d/Deaf and disabled artists.

### Leadership development

- Programs to better support disabled leaders at various stages of their careers.

### Inclusive pitching processes

- Pitching opportunities for d/Deaf and disabled artists to share their work with major festivals, arts and cultural organisations and other artists.

### Increasing employment opportunities for d/Deaf and disabled creative workers

- Programs to build skills for d/Deaf and disabled creative workers within various parts of the industry (for example producers and technicians), and to increase disability confidence among non-disabled creative workers.

### Access services

- Support to increase the volume, quality and promotion of access services available across the arts and cultural sector (for example, Audio Description).

# Supporting and growing arts and disability in Australia

The findings of this research are informing the work and advocacy of Creative Australia – including policies, initiatives and investment to support, strengthen and grow disability arts in Australia and to increase participation of d/Deaf and disabled artists, creative workers and audiences in Australia’s arts and culture.

While not every need highlighted through this research can be immediately addressed, collaborative effort – backed by evidence, voices and lived experiences – can support our arts and disability ecology to thrive. This in turn can redefine aesthetics and experiences for artists, audiences and workforces, change lives and enrich Australia’s arts and culture for the benefit of all Australians.

# Key terms used in this report

## d/Deaf and disabled

Terminology is constantly evolving. Creative Australia supports self-determination and respects how d/Deaf and disabled people choose to label and define disability.

In this report, we use the term ‘d/Deaf and disabled’ to include anyone with a lived experience of disability and we acknowledge that disability is caused by barriers in society (see the ‘social model of disability’ below). Barriers can be related to disability types that are visible or non-visible, sensory or physical, cognitive, intellectual or developmental, or to a person’s mental health or illness or neurodiversity.

The term ‘d/Deaf and disabled’ is used on the understanding that many people in the creative sector’s disability communities prefer identity-first language. We recognise that many people also use people-first language, ‘people with disability’.

‘Deaf’ (with an uppercase D) is usually used to describe people who are culturally Deaf – those that were born Deaf, or became Deaf early in life, and who use Auslan. Some do not refer to their deafness as disability, but others do. We respect the right of the Deaf community to label their experience as one of cultural and linguistic difference.

‘deaf’ (with a lowercase d) refers to the physical condition of having hearing loss. People who identify as deaf with a lowercase ‘d’ do not always have a strong connection to the Deaf community and may not always use sign language.

## Arts and disability

This report uses the term ‘arts and disability’ to collectively refer to the broad ecology that:

- works together with d/Deaf and disabled artists and creative workers to make arts and culture
- supports access to arts and cultural experiences for d/Deaf and disabled audiences.

Strengthening this broader ecology is the business of everyone in Australia’s arts and cultural sector.

## Disability arts

This report uses the term ‘disability arts’ to refer to a distinct form of arts and creative practice by d/Deaf and disabled artists, creative workers and organisations that addresses disability rights or lived experiences in some way. Disability arts is a professional practice that can change perceptions about disability through new creative forms, aesthetics and audience engagement techniques.<sup>3</sup>

‘...disability is seen as a perspective and a way of being in the world, which disabled people draw on to produce art, culture, and media work that differs from mainstream work not just in content but in form.’<sup>4</sup>

## Ableism

Ableism means treating d/Deaf and disabled people unfairly, or systematically excluding them, based on the (often unconscious) belief that non-disabled people’s abilities are superior and d/Deaf and disabled people need ‘fixing’. Ableism includes harmful stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalisations and is often expressed and reinforced through language.

## Social model of disability

The social model of disability says people are disabled by barriers in society, such as buildings not having a lift or how people communicate or behave. The social model helps us recognise and remove barriers to enable d/Deaf and disabled people to fully participate in society. It is now the internationally recognised way to view and address disability.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hadley, B and McDonald, D 2019 ‘Introduction: Disability arts, culture, and media studies - mapping a maturing field’, *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Arts, Culture and Media*.

<sup>4</sup> As above.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#).



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