



Australian Government

**Creative
Australia**

Creating Value

Results of the National Arts Participation Survey

Theatre factsheet

Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey is the first survey of its kind to be released by Creative Australia and the fifth survey in the landmark research series from the Australia Council, following iterations in 2009, 2013, 2016 and 2019.

The research series provides a comprehensive overview of Australians' evolving relationships with arts, culture and creativity. By examining our engagement with creativity – both through the lens of self-expression and engagement with arts and creative activities – this series builds the evidence base on participation in the arts in Australia.

The full report includes detailed insights on engagement with specific art forms, including theatre.

Key findings about **engagement with theatre**, including attending and creating theatre, are included in this factsheet.

In 2022:

36%

of Australians attend live theatre events or festivals

6%

Australians create or participate in theatre

Australians

who attend theatre performances attend 7.3 events per year

Introduction

Theatre is an influential and powerful art form. Through the telling of diverse stories, theatre has the power to educate, entertain, amuse, move and inspire audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Findings from *Creating Value* highlight the significant role of theatre in Australia.

In 2022, theatre performances or festivals attracted 7.4 million Australians, or 36% of the population (consistent with 37% in 2019). This includes one in five Australians who attend musical theatre or cabaret.

However, the frequency at which Australians are attending live theatre has decreased. The number of Australians attending more than once a month (eg, weekly or fortnightly) has dropped and more Australians are going to live theatre performances every couple of months.

Live theatre attendance was particularly high among people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, with 38% attending at least one form of theatre compared with 28% of non-CALD respondents.

Some 6% of the population aged 15 years or over also create or participate in theatre. This includes those who created theatre to engage with their own cultural background, language group or community, from musical theatre or cabaret to children's theatre and circus. First Nations Australians, CALD Australians, young Australians and people with disability were more likely to participate in theatre than other Australians.

Read on for more on Australians' engagement with theatre...

For the full report and online resources see: <https://creative.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/Creating-Value/>

Theatre – live attendance

Almost two in five Australians connect with theatre by attending

In 2022, 7.4 million Australians attended live theatre performances or festivals, or 36% of the population – consistent with 37% in 2019.

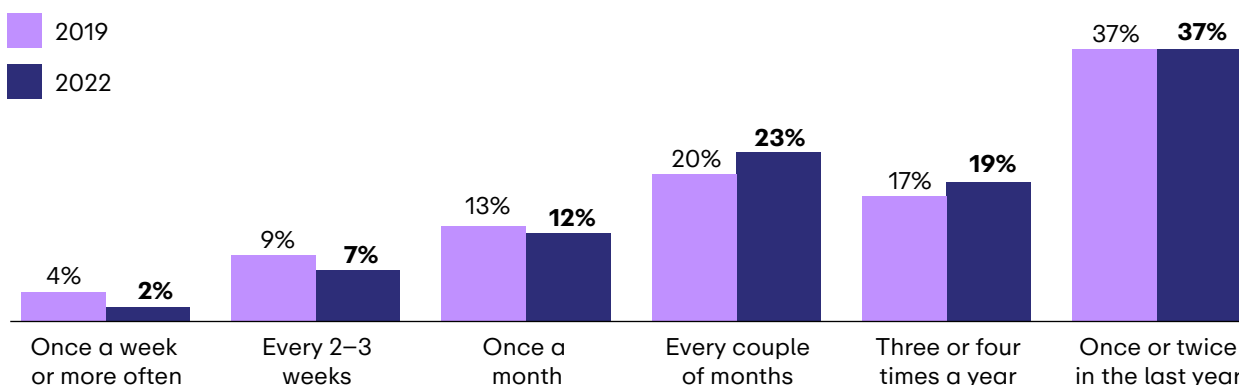
On average, Australians who attended live theatre attended 7.3 theatre performances in 2022, down from 8.8 in 2019.

Since the pandemic, fewer Australians are attending live theatre on a weekly, fortnightly and monthly basis

While the number of Australians who attended live theatre remains consistent with the 2019 National Arts Participation Survey results, the frequency at which Australians are attending live theatre has decreased.

Monthly or more frequent attendance such as weekly and fortnightly attendance has dropped five percentage points (21% down from 26% in 2019). Instead, more Australians are attending live theatre performances every couple of months (23% up from 20% in 2019) or three or four times a year (19% up from 17% in 2019).

On average, the number of live theatre events Australians attend has dropped. Australians who attended live theatre in 2022 attended 7.3 theatre performances, a decrease from an average of 8.8 theatre events in 2019.

Figure 1: Australians' attendance frequency at live theatre events

Q2_2. And in the past 12 months, how often did you personally attend these kinds of events (eg exhibitions, performances, shows)? - Theatre Base: Those who attended live theatre events (2022: n=2,858 // 2019: n=2,596)

What types of theatre do Australians attend?

- One in five Australians attend **musical theatre or cabaret** (20% consistent with 19% in 2019).
- 15% attend **traditional or contemporary theatre** (consistent with 16% in 2019).
- 7% of Australians 15 years and over attend **the circus** (consistent with 7% in 2019).
- 6% of Australians 15 years and over attend **children's theatre**, including 14% of parents with children under the age of 16 (consistent with 6% in 2019).

Who attends live theatre events and festivals

- **Young Australians** are more likely to attend live theatre events and festivals (44% of those aged 15–24 compared to 26% of Australians 50 and over). They are most likely to attend musical theatre or cabaret (25% of those aged 15–24 compared to 15% of Australians 50 and over).
- **First Nations respondents** are more likely than non-First Nations respondents to attend live theatre events and festivals (43% compared to 35%), in particular, they are more likely to go to a circus performance (10% compared to 6%) or children's theatre (8% compared to 5%).
- **CALD respondents** are more likely than non-CALD respondents to attend at least one form of live theatre and festivals (47% attended at least one compared to 33% of non-CALD respondents), with the most popular forms being musical theatre or cabaret (24%) and traditional or contemporary theatre (20%).
- While First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) respondents are highly engaged in theatre, a high proportion report feeling that **cultural and creative experiences are not really for them**. Two in five First Nations respondents and one in three CALD respondents report that **cultural and creative experiences are not really for people like me** (39% of First Nations respondents compared to 27% of non-First Nations respondents, and 31% of CALD respondents compared to 27% of non-CALD respondents).
- These seemingly contradictory results, also seen in previous iterations of the survey for some groups, suggest an ongoing disconnection between active participation and engagement, and perceptions of the arts as expensive, hard to access and narrowly defined. They also resonate with observations of the under-representation of non-dominant cultures and groups in audiences for certain forms of publicly funded arts and culture, adding important context to the body of research that seeks to understand who has access to arts and culture and why.¹

¹ Deakin University 2023, Changing Organisations to Diversity Arts Audiences: Summary of findings from national survey.

Case study

Monster Trucks, Terrapin Puppet Theatre

A fleet of cement mixers donned as leering, grinning monsters roamed the streets of Hobart and Launceston during 2022 MONA FOMA.

Terrapin Puppet Theatre worked with four Tasmanian artists – Tom O’Hern, Takira Simon-Brown, Molly Turner and Tricky Walsh – to bring the machines to life. Inspired by Stephen King’s horror short story Trucks, a tale about sentient machinery enslaving humankind, the ordinary machines were given independent life and personality.

Monster Trucks, Terrapin Puppet Theatre, MONA FOMA Launceston 2022.
Credit: Meg Siejka/Terrapin.



Theatre – creative participation

1.3 million Australians participate in theatre

In 2022, 1.3 million Australians, or 6% of the population aged 15 years or over, created theatre. This includes those who created theatre to engage with their own cultural background, language group or community, and is down from 8% in 2019.

In 2022, 3% of Australians creatively participated in theatre to engage with their cultural background in 2022. This has slightly decreased from 5% in 2019.

Excluding those who created theatre to engage with their own cultural background, language group or community, nearly 1 million Australians, or 5% of the population aged 15 years or over, created or participated in theatre in 2022. This has decreased slightly since 2019 (6%) and returned to levels seen in 2016 (5%).

In addition, one in seven Australians participate in community arts which includes community theatre among other community activities such as community choir (15%).

Who creatively participates in theatre?

Of the 6% of the population aged 15 years or over who create theatre, including to engage with their own cultural background, language group or community:

- One in 10 **respondents with disability** participate in theatre (10% compared to 6% of those without disability).
- One in seven **First Nations respondents** participate in theatre (15% compared to 6% of non-First Nations respondents).
- More than one in ten **CALD respondents** participate in theatre (13% compared to 5% of non-CALD respondents).
- **Young Australians** are more likely than older Australians to participate in theatre (13% of those aged 15–24 compared to 9% of those aged 25–49 and 2% of Australians aged 50 and over).

What types of theatre do Australians create?

In 2022, nearly one million Australians, or 5% of the population aged 15 years or over, created or participated in theatre, excluding to engage with their own cultural background, language group or community. Of these:

- 3% of Australians participate in **musical theatre or cabaret** (consistent with 3% in 2019).
- 2% of Australians participate in **traditional or contemporary theatre** (a decrease from 3% in 2019).
- 2% of Australians participate in **children's theatre** (a slight decrease from 2% in 2019).
- 1% of Australians participate in the **circus** (a decrease from 2% in 2019).

Research approach

The 2022 National Arts Participation Survey was conducted in September – October 2022 and the results are based on a nationally representative sample of 9,396 people. The previous National Arts Participation Survey was conducted in 2019, prior to the disruptions of COVID-19 and provided a benchmark of Australians' arts engagement before the pandemic. The 2022 survey results, in comparison, provide an update on arts engagement in the wake of COVID-19.

The 2022 survey results provide critical insights into how Australians' arts engagement might be changing following the disruptions felt by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to the role of the arts for our individual and collective wellbeing. The 2022 survey closely examined Australians' relationship with the arts throughout lockdown periods, providing insights into the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing. It asked participants to reflect on their digital arts engagement throughout this time and to share their own perceptions of how their engagement might have changed.