

December 2024
Department of the Treasury
Pre-Budget Submissions
(via online portal)

The national and state/territory peak bodies for dance, Ausdance National and the federated Ausdance network, welcome the opportunity to make a pre-budget submission on behalf of hundreds of thousands of practising dancers, students, choreographers, teachers and small business owners.

We represent and serve professional performing arts organisations/companies, private education businesses, primary, middle and secondary school educators, tertiary dance/performing arts institutions, festivals, therapists/medical professionals, First Nations Cultural dance and community dance groups, in the arts, education, health, sports and business sectors.

The 2025 federal budget should aim to recognise the social, economic, health/well-being, and cultural value of the arts in Australia, i.e. the arts in society as opposed to 'arts' as entertainment.

The budget should respond to the evidence of the lifelong impact, influence and outcomes of dance participation, businesses, communities, organisations, health and education.

In Australia, 573,726 adults and 387,617 children participate regularly in dance activities.¹ According to Fitness Australia, dance is the third most popular form of recreational activity. It is a part of everyday Australians' lives, and the diversity and impact of its sectors and industry practice needs recognition in all new arts policies.

When you dance, you **burn calories, strengthen muscles, improve balance** and your cardiovascular fitness. To dance **strengthens communities**, encourages friendships and releases endorphins, enhancing social bonding. **Dance lessens loneliness**. To dance **creates joy** – it improves mood, increases confidence and compassion. Dancing **lowers anxiety** and reduces the impact of trauma. Dancing **improves cognitive development and memory**. It protects the brain from aging induced neurodegeneration and reduces the perception of pain²

First Nations priorities

- **Invest directly and regionally** in Community/Traditional owner led long-term First Nations workforce capacity and capability to enable more sustainable careers, creative and Cultural leadership, products and services for First Nations dance practitioners, leaders and Communities. Approximately 20% of all First Nations businesses operate in the arts and heritage industries, with a significant share identified as medium or large-sized businesses.³

National leadership, service and accountability

- **Reform funding models to strategically invest in Australia's dance service organisation Ausdance; national and state/territory peak bodies**, pioneer of [Safe Dance](#) practice, to model and introduce improved systems of safety protocols (most urgently child safety – see below and First Nations Cultural safety) in dance activities and workplaces across the diverse and broad dance sector.

As a leveraged investment this would enable Ausdance to advocate on behalf of the sector on identified national and local priorities, update its voluntary standards, best practice guidelines,

¹https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/research/ausplay/results#data_tables_br_july_2023_june_2024

² <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-dancing-helps-your-mental-health-5206963>

³ [Analysis of the Cultural and Creative Sector—Revive: Sectoral Analysis—December 2024](#)

templates, resources and fact sheets to provide professional development and to work towards a more regulated industry. This aligns with the priority of the National Cultural Policy – to recognise and support 'artists as workers'.

Since 2016 service and support organisations have been drastically under-resourced at federal level, leading to direct government investment in dance and the arts having little impact or long-lasting broader community benefit.

Ausdance continues to field distressing reports by parents of unsafe teaching practices that are causing physical and mental harm to young children. Recognising nearly 350,000 Australian children participate in dance activities each week, the dance sector represents a substantial opportunity to improve community understanding and integration of child safety.

- **Invest in Australia's dance service organisation, Ausdance and its national network**, to work with the Office for Child Safety to model and introduce nationally consistent systems of child safety regulation in dance activities and workplaces, building on its voluntary standards, guidelines and fact sheets.

Without investment in Ausdance, this organisation is unable to undertake the work required to support improved teaching and business practices in line with state and territory child safety legislation.

Educators in Australia's schools are not sufficiently well supported or resourced to teach *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* and the state-based Senior years curricula. Arts subject associations such as Ausdance are best placed to deliver educator professional development programs and ongoing support with subject-specific expertise, thus significantly improving the national arts education landscape.

- **Invest in well-supported and resourced arts education** in primary, middle and secondary schools. Arts education in state schools removes barriers to access and opportunities and will result in diverse and representative artistic, cultural and creative output, *uniquely Australian in context*.
- **Urgently reverse the unfair and inequitable fee increases for Arts and Humanities courses** introduced as part of the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) program. The impact of these increased fees has been a drastic reduction (30-50%, and Australia-wide closure of tertiary arts courses) in arts and humanities students, which impacts the long-term creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving capabilities of the next generation of Australians.
- **Reconsider the social, cultural and economic impact of financial sustainability models of all government owned venues.** Ausdance is deeply concerned that the lack of affordable and accessible venue spaces, in particular government owned venues, is a large contributor to the unsustainability of independent dance practice and the commercial viability of successful productions with audiences.
- **Invest in expanding services for the betterment of vulnerable and ageing Australians** supported by a growing amount of peer reviewed evidence-based research and pilot studies that cross between arts and health science.⁴ Ausdance collaborates and partners with dance for wellbeing groups nationally. Many of our members and employees are accredited teachers with extensive professional experience working in aged care facilities with senior community groups, disability, mixed ability and Dance for Parkinson's participants.

⁴ Proceedings of Panpapanalya 2018 the 2nd Joint Congress of Dance and the Child International and World Dance Alliance Global Education and Training Network <https://ausdance.org.au/?ACT=73&file=2446>

Evidence-based investment

In the professional arts sector, a 2017 report by the Australia Council indicated that dance was the most precarious of all arts employment, and that dance artists were the lowest paid of all arts workers.

- **Invest in collection and distribution of data and evidence that address the social, cultural, well-being and economic value of the arts in Australia** i.e. a strategy that acknowledges the whole dance/arts ecology: Early years, community, school, tertiary, health, private studio, commercial, education, sport, technology, tourism.

Investment in dance workplaces

- Through Creative Australia and Ausdance, **invest in services and resources to support arts employers to meet their workplace health, safety and wage obligations**, i.e. Ensuring 'that the full costs of working as an artist are remunerated'. We re-emphasise **the major pay gap for female arts workers** that will need addressing more definitively when the government is considering new levels of funding for Creative Australia
- **Re-examine successful programs to nourish life-time careers for dancers** such as [SCOPE for dancers](#) (Securing Career Opportunities and Professional Employment) initiated by Ausdance National in partnership with the Australian Sports Commission, and later as part of a strategic initiative of the Australia Council. SCOPE was a program designed to ensure that dance artists proactively participated in and effectively managed their own careers, education and personal development. [See the evaluation '[Creating SCOPE for artists: Development, management and sustainability in the careers of professional dance artists in Australia.](#)']

In the performing arts, dance has the highest representation of female participants and workers across the sector yet suffers disparity on gender equity. Professional dancers (company dancers), predominantly women, have a minimum casual pay rate of \$37.05 per hour, compared to musicians who have a minimum casual pay rate of \$49.31 per hour.⁵ A professional dancer's career is also the shortest of all the performing arts (on average retiring at age 35). Providing dancers with skills, education and experience to transition out of performance into related industries is critical to promoting dance as a sustainable career.

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⁵ <https://calculate.fairwork.gov.au/payguides/fairwork/ma000081/pdf>