

AUSTRALIA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

SUBMISSION TO THE CLOSING THE GAP REFRESH

APRIL 2018

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***‘Art is talking about the land, the sea, about our culture,
about our connection, about our kinship relationships –
songs, dance, names, places, country, sacred sites.
All these things are important to us.***

***Art is important for communities; it is a life-long
journey to respect our culture and stay strong and
for children to learn two-ways.’***

- From Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists
Aboriginal Corporation (ANKA) Value Statement¹

¹ ANKA Members and Board of Directors 2012, [*Value Statement: What is true and important to us.*](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australia Council for the Arts welcomes the refresh of the Closing the Gap agenda to adopt a strengths-based approach recognising the centrality of First Nations cultures. We are pleased to provide this submission, which has been developed in collaboration with our First Nations stakeholders.

Internationally, art is recognised as an essential element of culture. Along with language, art is a medium through which culture is embodied and expressed. It is also recognised internationally that culture is broader than the arts. Culture includes distinct and complex thought systems, values and modes of life.² All peoples have the right to participate in cultural and artistic life by virtue of their right to self-determination³ – the right of choice, participation and control.⁴ First Nations peoples' indivisible rights to culture and self-determination are central in this submission.

For decades, First Nations peoples have advocated for the critical role of culture – as a necessary part of the solution to Indigenous disadvantage, and for the healing and strengthening of individuals and communities. Numerous inquiries have demonstrated the link between interrupted culture and Indigenous disadvantage, and the importance of valuing culture in addressing this impact. While the importance of culture is increasingly highlighted in the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap reports, culture has been the missing element from the Closing the Gap framework to date. Funding for First Nations culture made up just 1% of total direct government expenditure for Indigenous Australians in 2015–16⁵ (see Appendix A), and cultural outcomes have not featured in the measurement framework.

In its current form the Closing the Gap agenda has not succeeded – four of the seven targets are not on track,⁶ and suicide and incarceration rates are soaring.⁷ Over the life of the policy there have also been declines in First Nations peoples' attendance at cultural events⁸ and declines in creative arts participation in remote Australia⁹ – concerning trends for cultural sustainability and community wellbeing.

The Australia Council commends the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) recognition of the need to do better; to highlight First Nations peoples' achievements; and to honour and celebrate the richness and diversity of the world's oldest living cultures.¹⁰ We support the central position of Indigenous cultures articulated in the *Framework for Prosperity*, and the commitment that implementation of the new Closing the Gap agenda will be guided by principles of genuine collaboration between governments and communities and shared decision-making.¹¹

² '...in its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.' UNESCO, *Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, 1982*, World Conference on Cultural Policies, Mexico city, 26 July–6 August 1982.

³ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Article 1; *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, Article 1; *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Article 3.

⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, *Social Justice Report 2011*, p.23.

⁵ Based on Productivity Commission 2017, *Indigenous Expenditure Report 2017*, Advanced Database, accessed 2/2/18.

⁶ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2018*, p.9.

⁷ The Indigenous imprisonment rate has increased by 39% since 2007. *Ibid*, p.120. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men aged between 25 and 29 have the highest reported suicide rates in the world. Youth Action & Policy Association 2016, *Australian Youth Development Index: A jurisdictional overview of youth development: 2016 report*, p.22.

⁸ Productivity Commission 2016, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016 – Overview*, p.25.

⁹ Australia Council 2017, *Living Culture: First Nations arts participation and wellbeing*.

¹⁰ COAG 2017, *Closing the Gap the Next Phase: Public Discussion Paper*, p.4.

¹¹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *About the Refresh*, accessed 29/1/2018.

We recommend that the COAG turns these words and principles into action through:

- **Consolidated, targeted investment in First Nations arts, culture and cultural maintenance outcomes as a strategic priority area within the Closing the Gap framework. The aims are to increase opportunities for First Nations people to directly engage in arts and cultural activity, and cultural maintenance and renewal. This requires outcome measures in the framework.**
- **Simultaneous recognition of Indigenous cultures as a foundation across the framework, with investment in culturally based programs to improve outcomes in early childhood, education, employment, health and wellbeing, community safety, justice and suicide prevention.**
- **A flexible, localised community development approach that empowers communities to utilise their cultural knowledge and build on their unique strengths, with prioritised funding for First Nations-led organisations and solutions that is sufficient for long-term planning.**

These actions would:

- Demonstrate that COAG is hearing First Nations voices and responding to inquiries and community consultation findings over previous decades (see page 8).
- Support the Australian Government's commitment to a range of international treaties and obligations (see page 12).
- Recognise First Nations arts as an expression of culture and an area of strength, and take account of the evidence base about their contribution to First Nations wellbeing and socioeconomic outcomes (see page 13).
- Respect First Nation peoples' fundamental right to self-determination (see page 20).

The Australia Council's recommendations are in line with the holistic cultural determinants approach to First Nations health and wellbeing articulated in the 2017 *My Life My Lead* consultation report,¹² and are consistent with the 'Cultural Investment Strategy' for Western Australia proposed in the Discussion Paper *Investing in Aboriginal Culture*.¹³

The recommendations are based on recognition that participation in arts and cultural activity has both intrinsic and instrumental benefits – cultural strength and continuity is an outcome in itself, as well as a foundation for other outcomes. The Australia Council is therefore advocating for increased investment – far beyond the 1% currently allocated – for First Nations cultural maintenance and expression, and for culturally based solutions across portfolios. (See page 20 for discussion of culturally based solutions and community-led programs).

¹² Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, *My Life My Lead - Opportunities for strengthening approaches to the social determinants and cultural determinants of Indigenous health: Report on the national consultations December 2017*.

¹³ *Investing in Aboriginal Culture: The Role of Culture in Gaining More Effective Outcomes from WA State Government Services*. (DCA Reference 15/751, May 2016).

The Australia Council commends community for their generosity in continuing to highlight an array of solutions that build on community strengths. Drawing on this expertise, cultural outcome measures must be defined with and by First Nations peoples and communities as part of a holistic, interdependent framework, with consideration of indicators related to: types of arts and cultural participation, opportunities to connect with Country and Elders, and language maintenance and revival; as well as outcomes such as empowerment, wellbeing and the instrumental benefits communities aim to achieve through culturally based programs at a local level. (See page 19 for further considerations of how to include culture in the framework).

The evidence is clear that First Nations arts and cultural participation can support: the development of strong and resilient First Nations children; improved school attendance and engagement; higher levels of educational attainment; improved physical and mental health and wellbeing; greater social inclusion and cohesion; more employment, economic opportunities and meaningful work; safer communities with reductions in crime and improved rehabilitation; as well as the prevention of suicide¹⁴ – fostering a secure sense of cultural identity is a powerful protective factor against self-harm for young First Nations people¹⁵ and helps First Nations children and young people to navigate racism and being a minority group in their own country.¹⁶

In societies that enjoy continuity of culture from one generation to the next, children absorb culture with every breath. They learn what is expected of them, and grow confidence that their words and actions have meaning and predictable effects.¹⁷ The interruption of culture as a cause of Indigenous disadvantage cannot be overstated, and neither can the opportunity to heal this damage by valuing culture. For the Closing the Gap policy to succeed in improving the lives of First Nations Australians, it is time to ensure that the achievement of targets is not to the detriment of cultural maintenance, vibrancy, transmission, participation or safety. Now is the moment to invest in the inherent value and foundational role of strong culture in the Closing the Gap agenda.

¹⁴ See pages 13–18 of this submission.

¹⁵ Dudgeon P, Cox K, D'Anna D, Dunkley C, Hams K, Kelly K, Scrine C & Walker R 2012, *Hear Our Voices: Community consultations for the development of an empowerment, healing and leadership program for Aboriginal people living in the Kimberly*, WA, Telethon Institute of Child Health Research WA.

¹⁶ Department of Education and Early childhood Development 2010, *The State of Victoria's Children 2009: Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne.

¹⁷ Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1995, p.25, quoted in Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia 1995, *Telling Our Story*, p.52.

SUBMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Australia Council and Australian Government support for First Nations arts and culture

The Australia Council has a statutory role to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts practice.³⁵ We are committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to provide long-term support for First Nations arts as one of the four goals of our strategic plan for a culturally ambitious nation.³⁶

The Australia Council undertakes a broad range of activity to support First Nations arts and cultural expression, including investment in the creation, development, production and distribution of artistic and cultural works. This is delivered through project grants and multi-year organisational funding; targeted investment through the Chosen and Signature Works programs; capacity building and strategic development nationally and internationally; the National Indigenous Arts Awards; and research that investigates the First Nations arts ecology and promotes greater access and participation in First Nations arts experiences by all Australians.

Our investment is delivered in collaboration with First Nations artists and communities. In particular, the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Strategy Panel provides expert strategic advice to ensure the effective delivery of programs and other strategic activities. Our dedicated funding to First Nations people, groups and organisations through our grants program is assessed wholly by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peer assessors.

The Australia Council's support for First Nations-led organisations doubled through our Four Year Funding program that commenced in January 2017, which is open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations.³⁷ Of the 128 organisations supported, 13% are led by First Nations people. Overall we invested around \$13.1 million in First Nations artists and communities in 2016–17.

The Australian Government also administers a number of initiatives that support First Nations arts and cultures. This includes the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) and Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) programs administered by the Department of Communications and the Arts. The IVAIS program supports the operations of approximately 80 Indigenous-governed art centres at the heart of Australia's world-renowned Indigenous visual art movement. The ILA program supports activities that revive, maintain, celebrate and promote Indigenous cultures through languages and arts. In 2016–17, \$40 million was provided through the IVAIS and ILA programs.

³⁵ Section 9(1)(ba) of the *Australia Council Act 2013* (Cth) provides that it is a function of the Australia Council to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts practice. See Appendix B for further information about the Australia Council.

³⁶ Australia Council Strategic Plan 2014 to 2019, *A Culturally Ambitious Nation*.

³⁷ The Four Year Funding program provides multi-year core program funding for small to medium arts organisations of significant regional, national or international standing. See <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/funding/funding-index/four-year-funding-for-organisations/>

1.2 Scope of this submission

- This submission primarily addresses the discussion paper questions: ‘Should Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture be incorporated in the Closing the Gap framework? How?’
- In this submission, the terms ‘Indigenous’, ‘First Nations’ and ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ are used interchangeably to refer with respect to the First Peoples of Australia.
- In this submission, ‘culture’ includes the value that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people place on continuing to practice ways of knowing and being, which are embodied in Country, family, ancestors, language, art, dance, songs and ceremony. Practising culture can involve a living relationship with ancestors and the spiritual dimension of existence, traditional and contemporary cultural practice, kinship, connection to land and Country, healing, ancestry, belonging and self-determination.³⁸
- Our submission was developed in collaboration with our First Nations stakeholders.

2. HEARING FIRST NATIONS VOICES

In the Australia Council’s legislated role supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts practice, we are immersed in a dialogue with First Nations artists and cultural practitioners about the power of First Nations arts and culture to connect, strengthen and heal individuals and communities.

For example, First Nations delegates at the 2017 National Indigenous Dance Forum³⁹ nominated a priority to be: ‘*Culture and dance as medicine for wellbeing – getting back to country where our ancestors danced*’, and reflected on this priority in the context of the highest suicide rate in the world and the need to empower each other.⁴⁰

Directors at the Kimberly Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC) have endorsed and affirmed cultural solutions for healing their communities’ past trauma and building a future for their young people.⁴¹ For KALACC, culture is the compass and the key:

‘To heal our people, we must heal our families. To heal our families, we must heal our communities. Culture is the key.’⁴²

These echo the views captured in *The Elders’ Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-Harm and Youth Suicide* (2014) – there was a high level of agreement among Elders and community representatives about the role that loss of cultural connection plays in making young people vulnerable to self-harm, and the role culture can play in healing and protecting young people.⁴³ In introducing the report, Professor Pat Dudgeon, the Co-chair of the

³⁸ This definition is consistent with Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, *My Life My Lead*, *op. cit.* p.7–9.

³⁹ The [National Indigenous Dance Forum](#) was presented by BlakDance in partnership with YIRRAMBOI: First Nations Arts Festival, Melbourne, 5–7 May 2017.

⁴⁰ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men aged between 25 and 29 have the highest reported suicide rates in the world. Youth Action & Policy Association 2016, *Australian Youth Development Index*, *op. cit.* p.22.

⁴¹ KALACC 2017, *Cultural Solutions: Shared Pathways for Engagement in the Kimberley*, Position Paper–Sept 2017.

⁴² KALACC Director’s Statement, *ibid.* p.6.

⁴³ People Culture Environment 2014, [The Elders’ Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-Harm and Youth Suicide](#), p.8.

Aboriginal Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Advisory Group and National Mental Health Commissioner stated that:

*'Culture has become life-giving medicine for our people, closing the wounds of the past and standing us strong to face the future.'*⁴⁴

Prevention is better than cure, and support for culture is at the heart of this too, as recently articulated by Suicide Prevention Australia Ambassador Tom Calma AO:

*'In the spirit of prevention rather than cure, building on culture and social and emotional wellbeing would be at the heart of any overall response to our mental health and suicide rates.'*⁴⁵

The messages within the Elders report, from First Nations leaders, and from our stakeholders are consistent with the themes and messages of community consultations and inquiries over previous decades.

Numerous inquiries have demonstrated the link between interrupted culture and Indigenous disadvantage, and the importance of valuing culture in addressing this impact. The *Bringing them Home* (1997) report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families concluded that a principal aim of child removal policies was to eliminate Indigenous cultures.⁴⁶ Many witnesses spoke of their grief for the loss of their community and culture; for kinship, language, traditional knowledge, land and identity. They spoke of trauma, and of their strong sense of not belonging either in the Indigenous community or in the non-Indigenous community.⁴⁷ Most suffered multiple disabling effects,⁴⁸ communities suffered cultural disintegration, and the impacts have been intergenerational.⁴⁹ The 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody found that the history of colonisation, including destruction of culture, goes far to explain the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody.⁵⁰ Both Inquiries made recommendations about the need for government support for cultural renewal.⁵¹

Twenty years later, the 2011 report on the Inquiry into Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system, *Doing Time – A Time for Doing*, found that the incarceration of First Nations people had worsened.⁵² It reinforced the impact of historical processes that have disconnected First Nations people from their families, Elders, language, law and Country. This disconnection

⁴⁴ People Culture Environment 2014, *The Elders' Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-Harm and Youth Suicide*, p.6

⁴⁵ Tom Calma AO in Suicide Prevention Australia E-Newsletter, 14 February 2018. <https://ymlp.com/zNyiry>

⁴⁶ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, April 1997, p.237

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.176.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.11.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.4.

⁵⁰ Commissioner Elliott Johnston QC 1991, Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *National Report Volume 1- 1.4 The Importance of History*.

⁵¹ The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended the establishment of language and culture centres and that governments support these Indigenous initiatives (Recommendation 56). The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families recommended expanded funding to ensure national coverage at a regional level (Recommendation 12a).

⁵² Commonwealth of Australia 2011, *Doing Time – A Time for Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system*, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs p.ix.

results in a loss of wellbeing, accountability and culture, as norms of appropriate social and cultural behaviour are not transferred from one generation to the next. Many First Nations youth are caught between two worlds, as Anthony Watson (a Yiriman cultural boss) explained:

*'A lot of young people live in another culture; it's not mainstream, it's not traditional; they are lost in the wind. When they're lost in the wind is when they could end up in jail; they could end up dead, end up not contributing anything to the community, but becoming a lot of trouble.'*⁵³

The Inquiry recommended that the Commonwealth Government direct funding to locally led and developed programs that help young people at risk of criminal behaviour and have a strong focus on healing and culture.⁵⁴ However in 2018, the urgent need for culturally based programs remains, and incarceration rates are soaring.⁵⁵

Learning from the Message Stick reported on the 2016 Inquiry into Aboriginal Youth Suicide in Remote Areas – initiated following the suicide of a ten year old girl in the Kimberley.⁵⁶ First Nations children and young people represent 28 percent of recorded suicide deaths of children and young people, despite comprising only three percent of Australia's population. This overrepresentation is even more alarming among children aged 13 years and under. The death of a child by suicide is an all too frequent reality in many Western Australian Aboriginal communities.⁵⁷

The Inquiry report consistently recognises the importance of restoring culture and identity in protecting against suicide. This includes the words of a 13 year old Yawuru girl:

*'[Culture] tells me who I am and makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I belong somewhere.'*⁵⁸

The Inquiry found that previous reports and inquiries had made recommendations to address the suicide crisis in remote Western Australian communities through cultural renewal and empowerment – primarily through First Nation-led culturally based programs – but that the importance of culturally based programs continues to be overlooked.⁵⁹ The report states that the importance of culture cannot be underestimated in addressing the suicide crisis⁶⁰ and that governments' have failed to act on recommendations calling for culturally based solutions.⁶¹

A clear message from consultations with First Nations Australians for the 2012 Review of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators Report* was that 'culture underpins

⁵³ Commonwealth of Australia 2011, *Doing Time – A Time for Doing*, op.cit. p.14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.107.

⁵⁵ The Indigenous imprisonment rate has increased by 39% since 2007. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2018*, p.120.

⁵⁶ Education and Health Standing Committee 2016, *Learning from the Message Stick: The Report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal Youth Suicide in Remote Areas*, Legislative Assembly Parliament of WA, Report No.11, Nov 2016, p.2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.i.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.34.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.ii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.49.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.i.

*many of the outcomes across the framework, and the links across the strategic areas for action, and between these areas and the COAG targets and headline indicators, are particularly strong.*⁶² Without the inclusion of connectedness to community, land and culture, First Nations people did not see themselves in the report.⁶³

The *My Life My Lead*⁶⁴ report brings together findings from an extensive consultation process across Australia in 2017 examining the integral and supportive role that culture plays, and how social factors impact on health and wellbeing across the life course.

A consistent theme of the verbal and written feedback was that culture is both a protector and enabler of Indigenous health and wellbeing, and needs to be embraced and embedded across services⁶⁵ and at the centre of policies and programs.⁶⁶ Stakeholders overwhelmingly emphasised that the best results are achieved through genuine partnerships with communities, including working with First Nations-led organisations and providing opportunities for meaningful input from community members at the local level.⁶⁷

In the Foreword to the Elders' report, Mick Gooda also articulated the call for culturally based, community-led solutions:

*'What we know from decades of experience is that bringing in outsiders does not lead to long term solutions – these can only come from within communities, who need to own and control the healing process. Themes such as community empowerment, the strengthening of cultural identity, maintenance of Indigenous languages, culturally appropriate employment, bi-cultural education and returning to country; these human rights are what our people have been advocating for decades and for good reason.'*⁶⁸

We encourage COAG to listen to these voices and recognise the centrality of First Nations cultures within the refreshed Closing the Gap framework, through: targeted investment in First Nations arts, culture and cultural maintenance outcomes as a strategic priority area; recognition of Indigenous cultures as a foundation, with investment in culturally based programs to achieve outcomes across the framework; and through a localised community development approach, with prioritised funding for First Nations-led organisations and solutions.

⁶² Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014, [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014](#), Productivity Commission, Canberra, p.2.14.

⁶³ Australian Council for Educational Research 2012, [Review of the Overcoming Indigenous Expenditure: Key Indicators Report](#), for the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, p.22.

⁶⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, [My Life My Lead](#), *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.7.

⁶⁸ People Culture Environment 2014, [The Elders' Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-Harm and Youth Suicide](#), p.4–5.

3. INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND OBLIGATIONS

Refreshing the Closing the Gap framework to recognise the central role of culture, underpinned by First Nations decision-making supports the Australian Governments' commitment to a range of international treaties and obligations.

This includes our commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. A goal of this Convention is to advance the long-standing cause of integrating a cultural dimension in sustainable development frameworks.⁶⁹ The 2005 Convention was:

*'the first standard-setting instrument to place the links between culture and sustainable development at the heart of the rights and obligations of Parties. It highlighted the role of culture, creativity and artistic innovation as both drivers and enablers of development.'*⁷⁰

Australia ratified the Convention in 2009, agreeing to adopt measures to protect and promote cultural diversity, and to contribute to global reporting. A recommendation of the 2018 Global Report on the Convention is that Parties *'dedicate budgets to national development plans that integrate creativity'*.⁷¹ Investment in arts and culture as a central and underpinning element of the Closing the Gap framework would support our commitments under this international treaty.

Implementing a community development approach that empowers communities to lead their own solutions would also honour our international commitments. Self-determination, and the right to freely pursue cultural development by virtue of that right, is enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁷² and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁷³ – binding treaties that Australia has ratified. Agreement that these collective rights are afforded to Indigenous peoples was confirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).⁷⁴ Australia formally supported the UNDRIP in 2009, but is yet to fully implement the rights it sets out.

⁶⁹ UNESCO 2018, Global Report on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions Convention, [Re/Shaping Cultural Policies Executive summary](#), p.4.

⁷⁰ UNESCO 2018, Global Report on the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, [Re/Shaping Cultural Policies](#), p.169.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.27.

⁷² [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), Article 1.

⁷³ [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), Article 1.

⁷⁴ *'Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.'* [UNDRIP](#), Article 3.

4. FIRST NATIONS ARTS – THE EVIDENCE BASE

First Nations arts are diverse expressions of continuing living culture. They are a source of great pride to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; a reflection of cultural strength and resilience; and an area of celebration and achievement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are well represented in Australian arts awards and have a proportionally higher presence at international arts events than other Australian artists.⁷⁵ First Nations arts are also an integral part of our evolving national identity – almost all Australians agree that Indigenous arts are an important part of Australia’s culture.⁷⁶ While First Nations works comprised just 2% of programming in Australia’s mainstream festivals and events in 2015,⁷⁷ one in three Australians now engage with First Nations arts.⁷⁸

There is a growing body of evidence about the critical role of culture as the foundation of First Nations wellbeing, and of the benefits of First Nations arts and cultural engagement for First Nations people and communities. The arts provide ways of making sense of the world, and of passing meaning, knowledge and stories between generations. Through arts, First Nations people can connect to their culture, identity and community via a sensory, participatory experience. Opportunities to connect with First Nations arts and culture in contemporary ways engage First Nations youth and help to build a bridge between cultures. Participation in arts and culture supports outcomes across the Closing the Gap framework.

4.1 *Living Culture: First Nations arts participation and wellbeing*

New analysis of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSISS) for the Australia Council’s *Living Culture*⁷⁹ project found that:

- First Nations arts engagement supports empowerment, community connectedness and wellbeing among First Nations Australians.
- First Nations arts practice has a strong relationship with both cultural maintenance (such as speaking a First Nations language or recognising homelands) and mainstream outcomes (such as education and employment). Those who are disenfranchised from both are the least likely to access First Nations arts and their benefits.
- Older First Nations Australians are more likely to participate in, and earn income from, First Nations arts. This highlights the contribution of arts and culture to the wellbeing and livelihoods of older First Nations Australians. It also highlights the importance of supporting intergenerational cultural transmission, and of investment to engage young First Nations people in the arts – one of the fastest growing and at risk segments of our population.
- Creative arts participation rates⁸⁰ in remote Australia declined between 2008 and 2014–15 driven by declines in remote NT and Queensland – a concerning trend given the

⁷⁵ Australia Council 2015, *Arts Nation: An overview of Australian arts*.

⁷⁶ Australia Council 2017, *Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*.

⁷⁷ Australia Council 2016, *Showcasing Creativity: Programming and Presenting First Nations performing arts*.

⁷⁸ Australia Council 2017, *Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*.

⁷⁹ Australia Council 2017, *Living Culture: First Nations arts participation and wellbeing*.

⁸⁰ The proportion of First Nations people aged 15 years or over who: made First Nations arts or crafts; performed First Nations music, dance or theatre; or wrote or told First Nations stories. Based on ABS *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey*, customised report, available at <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/living-culture/>

importance of First Nations arts to cultural and economic sustainability, and community wellbeing.

These key findings are expanded upon in the following sections.

4.1.1 The wellbeing story

The Australia Council worked with researchers from the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) on new analysis of the NATSISS for the *Living Culture* project. Using a statistical model to control for a range of observed cultural and socioeconomic factors, Biddle and Crawford found that First Nations people who creatively participate in First Nations arts or attend First Nations festivals⁸¹ are more likely to be studying or intend to in the future, and are more likely to feel able to have a say within their community. First Nations people who attend First Nations festivals are also more likely to feel able to get support outside their household, and to report happiness.⁸²

These findings indicate that engagement with First Nations arts and cultural expression has an inter-relationship with measures of subjective wellbeing related to empowerment and community connectedness – but with the caveats that wellbeing is complex and multidimensional.

These results are reinforced – and the pathways further explained – by the Interplay Project, a multi-year project by the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP).⁸³ The Interplay Project worked with remote communities to map the interrelationships between:

- First Nations priorities of culture, empowerment and community; and
- government priorities of education, employment and health.

Bringing together stories and numbers, the results indicate that practising culture, including through arts participation, is the key to improving wellbeing for Aboriginal people in remote Australia – and that empowerment and spirituality are pathways between practising culture and wellbeing.⁸⁴

4.1.2 Cultural maintenance, education and employment

The NATSISS analysis for the *Living Culture* project found that First Nations arts practice has a strong relationship with both cultural maintenance and mainstream outcomes:⁸⁵

⁸¹ Make First Nations arts or crafts; perform First Nations music, dance or theatre; write or tell First Nations stories; or attend Festivals or carnivals involving arts, craft, music or dance (excluding NAIDOC week activities).

⁸² After controlling for a range of socioeconomic and cultural factors. Australia Council 2017, *Living Culture*, *op. cit.* Full details of the analysis are published in Biddle N and Crawford H 2017, *Indigenous participation in arts and cultural expression and the relationship with wellbeing: Results from the 2014–15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, CAEPR Working Paper No. 117/2017.

⁸³ See <https://old.crc-rep.com/interplay>

⁸⁴ CRC-REP 2017, *Interplay Wellbeing Framework Poster 2: It all comes back to culture*. Full details of the analysis are published in Cairney S, Abbott T, Quinn S, Yamaguchi J, Wilson B, Wakerman J 2017, 'Interplay wellbeing framework: a collaborative methodology 'bringing together stories and numbers' to quantify Aboriginal cultural values in remote Australia,' *International Journal for Equity in Health*, May 3, 16(1):68. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28468656>

⁸⁵ After controlling for a range of socioeconomic and cultural factors. Australia Council 2017, *Living Culture*, *op. cit.* Full details of the analysis are published in Biddle and Crawford 2017, *op. cit.*

- First Nations people who speak or understand a First Nations language or who recognise homelands are much more likely to attend First Nations festivals, and creatively or economically participate in First Nations arts.⁸⁶
- First Nations people who attend First Nations festivals or creatively participate in First Nations arts are more likely to be employed, and are more than twice as likely to have a degree.

These findings show that cultural maintenance and mainstream success can go hand in hand. They also indicate that those who are disenfranchised from both First Nations culture and mainstream outcomes are the least likely to access First Nations arts and their benefits.

The Interplay Project findings suggest that empowerment is a causal link between practising culture and employment outcomes, and that culture is the foundation upon which – through empowerment – pathways lead to better outcomes in education, employment and wellbeing.⁸⁷ Action is needed to ensure access to the empowering benefits of arts and culture for all First Nations people.

4.1.3 The intergenerational story

Analysis of the NATSISS for *Living Culture* showed that at an age when many Australians are retiring, First Nations artists are contributing to the arts economy, with those aged 65 plus the most likely to be earning income from First Nations arts.⁸⁸

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies* project by the CRC-REP found that artists over 55 years account for 31% of all artists in remote Indigenous art centres, and generate 55% of sales.⁸⁹

The NATSISS data show that, as well as being more likely to earn income from arts, older First Nations Australians are more likely to participate in First Nations arts. First Nations people aged 55–64 are more likely to creatively participate than those aged 15–24 (31% vs 24%), particularly in writing and telling stories (18% vs 7.3%). Those aged 45–54 are more likely to attend First Nations festivals (28% vs 19% of those aged 15–24).⁹⁰

These findings highlight the important contribution of arts and culture to the livelihood and wellbeing of older First Nations Australians, and the importance of supporting Elders to pass on cultural knowledge to younger generations before it is lost. They also highlight the importance of investment in engaging young First Nations people in the arts – one of the

⁸⁶ Attend festivals or carnivals involving arts, craft, music or dance (excluding NAIDOC week activities); make First Nations arts or crafts; perform First Nations music, dance or theatre; write or tell First Nations stories; or earn income from: the sale of painting or art works; the sale of weaving, dyed cloth, sculptures, pottery, wooden art and craft; or arranging or participating in cultural dances or performances.

⁸⁷ CRC-REP 2017, *Interrelationships: Bringing together Stories and Numbers*, viewed 7 September 2017. Full details of the analysis are published in Cairney S, Abbott T, Quinn S, Yamaguchi J, Wilson B, Wakerman J 2017, 'Interplay wellbeing framework: a collaborative methodology 'bringing together stories and numbers' to quantify Aboriginal cultural values in remote Australia,' *International Journal for Equity in Health*, May 3, 16(1):68.

⁸⁸ After controlling for a range of socioeconomic and cultural factors. Australia Council 2017, *Living Culture*, *op. cit.* See Biddle and Crawford 2017 *op. cit.* for full details of the analysis.

⁸⁹ CRC-REP *Policy Briefing: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies Project*.

⁹⁰ Based on ABS NATSISS data, customised report for Australia Council 2017, *Living Culture*, *op. cit.* Data tables available at <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/living-culture/>

fastest growing segments of the Australian population, who are at risk from a range of factors reflected in high rates of incarceration, suicide, unemployment, substance abuse and disability.⁹¹

4.1.4 The remote participation story

First Nations communities in remote Australia produce and market some of Australia's most dynamic visual art, generating income and employment opportunities while maintaining and transmitting culture.

*Integrating Art Production and Economic Development in the Kimberley*⁹² (2016) reports on an early stage of Macquarie University's National survey of Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists. It provides evidence to support the proposition that for many remote communities, long-term economic and cultural sustainability lies in providing viable and culturally relevant livelihoods through the production and marketing of artistic goods and services. This includes the visual and performing arts, writing and storytelling as well as film and audio-visual media.

The survey data indicate that Indigenous cultural capital is an unrealised resource, with significant numbers of artists willing to work on cultural production who are not currently able to do so. There are also opportunities for small-business development. The study demonstrates that development strategies need to integrate economic, social and cultural elements in a holistic and sustainable way; and the importance of cultural maintenance:

*'An essential aspect of sustainability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is to ensure that mechanisms for cultural maintenance are protected and encouraged; without cultural maintenance there is no creative arts. Moreover cultural maintenance activities offer substantial economic benefits to Indigenous people who engage in them.'*⁹³

NATSISS data collected for the first time in 2014–15 shows that almost one in ten First Nations people in remote Australia receive income from First Nations arts (8.8%, compared to 2.9% in regional Australia and 2.8% in major cities).⁹⁴

One in three First Nations people in remote Australia creatively participate in First Nations arts (33%), compared to one in four in regional Australia (25%) or major cities (27%). However, there were declines in First Nations creative arts participation rates in remote Australia between 2008 and 2014–15 (38% to 33%), driven by declines in remote NT (44% to 35%) and remote Queensland (39% to 30%). There were also significant declines in creative participation among females in remote Australia (40% to 33%).⁹⁵

These are concerning trends given the importance of First Nations arts to cultural and economic sustainability, and community wellbeing. The declines in First Nations arts

⁹¹ Productivity Commission 2016, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016*.

⁹² Throsby D & Petetskaya E 2016, *Macquarie Economics Research Papers: Integrating Art Production and Economic Development in the Kimberley. Research Paper 2/2016*. Macquarie University, Sydney.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p.5.

⁹⁴ Based on ABS NATSISS data, customised report for Australia Council 2017, *Living Culture*, *op. cit*.

⁹⁵ The proportion of First Nations people aged 15 years or over who: made First Nations arts or crafts; performed First Nations music, dance or theatre; or wrote or told First Nations stories. *Ibid*.

participation during the course of the Closing the Gap policy highlight the need for inclusion of arts and culture as a strategic priority area within the framework. The aims are to increase opportunities for First Nations people to directly engage in arts and cultural activity, and to recognise cultural maintenance and renewal as important outcomes for First Nations peoples. There is a need to ensure that achievement of targets and other policy objectives is not to the detriment of First Nations cultural outcomes and wellbeing.

4.2 Further evidence

There are a range of other research sources contributing the growing body of evidence about the role of cultural participation and maintenance in supporting First Nations wellbeing, resilience and socioeconomic outcomes. These include the following.

- A 2014 review for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse stated that art forms such as song, dance and painting, coupled with ceremony, are integral to cultural continuity and cultural maintenance in Indigenous Australian communities. It found that the benefits of participation in First Nations arts programs include: improved physical and mental health and wellbeing; increased social inclusion and cohesion; some improvements in school retention and attitudes towards learning; increased validation of, and connection to, culture; improved social and cognitive skills; and some evidence of crime reduction.

The review also found that the effects of arts programs can be powerful and transformative through various pathways. For example, arts programs can reduce juvenile anti-social behaviour through diversion: providing alternative safe opportunities to risk taking; maintenance of social status; as well as opportunities to build healthy relationships with Elders and links with culture. Linking arts programs with other services (for example, health services or counselling) and opportunities (for example, jobs or more relevant educational programs) improves the uptake of other services required to improve health and wellbeing outcomes, or behavioural change.⁹⁶

- A 2017 systematic review published in the *Australian Journal of Primary Health* provides evidence that interventions that include opportunities for expression of cultural identities can have beneficial effects for First Nations Australians.⁹⁷
- A 2012 review about culture and the Closing the Gap building blocks found that cultural participation supports: **early childhood development** by promoting resilience, and by supporting engagement in early childhood services and education; **schooling** by supporting self-esteem, attendance and academic performance; **health** by promoting physical and mental health and wellbeing; **economic participation** through employment, income from arts, and working on Country; **safe communities** through cultural identity as a protective factor against suicide, resilience in the face of racism, and diversion from offending; and culturally legitimate **governance and leadership**.⁹⁸
- A 2012 analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children suggested that learning about culture is central to the healthy and successful development of First Nations

⁹⁶ Ware V 2014, [Supporting Healthy communities Through Arts Programs](#), AIHW.

⁹⁷ MacLean S, Ritte R, Thorpe A, Ewen S, Arabena K 2017, '[Health and wellbeing outcomes of programs for Indigenous Australians that include strategies to enable the expression of cultural identities](#): A systematic review.' *Australian Journal of Primary Health*. 2017 Sep;23(4):309–318.

⁹⁸ Office for the Arts 2012, [Culture and Closing the Gap](#), Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport.

children; and that a review of the Closing the Gap agenda may be warranted 'to assess whether the implied pursuit of statistical equity against some targets may be undermining potential sources of strength and wellbeing for the current cohort of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.'⁹⁹

- A 2010 evaluation of three First Nations cultural festivals by researchers from RMIT found benefits for participants included empowerment, capacity building, social capital, exposure to positive role models, cultural security, cultural confidence, local leadership, economic opportunities and pride in Indigenous identity.¹⁰⁰
- Analyses of the 2008 NATSISS found that First Nations youth who speak an Indigenous language are less likely to experience risk factors associated with poor wellbeing, including high risk alcohol consumption, illicit substance use and violence;¹⁰¹ and that First Nations people who participate in cultural activities have higher rates of secondary school completion, are more likely to be employed, have markedly better physical and mental health, and are less likely to abuse alcohol or be charged by the police.¹⁰²
- A seminal 1998 study among Canada's First Nations communities found that a sense of identity and cultural continuity can help Indigenous people, especially youth, to see they have a future and provides a hedge against suicide.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Colquhoun S & Dockery AM 2012, *The link between Indigenous culture and wellbeing: Qualitative evidence for Australian Aboriginal peoples*, Curtin University, CLMR Discussion Paper Series 2012/01, p.26.

¹⁰⁰ Phipps P and Slater L 2010, *Indigenous Cultural Festivals: Evaluating impact on community health and wellbeing*, Globalism Research Centre, RMIT University.

¹⁰¹ ABS 2011, *Speaking an Indigenous language linked to youth wellbeing*, Cat. No. 4725.0.

¹⁰² Dockery AM 2011, 'Traditional Culture and the Wellbeing of Indigenous Australians: An analysis of the 2008 NATSISS,' in *Social Science Perspectives on the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, 11–12 April 2011, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra.

¹⁰³ Chandler M & Lalonde C 1998, *Cultural Continuity as a Hedge against Suicide in Canada's First Nations*, The University of British Columbia.

5. CONSIDERATIONS OF HOW TO INCLUDE CULTURE IN THE CLOSING THE GAP FRAMEWORK

5.1 The missing element

Despite the evidence and First Nations peoples' lived experience of the benefits of arts and cultural participation, culture has been the missing element from the Closing the Gap framework to date. Funding for First Nations culture made up just 1% of total direct government expenditure for Indigenous Australians in 2015–16¹⁰⁴ (see Appendix A for funding breakdowns), and cultural outcomes have not featured in the measurement framework. Despite the investment of billions of dollars, the Closing the Gap policy is widely considered to have failed.¹⁰⁵ The Australia Council's view is that to succeed, both the central and foundational roles of First Nations cultures must be recognised in the framework with practical investment strategies, underpinned by First Nations decision-making.

5.2 Recommendations

The Australia Council's recommendations to the Closing the Gap refresh are:

- **Consolidated, targeted investment in First Nations arts, culture and cultural maintenance outcomes as a strategic priority area within the Closing the Gap framework. The aims are to increase opportunities for First Nations people to directly engage in arts and cultural activity, and cultural maintenance and renewal. This requires outcome measures in the framework.**
- **Simultaneous recognition of Indigenous cultures as a foundation across the framework, with investment in culturally based programs to improve outcomes in early childhood, education, employment, health and wellbeing, community safety, justice and suicide prevention.**
- **A flexible, localised community development approach that empowers communities to utilise their cultural knowledge and build on their unique strengths, with prioritised funding for First Nations-led organisations and solutions that is sufficient for long-term planning.**

The recommendations are based on recognition that strong culture supports health, wellbeing and resilience, and that participation in arts and cultural activity has both intrinsic and instrumental benefits. Therefore cultural maintenance and increased opportunities for participation in arts and cultural activities should be considered priorities within the framework, with their own outcome measures. This is in addition to the need for culturally based, community-led programs as an underpinning priority across the framework, including investment in arts and cultural activity within health, education, employment, community safety and justice settings. The Australia Council is advocating for increased investment – far

¹⁰⁴ This includes 'Cultural facilities and services', 'Broadcasting and film production' and 'Recreation and culture nec'. See Appendix A for further detail of inclusions. Based on Productivity Commission 2017, *Indigenous Expenditure Report 2017, Advanced Database*, accessed 2/2/18.

¹⁰⁵ See for example, Higgins I 2017, '[Closing the Gap set for overhaul after failing to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians](#)', *ABC News*, posted 23/10/17, viewed 20/2/18.

beyond the 1% currently allocated – for First Nations cultural maintenance and expression, and for culturally based solutions across portfolios.

Our recommendations are consistent with the proposed ‘Cultural Investment Strategy’ for Western Australia put forward in the Department of Culture and the Arts Discussion Paper *Investing in Aboriginal Culture* (2016).¹⁰⁶ The paper proposed a consolidated, targeted approach to investment in First Nations arts and culture that would integrate with and support government actions across agencies and levels of government, to deliver more effective outcomes for Aboriginal people from government services. It proposed addressing underlying causes of social dysfunction by connecting First Nations people to their culture through cultural maintenance activities, including increased investment in existing cultural activities shown to be successful in engaging communities and improving wellbeing and socio-economic outcomes.

5.3 Consolidated, targeted investment as a strategic priority

The refresh of the Closing the Gap framework to adopt a strengths-based approach that recognises the central role of First Nations cultures provides an opportunity for greater strategic coordination of support for First Nations arts, culture and cultural maintenance, including clearer oversight of investment in the arts and cultural organisations that underpin the First Nations arts and cultural sector across Australia. Consolidated, targeted investment is required to ensure funding is delivered efficiently, effectively and coherently in genuine partnership with communities.

To complement and guide increased strategic investment, we propose a national peak body for First Nations arts and culture. This would provide a collective voice to governments on culturally based solutions and arts and cultural matters, including clearly articulated priorities for investment aligned to diverse communities and their contexts. Such a body could: support genuine, efficient and effective engagement with First Nations communities; provide meaningful representation for First Nations people on policy issues around arts and culture and a strategic and integrated response to governments; and be a national coordinating body to promote the rights of First Nations peoples’ traditional cultural expression.

Arts agencies and departments also have a critical role to play in the refreshed Closing the Gap framework. However, we note that funding for First Nations arts and culture is currently delivered across a range of portfolios and programs at both the Commonwealth and state/territory levels. This means that community need to navigate multiple guidelines and processes. There are also gaps in meeting urgent needs for cultural maintenance and renewal, and in meeting the demand for a level of funding to enable First Nations individuals and communities to thrive and prosper.

The Australia Council has half a century of experience delivering First Nations arts and culture funding on behalf of the Australian Government. Our dedicated funding to First Nations people, groups and organisations through our grants program is assessed wholly by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peer assessors. The Australia Council’s role supporting

¹⁰⁶ *Investing in Aboriginal Culture: The Role of Culture in Gaining More Effective Outcomes from WA State Government Services*. (DCA Reference 15/751, May 2016).

First Nations arts practice was legislated through the *Australia Council Act 2013*,¹⁰⁷ and one of the four goals of our Strategic Plan for a culturally ambitious nation is that Australians cherish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultures.¹⁰⁸

5.3.1 Case study: Multi-year funding and unmet opportunity

From the case study of the Australia Council's multi-year funded organisations – and those that have sought funding from the Australia Council that we have not been able to provide – we know that there are numerous immediate unmet opportunities to invest in cultural, artistic and social outcomes.

For example, the Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation (ANKA) recently conducted a Needs Assessment survey of its art centres. The survey identified an urgent need to capture knowledge held by Elders and senior knowledge holders about community collections held in remote Indigenous art centres before it is too late, and the importance of community collections to the revitalisation of culture for youth.

The responses emphasised the living cultural value of the community collections, as tangible records of connection to country, ceremony, law, history, cultural change, ingenuity, and as reference points to guide emerging artists and inspire their artistic practice. It found that increased resourcing for the care and management of community collections in remote Indigenous art centres is an urgent matter of national heritage.¹⁰⁹ In the words of the ANKA Chairman Djambawa Marawili AM:

*'We are talking about keeping a knowledge system alive. Not just any knowledge system, the longest living culture on earth.'*¹¹⁰

ANKA is one of 16 small to medium First Nations-led organisations that the Australia Council supports through our Four Year Funding program. These organisations are critical assets that achieve an array of outcomes for individuals and communities with limited resources. ANKA's needs assessment is illustrative of the expertise of these organisations in identifying opportunities for investment across the country to build on strength and achieve prosperity outcomes.

Along with Bangarra, the only First Nations company to receive directed funding from the Australian Government through the Major Performing Arts (MPA) Framework, these multi-year funded organisations play a critical role in the Australian arts and culture landscape. They achieve a diverse array of objectives across a range of arts and cultural practice areas, including visual arts and craft, dance, music, theatre, literature and cultural maintenance and renewal. They provide fundamental infrastructure and services over vast distances, with remits at local, regional, national and international levels. Their outputs and outcomes include training and professional pathways for young people; economic development; international and inter-cultural collaboration; strengthened capacity in governance and leadership;

¹⁰⁷ Section 9(1)(ba) of the *Australia Council Act 2013* (Cth) provides that it is a function of the Australia Council to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts practice. See Appendix B for further information about the Australia Council.

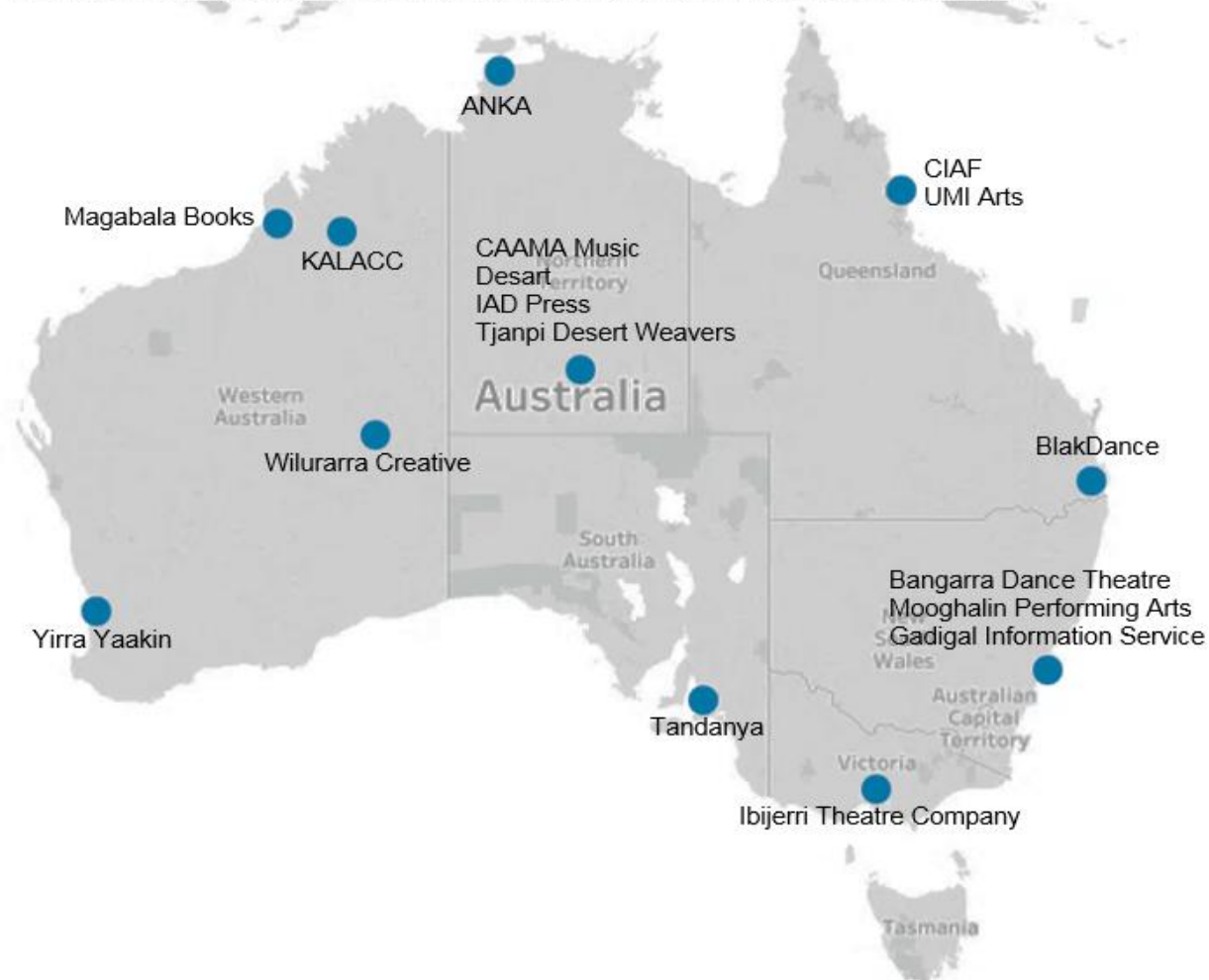
¹⁰⁸ Australia Council Strategic Plan 2014 to 2019, *A Culturally Ambitious Nation*.

¹⁰⁹ ANKA 2017, *Safe Keeping: A report on the care and management of art centre-based community collections*, August 2017.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.4.

audience development; repatriation; intergenerational cultural transmission; cultural performance and festivals; cultural employment; skills development; social enterprise; exhibitions; mentoring; engaging youth; keeping First Nations culture strong; and sharing First Nations culture with other Australians and on a global stage. (See Appendix C for an overview of the First Nations organisations receiving multi-year funding from the Australia Council).

First Nations organisations receiving multi-year funding from the Australia Council



Multi-year funding enables the planning and delivery of ambitious arts and culture programs, longer term certainty, and increases the capacity of organisations to leverage other support and collaborations. The value we see from targeted long-term investment is evident by the quality, reach and achievements of multi-year funded companies such as Bangarra.

In 2015, the Australia Council received Expressions of Interest from 43 First Nations-led small to medium arts and culture organisations for multi-year funding that equated to a total request of \$12.5 million per annum. We were only able to support 16 organisations with a total \$3.5 million per annum, declining over 60% of the organisations that applied and leaving unmet demand of over 70% in terms of dollars – the demand far outweighs the funding available.

This highlights the opportunity for increased investment in First Nations arts and culture and cultural maintenance across Australia through the Closing the Gap refresh, noting that government expenditure for First Nations people in Australia equates to over \$30 billion per

year¹¹¹ and that under the current arrangements the Closing the Gap policy is not meeting its aims. Investment in organisations such as these is an investment in thriving individuals, communities, economies and regions, and supports outcomes across the Closing the Gap agenda. The oversubscription of this program is just one example of demand for First Nations arts and culture funding – it is not the whole picture of unmet need and opportunity in redressing the intergenerational disruption of culture and supporting First Nations prosperity.

5.4 Self-determination, culturally based solutions and community-led programs

Self-determination is the most fundamental right for First Nations people, and is central to addressing disadvantage.¹¹² Self-determination means First Nations people having the right to make decisions concerning their own lives and communities; the right to retain their culture and to develop it;¹¹³ and the right to be full and equal participants in the construction and functioning of the governing institutions under which they live.¹¹⁴

The *Learning from the Message Stick* (2016) report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal Youth Suicide in Remote Areas stated that:

‘The effect of historic government actions and policies has been to strip Aboriginal peoples of their power and right to self-determination. This disempowerment has the dual effects of causing ongoing pain and trauma, whilst not providing opportunity for previous pain and trauma to be resolved. Empowering Aboriginal communities returns control to where it should be. Aboriginal people need to be empowered to make decisions which affect their lives, taking responsibility for leading and running their communities, programs and services. Where governments remain involved, Aboriginal people need to be fully involved in designing, implementing and evaluating programs and services so that they provide the required response.’¹¹⁵

Self-determination requires more than consultation and participation in the design and delivery of programs and services – it means penetrating their design to imbue them with cultural values.¹¹⁶ First Nations-led solutions that empower communities to utilise their cultural knowledge and build on their unique strengths are the most likely to succeed. This includes the need to listen to and work with First Nations leaders, and for prioritised funding for First Nations-led organisations that is sufficient to enable long-term planning for sustainability.

The role that culture plays in strategies, programs and services can be described in two broad categories. ‘Culturally based’ (or culturally embedded) programs involve learning about culture and/or participating in cultural activity, with the aim of reclaiming culture for personal and community development and healing. ‘Culturally appropriate’ programs are not specifically directed at reclaiming culture but need to be developed and implemented in a way

¹¹¹ Based on Productivity Commission, *Indigenous Expenditure Report*.

¹¹² ATSIC 1995, *Recognition, Rights & Reform: Report to Government on Native Title Social Justice Measures*, ATSIC, Canberra.

¹¹³ Commissioner Elliott Johnston QC 1991, Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *National Report Volume 1- Self-Determination and Non-Aboriginal Attitudes* 1–7.33.

¹¹⁴ Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples James Anaya, quoted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, *Social Justice Report 2011*, p.23.

¹¹⁵ Education and Health Standing Committee 2016, *Learning from the Message Stick*, *op. cit.* p.ii.

¹¹⁶ Dodson M 1993 cited in Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997, *Bringing Them Home*, *op. cit.* p.277.

that respects the culture of participants. What ‘culturally based’ and ‘culturally appropriate’ look like in practice is context dependent. What is suitable for one person or community may not be for another.¹¹⁷ This recognises the diversity of First Nations peoples across the country and the need to respond in a respectful and relevant manner to their priorities.

The Australia Council’s recommendations for the framework are focused on the need for investment in culturally based programs, both as a strategic priority area to increase opportunities for First Nations people to engage in arts and cultural activity for the achievement of cultural and artistic outcomes and cultural maintenance and renewal; and to improve outcomes across the framework – in early childhood, education, employment, health and wellbeing, community safety, justice and suicide prevention. According to KALACC, the ‘single biggest gap’ in suicide prevention strategies and services is the limited support for culturally based programs.¹¹⁸ Culturally based programs, by their very nature, are First Nations led.

5.4.1 Case study: *Kulata Tjuta (Many Spears)*¹¹⁹

Kulata Tjuta is a cultural renewal project through which the skills of spear making are shared across generations as an embodiment of intergenerational cultural knowledge transmission. Young people learn cultural responsibility from Elders, which helps them to navigate their place in society. The project demonstrates the multiplier effect of reinforcing cultural knowledge, and the value of cultural and artistic outcomes alongside outcomes such as employment and diversion from the justice system. It shows the power of culturally based programs to engage, connect and strengthen communities, enabling outcomes across the Closing the Gap framework. It evidences value of listening to First Nations leaders about the needs and priorities of their communities, and how this results in a dialogue that empowers First Nations communities and informs the state.

The *Kulata Tjuta* project formally began in 2010 at Tjala Arts in the community of Amata on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. It was initiated by Senior Anangu men who wanted to teach young men the skills of carving and spear production as an extension of cultural knowledge and a renewal of cultural practice that was dying on the Lands. They enlisted the support of young men in their communities, working together to craft punu kulata (wooden spears). The aim is to keep culture strong, to strengthen spirit and create better futures for their men and communities:

‘We know if culture is strong, Anangu will continue the fight with a strong spirit. Young men have always learned to make kulata through the old men, and through the old men like me the fight will continue for a better future for Anangu.’

– Project director Willy Kaika Burton¹²⁰

Kulata Tjuta started as a small project involving five men in Amata. It has grown to include over 100 Anangu men across the APY Lands. The young men, who are under the age of 40, are drawn to the project because it enables them to spend important time with family and

¹¹⁷ Education and Health Standing Committee 2016, *Learnings from the Message Stick*, op. cit. p.50.

¹¹⁸ Cited in *ibid*, p.55.

¹¹⁹ See <https://tjalaarts.com.au/kulata-tjuta/> and <https://www.apyartcentrecollective.com/kulata-tjuta/>

¹²⁰ Adelaide Biennale 2014, *Kulata Tjuta project*, accessed 7/3/18.

Elders and on Country. Engagement with cultural knowledge and practices has increased exponentially – as well as new generations learning to craft punu kulata, the project has also led to a revival of Inma (cultural song and dance) among young men on the APY Lands. In 2017, Senior women across the APY Lands also joined the project with their granddaughters, creating piti (large wooden bowls). The Elders of the Lands are thrilled with the cultural outcomes of the Kulata Tjuta project.

The Elders are equally thrilled with the project being an important vehicle for employment in every community on the APY Lands today. *Kulata Tjuta* has attracted support and partnerships with community service providers and schools in recognition of its success in capturing the engagement, interest and commitment of young Anangu men, and in recognition of the positive impact on the health and wellbeing of community members – particularly the young men of the Lands. The project has also made a significant positive impact on governance of APY art centres, and it allows the full APY art centre team to connect, share skills and collaborate on a regular basis, at bush camps, meetings and events.

To date, there have been three major artistic outcomes in partnership with major Australian institutions, including the Art Gallery of South Australia and The National Gallery. The artistic outcomes take the form of large scale, multidisciplinary installations that incorporate film, sound and live performance, drawing on collaborations with leading professional First Nations artists. The installations have enabled young male artists to engage with the use of cameras and drones, and to work with architects, lighting technicians, and a range of experts making their vision for the installation a reality – they love the project as a new medium for storytelling. The artistic outcomes have captured international attention.

Senior men have talked about their pride in seeing the *Kulata Tjuta* project build confidence and self-esteem in the young men. Many of the young men who come in and make a spear go on to grow the confidence to try painting and other mediums.

The 2017 Telstra Art Award, Australia's most prestigious Indigenous art award, was won by a collaboration between Frank Young, Anwar Young and Rhonda Dick from the Amata community for their work *Kulata Tjuta – Wati kulunypa tjukurpa (Many spears – Young fella story)*. Frank is one of the Senior Men in the APY Lands, and is Anwar's grandfather and Rhonda's uncle.

The multimedia work tells the story of young First Nations men from remote communities stuck in a cycle of juvenile detention, reoffending and incarceration. The work highlights the importance of culture, and sends the powerful message that locking people up is not working. The incarceration of these young men not only affects the individual, but whole families and entire communities:

'We need young people to be standing behind their culture, not behind bars.'

– Frank Young¹²¹

The *Kulata Tjuta* project receives funding through the Australia Council's Chosen program.¹²²

¹²¹ Cited in Veras S 2017, *Spinifex and spears: Here are the winning works of the 2017 Telstra NATSIAA Awards*, NITV, 11 August 2017.

¹²² Since 2015–16.



Kulata Tjuta – Wati kulunypa tjukurpa (Many spears – Young fella story)
by Frank Young, Anwar Young and Rhonda Dick; digital print, kangaroo tendon, kiti

5.4.2 Case study: Chosen – self-determination in program design and delivery

The Australia Council’s Chosen program is an example of a culturally based program and self-determination in program design and delivery. Chosen empowers First Nations communities to take control and plan for how they will nurture younger people from their community in the arts and/or culture. Chosen ensures artistic and cultural knowledge being passed on to the next generation in the most culturally appropriate manner, which is by empowering Senior First Nations people. Chosen sets out to reinvigorate the cultural practice of master apprentice relationships within the arts.

Chosen began when we visited a regional community gathering and asked the question: ‘What is the most important achievement for your community?’ The overwhelming response was ‘Passing on our knowledge to our children to make them strong for the future.’ It also stemmed from the knowledge that the majority of First Nations young people (57%) were not spending any time with an Elder, or did not have an Elder with whom they could spend time. Less than a third (31%) were spending time with an Elder at least one day a week, and 12%

were spending time with an Elder less than once a week.¹²³ The acculturation of children and young people is through the intergenerational transfer of knowledge – without this children lack solid foundations.

The Australia Council piloted the Chosen program in 2013. The outcomes were astounding and highlighted extraordinary success – success as defined by the communities themselves; activating community goals, enabling engaged participation and building on existing community assets. Importantly, through Chosen we are finding new innovative models arising from community that achieve real benefits and outcomes for young people, and recognise the vital role of arts and cultural practitioners in shaping vibrant communities and a future of possibilities for the next generation.

Applicants describe a diverse range of delivery models for the transfer of knowledge between Elders (and/or professional artists and cultural practitioners) and the younger generations. These include multiple mentors working with multiple young people, one mentor working with multiple young people, one-on-one mentoring, and mentors working with young people who then become mentors to the next generation. Project proposals draw on collaborations with language centres, art centres, schools, local councils, galleries and collecting institutions, the justice system, the tourism sector, small to medium arts organisations, festivals, community organisations and housing departments. Objectives include professional development, increased artistic skills, improved judgement and decision making abilities, increased self-confidence and respect, development of the next generation of Indigenous artists across geographic regions and art forms, increased potential for income generation from practice, successful cross generational engagement within communities, and increased social cohesion as a result.

The strategic program opened for the first time in 2016 with support from states and territories. The Australia Council received 26 Expressions of Interest requesting almost \$3 million over three years, and \$1.1 million in 2016–17 – 2.2 times the \$490,000 available. In 2017 there was increasing demand for the program with 45 applications received, requesting \$5.6m over three years – almost double the demand for Round 1.

Chosen represents the tip of the iceberg in addressing the impacts of long-term intergenerational interruption of culture for First Nations peoples in Australia. The unmet demand for culturally based programs is immense, as is their potential to address Indigenous disadvantage in a strengths-based approach recognising the centrality of Indigenous cultures.

¹²³ Children aged 4–14, based on ABS 2009, [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008](#) (cat. no. 4714.0).

5.5 Comments on existing frameworks

5.5.1 My Life My Lead

The Australia Council's recommendations are in keeping with the holistic cultural determinants approach to First Nations health and wellbeing articulated in the Department of Health's 2017 *My Life My Lead* consultation report:

'Cultural Determinants originate from and promote a strength based perspective, acknowledging that stronger connections to culture and Country build stronger individual and collective identities, a sense of self-esteem, resilience, and improved outcomes across the other determinants of health including education, economic stability and community safety¹²⁴... Cultural determinants are enabled, supported and protected through traditional cultural practice, kinship, connection to land and Country, art, song and ceremony, dance, healing, spirituality, empowerment, ancestry, belonging and self-determination.'¹²⁵

Within the *My Life My Lead* report, culture is identified as the first priority area, at the centre of change; as well as impacting on each of the other priority areas. For example, impacting on:

- **Employment** through the success of community-driven place-based initiatives that provide meaningful employment, and programs linked with Country and culture.¹²⁶
- **Foundations for a healthy life** through the teaching of histories and cultures, language immersion, bi-lingual education and participation in cultural arts activities from a young age.¹²⁷
- **Healthy living and strong communities** through the health outcomes of caring for Country and programs that support connectedness through arts, languages, culture, music and broadcasting.¹²⁸
- **Education** through the need to include parents, Elders and communities in learning to maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connection to family, Country and culture; and language maintenance for identity and wellbeing.¹²⁹

5.5.2 Canada's First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework

The role of community-led, culturally based programs as an underpinning priority is articulated in Health Canada's *First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework*. The framework positions 'Culture as Foundation', on the outside of the model holding the other components together and the underlying theme for each component of the framework:

*'...culture as a foundation means starting from the point of Indigenous knowledge and culture and then integrating current policies, strategies, and frameworks.'*¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Prof. Ngiare Brown (undated), cited in The Lowitja Institute – Cultural Determinants Roundtable, Melbourne 26th November 2014, [Background Paper](#).

¹²⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, [My Life My Lead](#), *op. cit.* p.7.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p.11.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p.15.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p.21.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p.26.

¹³⁰ Health Canada 2015, [First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework – Summary Report](#), p.6.

5.5.3 The Framework for Prosperity

The central position of Indigenous cultures is affirmed in the *Framework for Prosperity*. The Australia Council endorses this recognition that First Nations culture is integral for thriving communities, and inclusion of the community and environment as pillars in the framework. These inclusions complement the focus on individualism in the Closing the Gap framework to date, recognising the collective identities and needs of diverse communities.

First Nations arts such as song, dance, visual arts and craft, story-telling, music and theatre have an integral role to play in the aims articulated for the framework: of celebrating the richness and diversity of the world's oldest living culture, and moving beyond First Nations wellbeing to flourishing and thriving.

As well as culture, First Nations arts are central to the pillars of prosperity:

- **Economic:** the arts provide viable and culturally relevant livelihoods through the production and marketing of artistic goods and services; opportunities for skills development, including both cultural knowledge pathways and industry skills pathways; engagement in meaningful work that empowers First Nations people and shares culture, stories and histories with other Australians; opportunities for arts businesses, use of creative skills in other industries and cross-overs with tourism; wealth creation; and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and opportunity rather than poverty.
- **Individual:** the arts support engagement in early childhood education and school; resilience, self-esteem and social and cognitive development; good physical and mental health; and have a powerful role to play in addressing trauma by rebuilding connections to culture and identity.
- **Community:** the *Kulata Tjuta* case study is a case in point of how the arts support strong family relationships; thriving traditions and cultural practice; a sense of belonging; social inclusion; civic participation; personal community safety; and high-levels of trust through good governance.
- **Environment:** the arts express and support connections to country, land and sea.

5.6 Measurement

There is a need for arts and cultural outcome measures at both the national and local level. These must be defined with and by First Nations people and communities as part of a holistic, interdependent framework, with consideration of indicators related to: types of arts and cultural participation, opportunities to connect with Country and Elders, and language maintenance and revival; as well as outcomes such as empowerment, wellbeing and the instrumental benefits communities aim to achieve through culturally based programs at a local level.¹³¹

¹³¹ For an example of community wellbeing measured from the ground up, see Yap M & Yu E 2016, '[Community wellbeing best measured from the ground up](#): A Yawuru example,' *The Conversation*, September 17 2016.

KALACC is currently undertaking work demonstrating that impact of investment in culture can be measured in ways that are framed by Traditional Owner cultural priorities, while meeting the needs of governments to evaluate impacts in terms of health and social and emotional wellbeing.

At the national level, the Productivity Commission's 2016 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* (OID) report contains a number of indicators related to 'Governance, leadership and culture',¹³² however these are not headline indicators and no data is reported for them in relation to Closing the Gap. In the OID indicators, cultural attendance and participation is grouped with participation in sport and recreation activities under Indicator 5.7, 'Participation in community activities', with results reported in 2016 as 'unclear' because of conflicting results:

*'Between 2002 and 2014–15, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over attending cultural events decreased (from 68 to 63 per cent), while the proportion participating in sport and recreational activities increased (from 49 to 59 per cent).'*¹³³

The decline in cultural attendance along with the declines in First Nations remote creative arts participation¹³⁴ flag a concerning trend for First Nations cultural maintenance. This must be addressed and reported separately to participation in mainstream sport in the Closing the Gap framework if it is to recognise the centrality of First Nations cultures. Cultural outcome measures are needed to help ensure that the achievement of the targets and other policy objectives is not to the detriment of cultural participation, maintenance, vibrancy or transmission.

6. NOW IS THE MOMENT

The interruption of culture as a cause of Indigenous disadvantage cannot be overstated. Grief and loss are intergenerational effects of colonisation and the forced removal of the Stolen Generations. There is now an enormous opportunity to heal this damage by listening to First Nations peoples and by valuing culture. For the Closing the Gap policy to succeed in improving the lives of First Nations Australians, now is the moment to invest in the inherent value and foundational role of strong culture. Keeping First Nations cultures strong is a necessary part of the solution to Indigenous disadvantage in Australia and of providing a positive future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

'Now is the time to cut through and to build on the nice words... Real change means working from the cultural strength that has been the key to our survival.'

– KALACC Directors' Statement¹³⁵

¹³² These include 'Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance' (5.5), reported in 2016 as 'no significant change'; 'Indigenous cultural studies' (5.6), reported in 2016 as a 'data gap'; and 'access to traditional lands and water' (5.8), reported in 2016 as 'the main measure has shown progress'. Productivity Commission 2016, [*Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016 – Overview*](#), p.3.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p.25.

¹³⁴ The proportion of First Nations people aged 15 years or over who: made First Nations arts or crafts; performed First Nations music, dance or theatre; or wrote or told First Nations stories. Based on ABS *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey*, customised report, available at <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/living-culture/>

¹³⁵ KALACC 2017, *Cultural Solutions: Shared Pathways for Engagement in the Kimberley*, Position Paper – Sept. 2017.

APPENDIX A

Direct government expenditure for Indigenous Australians 2015–16¹³⁶

	Indigenous specific		Mainstream		Total	
	\$	% of total Indigenous specific expenditure	\$	% of total mainstream expenditure for Indigenous Australians	\$	% of total expenditure for Indigenous Australians
Cultural facilities and services						
Australian Government	\$98,283,696	2.95%	\$33,208,763	0.29%	\$131,492,459	0.90%
States and territories	\$30,938,315	1.15%	\$69,088,351	0.43%	\$100,026,666	0.53%
Total	\$129,222,011	2.14%	\$102,297,114	0.37%	\$231,519,125	0.69%
Broadcasting and film production						
Australian Government	\$49,642,525	1.49%	\$45,089,683	0.40%	\$94,732,208	0.65%
States and territories	\$1,462,543	0.05%	\$1,059,688	0.01%	\$2,522,231	0.01%
Total	\$51,105,068	0.85%	\$46,149,371	0.17%	\$97,254,439	0.29%
Recreation and culture nec (not elsewhere categorised)						
Australian Government	\$2,051,873	0.06%	\$567,343	0.01%	\$2,619,216	0.02%
States and territories	\$8,345,242	0.31%	\$7,828,040	0.05%	\$16,173,282	0.09%
Total	\$10,397,115	0.17%	\$8,395,383	0.03%	\$18,792,498	0.06%
Culture - total						
Australian Government	\$149,978,094	4.50%	\$78,865,789	0.70%	\$228,843,883	1.56%
States and territories	\$40,746,100	1.51%	\$77,976,079	0.49%	\$118,722,179	0.63%
Total	\$190,724,194	3.16%	\$156,841,867	0.57%	\$347,566,062	1.04%
Total expenditure for Indigenous Australians (all areas)						
Australian Government	\$3,332,961,790	100%	\$11,334,865,410	100%	\$14,667,827,200	100%
States and territories	\$2,695,174,965	100%	\$16,062,036,750	100%	\$18,757,211,710	100%
Total	\$6,028,136,755	100%	\$27,396,902,160	100%	\$33,425,038,920	100%

¹³⁶ This includes 'Cultural facilities and services' (outlays on libraries, facilities and services for the creative and performing arts, museums, art galleries and other cultural facilities and services, support to individual artists, monuments, historic houses and sites, zoos and botanic gardens, aquariums and arboreta, national, regional and local celebrations; and organisations engaged in promoting cultural activities); 'Broadcasting and film production'; and 'Recreation and culture nec' (not elsewhere categorised).

Based on Productivity Commission 2017, *Indigenous Expenditure Report 2017 Advanced Database*, accessed 2/2/18 from <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/indigenous-expenditure-report/2017>

APPENDIX B

About the Australia Council for the Arts

The Australia Council is the Australian Government's principal arts funding and advisory body. The Council is the national advocate for the arts and its purpose is to champion and invest in Australian arts. The Council invests in and strengthens Australia's artistic and cultural life by fostering excellence in the arts and increasing national and international engagement with Australian arts.

The Australia Council was established as a Commonwealth statutory authority in 1975, and its functions were updated under the *Australia Council Act 2013*. They are to:

- (a) support Australian arts practice that is recognised for excellence;
- (b) foster excellence in Australian arts practice by supporting a diverse range of activities;
- (ba) support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts practice;
- (bb) support Australian arts practice that reflects the diversity of Australia;
- (bc) uphold and promote freedom of expression in the arts;
- (bd) promote community participation in the arts;
- (c) recognise and reward significant contributions made by artists and other persons to the arts in Australia;
- (d) promote the appreciation, knowledge and understanding of the arts;
- (e) support and promote the development of markets and audiences for the arts;
- (f) provide information and advice to the Commonwealth Government on matters connected with the arts or the performance of the Council's functions;
- (g) conduct and commission research into, and publish information about, the arts;
- (h) evaluate, and publish information about, the impact of the support the Council provides;
- (i) undertake any other function conferred on it by the Act or any other law of the Commonwealth;
- (j) do anything incidental or conducive to the performance of any of the above functions.

The Australia Council is a Corporate Commonwealth entity under the *Public Governance Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

The Australia Council's Strategic Plan 2014–19, *A Culturally Ambitious Nation*, guides the work of the Council, including the four strategic goals:

- Australian arts are without borders
- Australia is known for its great art and artists
- The arts enrich daily life for all
- Australians cherish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultures.

APPENDIX C

First Nations organisations receiving multi-year funding from the Australia Council Four Year Funding program – current round 2017–2020

Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation (ANKA)

ANKA, founded in 1987, is Australia's first peak body for Indigenous art. ANKA is the only peak advocacy and support agency for 5,000 Aboriginal artists and 48 Art Centres located within an area of one million square km of northern Australia divided into the four regions of the Tiwi Islands, Darwin/Katherine, Kimberley, and Arnhem Land.

ANKA serves its members by working together to: keep art, culture, and country strong; support the development of strong and sustainable art centres; develop training and professional pathways for young people; keep their voices strong and respected; and to support the continuing development of the Aboriginal arts industry for its First Nations artists. ANKA fulfils its mission through: training; day-to-day resourcing and support; referral and networking; advocacy and lobbying; as well as marketing and promotion.

BlakDance

BlakDance is the national industry body for contemporary Indigenous dance. BlakDance's mission is to cultivate and promote dance in First Nations communities and beyond. BlakDance supports artists and communities across many forms of dance and diverse geographies of histories, songlines and protocols. BlakDance connects collaborators and communities; fuels creative exchange; and builds public discourse to strengthen the art form and dancing sovereignty.

BlakDance's sector-driven priorities include: dance and culture as medicine; safe space for contemporary dance to develop and innovate with protocol; international and inter-cultural collaboration through practice and dialogue; developing education and curriculum; and increasing presenters, producers and performing arts spaces cultural competency through programs and the development of Blak spaces.

Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF)

The CIAF is a dynamic three day event, flourishing now as the quintessential celebration of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. CIAF is committed to strengthening culture and generating interest in Queensland Indigenous art, creating professional development opportunities and cross cultural exchange.

Since its inception CIAF has matured, emerging as an annual 'art fair/festival' with an established place in the tropical event calendar of Cairns and the national Indigenous art fair circuit. The CIAF spirit comes alive city wide, with satellite event venues hosting theatre, dance, film and art. At its very core, CIAF is a curated collection of traditional and contemporary art works, produced by Queensland Indigenous artists from Indigenous art centres and independent artists.

Desart

Desart is the non-profit peak industry body for over 40 Central Australian Aboriginal art centres. Desart members represent approximately 8000 artists, from 16 distinct language groups spread across the Central desert region of Australia. Based in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), Desart has been providing support services for art centres for the last 20 years.

Desart's innovative, high quality projects and programs include: advocacy and research; building capacity in art centre governance and leadership; providing administration, infrastructure (building, equipment and vehicles) and human resource (HR) management support; marketing and promotion; and providing opportunities for artists to experiment, exchange and collaborate.

Gadigal Information Service (GIS)

GIS is the only Aboriginal media/arts organisation in Sydney that is governed, managed and staffed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. GIS is a unique media/arts organisation with activities that intertwine to successfully support the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural arts practices and a vibrant society and culture for all Australians.

GIS's contribution centres around three main activities. Each of these support and enable the others, and together they support great artists and arts workers; develop audiences for Indigenous music; and engage both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. These activities are: Gadigal Music – launched in November 2008 as a platform for established and emerging First Nations artists, incorporating the Gadigal Music Record Label and Kameygal Recording Studio; Gadigal Events – events throughout the year to showcase First Nations musicians and other artists; and Gadigal Broadcasting – including Koori Radio (93.7FM), Koori Radio Digital (Kr00), Koori Radio Outside Broadcasting and Young, Black and Deadly.

IAD Press (Institute for Aboriginal Development, IAD)

IAD are an independent Aboriginal community-controlled adult education and language resource centre which empowers Aboriginal people from Central Australia to engage in self-determination practices using First Nations wisdom and First World technology. This is done through: the provision of nationally accredited and non-accredited education and training programs; the delivery of language and culture services and programs; and a publishing arm, IAD Press.

IAD Press produces material on the Aboriginal people, languages and culture of Central Australia. Based in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), the traditional lands of the Arrernte people, its purpose is to: publish the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and artists; promote the many and varied voices of Indigenous Australia; and maintain and promote Indigenous language and culture. IAD Press is a publishing house with a rich catalogue of books including language dictionaries and learner's guides; Indigenous art; oral histories relating to land and culture; biographies; books for children and young adults; fiction; poetry; and short stories and natural histories.

Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC)

KALACC supports the traditional cultural practices of the 30 language groups of the Kimberley Region. Incorporated in 1985, KALACC has a proud history of advocating for culturally based self-determination for the Kimberley.

KALACC supports the 30 Aboriginal language groups of the Kimberley by encouraging the participation of these groups in song, story and dance, as they keep their culture strong through sharing their knowledge with people through performance and through cultural practices.

KALACC undertakes cultural maintenance through five strategies: Law Time – ceremonies, tradition, repatriation activities and the maintenance of authentic Kimberley Aboriginal culture; cross-generational programs, especially the Yiriman Project; cultural performance (from major festivals to small, local events); cultural employment (pathways in creative industries and in the cultural economy); and cultural governance, cultural awareness and advocacy (promoting Indigenous culture to community and government and strengthening culturally based leadership).

Magabala Books

Magabala Books is Australia's leading Indigenous publisher. Based in the pearling town of Broome in the far north of Western Australia, Magabala Books is one of the most remote publishing houses in the world. Since its incorporation in 1990, Magabala Books has been recognised as a producer of quality Indigenous Australian literature, receiving accolades in prestigious literary and national achievement awards.

As one of the most respected small publishing houses in Australia, Magabala Books works to celebrate the talent and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices through the publication of quality literature. Magabala Books has released more than 200 titles from a range of genres and publishes 10–12 new titles annually, across a diverse list including children's picture books, fiction (young adult and adult), non-fiction, poetry and biographies.

Moogahlin Performing Arts Inc (Moogahlin)

Moogahlin is the leading NSW First Peoples performing arts company and sits within a national black theatre context alongside other state based companies such as Ilbjerri Theatre Company in Victoria and Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company in Western Australia. Moogahlin operates in partnership with arts companies, community organisations, and local government agencies to deliver a core program of developing and commissioning new work, presenting new work, and regional projects.

Moogahlin contributes significantly to the First Peoples theatre sector through supporting and promoting established and emerging playwrights and their stories; employment opportunities for local, regional, and national theatre makers; and developing local, national, and international opportunities for the sector. Moogahlin delivers the only national First Peoples festival for theatre and performance, Yellamundie at Carriageworks in Redfern. The festival provides a platform for new work through public readings for community, general public, industry producers, and sector agencies.

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (Tjanpi Desert Weavers)

Tjanpi Desert Weavers (Tjanpi) is the award winning social enterprise of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council. Tjanpi represents more than 400 Aboriginal women artists from 26 remote communities on the NPY lands. The NPY lands cover approximately 350,000 square kms across the tri-state (WA, SA, NT) border region of Central Australia. Tjanpi field officers regularly travel to these communities and purchase artworks from the artists; supply art materials; hold skills development workshops; and facilitate grass collecting trips. These trips also allow a number of other cultural maintenance activities to take place. Tjanpi also runs public weaving workshops and a public gallery in

Alice Springs; regularly exhibits work in national galleries; and facilitates commissions for public institutions and collectors.

Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute

The National Aboriginal Cultural Institute Inc. (trading as Tandanya) is Australia's oldest Aboriginal-owned and managed multi-arts centre. Located in Adelaide on Kurna land, Tandanya is a visionary and vibrant place for all to experience contemporary and traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural expressions through the visual and performing arts. Tandanya's operations are multi-faceted, also including community arts, auspicing of events, and business portfolios such as venue hire and the Tandanya Gallery Shop. Tandanya enjoys a national and international reputation for innovation and excellence in visual arts programming, featuring emerging and established artists from around the country and overseas.

UMI Arts

UMI Arts is the peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultural organisation for Far North Queensland. UMI Arts was established in 2005 and its mission is to operate an Indigenous organisation that assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate in the maintenance, preservation and protection of cultural identity. This is done through the strengthening of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices, including visual arts and crafts, dance, ceremony, storytelling and music.

Yirra Yaakin Aboriginal Corporation

Yirra Yaakin which means 'Stand Tall' in Noongar language, is one of Australia's leading Aboriginal performing arts organisations. Yirra Yaakin produces award-winning, world-class theatre that is exciting, entertaining, educational, authentic and culturally appropriate.

The company has commissioned and premiered over 50 new theatre works. These include major festival presentations such as *Waltzing the Wilarra*, *One day in 67*, *Aliwah*, *Windmill Baby*, and *Cruel Wild Woman*. Prominent Aboriginal writers have included Dallas Winmar, Mitch Torres, David Milroy, Sally Morgan and Derek Nannup, amongst many others who have contributed to the Yirra Yaakin experience.

Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA Music)

The CAAMA Group provides a voice for Aboriginal Australia through language, culture, arts and media. This is delivered through core activities such as: creation and management of new and existing artistic content; advocacy for Aboriginal affairs; and facilitation of a global presence of Aboriginal culture and language, music, dance, arts, media, radio, film, documentaries, health messages and multimedia – all created by Aboriginal people.

CAAMA Music is one of five business units which make up the larger CAAMA Group. CAAMA Music provides training opportunities; industry knowledge and experience; nurturing support for artistic and career development; employment for Aboriginal arts workers; performance opportunities; and music industry workers through recording, performance, distribution, promotions, publishing and mentoring.

Ilbjerri Theatre Company

ILBIJERRI is Australia's leading and longest running Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre company. ILBIJERRI creates, presents and tours powerful and engaging theatre,

creatively controlled by Indigenous artists. Each year ILBIJERRI travel to national, regional and remote locations across Australia and the world. Since 2010, the company has presented 17 new works, and performed 530 times in 256 venues to over 85,000 people.

ILBIJERRI is an advocate and leader for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Australia. In this role the company delivers a broad program of artist development for new and emerging Indigenous writers, directors, actors and creatives.

Wilurarra Creative (Warburton Youth Arts Centre)

Wilurarra Creative is young adults building strong communities and opportunities through: arts-based training; skills-exchange; and creative practice that contributes to an evolving, contemporary expression of Ngaanyatjarra culture. Wilurarra Creative arts studios are a community hub and incubator providing ongoing programs and services that do not exist elsewhere on Ngaanyatjarra lands including: music composing, rehearsal and recording studios; access to a variety of musical instruments; computer and internet access; equipment for digital photography, video, graphic design and editing; and a multi-purpose arts project studio space.

Wilurarra Creative has an average daily participation rate of 52 individuals from an area where the average age is 24 and the life expectancy is 45. Through Wilurarra Creative, young adults are leading a movement of pride and self-determination with far reaching positive impacts throughout the remote Ngaanyatjarra lands, the Central Desert and beyond. Wilurarra is an example of the power of First Nations culture in contemporary settings to engage First Nations youth and build a bridge between cultures. For the 16–30 year olds of Warburton community, Wilurarra is the primary resource through which they can explore and express the evolution of Ngaanyatjarra culture in the context of contemporary Australia. Wilurarra exists because Ngaanyatjarra people want to move with the times without moving from their homelands.

Major Performing Arts (MPA) company funded through the MPA Framework:

Bangarra Dance Theatre (Bangarra)

Bangarra is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and one of Australia's leading performing arts companies. Bangarra is widely acclaimed nationally and around the world for powerful dancing; distinctive theatrical voice; and utterly unique soundscapes, music and design. Led by Artistic Director Stephen Page, Bangarra are currently in their 29th year but their dance technique is forged from over 65,000 years of culture, embodied with contemporary movement. The company's dancers are professionally trained, dynamic artists who represent the pinnacle of Australian dance. Each has a proud Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background, from various locations across the country.

Bangarra's annual program includes a national tour of a world premiere work, performed in Australia's most iconic venues; a regional tour allowing audiences outside capital cities the opportunity to experience Bangarra; and an international tour to maintain their global reputation for excellence. Complementing this touring roster are education programs, workshops and special performances and projects, planting the seeds for the next generation of performers and storytellers.