

The Hon. Josh Frydenberg
Treasurer
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Treasurer

2021 Budget submission
Australian Dance Council – Ausdance Inc.

As the peak body for professional dance in Australia, the Australian Dance Council – Ausdance Inc. welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the 2021-22 Budget.

We wish to reiterate the dance industry's major concerns about the loss of income, company reserves and the plight of large and small dance companies, independent artists and sole traders caused by the decimation of the industry in 2020. We emphasise the relevant points made in several previous submissions about the very real effects Covid-19 is having on dance artists, companies and independent projects.

Ausdance collaborates with nine other national peak bodies for the performing arts: APRA/ AMCOS, Theatre Network Australia, BlakDance, Diversity Arts Australia, Live Performance Australia, Symphony Services Australia, Performing Arts Connections Australia, Regional Arts Australia and the First Peoples Performing Arts sector. We have jointly committed to calling for urgent investment in the following key areas in order to stabilise the industry and provide a sustainable basis on which it can recover from the impact of COVID-19.

1. **Establishment of the National Indigenous Arts and Cultural Authority (NIACA):** \$4.5m over 4 years and, in addition, a \$20m p/a investment in First Nations arts and cultural companies and artists, through the Australia Council for the Arts. We strongly support the need for bipartisan commitment to closing the gap that recognises that First Nations people are calling for greater recognition of the importance of culture and cultural practice in building community wellbeing and employment opportunities.

We therefore support the development of a National Indigenous Arts and Cultural Authority (NIACA), estimated at \$4.5m over four years. In 2015, the Australia Council for the Arts (Closing the Gap Refresh submission, April 2015) argued that there is significantly unmet funding for First Nations organisations, including an unmet funding demand of \$9m p/a for small to medium companies alone. In addition, there is a growing sector of First Nations independent artists working in dance, theatre, circus, music and hybrid arts. A program of \$3.4m p/a for independent First Nations artists would create new opportunities for local capacity building in programs for health and wellbeing, domestic tourism, creative entrepreneurship and cultural maintenance. Total investment required would be \$20m p/a.

2. **A targeted wage subsidy for workers in the performing arts:** Workers in the performing arts – one of the hardest hit sectors – continue to be impacted by COVID-19. Casual artists' ability to restart their businesses in a viable and sustainable way is already in doubt, as many were ineligible for JobKeeper or

JobSeeker initially, but those who were eligible are now facing massive disadvantage when these programs are wound down in March. Lack of ability to repay mortgages, pay rent and provide support for their families will be the most serious outcome when these two benefits are substantially reduced or are phased out altogether.

- Freelance dance professionals, without any safety net, are struggling to remain in an industry in which they provide an essential element. A large majority of these workers has been omitted from JobKeeper because they have not worked for one employer for the length of time deemed necessary to meet eligibility criteria, yet as workers who have been consistently engaged by multiple employers in the 12-month period prior to COVID-19 they may have earned too much to meet JobSeeker eligibility.
- Employers cannot support their other casuals left without JobKeeper. As a result, they are finding that they are unable to retain and support uniquely skilled casual staff who provide the specific expertise required because they work on short-term contracts across multiple businesses.
- Ausdance emphasises in particular the importance of JobKeeper for sole traders – performers, lighting designers, writers, directors and crew are sole traders and many are still out of work and facing the prospect of losing wage support in March. A targeted wage subsidy program will allow a gradual return to full employment (see recent [ArtsHub article](#) for further industry responses).
- The business activities carried out by casual freelance professionals, and micro and small dance businesses fulfil integral roles that support the business activities of the ‘sector significant organisations’ the Government has already identified. These are activities the ‘sector significant organisations’ are not positioned to undertake, but which are necessary to ensure effective, productive functioning of the dance ecology.
- Ongoing COVID-19 outbreaks and subsequent restrictions to live events and performances will continue to impact the performing arts in particular in 2021. Recognising that arts workers continue to be heavily impacted by the virus, there must be a continuation of a targeted wage subsidy for performing artists, including those casual workers and sole traders working dance, theatre, circus and the music industry, i.e. JobKeeper or a new initiative.

3. An urgent investment in the Australia Council for the Arts’ existing programs of \$25m p/a over the next four years to stabilise the industry: \$100m over 4 years.

We are particularly concerned about the Australia Council’s reduced capacity to respond adequately to recovery of the arts sector into 2021, leaving many small companies, independent artists and organisations’ activities unsupported in an already-diminished funding environment.

The dance ecosystem is inter-dependent, having a distinctively diverse cultural impact on Australian society, and the Council must be adequately funded to strengthen and develop it into 2021 and beyond. Increased Australia Council funding is an investment in our future, and it will provide an important and vital contribution to recovery.

Further, policy settings must recognise that different dance sectors serve different purposes in the community, i.e. First Nations performers, the major dance companies, small to medium and youth dance companies, independent artists, community dance practitioners across regional Australia, school and studio teachers, choreographers and producers. It is self-evident that 2021 will require more than limited, thinly-spread Council funding for the arts and cultural sectors to re-emerge as viable creative industries and important drivers of innovation and new thinking.

4. **In partnership with industry, establish a \$100-\$500m Live Entertainment Business Interruption Fund (BIF) to increase industry confidence to re-activate live events.** The BIF would do this by providing indemnification for costs if, due to COVID-19 related issues, a live event in Australia is cancelled, postponed or negatively affected by the re-introduction of government restrictions. Industry would contribute a percentage of cost exposure to the BIF and the government would provide underwriting.
5. **An increase of a minimum 40% (\$2.8m) to the Playing Australia Fund** to strengthen regional access to the arts and opportunities for regional companies and artists: Increase to \$10.8m p.a. annually in order to address increasing demand and to exponentially increase the program's impact, and continue the \$10m investment made in 2020 over the next four years, administered through Regional Arts Australia.

The national performing arts touring program, Playing Australia, provides the mechanism by which regional, remote and outer metropolitan communities access the best of Australia's creative performance. There is the potential for the program to lead audience development, to build the sustainability of arts organisations and provide employment opportunities that strengthen connections between artists and audiences in regional Australia.

6. Strengthen regional access to the arts and opportunities for regional companies and artists.

Strengthen regional access, develop regional audiences' engagement and develop regionally based performing arts practice through increasing the scope and funding directed into regional arts initiatives. Investment in regional arts will further contribute to the liveability of regional communities and the strengthening of regional industries, leading to their diversification, an increase in regional communities' liveability and further tourism opportunities.



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