

**auSDANCE**  
**NETWORK.**

# National Dance Gathering

Supported by

Creative Australia  
Queensland Ballet  
Ausdance (National)

2023

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## Executive Summary

Representatives of the dance sector across Australia met in Brisbane to consider and address major common issues.

The meeting was coordinated and produced by Ausdance QLD. It was supported by Queensland Ballet, Creative Australia and Ausdance National.

Participants included major companies, government stakeholders, small and medium sized companies, private businesses, community groups and independent dancers/producers.

**This is a high level summary of issues, proposed solutions and what happens next.**



*Julie Englefield*  
Executive Director  
Ausdance QLD

# CAREER PATHWAYS

Dancing begins in childhood. When people get ‘serious’, they train full-time with a dream of employment. There are no guarantees.

A greater understanding of the dance ecology and pathways to dancing or performing arts careers is required to make effective improvements. With a goal of a diverse and thriving dance sector, we must prioritise First Nations Cultural capability. Lifelong, sustainable dance careers and experiences can’t exist without a strong ‘pipeline’,

01

## The sector has limited Cultural capability

Studios and teaching organisations aren’t Culturally safe, there are racist expectations of form and technique. Non-Indigenous structures of learning systems, companies, venues and festivals are unsuitable for many First Nations People.

02

## The whole dance ecology is not understood

There are substantial gaps in understanding and support of areas including children, youth, and broader performing arts careers such as management, production and technical theatre.

03

## The ATAR scaling of dance reduces participation

In all states and territories, dance scales down in the ATAR system. This means students are electing not to take dance as a subject at school. Participation has decreased dramatically since 2020

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in **educational, youth and early career** initiatives

Invest in **First Nations Cultural dance teaching** and training programs.

Support ongoing participation in performing arts-specific **Cultural capability building** programs

Create and support **traineeships and internships**

Review **secondary and tertiary dance education** programs

Improve **accessibility of training programs**

# GOVERNMENT FUNDING STRATEGIES

Dance is everywhere. We need to support local, state and national dance activities so all dance is as good as it can be.

For a thriving performing arts sector, there should be no gaps in equitable funding opportunities. A strategic collaboration across all levels of government will meet the needs of the whole dance ecology, and enable a thriving, creative and sustainable sector.

01

## There's minimal data about the value of dance

There is no consistent data or data repository looking at the combined social, economic and cultural value of dance. This means it is undervalued, particularly in First Nations Communities.

02

## Not enough is invested in youth

Across all government levels, investment in youth dance companies, projects and activities is limited. There are no youth companies funded federally. This is a significant gap.

03

## Service organisations receive limited support

Valuable 'pathway' resources, training, networks and advice are missing. Funding for service organisations has either remained static or been removed completely across the country.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Incentivise private donations and philanthropy through **increased tax deductibility** incentives.

**Harmonise investment strategy** across all levels of government; federal, state and local.

**Review grant application and reporting processes** to ensure accessibility and equity of opportunity.

**Review financial KPIs** so there is an incentive to build reserves through surplus.

Invest in **service organisations** to leverage funding impact across the whole sector.

Funding should reflect the broader economy.  
**Increasing multi-year funding by at least CPI** means we keep up with the rest of Australia's economy.

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# VENUE ACCESSIBILITY

A place to perform or rehearse is the single most important asset required by the dance sector.

A range of factors over the last few years has decreased the availability and affordability of venues. Policy decisions around staffing levels, add-ons in venue hires and venues' retention of audience data severely limits the potential of dance organisations.

01

## Venue hire fees have increased

Opaque decision-making around price increases, additional 'hidden fees', and costly new WH&S requirements means performances become economically unviable.

02

## There is 'gatekeeping' in venue programming

Feedback to some First Nations and community groups is their work isn't 'appropriate' for the space. The 'colonial' structure (top down, hierarchical decision-making) means there is limited authentic engagement with First Nations People.

03

## Public/free outdoor space is off-limits

Outdoor and public spaces or amenities are limited/inaccessible by bureaucracy, such as requirements for insurance or unnecessary paperwork.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Build an **online system to share available studio/performance** and admin facilities (eg: 'Spacer')

**Govt. owned venues review pricing structure** to support First Nations, small scale, independent events.

**Government-owned** venues to implement substantial and ongoing First Nations Cultural capability training.

**Negotiate access** to state, independent and Catholic school facilities.

**Mandate accessible facilities** for audiences and performers in all venues. Raise the standard of design for people with disabilities.

**All venues should provide audience data** back to hirers. If this happens, organisations will be able to develop audiences and donors properly.

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# FAIR PAY AND EMPLOYEE RIGHTS

The National Cultural Policy emphasises the need for sustainable arts careers.

If a job in the performing arts is financially and socially sustainable, skilled workers will stay in the industry. A substantial paradigm shift is required to shift the perception that dancers/artists should work for free or for the 'exposure'.

For dance to be considered a sustainable career, we must ensure employee rights and employer obligations are understood and maintained.

01

## First Nations Cultural dancers are underpaid

Large organisations such as the NRL, AFL pay small fees for First Nations performers. Dancers with decades (and millenia) of experience are substantially underpaid according to the Award.

02

## Dancers don't value their own work

Dancers will often agree to perform for minimal or no fee. This perpetuates the perception that dance is not work and results in presenters and producers expecting dancers to work for free.

03

## The gig-economy is not sustainable

With funding models supporting project-based work, dancers/arts workers are forced into the gig-economy. This is not sustainable, and provides limited worker protection.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Education** program for young dancers/arts workers about industrial relations and worker rights.

**Focus on First Nations first.** Directly address the NRL, AFL and other major sporting events and support First Nations performers being paid correctly.

**Education** for businesses, companies, organisations about employer obligations and worker rights.

**Develop services and resources** to support employers to meet their obligations.

**Publish** and promote recommended fees, Award and entitlements. Provide support to back up these publications.

**Work with MEAA and LPA** to update information/resources and create a central repository of administrative support for employers and employees.

FAIR PAY

# SAFETY IN THE DANCE SECTOR

Safety is a growing issue. Higher standards are expected and required to reduce risk across the sector.

There is a gap in knowledge, capability and accountability in all areas of safety, including but not limited to First Nations Cultural safety, workplace health & safety, intimacy/contact safety and child safety.

01

## Cultural safety is an issue

It is an issue in venues, in studios, and in small dance communities. It is an issue when dealing with government and it is an issue throughout the hierarchy of large companies.

02

## Dancers do not speak up

It is 'cultural' in dance to be silent. This means people dance through the physical or emotional pain inflicted upon them in their dance activity.

03

## Child safety is a major concern

There are no consistent child safety processes or standards across the country and there is no accountability to any organisation to demonstrate child safety in dance activities.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Education** program for dancers, teachers, studio owners and creators about safety, child safety and required processes.

**Urgent First Nations Cultural child safety** educational programs must be created for dance/performing arts businesses, venues and organisations.

**Employee Assistance Program** available to all workers, with a specific understanding of First Nations Cultural safety.

**Develop safety training accreditation program** supported by a public campaign about safety in the performing arts.

**Encourage a culture shift** in dance companies so dance/artistic staff are included in 'whole company' management and operations.

**Review and publish** systems of accountability for all safety areas in each state/territory.

SAFETY

# ADVOCACY FOR DANCE

With a coordinated national voice, needs can be met and the huge benefits of dance will be well understood.

Advocacy is the practice of representing the needs and priorities - and celebrating the great wins - of a sector, group, individual or community. We've long heard the dance sector doesn't feel this is done well enough, meaning the decision and policy-making in governments and institutions do not reflect the value of dance.

01

## The dance sector is disconnected

Dance studios, communities, schools, institutions and companies work on their own, in silos and disconnected from their peers. There is inefficiency when shared services or assets would be beneficial.

02

## We are missing a national industry focus

The dance sector is becoming unsafe, unprofessional and unsustainable. Consistent collaborative national consultation, strategy and programs are the most efficient and effective way of improving this.

03

## No group has good lobbying power

Without a trusted and well-resourced advocacy 'voice', the needs of the sector are not understood across all levels of society. We are unable to deliver key messaging promoting the physical, mental and social benefits of dance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Regular **'whole of sector' meetings or communication platform** to build connectivity across the breadth of the sector.

**Invest in peak bodies** and ensure their processes mean all voices in the sector are properly represented so they can deliver systemic improvements.

Develop **strategic advocacy priorities and media/PR** for sector.

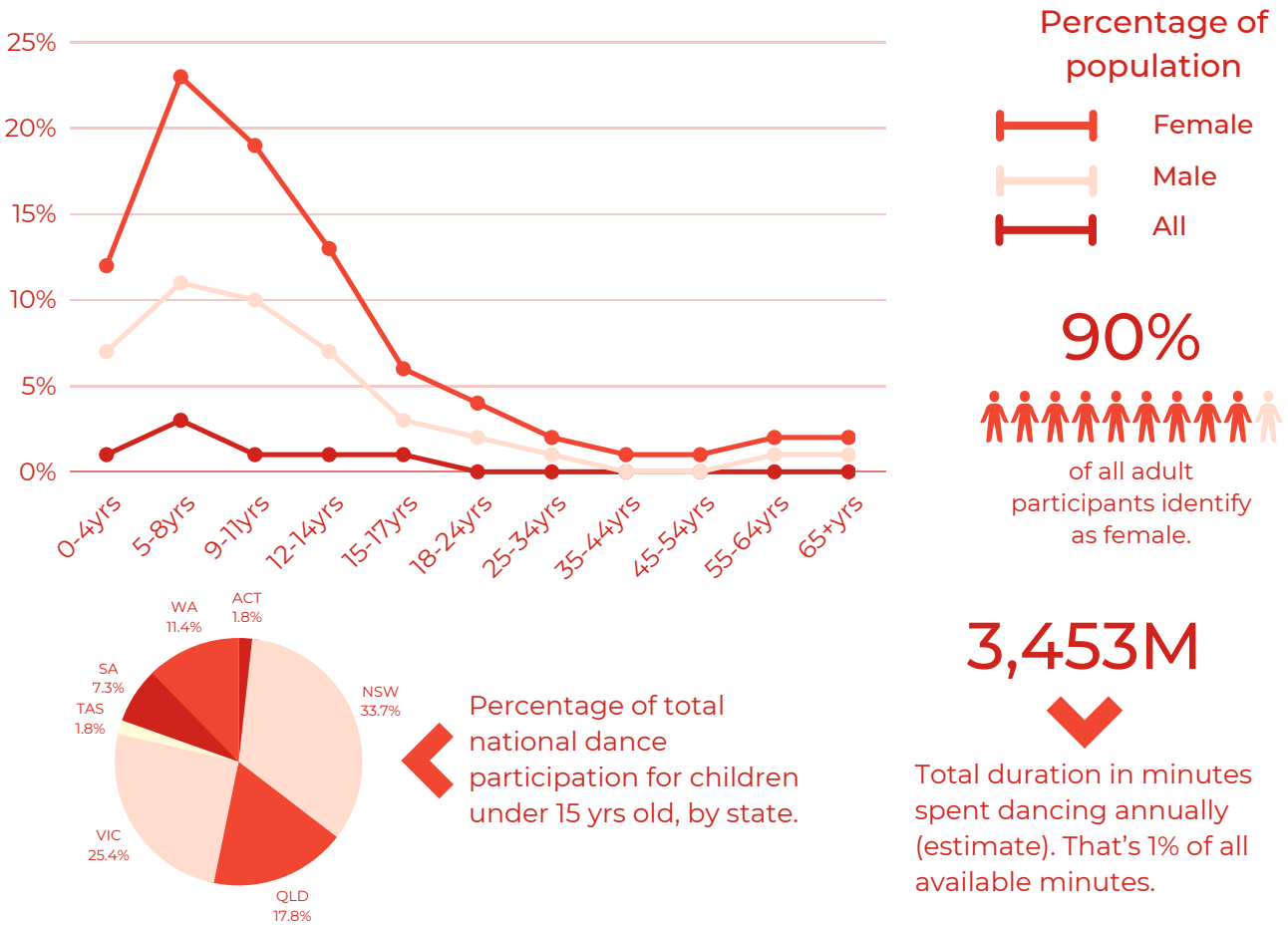
**Prioritise systemic issues** such as compliance, Cultural IP, child safety which need improvements and address them strategically.

# Overview of Australia's dance sector

- 413,900 children dance in Australia each week, **more children than participate in AFL.**
- 336,169 adults dance in Australia each week.
- The biggest reason for dropping out of dance is lack of time, the second is injury.
- Female dance participants aged 15-24 are responsible for acquiring 27% of audiences.

## Dance participation is important

People who participate in dance are more likely to consider a dance career, and are most likely to attend dance performances as an audience member.



**\$368M**

Total annual expenditure on dance participation for all age groups.



# NEXT STEPS

Where do we go from here? We've listened, considered ideas and worked out how to create necessary change.

The next steps are to develop a detailed plan - including delegation of responsibilities, funding and accountability. Leadership of this plan will require funding and the will to work together to improve all aspects of the dance sector.

01

## Spread the word

Include the detailed notes and schedule meetings with all states, territories and federal governments. Where possible, also provide this report to local councils.

02

## Develop an action plan

The Ausdance network will build an action plan in response to this report, with urgent issues prioritised. A budget can be developed from this plan. This can proceed in proportion to Ausdance network's capacity.

03

## Allocate responsibility and accountability

Responsibility will be allocated, including funding. Goals will be set, and accountability for actions will be agreed.

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### National Dance Gathering Participants

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## About the Australian Dance Council (Ausdance)

The federated Ausdance network is made up of State and Territory and national independent organisations. The purpose of Ausdance is to facilitate a capable, inclusive, creative and sustainable dance ecology in Australia. We do this through providing resources, advice and education to our members.

Members are individuals, companies, organisations and dance communities across all styles, traditions and levels of dance.

Each State and Territory has different organisational strategies with regular meetings agreeing on priorities and allocation of resources/responsibility.

## For Further Information

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