

7 September 2015

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs  
Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

**RE: Inquiry on the Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Budget Decisions on the Arts**

cohealth is Australia's largest community health provider with a range of allied health professional services, general practice, oral and dental health, community mental health services, alcohol and other drugs services and health promotion in numerous communities. One of our key and most successful programmes is called cohealth Arts Generator, which uses participatory arts and exposure to high quality art to:

- Engage with people that mainstream services find difficult to reach, such as those dependent on drugs or alcohol, experiencing mental health problems or are homeless
- Use the creative process to increase the individual wellbeing and agency of people, to discover their own creative potential and build connections with their community.
- Promote health and wellbeing in communities by tackling entrenched social problems, with particular success regarding promoting tolerance and freedom from discrimination e.g. gender, racial and religious

cohealth Arts Generator's studio is based in Footscray Community Arts Centre and is part of Arts West, a collaboration of eight organisations that deliver over 4,500 arts, cultural and engagement activities throughout Melbourne's west, with some touring nationally and internationally. We also work with Arts Centre Melbourne to produce and display art and created Australia's first hip hop choir (MASSIVE) which has developed the artistic careers of numerous young people. Our Sisters and Brothers programme, using young emerging artists, uses singing, story telling, and writing to reduce discrimination amongst young people and build positive relationships. It was highly commended by VicHealth as part of their 2014 awards. However, none of our work will be eligible for funding from the National Programme for Excellence in the Arts.

The draft guidelines for the National Programme for Excellence in the Arts proposes that funding will only be available to organisations that have arts as its principal purpose, which can have the effect of maintaining barriers between the arts and other sectors, such as health and education. The Australia Council for the Arts has been a significant funder of arts that engage members of vulnerable and hard to reach communities so that we can increase individual and community health and wellbeing. It has played a critical role in fostering collaboration between experts in the arts and health sectors creating benefits for both sectors and the populations that we serve. The movement of funding from the Australia Council for the Arts creates serious concerns for the continuation of such important work.

The focus of the National Programme for Excellence in the Arts appears to be on supporting elite performing arts rather supporting people to participate in the arts or development of participatory arts practitioners, like the ones that we rely on in projects mentioned above. Elite performing arts are only the tip of the arts sector and the tip needs a foundation to be sustainable. The foundation must encompass opportunities for the development of diverse forms of art, artists' skills and techniques, and provide opportunities for talented artists to use their skills in ways different to elite performance.

The three streams that the Programme will support appear to have a narrow focus, which will not assist more people to create or participate in art. The first stream, Endowment Incentives, appears to favour large organisations and not the multitude of smaller organisations that are key to being the first step into the arts for many people. The second stream regarding International and Cultural Diplomacy also indicates that large arts organisations will be in a much better place to be funded. Excellence is the end of something that begins many years before and a range of local organisations are required to help people, from all cultural backgrounds, take the first steps towards that.

The third stream, Strategic Initiatives, does advise that projects will be supported that enable regional and remote audiences to access art, but in terms of growing audiences, which is a stated objective, ignores all of those people who do not engage with mainstream arts organisation in urban areas. Australia is a country of huge multicultural diversity but this is not reflected in the creation and attendance of arts. Remote audiences must also include people whose culture may be very far from the art that is generally on offer.

The movement of funding from the Australia Council will likely harm access to diverse, quality arts and cultural experiences, and exclude many people living in Australia from the arts. Opening up the arts is now more important than ever before as it can help bring people into the life of the country, breaking down barriers and increase mutual understanding.

A meta-review commissioned by Arts Council England found that the arts had been used to benefit mental health and improve recovery from cardiovascular treatment. However, the arts can be used to not only reduce pain or improve recovery, but as a previous editor

of the British Medical Journal Richard Smith wrote, the arts can create spaces, stories and activities that vitalise our lives and those of the communities we live in. He believed that the role of the arts in improving individual and community wellbeing was more important now than ever before. Yet it only receives a fraction of the funding given to sports.

Together, we face many challenges in the communities we live and we cannot be successful in tackling these without an arts sector being deeply involved, and not just valuing art in terms of elite performance only.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Joyce', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Catherine Joyce  
Director of Advocacy and Partnerships (acting)