



National Office
Level 1, ALIA House
9-11 Napier Close
Deakin ACT 2600

Postal Address
PO Box 24
Deakin West ACT 2600

info@amaga.org.au
02 6230 0346

Submission to the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

28 May 2020

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the Senate's investigation.

This submission outlines the significant impact of the pandemic upon Australia's museums and galleries and their response, addresses damaging gaps in the Government's response to COVID-19, and recommends a number of priorities and actions that should enable better support, and return on investment, of Australia's museum and gallery sector.

Before making specific comments, we will outline who we are and what we do.

Who we are

AMaGA is the national membership association and peak advocacy body representing museums and galleries. We encompass a wide and diverse range of national, state, regional and community museums, art galleries, historic sites, botanic and zoological gardens, research centres, Indigenous cultural centres, and Keeping Places across Australia. Our 1400 members represent thousands of individual professionals through the large institutions and thousands more individual volunteers.

AMaGA is an advocacy, research, service and professional development organisation. We build on a history of museum professional association activity that extends back to the 1930s, have branches in every state and territory, and support professional national networks of expertise. AMaGA works closely with our partner, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Australia Committee, which provides an international voice for museum professionals, and we endorse their submission to this Senate committee. More information on AMaGA and our members can be found at <https://www.amaga.org.au/annual-reports-0>

Public value

Galleries and museums are central to wellbeing, identity, and maintaining social cohesion. They inspire a high level of trust and confidence, and connect Australians with the stories, art, heritage and histories of their community at a local, regional and national level. They are also critical contributors to national and regional economies. They help foster the creative industries which are one of the engine houses of the economy and are key drivers of successful cultural tourism and regional development. For example, more domestic tourists attend the arts than organised sport, amusement parks or wineries. See <https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/domestic-arts-tourism-connecting-the-country/>

"The creative sector [is] distinctively positioned to help when society is ready to emerge. We will help people reconnect, create tailored events, share stories to heal, celebrate and reflect. These are ingredients that can help kick start society and get the economy back on track." (P Miles, ArtsHub)

Vital Statistics

- **Over 2,500** museums and galleries across Australia
- In 2017/18 **over 10 million** people visited the national collecting institutions (on + off site)
- **33%** of people with a disability had visited a museum or gallery in 2014 (*ABS General Social Survey, 2014*)
- **Over 50,000** Australians volunteer in museums and galleries
- **98% of Australians engage with the arts.** (Australia Council National Participation Survey Report 2017)
- Museums and galleries are also integral parts of Australia's arts and cultural ecosystem which is a **\$111.7bn industry that contributes 6.5% of GDP.**

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The impacts of COVID-19 upon Australia have been and will continue to be extreme. The event has been called a sprint to contain it and a marathon to cope with the aftermath. While attention is now pivoting to re-opening and recovery, it is essential that there is a better understanding of impacts occurring now and that decisions should continue to be taken to support struggling organisations and communities.

In Australia, along with the tourism industry, hospitality and higher education, the cultural and creative sectors are the most affected by the current coronavirus crisis. Museums and galleries – of all types, sizes, funding sources and governance arrangements – are no exception.

There are over 2,500 museums and galleries throughout Australia. The sector is diverse, with distinct segments, impacted in different ways. Key organisations are the 22 state and national institutions. A second significant cohort is the 250 or so public galleries and museums operated by local governments, both regional and metropolitan. And there are over 2,000 volunteer-run, community organisations acting as community anchors and custodians of Australia's distributed national collection spread across regional and rural Australia.

Impacts

- All museums and galleries were, rightly, closed to the public, to protect visitors, workers and contractors. In doing so:
 - They have lost major sources of self-generated income
 - They have lost workers, in particular early-career staff
 - They have lost volunteers
 - They have struggled to continue to support artists, contractors and other specialists who all contribute to their work and are part of the cultural ecosystem that generates experiences and profit.
- National and state galleries and museums have continued to offer opportunities for the public to interact with the collections and public programs, through rapid development and delivery of online experiences, such as virtual tours and Digital School Excursions, while maintaining ongoing collection and facilities management requirements.
- Local government is under stress, and council-supported galleries and museums have been seriously affected by the current crisis.
 - Many councils have redeployed their professional staff or stood down all their museum/gallery staff. While the need to deliver basic services is clear, the negative impact of ceasing these cultural services will be long term.
 - Contract, casual and temporary staff have been let go. These are generally highly-skilled and deliver specialised services. This is significantly affecting both current and future programming and community development.
 - For local government institutions, the impact of ineligibility for the Commonwealth Government's Job Keeper program has had an immediate negative effect, with concerns that this may lead to permanently reduced staffing levels and a significant lessening of cultural opportunities for communities as well as putting nationally significant collections at risk.
- Council-run art galleries (and libraries presenting cultural displays) significantly outnumber council-run history museums, with many municipalities leaving the care and access to local history collections to community volunteers. For example, c.74% of regionally-based public galleries in Queensland are owned or operated by local government, compared with c.6.5% of regionally-based museums.
 - However, councils play an important role in housing many community collections and advising community collecting groups. These small, volunteer-managed community organisations are generally severely under-resourced. They are also experiencing distress under closure, with plummeting income and volunteer engagement, and are very vulnerable to ongoing disruption or permanent closure.
 - One of the most useful and cost-effective actions that governments at all levels could do for community recovery and rebuilding is to provide professional advice and an adequate level of funding support for these organisations.

- For many museums and galleries at all levels, uncertainty about their future operations and viability is a consistent concern.
- COVID-19 has created a destructive cumulative impact on those organisations, regions and communities who are reeling from the bushfires and extreme weather events in late 2019 and early 2020.

Survey Data

Data from AMaGA's Membership Survey on COVID-19 Impacts (which closed 11 May) shows that:

86% of organisations have been or anticipate to be financially affected – through loss of income (events, visitation, rent, donations, sales, education visits, sponsorship and budget cutbacks by the funding organisation).

Significant changes to paid staff to cope with COVID-19 cover:

Paid staff redeployed outside primary role: 55%

Paid staff asked to reduce hours: 53%

Paid staff 'stood down' temporarily: 57%

Paid staff discontinued: 51%

Significant changes to volunteering cover:

Volunteers asked to stay home: 87%

Looking at paid staff and volunteers:

Staff / Volunteers working from home: 87%

Staff / Volunteers working in isolation but still at work: 77%

Commonwealth government support packages:

When organisations were asked whether the Commonwealth government's economic packages were available to them, **67% replied No to Job Seeker and 66% replied No to Job Keeper.**

When they were asked whether the amount of government assistance was sufficient, **53% said they did not qualify, or were unclear at this stage, while a further 26% said No. Only 21% replied Yes.**

Concerns about the collections:

Most museums in Australia are small, volunteer-managed community organisations which are embedded in their local communities and provide a range of social and economic benefits, including a sense of belonging to their community, and of contributing to society. Thus it is no surprise, but deeply troubling, that **77% of responding organisations were now concerned by their lack of engagement with the community (for example, through cancellation of events/exhibitions or no online engagement).**

Support:

When asked what support they needed now and over the next 6-12 months, the standout was **immediate and ongoing financial support**, along with **public statements of their value.**

"Access to special funding to enable us to reschedule cancelled exhibitions, as it will be some time before sponsors are ready to step back into this space. Also access to funding to allow us to commission new work, as this will pass through to artists who need support at this time."

"If we remain closed for 6 months, we may be financially unviable and may require financial assistance. If/when museums can open to the public, big national advertising campaign and promotion for the Museum sector - it is full of amazing people, volunteers and supporters. Encourage the schools /education sector to utilise museums as a way of reinvigorating the Sector"

Individual members of AMaGA also responded to the Survey. Most who had lost their paid work were **accessing their personal savings (45%)**.

Those who were still employed in organisations reported a good level of support:

79% of these employees received regular communications. 53% had mental health support. IT support (47%) and assistance setting up your home office (36%) were ahead of training and professional development opportunities, which was 32%.

75% asked for AMaGA to provide skills development at this time.

“Paramount is staying connected”.

During this period, many organisations are also recognising opportunities to rethink business models and operating processes, and experiment with new modes of community engagement. **66% of surveyed organisations highlighted increased online content as a key adaptive strategy.**

The national and state museums and galleries have demonstrated great flexibility in re-purposing programs to deliver experiences and education online, as well as developing new materials, such as virtual tours.

Those smaller regional and metropolitan galleries and museums who have retained professional staff in their primary roles are undertaking a range of innovative public programming (both digital and offline) as well as managing their collections and supporting artists and their local communities. Their resilience and creativity is contributing to community health, wellbeing and continuing education during this lockdown period.

The community/volunteer museums, galleries and historical societies continue their unsung roles.

“We are a small, rural based, volunteer run, Historical Society and were burnt out before this, it is hard to remain positive at times, then I look at one of our brilliant 10,000 digitised glass plate negatives, think of all that hard work and take a deep breath and start again.”

Longer term impacts

People are the primary focus here.

A critical concern is the loss of young, early-career museum and gallery workers through the lack of job opportunities. They are the future of the industry.

Artists have also been hard hit and many may leave their profession.

Many volunteer-run community organisations are likely to lose their workers and possibly not re-open at all if there is not careful and targeted support and safety for them to return.

In all these cases, **if unaddressed**, there will be inestimable damage to the mental health of individuals, to the institutions, and to Australia’s cultural industry and cultural life.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Commonwealth

AMaGA commends the Government and National Cabinet for the overall responses to the pandemic with restrictions on movement, social distancing and closures. This appears to have been necessary and effective. The consequences on culture and the arts have, however, been profound.

Arts industry leaders have repeatedly called for greatly increased and targeted Commonwealth government support to avert or ameliorate catastrophic impacts. This has not been forthcoming. Indeed, the Australia Council had to re-purpose \$5 million earmarked for sector development to emergency support for a small percentage of artists and organisations from amongst the multitudes in need.

A detailed account of COVID-19 impacts upon the broad arts and culture industry, the repeated, united and evidence-based calls for targeted Government support, and the shortcomings of the Commonwealth government’s response to date, is contained in the submission to this Senate investigation by the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA).

- **AMaGA joined with NAVA and other peak bodies in advocating for these specific types of industry support, and endorses NAVA's submission.**

AMaGA has previously pointed out the damaging effects of the lack of a national cultural policy framework and associated resourcing, data management, strategic planning and support for arts and culture across the country. The damage of this lack of leadership and understanding at the national level has been laid bare by the COVID-19 crisis.

- We commend the creation of the Job Keeper program for businesses and the expanded Job Seeker support, and a number of organisations and individuals have been able to access them. However, these disproportionately exclude many arts workers and cultural organisations - they have not been eligible, which has led to immediate hardship and longer term diminution or probable collapse of numerous independent or non-profit organisations, sole traders, contract and casual workers in the industry. Longer term damage is still avoidable, in many cases, if the programs are changed.
- Apart from small packages for regional arts and Indigenous arts centres, there has been no bespoke national package to support the arts industry as a whole, or the museum and gallery sector.
- We are also concerned that the Commonwealth government appears unwilling to include culture and the arts in developing plans for the country's rebuilding post COVID-19. This is despite strong evidence of their contributions both to the economy, and social health and wellbeing.

State and Territory

In the face of this pandemic, state and territory governments have responded with a series of emergency grants and cultural stimulus measures. The support provided to the arts and cultural collections varies greatly across the country, but the various support policies add up to an important national stimulus for the cultural sector. The standout until recently, for support and understanding of the economic and social benefits of the cultural and creative industries, is Victoria with their successive packages to specifically help the creative sector totalling \$51 million. NSW has just announced a further \$50 million package, with unspecified guidelines, taking their total to \$56 million.

All have provided some targeted support for culture, and close to \$130m has been committed since March.

Local

Local governments vary in the support they can offer. Some, such as the Sydney and Melbourne City Councils, have created or extended grants programs for local arts activities, while others are focused on providing basic services.

AMaGA RESPONSES

Our responses have been twofold:

- membership support, such as greatly increased and highly successful online professional development programs across Australia, and developing protocols and guidance for managing closed collections and then reopening safely, for example, <https://www.amaga.org.au/covid19-reopening-and-recovery-hub-museums-and-galleries> and
- advocacy through convening or participating in industry roundtables, undertaking research and providing information and inspiration through public engagements and invited media commentary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We strongly recommend that the Commonwealth government consults with the sector and shapes a **culture/creative-led recovery as part of the overall Government response to the crisis.**
2. **A Cultural Commissioner** should be appointed to the National COVID Coordination Commission.

3. The Commissioner should be supported by a **Taskforce**, whose work should include the development of a confident and aspirational **national cultural framework** that sets aims and priorities, delineates roles, undertakes research and enables funding for implementation. As with other national policy making (for example in industry or social policy) a national cultural policy both demonstrates the public value of culture and provides a structure for strategic investment and impact.
4. **The Framework** should:
 - set out a coherent *Roadmap for Recovery and future Resilience* that understands and supports the interconnectedness between industry policies/programs such as tourism, regional development, health and education
 - link with recommendations and decisions coming out of the Bushfires Royal Commission
 - include cross-governmental strategies and programs
 - support local/community/place-based recoveries as well as investment in touring
 - provide new and expanded grants programs to help with adaption to any “new normal” that arise from COVID-19 impacts
 - have sustained, strategic investment over the next decade including doubling the funding available to the Australia Council for the Arts and expanding its remit to include museums and galleries
 - support massively increased digitisation of collections and public programs
 - include a public campaign to state the value of Australia’s culture and to rebuild confidence
 - engage with and support associations and peak bodies to deliver services, advice and support.
5. The Senate Select Committee should set aside at least **one day of hearings** to focus specifically on culture and the arts.

Expert Advice

“An increasing body of evidence shows that “museums can bring benefits to individual and community health and wellbeing in their role as public forums for debate and learning, their work with specific audiences through targeted programmes, and by contributing to positive wellbeing and resilience by helping people to make sense of the world and their place within it...” (Dodd and Jones 2014)

In the UK, there is significant support for public investments in social participation and inclusion through the arts. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing carried out an extensive inquiry in 2016/2017. The three key messages from that inquiry were:

- *“The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.*
- *The arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long term conditions, loneliness and mental health.*
- *The arts can help save money in the health service and social care.” (APPG Inquiry 2017)*

There are opportunities for the health sector to strategically embed the role of museums and the arts sector at national, state and local level.

“Museums and galleries have a special role to play in helping inspire public confidence and encourage a return to normal activities. The position of museums and galleries as trusted organisations makes them especially useful in this regard, as their own return to normal operations can help people overcome their own uncertainties about the residual or latent threat of the virus in Australia as the recovery begins.” (ICOM Australia May 2020)

“Museums and galleries hold a wealth of knowledge in their collections. Building on the experience of the last 3 months, a longer term investment in helping them to provide more digital access would power a wave of creativity, public engagement, new research and innovation.” (Dr Robin Hirst, National President, AMaGA)

"GLAM Peak's work (the network of peak bodies in the galleries, libraries, archives, historical societies and museums sectors) over the last four years has revealed the power of digital discoverability and access to collections for increasing participation and social connection by people with a range of capabilities. Strategies and support for the digitisation of collections in regional and community galleries and museums would be an invaluable contribution to Australians' social engagement, recovery and re-connection, and life-long learning." <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/>

References and Further Reading

Museum facts and data: American Alliance of Museums: <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-museums/museum-facts-data/>

First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries: <https://www.mgaindigenousroadmap.com.au/>

AMaGA Submission to the Bushfires Royal Commission <https://www.amaga.org.au/news/amaga-submission-royal-commission-recent-bushfires>

AMaGA Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health <https://www.amaga.org.au/news/amaga-submission-pc-inquiry-mental-health>

AMaGA Submission to the Commonwealth Department for Communications and the Arts on renewing the National Arts and Disability Strategy, 3 December 2018 at <https://www.amaga.org.au/news/mga-submission-national-arts-and-disability-strategy>

AMaGA Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry on Canberra's national institutions https://www.amaga.org.au/sites/default/files/uploaded-content/website-content/SubmissionsPolicies/mga_submission_to_inquiry_on_canberras_national_institutions_may_2018.pdf

Telling Australia's story - and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions (2019). <https://apo.org.au/node/228746>

GLAM Peak and Digital Access frameworks: <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/framework>

Six case studies in developing digital access to collections in 2016: <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/case-studies>

A New Approach, *Insight Reports One and Two* <https://www.humanities.org.au/new-approach/report1/>

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report, *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*, July 2017 http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative_Health_Inquiry_Report_2017.pdf

Crossick & Kaszynska, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture*, AHRC, UK 2016

Jocelyn Dodd and Ceri Jones, *Mind, Body, Spirit: how museums impact health and wellbeing*, UK 2014 <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/publications/mind-body-spirit-report>

Darren Henley, *The Arts Dividend: Why investment in culture pays*, 2016

Kerry Wilson and Gayle Whelan, *The Art of Social Prescribing*, 2015 <http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/?research=the-art-of-social-prescribing-informing-policy-on-creative-interventions-in-mental-health-care>



Alexandra Marsden
National Director