



**SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE
ON COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS
INQUIRY INTO BROADCASTING, ONLINE CONTENT AND LIVE
PRODUCTION TO RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA**

**"The Common Wealth
of Arts and Health"**

February 2016

This Submission is based on the views of the National Rural Health Alliance but may not reflect the full or particular views of all of its Member Bodies.



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...good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia

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The Common Wealth of Arts and Health

The National Rural Health Alliance's vision is good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.

Being well means much more than experiencing an absence of disease. That is certainly an important pre-condition but increasingly we are coming to understand that one's lifestyle and the psychological and spiritual aspects of being are critical elements of health.

Within this broad context lies the strong relationship and connection between creative involvement in cultural activity and health and wellbeing. Leaders of the rural and remote health sector now accept the benefit of involvement in creativity and understand that the arts are major contributors to living healthy lives. It is this connection between creative involvement in cultural activity and health and wellbeing that is the core focus of this submission: notwithstanding the fact that the health, wellbeing and contribution of people living in rural and remote Australia is also being enabled through education, employment, innovation and entrepreneurial activity facilitated by local communications capacity.¹

The recently endorsed National Arts and Health Framework² reflects a growing recognition by all Australian governments of the value of arts in improving wealth and wellbeing (even in the face of tight budgetary pressures) and their efforts to integrate arts and health initiatives into key policy areas.

The National Rural Health Alliance has long advocated the place of the arts in the healthy life of Australians. In its policy work the Alliance gives high priority to the social and economic determinants of health. The Alliance has consistently supported a prominent place for arts initiatives both in its programming for successive National Rural Health Conferences and in its advocacy to government on rural and remote health policy. The Alliance position reflects the key functions that art can play in the life of a community:

- art in its various forms³ is used as a means of communication on health and health-related issues;
- art is itself therapeutic and is widely used to complement treatment and management; and
- art is widely used as a force for community development, to sustain communities and develop their capacity to deliver health-promoting lifestyles.

The Alliance's position has received strong endorsement from successive National Rural Health Conferences. Priority recommendations at recent conferences⁴ have shown that across the rural and remote health sector there is strong recognition of and support for extending arts-and-health initiatives. Particularly in the context of conference organisation, links have

¹ The importance of local news and information services remain vital to rural and remote communities. People living in rural and remote Australia are anything but averse to the early adoption and use of new communications technology: their circumstances often pre-dispose them to high levels of take-up and competence. However, on-line and other information developments, when available, do not at this stage provide for all of the access and information needs of communities. Locally-focused media remain vital for such things as emerging health and safety alerts, emergency services, major and changeable climate events, local economic development and innovation opportunities, to name a few.

² <http://mcm.arts.gov.au/national-arts-and-health-framework> accessed 11 February 2016

³ including visual, theatre, dance, music and literature, both as individual and collaborative (community) creations and increasingly, as expressed digitally (electronically). For rural and remote Australia broadcasting has been a key delivery channel of many arts experiences.

⁴ Details of Conference recommendations are available at <http://ruralhealth.org.au/conferences> accessed 27 January 2016

also been developed with major regional arts organisations and community arts practitioners⁵. The Alliance objective has been to enhance the conference experience and to showcase the potential contribution of high quality arts components produced by local artists. At the same time, the formal inclusion of arts-in-health within the themes of successive National Rural Health Conferences has improved awareness of the capacities and contributions of the arts to health and wellbeing.

While the Alliance takes a broad view of the benefits of the arts to health and wellbeing, it also recognises that there is great potential for the arts to play a vital role in the lives of people with disabilities and special needs. The 2009 Public Seminar arranged by the Alliance in conjunction with CouncilFest focused on *From creative ageing to end-of-life in rural and remote Australia*⁶. Seminar presenters included several international speakers who provided evidence of the positive contributions local and outreach arts programs can make for creative ageing – and as support for overworked carers.

In seeking to implement the recommendations of the 2009 National Rural Health Conference, the Alliance joined with Regional Arts Australia to support the publication of *Seeded – great arts stories grown in regional Australia*. It documents 13 great arts and health projects from rural, regional or remote Australia. They include the *Tree project*, a remarkable response to the disastrous Victoria bushfires, and *Dust*, the theatre performance that brought home the issues of asbestos contamination to rural communities in Victoria. There is also the Cooma (NSW) multimedia project *Beyond Roundabouts* that addressed life challenges for young parents and won State and National Arts Health Foundation Awards in 2010. Also noteworthy is the Western Desert Kidney Health project which is helping to achieve significant preventive health outcomes in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

The rich diversity of arts practice in regional and remote Australia is easy to find online. Websites such as the Platform⁷, and the archives of Regional Arts Australia⁸ contain many examples of successful and valuable projects that enrich social and personal lives. These projects and their significance deserve a more prominent place in the programming of public and commercial broadcasters, not just because of their intrinsic merit and their reflection of the values of the communities within which they are created, but also because of the contribution they can make in promoting healthy and creative lifestyles.

The important synthesis of arts and health has been recognised by all Australian Health and Arts Ministers in the 2014 endorsement of the National Arts and Health Framework. The Framework commits Australian Health and Arts Ministers to recognise and support the place of arts and health in improving the health and wellbeing of Australians. It has been developed to enhance the profile of arts and health in Australia and to promote greater integration of arts and health practice and approaches into health services, settings and facilities. The Framework encourages partnerships between the arts and health sectors to develop new strategies and approaches and will be a useful tool for advocacy and a resource for practitioners. Importantly, the Framework anchors the practice of arts and health in a strong evidence base. Its Attachment 3 draws together Australian and international research and reports that span a continuum from the effectiveness of the arts in treating illness to the

⁵ These have included Murray Arts (Albury, 2007), Arts Nexus (Cairns, 2009), Country Arts WA (Perth, 2011), Arts SA (Adelaide, 2013) and in Darwin 2015 the program included prominent Darwin artists and arts organisations as well as regional groups such as Barkly Regional Arts.

⁶ See <http://ruralhealth.org.au/conferences/public-seminars/creative-ageing-end-life-rural-and-remote-australia> accessed 28 January 2016

⁷ <http://theplatform.com.au/stories/> accessed 26 January 2016

⁸ <http://regionalarts.com.au/regional-arts-fund/raf-projects/> accessed 26 January 2016

contribution of the arts in promoting and maintaining health. Papers presented at successive National Rural Health Conferences add to this resource⁹.

In the short time since the endorsement of the National Framework, initiatives have commenced in a number of Australian jurisdictions to activate the Framework's principles. In Victoria, VicHealth focuses on strengthening social connections to improve health and wellbeing – both mental and physical. The VicHealth Active Arts Strategy aims to encourage physical activity and improve mental wellbeing for the benefit of all Victorians and is specifically designed to align with the National Arts and Health Framework.¹⁰ The NSW Ministers for Health and the Arts recently have commissioned a task force to report on ways in which art can inspire positive health outcomes in the community, from people living with dementia in nursing homes to jail inmates seeking rehabilitation or paediatric patients being inspired to explore creativity and imagination.¹¹ The WA government is following this approach with the establishment of an Arts and Health Consortium Reference Group focussing on current and future arts and health collaborations in WA hospitals.¹² In Tasmania there is strong support from community groups.¹³

The National Rural Health Alliance has long championed the important role that arts and culture can play in community development by sustaining communities and developing their capacity to deliver health-promoting lifestyles. Culture and arts infrastructure has now been convincingly demonstrated to be a core part of the structure, function and economic viability of societies and local communities, not an indulgence in times of plenty.

Creative arts, and health, are especially important in regional areas to support and sustain local economies, employment within those communities, and community health in general. While broadcasting has played an important role in the cultural life of rural and remote Australia the rapid penetration and adoption of digital media has thrown the role of electronic media increasingly into the spotlight. Current trends towards media aggregation and technological convergence are combining to drown the unique, vibrant regional voices in the grey homogenisation of metropolitan cultural mores and norms.

The Alliance welcomes recent comments by media commentators such as Chris Earl who has outlined the situation in these terms:

Media reforms and the demise of locally-owned media over the past 35 years have deprived country areas of too many opportunities to express what is unique and special in rural and regional Australia and project that civic pride to wider audiences.

*The stories of people and towns beyond the capital cities and the eastern seaboard are as much a part of that patchwork and deserve a voice through programming on national and commercial radio and television.*¹⁴

⁹ See for example: Christine Putland *Changing and adapting: exploring an arts-health-environment interdisciplinary partnership* http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/13nrhc/images/paper_Putland%2C%20Christine.pdf accessed 11 February 2016.

See also: <http://www.instituteforcreativehealth.org.au/resources/research> accessed 11 February 2016

¹⁰ Refer <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/active-arts-strategy> accessed 25 January 2016.

See also <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/our-work/arts-and-social-connection> accessed 11 February 2016

¹¹ http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/Documents/20151105_01.pdf accessed 25 Jan 2016

¹² <http://www.instituteforcreativehealth.org.au/news-events/news/new-arts-and-health-consortium-western-australia> accessed 25 January 2016

¹³ https://www.facebook.com/ArtsHealthTasmania/info/?tab=page_info accessed 25 January 2016

¹⁴ Chris Earl *The voice of regional Australia needs to be heard* ABC The Drum 21 January 2016

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-21/earl-the-voice-of-regional-australia-needs-to-be-heard/7103594> accessed 21 Jan 2016

Andrea Carson, Lecturer, Media and Politics, School of Social and Political Sciences; Honorary Research Fellow, Centre for Advancing Journalism, University of Melbourne has also highlighted this trend:

By cutting back in regional and remote areas – where media choices are already limited compared to those of city cousins and digital connections are often unreliable – the ABC risks sending a message that some parts of Australia are more important to our national conversations than others. The loss of local voices in diverse places by default suggests that what really matters is news and views from Australia’s largest east coast cities of Sydney and Melbourne.¹⁵

Senator Bridget McKenzie has also expressed concern about the risk of losing local news and information content and capacity in these terms:

Sadly, regional Australia is losing its ABC voice and the ABC is not looking to project regional ideas, culture or journalism.¹⁶

and

Rural and regional Australians want media services that add value to their daily lives and which assure them of their connectedness with their local communities, weather forecasts and greater surrounds.¹⁷

Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss has also identified the problem in these terms:

And the country areas are not just a novelty, they’re not just a part of our history and a part of what we like to think about our country and its heroism and its stoicism. It’s actually the part of our country that contributes enormously to our nation’s national wealth, it produces a lot of – most – of our export income, and needs to be respected as a part of our industry, and our commerce, and our lifestyle.¹⁸

The National Rural Health Alliance has also long advocated the crucial importance of fast, efficient broadband as a cornerstone of rural and remote sustainability. Good communications underpin all aspects of contemporary life: health, education, the economy and culture. The Alliance believes that high speed broadband should be available to the same technical standard and at the same effective cost to all families, services, businesses and communities everywhere. The costs to the consumer must not discriminate against people in rural and remote areas. Equally, the content of regional services must be of a high standard and reflect the values and aspirations of the rural and remote communities which it serves. In this way it will serve the purpose of promoting resilient communities with strong sustainable and healthy lifestyles.

The platforms through which this is achieved must be robust and adaptable enough to accommodate future IT developments, and to provide high speed connectivity through

¹⁵ Andrea Carson *ABC cuts a tale of two Australias: Sydney-Melbourne and also-rans* The Conversation November 24, 2014 <http://theconversation.com/abc-cuts-a-tale-of-two-australias-sydney-melbourne-and-also-rans-34424> accessed 23 Jan 2016

¹⁶ http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/chamber/hansards/3c81533a-ef3e-4556-ad55-20845a726291/0067/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf accessed 21 Jan 2016

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ “Truss suggests ABC provide regional TV” 20 January 2016 <http://southburnett.com.au/news2/2016/01/truss-suggests-abc-provide-regional-tv/> accessed 21 Jan 2016

appropriate combinations of telecommunications media including mobile phone, fibre, wireless, satellite and emerging technologies.¹⁹

The need for resilient communities has never been greater, particularly against the background of mental health challenges faced by rural and remote communities²⁰. A supplementary submission focussing on possible ways to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people looked extensively at ways in which arts and health initiatives can help with a person's mental health state, not only through the intrinsic value of producing the art, but also through participants' contributions towards developing social and economic capital. The supplementary submission underscored the general position of the National Rural Health Alliance:

*Agencies with responsibility for devising and implementing policies in mental health, should take account of the demonstrated significant social, therapeutic and economic benefits of arts in health projects, so that the scope for such projects is further extended to assist people in Australia's rural and remote communities.*²¹

Australia's commitment to innovation has never been stronger. The recently released National Innovation and Science Agenda has made significant initiatives to strengthen the infrastructure of innovation in Australia. The Prime Minister's vision of innovation [the Agenda] as the "... boom that can continue forever, [it] is limited only by our imagination, and I know that Australians believe in themselves, I know that we are a creative and imaginative nation"²² is well placed. Its success will depend as much on the measures outlined in the Agenda as on the fostering of the optimal social conditions and communications channels that will allow creativity and imagination to flourish and for ideas to compete and to be exchanged. The Prime Minister's statement provides an optimistic view of Australia's prospects, but crucially underpins that view with the qualification that Australians must be enabled to engage in that process, through policy settings, infrastructure and programmes to strengthen access, innovation and partnership.

In this, the broadcasting system must play a crucial role. If social innovation is the spread of new ideas then the role of broadcasting system must be broader than disseminating commercially sponsored messages. The broadcasting system must contribute to the exchange of ideas, to collaboration and communication and it should promote the creativity of the communities it serves. Social and economic innovation demands special features, long form investigative journalism and documentaries, creative presentations which embrace new media and re-purpose old forms; and present the best of cultural, information and intellectual programming to rural and remote audiences.

New digital technology allows that this does not have to be only a top down process. The ABC's successful ABC Open is one example of a successful program that publishes and

¹⁹ The Alliance's Factsheet Connectivity for Rural and Remote Health outlines development of fit-for-purpose infrastructure for phone, internet and television connections in rural and remote Australia.

<http://ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/nrha-factsheet-connectivity.pdf> accessed 28 January 2016

²⁰ The Alliance's Submission to the National Mental Health Commission on the Review of Mental Health Services and Programmes examines mental health services in rural and remote Australia. See Appendix 1: The state of mental health across Australia, p33

<http://ruralhealth.org.au/document/review-mental-health-services-and-programmes-submission-national-mental-health-commission> accessed 26 January 2016

²¹ National Rural Health Alliance Supplementary Submission National Mental Health Commission's Review of Mental Health Services and Programmes, p5 <http://ruralhealth.org.au/document/review-mental-health-services-and-programmes-supplementary-submission-national-mental> accessed 26 January 2016

²² [http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-07/pm-malcolm-turnbull-unveils-\\$1-billion-innovation-program/7006952](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-07/pm-malcolm-turnbull-unveils-$1-billion-innovation-program/7006952) accessed 24 January 2016.

broadcasts stories made by regional Australians, online and on TV and radio. It is particularly notable that ABC Open runs free workshops in regional Australia to teach the skills of video, writing, photography and online publishing. The Australia Council supported National Sector Development initiatives show strong potential to support the sustainable development of creative rural and remote communities. Of particular value is the creation of a new national digital platform²³ to showcase practice and support communications and collaboration in the Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) sector and the establishment of a National Local Government Cultural Forum²⁴ that will generate ideas and learn from the experiences of over 500 councils and provide a laboratory of CACD practice.

These digital initiatives to create communications and collaboration platforms for communities that are isolated and restricted in size are important initiatives to overcome the relative impacts of size and remoteness on rural and remote communities. But it is important to recognise that health and wellbeing initiatives require initial investments to ensure that there is a minimal level of arts practice extant which will allow the arts and health to operate. These pre-conditions include adequate and sustainable funding so that arts and health projects which depend for their success on the quality of relationships for participants (both clients and service providers) are not plagued by the uncertainties of short term project funding. Participating artists and health workers need to be remunerated at appropriate levels and with proper regard to employment security.

Arts and health is a whole of government issue. The incipient initiatives taken to pursue the National Arts and Health Framework have joined health and arts Ministries in pursuit of common policies. Broadcasting and arts agencies have a powerful role to play so that the full potential of local communities can be realised. Rural and remote communities depend on these services to strengthen their vibrancy, engagement, social and economic linkages - locally, nationally and internationally.

²³ <http://theplatform.com.au/>; successor to <http://placestories.com/about> both accessed 24 January 2016

²⁴ <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/projects/nlgcf/> accessed 24 January 2016.

ATTACHMENT

Member Bodies of the National Rural Health Alliance

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|---------------------|---|
| ACEM (RRRC) | Australasian College of Emergency Medicine (Rural, Regional and Remote Committee) |
| ACHSM | Australasian College of Health Service Management |
| ACM (RRAC) | Australian College of Midwives (Rural and Remote Advisory Committee) |
| ACN (RNMCI) | Australian College of Nursing (Rural Nursing and Midwifery Community of Interest) |
| ACRRM | Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine |
| AGPN | Australian General Practice Network |
| AHHA | Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association |
| AHPARR | Allied Health Professions Australia Rural and Remote |
| AIDA | Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association |
| ANMF | Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (rural members) |
| APA (RMN) | Australian Physiotherapy Association Rural Member Network |
| APS | Australian Paediatric Society |
| APS (RRPIG) | Australian Psychological Society (Rural and Remote Psychology Interest Group) |
| ARHEN | Australian Rural Health Education Network Limited |
| CAA (RRG) | Council of Ambulance Authorities (Rural and Remote Group) |
| CRANApplus | CRANApplus – the professional body for all remote health |
| CWAA | Country Women's Association of Australia |
| ESSA (RRIG) | Exercise and Sports Science Australia (Rural and Remote Interest Group) |
| FRAME | Federation of Rural Australian Medical Educators |
| HCRRRA | Health Consumers of Rural and Remote Australia |
| IAHA | Indigenous Allied Health Australia |
| ICPA | Isolated Children's Parents' Association |
| NACCHO | National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation |
| NRF of RACGP | National Rural Faculty of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners |
| NRHSN | National Rural Health Students' Network |
| PA (RRSIG) | Paramedics Australasia (Rural and Remote Special Interest Group) |
| PSA (RSIG) | Rural Special Interest Group of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia |
| RDAA | Rural Doctors Association of Australia |
| RDN of ADA | Rural Dentists' Network of the Australian Dental Association |
| RFDS | Royal Flying Doctor Service |
| RHWA | Rural Health Workforce Australia |
| RIHG of CAA | Rural Indigenous and Health-interest Group of the Chiropractors' Association of Australia |
| ROG of OA | Rural Optometry Group of Optometry Australia |
| RPA | Rural Pharmacists Australia |
| SARRAH | Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health |
| SPA (RRMC) | Speech Pathology Australia (Rural and Remote Member Community) |