

30 April 2024

Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA  
Canberra ACT 2600



To the Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts,

## **Submission to the parliamentary inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry**

The Push welcomes the opportunity to elevate young people's voices and make a submission to the parliamentary inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry.

### **About The Push**

The Push is an Australian youth music organisation and registered charity based in Melbourne. Over three decades we have supported more than 4 million young people with access to contemporary music programs and events, fostering a pipeline for young people into the contemporary music sector as artists, audiences and industry practitioners. Our work is guided by our purpose of giving every young person the opportunity to participate and thrive in Australian music. At the forefront of emerging trends and innovations, The Push delivers a range of programs Nationally, that are relevant and responsive to Australia's future music industry leaders and audiences.

We recognise that there are significant barriers facing young people right across Australia. Which is why we are committed to ensuring that every young person, regardless of cultural background, gender or sexual identity, location, income or ability can participate and thrive in Australian music. Featured as a Case Study in the Australian Government's 2023 National Cultural Policy - Revive, The Push has the proven ability to coordinate and implement dynamic multifaceted programs that support the development needs of young people from a range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and abilities.



## Contemporary music plays a vital role to young Australians

Young people are integral to the vibrancy and depth of our nation's creativity. They are amongst the most exciting musicians on our stages, and they are the audiences at our festivals and live music events. They are the most innovative recording artists and producers in our studios, and the songwriters of the most streamed songs across the globe. They are the leaders in developing new business models and shaping industry practices in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Young people are the future of our industry.

Music plays a vital role in the daily lives of Australians aged 15-24.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary live music is the most popular art form attended by two in three young Australians aged 15-24 years and almost all (96%) young Australians aged 15-24 listen to recorded music.<sup>2</sup> The Push recognises that participation in music at any level can be the defining moment in a young person's life. It helps young people shape their identity and establish lifelong relationships. Attending a live music performance can provide feelings of social connectedness, commonality and belonging, and collective understanding<sup>3</sup>.

However, for young people in Australia mental health is a concern.<sup>4</sup> Research from 2023 has revealed that young people across Australia are becoming lonelier and experiencing more psychological distress.<sup>5</sup> This follows the 2022 National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing which demonstrates, there has been a significant increase in the rate of mental ill-health amongst young people. However, we know that young people who participate in music programs are more likely to be in good health, go on to further education, volunteer and be part of their local communities.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, there is a mounting body of evidence highlighting the powerful health, social and educational benefits participation in music generate.<sup>7</sup>

Providing young people access to contemporary music programs may be the key.

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<sup>1</sup> Australia Council for the Arts. *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey* [Internet]. Canberra: Australia Council for the Arts, 2020 [cited 2022 August 20]. Available from <https://australiacouncil.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Creating-Our-Future-Results-of-the-National-Arts-Participation-Survey-PDF.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Creative Australia. (n.d.). *Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*. [online] Available at: <https://creative.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/creating-value/>.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins, R., Mason-Bertrand, A., Tymoszuk, U. et al. Arts engagement supports social connectedness in adulthood: findings from the HEartS Survey. *BMC Public Health* 21, 1208 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11233-6>.

<sup>4</sup> SBS News. (n.d.). The kids are not alright: Is Australia in the midst of a youth mental health crisis? [online] Available at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/the-kids-arent-alright-is-australia-in-the-midst-of-a-youth-mental-health-crisis/3i2d41k4w>

<sup>5</sup> Murray, A. (2020). HILDA Survey. [online] Melbourne Institute. Available at: <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda>.

<sup>6</sup> Tait, R., Kail, A., Shea, J., Mcleod, R., Pritchard, N. and Asif, F. (2019). How can we engage more young people in arts and culture? Available at: <https://www.thinknpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Arts-Engagement-Report-2019-web.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> MacDonald, R.A.R. (2013). Music, health, and well-being: A review. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 8(1), p.20635. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v8i0.20635>



## Young audiences have limited access to Australian live music

Access to live music events is not a reality for all young people in Australia. There are fewer events in regional and outer-suburban areas, many events come with unaffordable ticket prices, and rarely are live music events staged for underage audiences or designed to be accessible and culturally safe. There has been a steady decline in the number of all-ages live music events over the last 10 years, and a decline in attendance by young people at music festivals in general. New research reveals that young people aged 18–24 are purchasing fewer tickets to music festivals, decreasing from 41% of ticket buyers in 18/19, to 27% in 22/23.<sup>8</sup>

## Research into young audience behaviours

Recently there has been a significant national focus on declining youth attendance at live music events across the country,<sup>9</sup> but only speculation as to why. There is a need to better understand why younger Australians, who have typically been the primary audience at live music events, are purchasing fewer tickets. We need to understand the barriers they face and why they are choosing alternative entertainment. There is also a need to understand the structural shift underway in the Australian music sector, and why audiences are choosing to spend their money on international superstars and large stadium concerts, while local acts and promoters struggle to find audiences.<sup>10</sup> It is essential that the structural factors contributing to declining audiences are properly understood, and that targeted investments are made to address this concerning trend.

## Cost of living

Certainly, cost of living has become a major obstacle to youth participation in live music with data from 2022 confirming that cost of living is the biggest concern to young Australians.<sup>11</sup> Further data reveals that a majority of young people (90%) have reported experiencing financial difficulties, with a jump in those who experienced difficulties often or very often (26% in 2022 up to 32% in 2023). The financial difficulties amongst young Australians are deepened by high job insecurity. While accounting for 15.7% of the labour market, 18–24-year-olds make up 25.2% of the long-term unemployed.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Creative Australia. (2024). Soundcheck: Insights into Australia's music festival sector. [online] Available at: <https://creative.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/soundcheck-insights-into-australias-music-festival-sector/#:~:text=Soundcheck%3A%20Insights%20into%20Australia>

<sup>9</sup> Quinn, K. (2024). Festivals 'in the thick of a real crisis', says Music Australia chief. [online] The Sydney Morning Herald. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/music/collapse-in-number-of-young-australians-going-to-festivals-amid-rising-costs-20240409-p5fjcr.html>

<sup>10</sup> Eltham, B. (2024). As Taylor Swift sells out the MCG, local festivals and music venues shut their doors. [online] Crikey. Available at: <https://www.crikey.com.au/2024/02/19/taylor-swift-tickets-local-music-industry-festival-venues-close/> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

<sup>11</sup> Young People at the Polling Booth Federal Election Poll Report 2022 2. (n.d.). Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60948b9e3847ee0caf0e2dd4/t/626f43cbcdc9c255bdb55c97/1651459040073/Federal+Election+Poll+Report+-+AYAC.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Monash Education. (n.d.). The 2023 Australian Youth Barometer: Understanding young people in Australia today. [online] Available at: <https://www.monash.edu/education/cyep/research/2023-australian-youth-barometer-understanding-young-people-in-australia-today>



## Changing attitudes towards alcohol

Young people's consumption of alcohol is rapidly declining and anecdotally appears to have become another obstacle to participation in live music, as young people choose to not engage in activities that focus on the consumption of alcohol and link excessive consumption of alcohol with perceptions of safety. Data reveals that in 2022-2023, 31% of young people aged 14-17 had consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months, a substantial reduction from 2001 (with 69%).<sup>13</sup> The Australian live music sector is significantly dependent on alcohol sales to exist.<sup>14</sup> Therefore the model needs to shift, as we see young people's attitudes towards alcohol shift. If our contemporary live music sector continues to be dependent on alcohol sales to exist, what does this look like in the future, with audiences who will not be consuming alcohol at the rate they once were?

## Liquor licensing reform

The dependence on alcohol sales within the Australian live music sector, along with strict legislative controls surrounding liquor licensing, has also led to a reluctance across the industry to support all-ages events. If young people under the age of 18 are not able to access live music, how can Australia build the next generation of live music audiences. Strict legislative requirements and the added costs of de-licencing are key factors contributing to the exclusion of young people from many of Australia's music festivals and venues. The past 15 years has seen a steady decline in the number of all-ages live music events held in Australia and this is reflected across all music genres, with a majority of venues, promoters and artists prioritising 18+ events in licensed premises.

## Access, diversity, representation and inclusion

Data from 2022 Audience Outlook Monitor reveals that young audiences are more than ever focused on matters related to access, representation, inclusion and diversity, highlighting this pre-existing concern.<sup>15</sup> This too has emerged as an obstacle to youth participation in live music and anecdotally The Push can confirm this through our experience with young people. Feedback from young people highlights the critical role that access, diversity, representation and inclusion play in their perceptions of cultural organisations and their purchasing decisions. Young people want to see themselves represented on stages, reflecting the diverse of voices in their community.

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<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024). *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2022-2023: Young people's consumption of alcohol*. [online]. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol/young-people-alcohol>

<sup>14</sup> Naglazas, M. (2024). *Gen Z is not drinking - and it's threatening Perth's live music scene*. [online] WAtoday. Available at: <https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/gen-z-is-not-drinking-and-it-s-threatening-perth-s-live-music-scene-20240404-p5fhhg.html> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2024]

<sup>15</sup> Audience Outlook Monitor National Fact Sheet. (n.d.). Available at: [https://creative.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AOM\\_March2022\\_Fact-Sheet\\_Young-People.pdf](https://creative.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AOM_March2022_Fact-Sheet_Young-People.pdf).



## Youth led initiatives to build new audiences

Nationally there are limited formal supports and programs for young people wanting to participate and experience contemporary music. Engaging young people and provide them with opportunities to participate in contemporary music is essential for audience development in contemporary music<sup>16</sup>. If young people are not able to access live music, how can Australia build the next generation of live music audiences?

In order to provide greater opportunities for young people to participate in live music and create a new generation of live music audiences, artists, and industry practitioners, we must create opportunities for young people to participate in live music and these must be youth led. Authentic youth engagement requires that young people have actual authority and responsibility, as well as opportunities to develop the skills needed to make sound decisions.<sup>17</sup> Young people then are empowered and become the agents of change instead of targets to be changed.

The FReeZA program in Victoria was established in 1997 and is based on a youth participation model where young people establish all-ages youth committees which lead the planning, development and delivery of music, cultural and recreational events in their local community. This significantly increases access to live music and over the past thirty years FReeZA has become a shining example of youth led practice and has contributed to building generations of music audiences within Victoria.<sup>18</sup> This innovative youth development program enables young people to enjoy fully supervised drug, alcohol, smoke and vape free events and ensures these events are diverse and reflect the unique needs and interests of young people in their local area.

Furthermore, the program helps establish lifelong relationships, and increases young people sense of social connectedness. It creates communities and provides significant health, social and educational benefits. Through the program, young people are empowered to make decisions and lead in the staging of events, whilst also broadening networks within the community by connecting with local businesses, schools and other organisations. Being a part of a FReeZA committee builds self-confidence, creates and develops professional relationships, builds employment skills, and provide opportunities to explore various education and employment pathways in the music industry.

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<sup>16</sup> newaud.org. (n.d.). *Audience development engaging young people in contemporary music*. [online] Available at: <https://newaud.org/working-communities/engaging-young-people> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2024].

<sup>17</sup> Engaging YOUTH in Community Decision Making. (n.d.). Available at: <https://youthrex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/engaging-youth-in-community-decision-making.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> FReeZA | Youth Central (2017). [online] [www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au](http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au). Available at: <https://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/get-involved/youth-programs-and-events/freeza>



## **Recommendation: Support the Australian live music sector to deliver viable all-ages events and create new approaches for growing our future live music audiences**

### Suggested actions:

- Undertake a comprehensive national research study that captures the insights and behaviors of young Australians as music consumers and audiences. We need clear data to better understand the perceived and actual barriers young people face in accessing live music, and why younger Australians are not attending live music events and festivals at the same rates. It is essential that the structural factors contributing to declining audiences are properly understood to secure future generation of music audiences.
- Consider the introduction of a small (\$1) ticketing levy across all large arena concerts and live music events, to provide greater funding for all-ages events and grassroots venues and artists, similar to what is being considered in the UK<sup>19</sup>. A levy such as this will support the next generation of live music audiences and artists across Australia and will assist with shifting the funding model away from the consumption of alcohol.
- Consider the introduction of a Live Music Pass or Culture Pass scheme to remove financial barriers for young people in attending live music events. There is increasing evidence that for young people under the age of 25, cost of living has become a major obstacle to participation in live music,<sup>20</sup> which will have generational audience development impacts. Many European countries have introduced similar programs<sup>21</sup> to encourage greater participation of young people, and shift audience consumer trends. This may also assist in addressing youth mental health issues, as we know live music can provide feelings of social connectedness, commonality and belonging, and collective understanding.<sup>22</sup>
- Deliver a targeted all-ages funding program that provides subsidies to live music venues, festivals, booking agents, artists, promoters to stage all-ages live music events nationally. Delivering targeted funding will address the cost barriers that exist for staging all-ages events and assist with shifting the Australian live music sectors dependence on alcohol sales.

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<sup>19</sup> Trendell, A. (2024). The case has been made for a £1 ticket levy on all arena gigs – for the survival of grassroots venues and artists. [online] NME. Available at: <https://www.nme.com/news/music/the-case-has-been-made-for-a-1-ticket-levy-on-all-arena-gigs-for-the-survival-of-grassroots-venues-and-artists-3611533> [Accessed 23 Apr. 2024].

<sup>1\*</sup> Audience Outlook Monitor National Fact Sheet. (n.d.). Available at: [https://creative.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AOM\\_March2022\\_Fact-Sheet\\_Young-People.pdf](https://creative.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AOM_March2022_Fact-Sheet_Young-People.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Time. (2022). *European Countries Are Giving Teens Free Money for Culture*. [online] Available at: <https://time.com/6236940/europe-germany-youth-culture-pass/>

<sup>11</sup> Perkins, R., Mason-Bertrand, A., Tymoszuk, U. et al. Arts engagement supports social connectedness in adulthood: findings from the HEartS Survey. *BMC Public Health* 21, 1208 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11233-6>.



- Review the various liquor licensing legislation across Australia with a view to streamlining liquor licensing rules across the various States and Territories, as well as removing inconsistencies and unnecessary requirements that discourage and place financial barriers to staging all-ages events. In addition, the review should consider possible incentives which could be introduced within the liquor licensing process to encourage and increase the number of all-ages events in local communities across Australia.
- Establish a national youth led program of all-ages youth committees, similar to the Victorian FReeZA program, but on a national scale, to allow greater opportunities for young people to participate in live music at a local level and build future audiences. Such programs will address the obstacles to youth participation in live music and assist with creating a new generation of live music audiences, artists, and industry practitioners. Further, a program like this would have far reaching health, social and educational benefits.

## **Young artists have limited access to build a career in live music**

Along with the challenges young people face accessing and participating in Australian live music as audiences, young people are also struggling to build a career within the Australian live music industry. Research from 22/23 found that a majority (89%) of aspiring artists are struggling to pursue a music career, and almost as many (73%) were considering a career change.<sup>23</sup> These findings correlate to research results from Tripe J in 2023 which indicated that almost half (48%) of musicians thought about leaving the music industry in the last few years.<sup>24</sup>

## **Decline in formal education**

Research indicates that for young people, the costs associated with gaining formal tertiary education, may have become a barrier to building sustainable careers in live music and The Push can confirm this through our ongoing experience with young people. University fee structure reforms have led to a significant decline in applications across Creative Arts (5.1%) and Humanities courses (6.5%)<sup>25</sup> while the number people undertaking a bachelor's degree has fallen 12% over 10 years.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lockie's band was on the rise before COVID 'destroyed' their momentum – and things still aren't back to normal. (2023). ABC News. [online] 21 Mar. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-22/qld-music-industry-musicians-career-change-survey/102112972>

<sup>24</sup> triple j. (2023). Here's what's up in Australian music. [online] Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/program-uneearthed/whats-up-in-australian-music-survey-results-feature/102988278>

<sup>25</sup> Cassidy C, 'It's so hard': how the pandemic upended young people's career paths [Internet]. The Guardian, 2021 [cited 2022 August 20]. Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/sep/12/its-so-hard-how-the-pandemic-upended-young-peoples-career-paths>

<sup>26</sup> Cassidy, C. (2023). Number of Australians enrolled in bachelor degrees falls by 12% in less than a decade. The Guardian. [online] 16 Nov. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/nov/16/australia-higher-education-university-enrolment-decline-falls-why-cost>



The declining university enrolment rates come, as the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report estimates that, by 2050 approximately 55% of jobs will require higher education qualifications<sup>27</sup> and as news breaks regarding Hecs/Help debt rising by 4.8% in June 2024, as indexation lifts the average University loans by more than \$1,200.<sup>28</sup> With the rising student debt turning young people off higher education<sup>29</sup> the need for non-formal education and pathways has never been greater, to support young people to build sustainable careers in the music industry, not just as artists, but as industry practitioners.

### **Skill shortages**

This struggle also extends to young people trying to build a career as an industry practitioner within the music industry. Skills shortages are occurring across all parts of the industry including production crew, ticketing staff and publicists, social media experts and marketers.<sup>30</sup> However young people are struggling to see viable and sustainable careers with the music industry, and as the industry addresses the skills-shortages, we also need to also address the disconnect that exists between young people and the music industry and ensure young people can see viable career pathways and are appropriately supported to build sustainable and successful careers across the industry.

### **New pathways**

These challenges have exacerbated the issue of representation – across a sector where pathways for young people who because of their cultural background, gender identity, location, income and ability were already impacted. Pathways into the creative industries as either an artist or practitioner often rely on education and training, resources and networks. We know that these pathways exclude, and often discourage, many young people from pursuing a career in the music industry, especially those from low-income backgrounds or living in regional or rural areas. As we build non-formal education opportunities, we need to ensure we are building new pathways into the music industry.

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<sup>27</sup> Remeikis, A. (2023). Australian universities must provide more places for poorer students to meet future labour market demands, report says. The Guardian. [online] 18 Jul. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jul/19/australian-universities-must-provide-more-places-for-poorer-students-to-meet-future-labour-market-demands-report-says>

<sup>28</sup> Cassidy, C. and reporter, C.C.E. (2024). Hecs/Help debt to rise by 4.8% in June as indexation lifts average loan by more than \$1,200. The Guardian. [online] 24 Apr. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/apr/24/australia-hecs-debt-fee-help-loans-rising-indexation-cpi> [Accessed 26 Apr. 2024].

<sup>29</sup> Australian Financial Review. (2023). Have young Australians lost faith in the value of uni? [online] Available at: <https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/education/have-young-australians-lost-faith-in-the-value-of-uni-20231101-p5eglz>

<sup>30</sup> Brandle, L. (2023). *Music Industry Skills Shortage Is Acute, Study Could be the Answer*. [online] The Music Network. Available at: <https://themusicnetwork.com/music-industry-skills-shortage-aim-course/>





## Youth grants

Grant funding appears to have become another substantial barrier for young people building sustainable careers in live music and The Push can confirm this through our ongoing experience with young people. Grant programs on the whole focus significantly on short-term, once off projects rather than ongoing funding that builds sustainable careers. With limited funding available, traditional grant programs also focus on and favour experience to the detriment of emerging, young artists. There is a need to establish new grant programs exclusive for young artists and industry practitioners that ensure young artists are being assessed against their peers, as opposed to artists with decades of experience.

## **Recommendation: Young people need increased opportunities to develop the skills, confidence, networks and pathways into the Australian live music sector as artists, and industry practitioners**

Suggested actions:

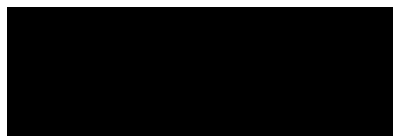
- Support the delivery of structured industry-based training programs and non-formal education opportunities, that provide young people with the opportunity to learn new skills, build confidence and networks, and develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for sustainable career pathways. With the decline in university enrolment, the need for non-formal education opportunities and industry-based training programs has never been greater. This can be achieved through establishing free masterclass programs for young people across the country, as well as professional development programs and increasing training opportunities outside of formal education. Programs such as these will also assist with identified skills shortages.
- Support music industry organisations to deliver ongoing mentoring programs for young people which build and help young people sustain a career in the music industry. Mentoring programs provide young people the opportunity to develop new skills, confidence, and networks across a range of careers related to the music industry and responds to ongoing sector-wide skills shortages and declining enrolments, creating a pipeline for skilled industry practitioners, and providing both young people and workplaces with a framework that ensures workplace readiness and meaningful pathways into the contemporary music sector.



- Mentoring programs can also greatly assist with redressing issue of representation, whereby traditional pathways into the creative industries have relied heavily on established networks. However, such programs must provide adequate payment to the young people involved. Unpaid internships and mentoring programs provide a significant barrier to economically disadvantaged students, by privileging young people able to absorb the additional time and financial costs of unpaid work.<sup>31</sup>
- Deliver targeted grants programs that supports young people entering the contemporary music sector and address the barriers that exist for young people in accessing traditional music funding programs. This can be done by embedding dedicated youth grant streams across Creative Australia and Office for the Arts for young people and youth organisations.

Thank you for the opportunity to elevate young people’s voices and make a submission to the parliamentary inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry.

If you would like any further information or to hear more about The Push’s work, please contact me on the details provided below.



Kate Duncan (she/her)  
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The Push

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<sup>31</sup> Phillipov, M. (2022). Work placements in the media and creative industries: Discourses of transformation and critique in an era of precarity. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 21(1), 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14740222211021337>

