

Adrian Collette AM, Chief Executive Officer, Australia Council for the Arts:

I welcome the opportunity to update the Committee on the Australia Council's response to COVID-19.

I'd like to acknowledge the many frontline health workers who have ensured our health and safety during these uncertain times.

I would also like to acknowledge the many arts and cultural industry workers, who once again were among the first to act to support our communities, while they themselves were immediately and drastically impacted by these devastating times.

When the pandemic hit, the Council responded swiftly. Our number one priority has been to support the creative workforce to sustain themselves in these difficult times and be in a position to come out of this crisis able to resume activity.

We immediately suspended our investment programs and repurposed all available funds to create the *Resilience Fund* – focussed on providing immediate relief. It attracted an unprecedented number of applications - over 6,600 – and we will distribute \$6.4M in funds to artists in need through this channel.

Most recently we offered the first phase of the *Cherish Fund* for First Nations artists and organisations. Again, this fund was created from repurposed activity – in this case First Nations strategic activity that could no longer take place due to the pandemic. This attracted 173 applications with a funding request of over \$11.5M. The second phase of the Cherish Fund will open in August.

We made critical adjustments to our Four Year Funding program for organisations which was announced during the height of the pandemic.

We immediately pivoted our capacity building work to online delivery. To date the Council hosted 38 webinars across a range of online programs that have received over 15,000 interactions from the sector.

We have held 15 First Nations' Roundtables that have engaged with over 2,400 attendees across Australia.

We have developed a protocols framework for the arts and cultural sectors operating in a COVID-19 environment. We have published the first stage of this work which is focused on steps 1-3 and will soon publish the second stage, focused on steps 4-6.

Council also rapidly responded with a suite of research to support the sector through COVID-19. This included working with the sector to collate and standardise the immediate impact data that was being collected through numerous surveys; providing regularly updated information on the available support across jurisdictions and through the government support package; and not least, our Audience Outlook Monitor that is already gathering valuable data on audience responses and intent to engage with arts and culture during and post pandemic.

Very soon we will communicate to the sector that we will re-open our direct investment opportunities in July, along with a number of other strategic investment opportunities.

Council rapidly, and successfully transitioned to a remote working environment, thanks to a business transformation program that ensured we had the systems to do so.

The impact of COVID-19 is particularly challenging for our cultural and creative sectors – first in and last out of this crisis. And the flow on effect is immense for the broader community and economy, not least the many thousands more employed in related industries driven so strongly by the cultural and creative industries, including tourism, hospitality, and regional development.

The Australia Council has been working with arts and cultural organisations, peak bodies and independent artists about the impacts of COVID-19 to identify what is needed to re-ignite arts and cultural activity across the country.

We have worked collaboratively with the Minister's Office and the Office for the Arts and all state and territory jurisdictions, providing detailed advice and up to date information.

We welcomed the \$27M sector injection in March and warmly welcome the \$250M JobMaker package announced last week. We'll continue to working with the Minister's Office to ensure the future sustainability of the cultural industries.

In all of this, we have never lost sight of the enormous public value of the arts for all Australians, whether in the social returns of community cohesion and well-being, the returns of a strong, competent and diverse Australian culture or the economic returns of increased investment for cultural tourism, export, trade and jobs.