

The Childers Group 2025-2026 Budget Submission

For twelve years the Childers Group has been contributing to the development of the ACT budget through ACT Treasury's budget consultation process.

The Childers Group welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the 2025-2026 ACT Government Budget development process.

The Childers Group is an independent arts forum established in 2011. Our advocacy is based on the principles of:

- independence;
- objectivity;
- valuing the arts; and
- pride in Australia's national capital city and the surrounding region.

The Group has delivered yearly forums and advocates for the arts through MLA meetings with the three main political parties and in 2025 with the Independents.

We continue to hold a variety of meetings with stakeholders such as the Cultural Facilities Corporation, the Federal Government, A New Approach and Creative Australia.

Consequently, what follows is informed, considered, and situated in a national policy context.

Opening Statement:

The Childers Group would like to acknowledge the ongoing support from the Government in relation to the arts and creative industries in the ACT and Region.

However as mentioned in our submission for 24-25, the sector is still at a crucial crossroad and a greater response in terms of funding from government is needed to consolidate and grow the sector.

New Arts Minister Michael Pettersson needs to meet these challenges across the sector by increasing funding in this Budget and budgets in the outgoing years.

- **A brief summary of our submission.**

The Childers Group acknowledges the Government’s ongoing support for the arts and creative industries.

Canberra is one of the most liveable cities in the world. This achievement is due in part to the rich diversity of creative opportunity available to us to experience and participate in. Our city continues to grow quickly and we must be courageous and imaginative in ensuring these opportunities grow with us. As our city has grown the contribution from government to arts funding has not grown to match it. This is a serious misstep. Additionally we do not have a “local Council” function in our government structure (as distinct from the states) and as A New Approach (National Arts and Culture think tank based in Canberra) has noted through its research, that is where the greatest increase in funding for the arts has been seen over the past 10 years.

The current Arts “Statement of Ambition” has calls for Canberra to be the Arts Capital of Australia. It is a bold plan and it must be met with **increased investment into the arts portfolio. This needs to be for our Arts Centres, our Arts Organisations, our Emerging Arts Organisations and our individual artists.**

Research shows that increased investment brings measurable outcomes, not only for the artists and companies concerned but for society more widely. (A New Approach :
<https://newapproach.org.au/>

Childers Group strongly supports the Government’s ongoing commitment to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Cultural Arts Program.

With the adoption of the ACT Government’s Wellbeing Framework Childers Group believes that the arts can play a central role in bringing the framework into focus and can generate real measurable returns for the arts investment. We note that information on the role that arts and culture can play in the “Wellbeing Framework” has not been developed.

What more can the ACT Government do to improve community well-being in Canberra?

The Wellbeing Framework : Where are the Arts???

We note that in relation to Arts and Culture as of May 2025 there is still no data or comments in relation to the impact of arts and culture in the Framework. This must be addressed as a matter of priority.

Across the 12 Domains of the Framework the arts can play a significant role. We note that

Research done by the Canberra based arts, creativity and culture research think tank A New Approach (ANA) (www.newapproach.org.au) clearly shows :

“...when a considered effort is made to direct cultural and creative activities towards improving social cohesion , the impacts are significant including :

- building feelings of community belonging and trust, enhancing empathy and inclusion

- help in combating the growing issues of loneliness and isolation.
- increasing civic participation and making cities, suburbs and regions more liveable
- help individuals and communities recover from disasters and trauma”.

In relation to building a healthier Australia, ANA research has shown that :

- “engagement with arts and cultural activities reduces health risks particularly for mental health
- arts and cultural tools have also been successfully used to improve outcomes in terms of both prevention and treatment of physical illnesses and diseases.
- the arts can improve in-patient outcomes, can improve recovery from long term conditions, can reduce dementia risk and can improve elderly quality of life.”

Our priorities for the 2025-2026 Budget

Every Canberran should have access to the key arts organisations to inspire and engage them. Every Canberran artist should have a Centre and an arts organisation that will support them to grow and develop.

And every visitor to Canberra should be able to find the key Canberra arts organisation that invites them to share in the wonderful cultural life of our city. **“Sure come for our National Institutions but stay a day or two longer to see the rich Canberra Arts Experience : galleries, theatre, dance, music, visual arts, writing and our wonderful Indigenous Story.”**

PRIORITY ONE : FUND THE 2024 ELECTION PROMISES

We would expect to see that in this Budget that Government moves quickly to honour it’s election promises.

The Childers Group key priorities for this year’s budget would be :

- an immediate increase of 50% in 2025 to artsACT’s arts activity program. (\$0-\$5k and \$5K-\$50K program) This is the “engine room” of arts practice for individuals and small companies.
- bring forward the commitment to “increase funding for arts organisations and centres by 25% in the **next term**” of the Assembly to the **current term** beginning with some increase in this year’s budget and the rest over the next 4 years. Our organisations and centres urgently need this commitment to begin in 2025.
- continue with the government commitment to the Kingston Arts Precinct and the new Canberra Theatre

PRIORITY TWO : STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES AND DIRECTORATE LINKS

RECOMMENDATION 2

Childers Group recommends that the ACT Government establish links between Government Directorates to maximize Arts Development in the ACT and region.

Stronger links between arts organisations, practitioners (companies and individuals), Events Canberra and Visit Canberra has commenced and need to be continually pursued with some urgency.

Tourism and the Arts are a strong area for ongoing development.

In line with ACT Government strategic priorities of enhanced liveability and social inclusion, suburban renewal and health and education investment, the role of the arts in these areas should be recognised with the establishment of officer positions in ACT Government Directorates, including Education and Training, Health, Environment and Planning, JACS and Transport , **at the Senior Officer Grade 3 level, to identify and implement strategies where arts activity can multiply existing value and enrich outcomes. In the first instance, this should be a 3-year initiative.**

Establishing and consolidating existing links between artists, arts organisations and the stakeholders of each Directorate should be a key component of the work. For example, engagement in the arts throughout a child's schooling, including early childhood, has immeasurable benefits which are now both quantifiable and proven in countries that have invested in strong arts programs within their schools.

The Childers Group looks forward to engaging with government over our Budget Submission in the next few months.

Yours Sincerely

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12th May 2025

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