

NSW Health and Wellbeing Strategy: Museums & Galleries of NSW Submission

29th August 2025

ABOUT MUSEUMS & GALLERIES OF NSW:

Museums & Galleries of NSW (M&G NSW) is a peak body and service organisation supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW. Our Purpose is to ‘*support the capacity building of small to medium museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres so they can realise and maximise their impact on their communities*’. We develop these organisations’ skills, connect them with others in the industry, provide funding, point visitors their way, and give them access to ground-breaking exhibitions. We also place importance on advocating for and behalf of the sector.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Arts and culture are powerful, evidence-based contributors to mental health and wellbeing that align strongly with the priorities of NSW Health. Programs like *Arts on Prescription* and *Culture Dose for Kids* demonstrate measurable benefits across prevention, early intervention, and recovery. Embedding these initiatives within the upcoming NSW Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy offers a cost-effective, inclusive pathway to stronger community resilience and reduced demand on clinical services.

However, we write this submission at a time when funding for public galleries and museums are under great strain. The recent announcement of Create NSW 4-Year Multi-year funding saw over 15 organisations lose funding. Unfunded organisations told us that the first types of programs they will need to cut will be community-focused programs such as those delivering on wellbeing and community cohesion. This loss of funding will further cement these organisations into the project-based ‘funding merry-go-round’ meaning the loss of these longer-term initiatives.

EVIDENCE-BASED ARTS AND HEALTH INITIATIVES:

Culture Dose for Kids is a pioneering children-and-families arts engagement program developed by the Black Dog Institute and the Art Gallery of NSW to support young people aged 9-12 years experiencing mild anxiety, and their parents or caregivers. The program is delivered in-person over eight weeks and includes guided reflection on artworks and hands-on creation.

Key findings from the 2022 pilot include:

- **29% reduction** in anxiety/depression scores based on parent evaluations
- **15% reduction** in anxiety/depression self-reported by children

Participants also gained improved social connectedness, mood, confidence, a sense of empowerment, and practical coping strategies for families.¹

¹ New research shows regular arts-engagement has positive benefits for youth mental health | Art Gallery of NSW, 19 Nov. 2024, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/media-office/black-dog/>

Culture Dose for Kids has reached over 540 participants across the Art Gallery of NSW and regional galleries across the state, including communities particularly affected by natural disasters. Its success and toolkit development also pave the way for scalable, regional delivery.

The program is reliant on occasional project funding and/or sponsorship sourced by a range of interested stakeholders.

The Arts on Prescription model delivers structured, participatory creative activities over multiple weeks. Evaluations show significant improvements in mental wellbeing measured by the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale, and qualitative findings point to increased purpose, empowerment, and social connection among older adults and others with diverse health needs.²

Art and Dementia programs have become popular programs delivered by museums and galleries when funding is made available. In the aged care context, HammondCare’s *Arts on Prescription at Home* (AoP@Home) pilot in Greater Sydney targeted people living with dementia and their carers and showed improvements in mental health, social interaction, and empowerment.³

NSW HEALTH ALIGNMENT:

While NSW Health’s official *Health and the Arts Framework* recognises the arts as a valuable contributor across key service areas, including Aboriginal health, mental health, community innovation, and workforce wellbeing⁴, there are few funding pathways for small, medium and major cultural organisations to ensure continued delivery of these programs.

However, it is clear that art programs deliver on mental health and wellbeing outcomes, with alignment across NSW Policy directions:

NSW Policy Priority:	Alignment with Arts & Culture Initiatives
Prevention & Early Intervention	<i>Culture Dose for Kids</i> directly targets early-stage mild anxiety in youth before clinical escalation.
Whole-of-Government Integration & Innovation	Co-designed by NSW cultural and health bodies, these programs exemplify integrated, cross-sector innovation.
Aboriginal and Community Health	Both <i>Culture Dose</i> and <i>Arts on Prescription</i> include inclusive programming with potential for adaptation to First Nations cultural practices.
Cost-Effectiveness & Wellbeing	Arts engagement offers low-cost, non-clinical intervention that can alleviate demand on acute mental health services while boosting wellbeing.
Future Health Strategic Goals	Embodies NSW Health’s commitment to new, human-centred models of care, as outlined in their strategic frameworks.

² Poulos RG, Marwood S, Harkin D, et al. *Arts on prescription for community-dwelling older people with a range of health and wellness needs*. Health Soc Care Community. 2018;00:1–10

³ *At-home arts program a ‘prescription’ for wellbeing*, Australian Journal of Dementia Care January/February/March 2022 Vol 11 No 1

⁴ NSW Health, *NSW Health and the Arts Framework 2024–2032*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NSW MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY:

1. Policy Recognition
Explicitly recognise arts and culture (e.g., *Arts on Prescription*, *Culture Dose for Kids*) as core preventive and recovery tools across NSW Health policies.
2. Fund Culture Dose for Kids
Establish specific funding to the Art Gallery of NSW to continue delivery of Culture Dose for Kids within their institution and across NSW regional galleries.
3. Targeted Research & Evaluation
Expand NSW-led research to validate arts-based models across diverse populations - including First Nations, rural/regional, and low-income groups.
4. Sustainable co-funding
Based on outcomes of research and evaluation above, establish joint investment streams between NSW Health and Create NSW to embed arts-mental health models in cultural organisations, communities and schools.

CONCLUSION:

Embedding arts and culture within the *NSW Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy* will deliver inclusive, preventative, and cost-effective pathways to improving mental health and wellbeing across the state. These programs are backed by strong evidence and are directly aligned with NSW policy goals and frameworks.

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