MYAN
multicultural youth advocacy network (australia)

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia

Submission to the

Towards a New National Cultural Policy

Public Consultation MAY 2026

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About MYAN Australia

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) is the national peak body representing the rights and interests of children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. We work across policy, advocacy, research and capacity building to ensure young people from diverse cultural backgrounds can fully participate in Australian society.

Our network spans state and territory multicultural youth organisations, community groups, service providers and, most importantly, children and young people themselves. We are a youth-powered, community-driven organisation with direct connections to the communities most affected by the issues raised in this consultation.

MYAN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next National Cultural Policy. Culture is not peripheral to the lives of multicultural young Australians, it is central to their identity, wellbeing, belonging and future.

Australia is home to the world's oldest continuous culture and non-Indigenous residents from over 300 different ethnic ancestries. Approximately 32% of Australians were born overseas, and nearly half of the population has at least one parent born abroad.

We urge the government to ensure the new policy meaningfully centres the voices and lived experiences of young people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

MYAN calls on the next National Cultural Policy to:

- Pillar 1 (First Nations First): Protect and celebrate the living cultural heritage of new Australians alongside First Nations cultures as foundational to our national story.
- Pillar 2 (A Place for Every Story): Embed multicultural youth voices as co-designers—not afterthoughts—while breaking down the structural barriers that prevent them from accessing, creating, and being represented in Australia's cultural sector.
- Pillar 3 (Centrality of the Artist): Fund culturally specific arts, storytelling infrastructure, and AI/media literacy initiatives that are led by and for multicultural youth to safeguard their creative practices.
- Pillar 4 (Strong Cultural Infrastructure): Ensure arts education, creative pathways, and community cultural funding explicitly reach young people in outer-suburban and regional communities that are often overlooked.
- Pillar 5 (Engaging the Audience): Design audience strategies for genuine cultural relevance and co-design, rather than relying solely on physical or subsidised access.

MYAN acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people. We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which MYAN partners operate across the country, and pay our respects to all Elders past, and present. We work towards reconciliation with, and self-determination for the First Peoples of this country.

1. Challenges and Opportunities in the Cultural Sector

1.1 Underrepresentation in storytelling and cultural production

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds remain significantly underrepresented in mainstream Australian arts and cultural institutions as audience members, artists, practitioners and decision-makers. When their stories are told, they are too often told by others, shaped by deficit narratives of trauma and disadvantage rather than by the richness, complexity and joy of multicultural youth experience.

This underrepresentation is not accidental. Research published by Western Sydney University's analysis highlights historical division between "mainstream" and "ethnic" art in Australia, detailing how systemic, unconscious bias prevents diverse creatives from gaining access to decision-making roles within major arts institutions[1]. It reflects structural inequities in who receives funding, who sits on boards, who is platformed, and whose cultural expressions are considered 'art' within institutional frameworks. These gaps must be explicitly addressed.

1.2 Barriers to access and participation

Multicultural young people face compounding barriers to cultural participation:

- Economic barriers: cost of tickets, equipment, training and transport particularly affects young people in low-income migrant and refugee families.
- Language and cultural barriers: programs and institutions that do not communicate in community languages or reflect culturally relevant content create exclusion.
- Geographic barriers: young people in outer-suburban and regional areas where often newly arrived communities settle have significantly less access to cultural programming.
- Institutional barriers: cultural organisations often lack the cultural intelligence to meaningfully engage diverse youth communities.

1.3 Digital culture as both opportunity and risk

Many multicultural young Australians are already active cultural producers through music, social media content, digital storytelling and community media yet this creative labour is rarely recognised or resourced by cultural policy. Digital platforms offer genuine opportunities for diasporic youth to express identity, connect across communities and reach

[1] https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ics/news/archive/2019/australias-art-institutions-dont-reflect-our-diversity-its-time-to-change-that

global audiences[2]. However, without investment and recognition, digital cultural production by multicultural youth will remain informal and unsupported.

Simultaneously, the rise of AI-generated content and algorithm-driven platforms risks homogenising cultural expression[3] and disadvantaging smaller cultural communities whose content receives less platform visibility[4].

This risk is compounded by a critical AI literacy gap:

- Uncritical adoption: 90% of youth over 14 use AI, but 20% never fact-check its outputs.
- Cultural distortions: Accepting AI "hallucinations" at face value risks reinforcing biased or westernised distortions of minority cultures.
- Amplified CALD precarity: Mainstream verification tools are English-centric, leaving multicultural youth with fewer resources to cross-verify nuanced cultural data[5].

2. What Matters to MYAN and the Communities We Represent

2.1 Culture as identity and belonging

For many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, cultural expression is not a leisure activity it is an act of identity-making, healing, connection to heritage and negotiation of belonging. Whether through language, music, dance, cuisine, storytelling or religious practice, culture is how families maintain continuity across displacement[6] and how young people navigate dual identities.

A national cultural policy that does not reflect this lived reality and actively invest in culturally specific expression, will fail to serve a significant and growing part of Australia's population.

2.2 Youth as cultural leaders, not just recipients

Young people from diverse backgrounds must be recognised as cultural producers and leaders, not simply as the passive beneficiaries of cultural programs designed by others. MYAN advocates for meaningful youth co-design with adequate remuneration, support and decision-making power in any programs and policies that affect them.

[2] Carah, N. (2025). Younger generations are moving away from traditional media to fill cultural gaps. ABC News.
[3] Jennings, M., & Pasquale, F. (2025). The homogenizing engine: AI's role in standardizing culture and human expression. Journal of Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 12(4), 145–160. doi.org
[4] Association for Progressive Communications. (2025). Artificial intelligence, cultural rights and digital sovereignty: A submission on minority erasure. APC United Nations Human Rights Report Series. apc.org
[5] https://australianyouthdigitalindex.com/2025-index-what-stands-out-5-key-takeaways/
[6] Colic-Peisker, V. (2008). Migration, class and transnational identities: Croatians in Australia and America. University of Illinois Press.

2.3 The importance of community-led cultural infrastructure

Ethnic community organisations, multicultural arts companies and diaspora cultural groups represent some of the most vital and under-funded cultural infrastructure in Australia. These organisations often operate on shoestring budgets, rely on volunteer labour, and face precarious funding conditions yet they deliver extraordinary cultural and community outcomes. Sustained, recurrent funding for community-led cultural organisations is essential.

3. MYAN's Recommendations for the Next National Cultural Policy

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Recommendation 1: Recognise Shared Foundational Heritages

Formally recognise, protect, and celebrate the living cultural heritage of new Australians alongside First Nations cultures. This dual recognition must be treated as foundational to our evolving contemporary national story within all federal cultural frameworks.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Recommendation 2: Invest in multicultural youth representation

The new policy should set explicit representation targets for people from refugee and migrant backgrounds particularly young people on the boards, advisory bodies and programming panels of publicly funded arts organisations. Diversity on these bodies must be measured and reported publicly.

Recommendation 3: Fund youth empowered/led multicultural storytelling

Establish a dedicated funding stream within Creative Australia for multicultural youth-led arts and storytelling projects. This funding should be accessible, low-barrier and genuinely responsive to diverse community needs with simplified application processes that do not disadvantage smaller community organisations.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Recommendation 4: Invest in creative pathways for multicultural young people

The policy should invest in targeted arts education, mentorship and vocational pathway programs for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds including in schools, community settings and digital environments. These programs should be co-designed with young people and delivered in culturally safe ways.

Recommendation 5: Recognise and protect digital cultural production

Develop a framework that recognises digital cultural production by multicultural young Australians as legitimate artistic practice. This includes exploring micro-grants, digital skills programs, and platforms that amplify diverse community voices in online spaces. Crucially, this must include targeted, culturally responsive AI and media literacy initiatives to equip

diverse youth with the verification tools needed to counter algorithmic bias and safeguard their digital heritage.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Recommendation 6: Sustain community cultural organisations

Provide multi-year, recurrent funding for ethnic community cultural organisations, particularly those serving refugee and migrant youth. Short-term, project-based funding undermines organisational stability and prevents genuine community cultural development.

Recommendation 7: Invest in outer-suburban and regional cultural access

Direct investment toward cultural programs in outer-suburban growth corridors and regional areas where newly arrived communities are concentrated. Partner with local governments, schools and community organisations to deliver accessible, affordable and culturally relevant programs.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Recommendation 8: Design for cultural relevance, not just physical access

Audience engagement strategies must go beyond removing physical barriers. Cultural institutions should invest in genuine community consultation, multilingual communications and programming that resonates with culturally diverse young audiences. Subsidised access and targeted outreach are necessary but not sufficient.

Conclusion

Australia's multicultural young people are already active in their communities' cultural performance, on their screens and in their everyday lives. The next National Cultural Policy has a genuine opportunity to recognise, resource and celebrate this contribution, and in doing so, produce a policy that truly reflects the nation we are becoming.

MYAN urges the government to move beyond tokenistic inclusion toward transformative structural change investing in the cultural infrastructure, creative pathways and community-led storytelling that will allow every young Australian, regardless of background, to see themselves reflected in our national cultural life.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further and to connect the government with the young people whose voices should shape this policy.

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Submission date: 23 May 2026