

SUMMARY OF DATA

MEASURING THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE AUSTRALIAN ARTS SECTOR

During the second half of March 2020, the Australian Government announced increasingly restrictive bans on public gatherings and travel to protect Australians from the COVID-19 pandemic. In the wake of these announcements, a number of peak bodies initiated surveys to track impacts of the pandemic on artists and arts organisations. The following summarises the findings from these surveys as of 6 April 2020.

INTRODUCTION

Necessary distancing measures to protect Australians from the COVID-19 pandemic, including restrictions on public gatherings and travel, have caused unprecedented disruption to social and economic life in Australia. This disruption is having devastating impacts for Australia's cultural and creative workers and industries with the cancellation of events and programs across the country as well as international work.

Artists are often among the first to respond with creative approaches in times of crisis. Amid the recent bushfires, artists took the lead in generating public awareness, empathy and direct action – from the Facebook campaign led by comedian Celeste Barber, to the authors and visual artists auctioning works, to musicians volunteering their time for benefit concerts such as the Fire Fight festival. Following such disasters, artists and their creativity have a key role in helping communities make sense of loss, reconnect and recover.

In these stressful times of COVID-19, the arts sector continues to exhibit great acts of organising and solidarity, including many creative responses to make people feel included at a time of physical distancing. The United Nations recognises this vital role, and has [called on artists to help stop the spread of COVID-19](#) through ideas that encourage people across different cultures, languages, communities and platforms to adopt public health precautions, act in solidarity, and prevent the spread of misinformation.

However, across the arts community the impact of COVID-19 is catastrophic. Venues have shut their doors with little or no notice and organisations have been forced to cancel their programs and activities.

Hundreds of thousands of arts workers have had significant negative impacts to their immediate and future livelihoods. The original 'gig' workers, the vast majority of artists work as freelance or self-employed in their art form (81%), relying most commonly on contracts for fixed amounts (43%) followed by royalties and advances (35%).¹

¹ Throsby D & Petetskaya K 2017, [Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia](#), Australia Council for the Arts.

A national cross-industry survey conducted by the ABS between 16 and 23 March showed that more than half of all arts and recreation businesses had ceased trading, the highest proportion of the 17 industries analysed. In addition, 73% of arts and recreation businesses reported that their business had been adversely affected by COVID-19 in the previous two weeks – second only to accommodation and food services businesses (78%). The most common adverse effect was reduced local demand (93% of those affected) followed by staff shortages² (49%) and reduced international demand³ (32%).⁴

The impact on the cultural and creative sectors has an immense flow on effect for the broader community and economy. This includes the many thousands more employed in related industries driven so strongly by the arts and creative industries, such as tourism, hospitality, and regional and community businesses.

And importantly, the rapid disappearance of Australian creative work from our lives will have a major social and cultural impact on the Australian public in both the short and long term.

PERFORMING ARTS

Music and other performing arts

[I Lost My Gig Australia](#) was one of the first surveys to appear, launching on Saturday 14 March following the first announcement of restrictions on public gatherings. Organised by the Australian Music Industry Network and Australian Festival Association, the survey was originally intended to capture lost income from the music industry, but was expanded to include responses from other performing arts such as comedy, theatre and dance.

Ultimately, the survey has tracked lost income from performers, services and supplies, sound and lighting, technical services, and performance related aspects of hospitality.

- As of 1 April, the survey had received **12,100 responses**, reporting a **total lost income of \$325 million**.
- The majority of this revenue was lost in **NSW and Victoria**, followed by Queensland and WA.
- The survey tracks **income lost from confirmed cancelled events** and does not include projected future losses.
- It is also collecting **stories** about the devastating **personal and community impacts** of these losses.

² Staff shortages due to COVID-19 related illness, quarantine measures, school closures or transport interruptions.

³ Either overseas based customers or visiting international tourists.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistic, [Business Indicators, Business Impacts of COVID-19](#), March 2020.

Dance

The Ausdance Network has been administering a [National COVID-19 Impact Survey for the Dance sector](#):

- As of April 2, the survey had received over **251 responses**, with results suggesting **lost income of \$5.6 million** so far, and **1,302** workers impacted.
- However, this is **far from the full story**, given many large, funded organisations are yet to respond.
- Dance **studios and dance businesses** all across the country have closed with no alternative income available. The large majority can no longer pay rent, utilities, staff, contractors or themselves. Many are turning to online solutions, but income is minimal and many will never be able to reopen. Independents and sole-traders are also struggling with complete loss of income and are finding it difficult to finance the equipment and services they need to adapt.
- Over 80% of respondents have noted a **negative impact on their mental health**.

First Nations performing arts

First Nations performing arts organisations including **Blakdance** are currently developing a survey addressing the specific challenges for First Nations artists and organisations.

Venues

Performing Arts Connections have conducted two research initiatives:

1. An initial [COVID-19 impact survey](#) available to venues beyond Performing Arts Connections' membership. It launched following the first Australian Government announcement restricting public gatherings to less than 500 people.⁵
2. A targeted round of data collection in which they asked members (presenters, producers, independents) to provide **case studies**.

Results from the impact survey show:

- The average **overall lost income so far comes to \$720,000 per organisation**. This comes from lost gig income, and lost venue hire.
- Venues still have **overheads** to pay. These can be between \$50,000-\$720,000 per month.
- Early findings suggest that **12% of venues are unlikely to be able to reopen**, even after the ban is lifted.

⁵ Gatherings were subsequently limited to 100, ten and then two people over the second half on March 2020.

- Many venues are experiencing **cancellations of hires and tours** well beyond the current ban dates. The impact will extend well beyond the ban.
- The lack of a sector-specific package is being felt strongly.
- Presenters are reporting an impact on their future capacity to program with losses from this year's program to be absorbed in future years. There is a high risk that venues will be forced to revert to old models of "venue for hire" only, as opposed to actively programming touring work. The ongoing impact on the touring ecology will be immense, with a significant downturn in engagement with touring companies and subsequent drop in employment opportunities for artists and companies.
- There is a large gap of Local Government owned venues whose casual staff fall through the gap of the Job Keeper payment. The Local Government is no longer offering employment through the venue and they are not eligible for Job Keeper.

VISUAL ARTS AND LITERATURE

In addition to the significant effect on those working across performing arts, **visual artists** and **writers** – also 'gig' economy workers – are feeling the effects of cancelled events on which many rely for income.

Visual arts

On 16 March, the National Association for Visual Arts (**NAVA**) rolled out their **COVID-19 arts impacts** survey for visual arts organisations and artists. This focussed on measuring the immediate financial loss for artists and organisations, through cancellations, postponements and downsizing.

- As of Wednesday 25 March, **over 39,000 artists and arts workers** had been impacted, with **475 organisations** recording that events or activities had been affected.
- An estimated **\$49.4 million of losses** were reported, along with **9,827 event cancellations**.
- As with the other surveys, this only tracks immediate financial losses. Further work is needed to measure the longer-term impact, including projected financial loss.

Literature

Writers have lost income from cancelled festivals, book launches, workshops, school appearances and other community events.

The National Writers Centres Network have collected survey data on the **impact of COVID-19 on writing practice**. It records:

- **110 cancelled engagements**, and roughly **\$240,000 of lost income**.

- However this **only scratches the surface**, only recording losses from individual practitioners and excluding impacts on publishers, booksellers, libraries and literary festivals. At this stage, results are from a small number of initial respondents and analysis has not been undertaken to assess writers' stage of career. Revenue losses will vary across the spectrum of emerging and established writers.
- There will be **additional impacts on writers down the track**, as cancelled festivals and impacts upon publishers translate into lost book sales and reduced advances and/or contracts. The true scope of loss across the writing sector will not be evident for some months, when the accumulative effects of cancelled festivals, events, book launches and promotions not only result in lost gig revenue, but also in anticipated delays in book releases, a backlog of books waiting for release, reduced books sales, and subsequent reductions in advances and new publishing contracts.

SCREEN PRODUCTION

Screen Producers Australia is calling on the Australian screen industry to share how their production slate and release schedules have been impacted in a survey of the [**effect of COVID-19 on screen production**](#).

Initial results indicate:

- **Over 90 screen productions have ceased** activity due to COVID-19.
- When adding in the likelihood of business failures and flow on effects, Screen Producers Australia estimates damage to the sector is **greater than \$2 billion, affecting over 20,000 working employees, freelancers and contractors**.

CROSS-SECTOR

Diversity Arts Australia

Diversity Arts Australia's survey [**Lost Work for Artists and Creatives of Colour**](#) is for culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) creatives affected by cancellations and postponements in the creative industries. The survey collects data from creatives identifying as **CaLD, First Nations, LGBTIQ+, and People with Disability**. It also includes creatives from **refugee** backgrounds and other migrants who may not qualify for stimulus benefits.

Early results show:

- 91% of surveyed **culturally diverse** respondents expect to lose income.
- The estimated amount of income lost is **over \$2.3 million**.
- Respondents have reported negative effects on their **interconnected communities** and their **mental health**, including some increased experiences of COVID-19 related **racism**.

Workers in the media, entertainment and arts industries

Results are not yet available from a survey launched by the **Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA)** on the [impacts of COVID-19 on workers in the media, entertainment and arts industries](#).

Arts and cultural organisations

[Culture Counts](#) is soon to launch a survey targeted at **event producers, presenters and venue managers** working within the broader cultural sector, asking them about how the COVID-19 situation has affected their business and if they are adapting their strategies to continue reaching audiences in the current climate.