

Arts spend up but behind world's best

EXCLUSIVE

By **MATTHEW WESTWOOD**, ARTS CORRESPONDENT

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Public spending on arts and culture is the highest it's been in a decade, reaching \$6.86bn last year, but funding commitments across three tiers of government are volatile and only just keeping up with the growing population, a new study of arts funding says.

The federal government's share of cultural spending has slipped compared with state, territory and local governments, and the nation ranks well behind the world leaders in terms of funding culture.

The trends are detailed in a research paper prepared by arts think tank A New Approach, and are intended to provide a factual basis for debate about arts policy.

While the paper does not recommend specific funding levels, it suggests Australian cultural spending as a proportion of GDP be increased in line with the OECD average — a measure that would more than double current expenditure to \$15.6bn.

The paper finds total per capita spending fell by 4.9 per cent in the decade since 2007-08 to \$274.60 a person, partly because of a population increase in that time of 3.6 million.

Public spending on culture — including TV, radio and film, collecting and heritage organisations and the arts — has been volatile rather than steady, hitting a decade low of \$253.14 per capita just three years ago.

Such instability has been “unsettling for a sector that relies on the long-term development of skills, programs and markets”, ANA says, and is disruptive to other funding partners such as philanthropists.

Another trend is the recent boost for new museums, galleries and other capital works, while subsidies for arts organisations and artists have been in long-term decline.

Described as an independent think tank, ANA was launched in 2016 with a \$1.65m commitment by three philanthropic foundations with strong connections to the arts: the Myer Foundation, the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and the Keir Foundation.

ANA program director Kate Fielding said she was surprised that detailed information about the extent of arts and cultural funding was not readily available.

“It’s the kind of material that I assumed existed somewhere, but it does not,” she said.

“We want to start from a place of good information and shared understanding.”

MATTHEW WESTWOOD, ARTS CORRESPONDENT

Matthew Westwood, the newspaper's chief arts correspondent, was arts editor from 2008 to 2011. He has been writing about the performing arts, particularly classical music and opera, for two decades. He writes a... [Read more](#)