



Regional Context - Community, Arts and Culture in the Illawarra

A range of converging historic and contemporary issues and needs have impacted on communities, the arts and culture in the Illawarra region and hindered the development of a more inclusive, diverse, connected and creatively innovative culture in the region:

Access to arts and culture that reflects us

The Covid pandemic, recurring natural disasters and global wars, combined with an historic lack of access to meaningful arts and cultural experiences, have taken their toll on Aboriginal and culturally diverse communities living in the southern suburbs of greater Wollongong and Shellharbour. There is a pressing need for increased access by these communities, particularly children, young people and the elderly, to creative and cultural opportunities that reflect and celebrate their stories, aspirations, cultures and languages; facilitate their active participation and community cultural leadership; promote their health, wellbeing and social connection; and rebuild their hope and confidence in the future.

Opportunities for inter-cultural, inter-generational dialogue

The Illawarra is a culturally and linguistically diverse region, combining a rich and diverse First Nations community and history, as well as a recent history of settlement and migration by people from CALD and Refugee backgrounds. It is also a demographically diverse region, with a large aging population. Historically, however, there have been limited opportunities for inter-cultural, inter-generational interaction and exchange between members of our community. This has had an adverse impact on the wellbeing, vitality and social cohesiveness of our community as a whole. Increased opportunities for inter-cultural, inter-generational dialogue and connection in our community are especially critical in the contemporary context of advancing Reconciliation with First Nation's Peoples in the aftermath of the 2023 Voice Referendum.

Diversity in the arts and cultural sector in the region

The cultural and arts sector in the Illawarra was severely impacted by the pandemic and is only

just starting to make a recovery. This has highlighted and compounded an historic lack of diversity in the sector, an absence that the FICAA coalition has identified over an extended period.

This has led to the exclusion of many members of our CALD community from meaningful cultural and arts experiences, while at the same time impoverishing our community as a whole. It has also resulted in a dearth of employment and training opportunities for local CALD artists and young people. Funding cuts to TAFE Illawarra have further reduced access to arts training, particularly for young people interested in exploring vocational opportunities in the cultural industries. Mentorship and employment opportunities for young emerging local artists are therefore critical.

In this context, feedback received over an extended period from community participants, artists, partners, audiences and researchers has consistently highlighted the importance of, and need for, greater access to the unique collaborative multi-arts practices developed by FICAA's Creative Producers, and to the creative outcomes co-produced by artists and participants as part of these initiatives.