

Participation in Dance and Performing Arts in Australia: Children and Young People

Position Statement and Sector Overview

Dance Arts Alliance - June 2026

Dance and performing arts play a significant role in the lives of Australian children and young people. While participation in organised sport is routinely measured, recognised and supported through public policy, participation in dance and performing arts has historically received less attention despite engaging hundreds of thousands of children every week.

An examination of available national participation data demonstrates that dance is one of Australia's largest organised children's activities and one of the most significant forms of creative participation. When considered alongside drama, musical theatre, singing and related performing arts activities, the sector reaches an estimated **more than one million Australian children and young people annually**, making it a major contributor to Australia's cultural, social and community life.

What the Data Tells Us

The most recent AusPlay data (July 2022–June 2023) recorded approximately **464,500 children aged 0–14 years** participating in organised recreational dance activities, with a further **119,400 children participating in DanceSport (ballroom)**. Together, this represents more than **583,000 organised dance participants aged 0–14 years**.

Importantly, AusPlay identifies that:

- Approximately **384,300 children aged 0–14 years** undertake recreational dance training through a private dance studio.
- Approximately **95,300 children aged 0–14 years** participate in DanceSport through a private dance studio setting.

This means that nearly **480,000 children aged 0–14 years are participating in dance through private studios alone**, highlighting the critical role independent dance businesses play in delivering arts education and physical activity opportunities across Australia.

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The Australian Ballet and Patternmakers' *Participation Pathways for Australian Dancers* report (2024) further estimates that Australia has approximately **4,000 private dance studios** serving around **800,000 students aged 0–18 years**.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics also identified dance as one of Australia's largest organised creative activities for children aged 5–14 years. In 2021–22:

- **415,000 children** participated in organised dance activities.
- **156,200 children** participated in organised drama activities.
- **620,700 children** participated in organised singing and music activities.

Collectively, these organised creative activities engaged well over **one million participation instances** among Australian children.

Estimating National Participation

While no single national dataset captures every child involved in dance and performing arts, the available evidence strongly suggests that participation exceeds one million children and young people.

Dance Arts Alliance estimates that **more than one million Australian children participate in dance and performing arts activities each year**, based on:

- AusPlay participation data for recreational dance and DanceSport.
- ABS organised participation data for dance, drama, singing and music.
- Independent sector estimates indicating approximately 800,000 students enrolled in private dance studios nationally.
- The substantial overlap between dance, musical theatre, drama, singing and performing arts training delivered through private studios and community organisations.

While these datasets measure participation differently and should not be simply added together, collectively they demonstrate that dance and performing arts constitute one of Australia's largest youth participation sectors.

Dance and Participation for Girls and Young Women

Dance has long been one of Australia's most popular organised activities for girls and young women. National participation data consistently identifies dance as a leading activity for female participation, engaging hundreds of thousands of children and young people across the country.

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This level of participation highlights the important role dance plays in supporting physical activity, confidence, creativity, leadership, social connection and positive wellbeing outcomes for girls and young women.

As governments continue to invest in strategies aimed at increasing participation opportunities, health outcomes and leadership pathways for girls and young women, the contribution of dance and performing arts education should be recognised alongside other major participation sectors.

Given the scale of participation and the breadth of benefits delivered through dance and performing arts education, Dance Arts Alliance believes the sector should be considered an important contributor to Australia's youth development, community wellbeing and gender equity objectives.

Why This Matters

Participation in dance and performing arts delivers benefits far beyond artistic development.

Research consistently demonstrates that engagement in creative activities supports:

- Physical health and fitness.
- Mental health and wellbeing.
- Social connection and belonging.
- Confidence and self-expression.
- Discipline, resilience and teamwork.
- Communication and leadership skills.
- Cultural participation and community engagement.

Dance and performing arts provide important pathways for children who may not connect with traditional sporting environments, ensuring broader opportunities for participation, personal development and lifelong engagement in community activities.

The sector also contributes significantly to Australia's cultural infrastructure. Private dance studios, performing arts schools, community organisations and independent teachers operate in metropolitan, regional and remote communities, providing accessible opportunities for children and families regardless of whether they aspire to professional careers.

For many young Australians, dance and performing arts are their first experience of creative expression, performance, volunteering, leadership and community participation.

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The Role of Dance Arts Alliance

As the national peak body for dance and performing arts organisations with a focus on education, Dance Arts Alliance (DAA) recognises the importance of ensuring this substantial sector is appropriately represented, supported and recognised.

Given the scale of participation, DAA believes dance and performing arts should be recognised as essential contributors to Australia's:

- Cultural life.
- Community wellbeing.
- Youth development.
- Education ecosystem.
- Creative economy.

DAA advocates for:

- Improved recognition of dance and performing arts participation within government policy.
- Strong child safety and safeguarding standards.
- Professional standards and accreditation frameworks.
- Sustainable business and employment practices.
- Access to funding and support comparable to other major participation sectors.
- Increased awareness of the social, cultural and economic value of dance and performing arts.

As participation continues to grow, it is increasingly important that policy, funding and regulatory frameworks reflect the reality that hundreds of thousands of Australian children engage in dance and performing arts every week.

Conclusion

The evidence is clear: dance and performing arts are among Australia's largest organised participation activities for children and young people.

With an estimated participation base exceeding one million children and young people nationally, the sector makes a significant contribution to health, wellbeing, education, community connection and cultural life.

Dance Arts Alliance is committed to ensuring this contribution is recognised, valued and supported through effective advocacy, professional standards, child safety leadership and a unified national voice for the sector.

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Sources

Australian Sports Commission. *AusPlay Survey Results July 2022–June 2023: Organised Participation by Activity (Children)*. Released 31 October 2023.

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Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Cultural and Creative Activities, 2021–22*, Table 8: Participation in Cultural Activities by Children Aged 5–14 Years. Organised participation in dance, drama and singing/music activities.

Creative Australia. *Creative Transformations: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey* (2025). Evidence regarding the value of arts participation, arts education and cultural engagement in Australia.