



26 August 2024

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By email: strategy@creative.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Coughlan,

[Submission in response to Victoria's next *Creative State* strategy Discussion Paper](#)

The National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Victoria's next *Creative State* strategy Discussion Paper. We share the Victorian Government's recognition of the importance of having opportunities to engage in creative activities and support for creative industries for the wellbeing of our communities.

We applaud the successes of the previous strategy *Creative State 2025*, and the Victorian Government's ongoing commitment to implementing a dedicated Creative State Strategy. We endorse the principles that underpinned *Creative State 2025* and urge that they remain embedded in the next strategy the principle of spatial equity: "Ensuring that remote, regional, and outer-metropolitan areas have improved and more equitable access to cultural experiences."¹

The NGAA is the peak body for local governments in Australia's outer metropolitan growth areas and advocates to state and federal governments on growth area challenges and opportunities. Together, we represent more than five million people living in Australia's fast-growing suburbs and are united by shared experiences of population growth rates at double the national average and long-term under-investment in vital infrastructure.

We take an evidence-based approach, with a Policy Platform built on the foundations of our comprehensive research strategy. We also help to develop Alliance Councils' capacity to deliver good growth through best practice case studies, policy discussions, and extensive networks.

Around one in four Victorians live in Melbourne's growth areas and it is projected that their collective population of 1.6 million will grow to more than 2 million within the next decade. We believe that a greater focus of the next Creative State strategy should be on developing the potential of our growth areas communities to engage more fully in creative activities through strategically targeted funding and locally informed initiatives.

Our member councils in Victoria's outer metropolitan growth areas have in-depth knowledge of the needs of their young, diverse, and growing communities. They successfully deliver many innovative

¹ Victorian Government 2024 Victoria's next Creative State strategy Discussion paper, page 4

projects that support engagement in creative and performing arts, including with their First Nations communities. Their community engagement, strategies and plans can inform and guide the development, implementation, and impact measurement of new initiatives the next *Creative State* strategy.

We argue that close coordination and collaboration with local government in outer metropolitan growth areas in planning and delivering cultural infrastructure and programs will make a significant contribution to achieving the goals and objectives of the next *Creative State* strategy. This is in line with the five pillars of the Commonwealth's *Revive*, Australia's Cultural Policy for the next five years². In relation to Pillar 4, Strong Cultural Infrastructure, the *Revive* policy document states (page 72):

Like the building of physical infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, strong cultural infrastructure requires a framework that facilitates partnership and coordination between the Commonwealth, states and territories and local governments. ... This includes consideration of, and transparency around, the distribution of funding across states and territories.

Growth areas councils are challenged with the competing responsibilities of maintaining quality services for their communities while also planning, developing, and building the new roads and bridges and other physical infrastructure that will help deliver new housing for future population growth. These competing priorities can delay the development of strong cultural infrastructure and services because of a lack of adequate resources.

Exacerbating this is the significant infrastructure deficit experienced by growth area councils which creates a disproportionate financial burden on growth councils compared to other regions. NGAA member council feedback reveals that the current infrastructure funding arrangements for growth area councils are complex, opaque, and insufficient. Further, there is evidence to show that growth area councils are expected to fund an increasing share of community infrastructure where the current infrastructure funding framework falls short. Similarly, NGAA member councils are reporting an increasing transfer of costs and responsibilities from federal and state governments to local government in the context of service delivery.

In this submission, we wish to emphasise the need to recognise that communities in outer metropolitan growth areas have specific social and spatial characteristics that distinguish them from both inner metropolitan and regional areas, and that growth area councils face unique challenges providing community infrastructure and services to meet the needs of their rapidly growing populations.

In this context and advocating for enhanced and effective resourcing for our growth areas, this submission provides responses to the following questions raised in the Discussion Paper:

- How can we continue to build on the successes of previous *Creative State* strategies, while also addressing new areas of need and opportunity?
- What can we do to keep growing Victoria's creative industries, while contributing to social and cultural impact?
- In a constrained environment, how should Government best focus its efforts?
- What partnerships or new ways of working can we pursue to achieve a greater impact?

We argue that what is required is the coordination of funding for local governments in growth areas for physical and social infrastructure and the human resources to engage communities in creative and

² Commonwealth of Australia 2023, *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place – Australia's cultural policy for the next five years.*

cultural participation, practice, and production opportunities, and to support local artists and arts and cultural businesses.

We believe that a clear focus on coordinated, strategic investment in Melbourne’s metropolitan growth areas will ensure that our communities can benefit from greater engagement in creative activities and contribute to strengthening creative industries, and Victoria’s reputation as Australia’s foremost Creative State.

Significance of outer metropolitan growth areas for a Creative State

Geographically, Australia’s growth areas are located on the edge of Australia’s major cities and were designated for future urban growth when they were established up to twenty years ago. These areas now comprise established urban centres and urban areas under development, as well as regional townships and agricultural land. Indeed, some of the NGAA Member Councils straddle the metropolitan and regional boundary (see Appendix 1). An example in Victoria is the City of Casey where Narre Warren is one of the older growth area suburbs and Clyde is relatively new and still under construction.

The NGAA Member Councils in Victoria are:

Established growth areas

- [City of Casey](#)
- [Hume City Council](#)
- [City of Melton](#)
- [City of Whittlesea](#)
- [Wyndham City Council](#)

Emerging growth areas

- [Cardinia Shire Council](#)
- [Mitchell Shire Council](#)

Around one quarter of Victoria’s population lives in these outer metropolitan growth areas of Greater Melbourne. In December 2023, there were an estimated 1,610,743 residents Melbourne’s growth areas. These growth areas had experienced a growth rate of 4.12%, or an extra 63,768 residents on the previous year. In comparison, the population growth rate in Victoria was 2.83% for the previous year³. The City of Melton had the highest population growth rate at 6.5% of any LGA in Australia⁴.

State government projections show that the population in these growth areas will exceed 2 million people by 2031⁵. That’s an extra 400,000 people to potentially engage in the creative industries as participants, artists, performers and producers and workers. Around 8,548 workers in growth areas are employed in arts and recreation service industries. This represents 1.3 per cent of working residents of growth areas in these industries compared to the average of 1.8 per cent of workers in arts and recreation services industries across Greater Melbourne. If another 0.5 per cent of workers in growth areas (that’s another 1,315 workers) were to take up employment in creative industries, that would bring the employment in creative industries on a par with that of Greater Melbourne in 2021. To help realise this potential, we must first address the disparities that currently exist in growth areas in culture and arts infrastructure and program funding and plan for future growth.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population Growth, Australia (3218.0). Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id (informed decisions) <https://profile.id.com.au/ngaa>

⁴ Centre for Population, 2024, based on ABS, Regional Population 2021-22, Released 31 August 2023 <https://population.gov.au/data-and-forecasts/dashboards/fastest-growing-local-government-areas>

⁵ Department of Transport and Planning 2024 Victoria in Future (VIF) population and household projections 2023, [VIF2023 LGA Population Age Sex Projections to 2036 - Dataset - Victorian Government Data Directory](#)

Building on the successes, while addressing new areas of need and opportunity

The availability of suitable community infrastructure that support engagement in creative activities, is essential to developing and building a successful creative sector. Our recent research (RMIT, 2022)⁶ has demonstrated that place-based development of community infrastructure, such as clustering facilities like youth service hubs, health and community facilities, libraries and resource centres, parks and sports centres, and arts and cultural facilities, delivers substantial community benefits, including improved health outcomes, community cohesion, networking and social equity benefits.

Further, this research revealed that the presence of the community infrastructure such as community hubs, business centres, and sporting facilities provides opportunities to receive further funding for programs and increases the ability of councils to offer more programs to communities. A renowned success has been the development of a dedicated precinct and facility: Bunjil Place in the City of Casey. Bunjil Place brings together an unprecedented mix of facilities including an outdoor community plaza, theatre, multipurpose studio, function centre, library, and gallery together with the civic services centre. Since Bunjil Place opened in 2017 there has been exponential growth in arts participation children, youth people and families in the region. This has been achieved by engaging with 107 schools, delivering Professional Development training for teachers of First Nations curriculum, establishing 'Night Mode' and 'Art Bites' programs to facilitate creative participation and learning after hours, facilitating Arts Agitators, a youth-led creative collective and presenting content from state-funded cultural institutions, such as NGV kids on tour, MTC's Slap Bang Kiss, MSO's Jams for Juniors, and Ilbijerri Theatre Company. work at Casey's Aboriginal Gathering Place, as well as partnering with Victorian College of the Arts to deliver a graduate-led program for young people to devise and make theatre⁷. At a smaller scale, another example, the Wallan Youth Services Hub in Mitchell Shire enables council and service providers to apply for funding for program delivery on the basis that they have the physical infrastructure to offer those programs, whereas the program delivery would have been difficult beforehand.

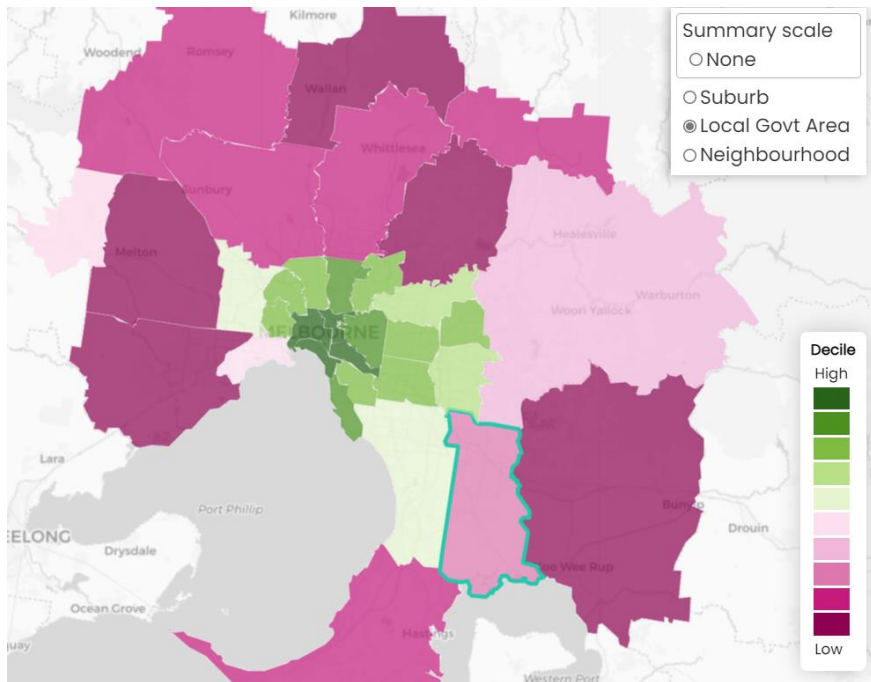
While there are varying experiences across NGAA member councils in receiving funding for community infrastructure that support engagement in creative sector, the shared experience is that, in general, communities in growth areas have relatively less access to creative arts infrastructure and services than other metropolitan areas. Some more established growth areas have some community infrastructure - but not enough to properly support their communities – while other emerging growth areas typically have none or it is very limited.

Spatial analysis of access to culture and leisure social infrastructure that are typically associated with creative sector (museum or art galleries, cinemas or theatres and libraries) illustrates the lower rate of access in outer metropolitan LGAs (Figure 1).

⁶ RMIT University Centre for Urban Research (2022) [The Benefits and Challenges of Australian Government Investment in Infrastructure in Outer Suburban Growth Areas](#)

⁷ City of Casey 2024, Bunjil Place, <https://www.bunjilplace.com.au/>

Figure Relative access to culture and leisure social infrastructure by LGA in Greater Melbourne



Source: Australian Urban Observatory, 2024⁸ (see Appendix 2 for details on methodology).

Hume City Council Community Infrastructure Plan endorsed in 2023 identifies the need for regional creative arts infrastructure. It currently has no fit-for-purpose performance arts facility. In the absence of adequate facilities, the community must travel outside of Hume for these activities, which is costly and impacts their participation and attendance.

The plan recommends provision based on population projections to 2041 for 3 facilities that can cater for up to 350 people including a regional performing arts facility in Kalkallo MAC, Creative Arts Hubs (with varied regional functionality) in Craigieburn, Broadmeadows, Sunbury and Merrifield precincts.

Funding for community infrastructure should be based on an analytical framework with clearly defined needs and requirements that is able to make robust comparable assessments of priority across the national growth areas. This includes assessing community needs at the local level, while also considering the sub-regional view rather than focusing on municipal boundaries. A more systematic program that aligns community infrastructure funding with robust independent assessment procedures, could also avoid the politicisation of funding allocations and ad-hoc decisions about community need.

Growing Victoria’s creative industries, while contributing to social and cultural impact

Dedicated and targeted investment in growth areas can contribute to a greater social and impact from creative industries because, in general, growth area populations comprise a higher proportion of First Nations populations, have greater cultural diversity, and are more likely to experience socio-economic disadvantage, than other LGAs in the metropolitan area.

In 2021, there were around 14,000 First Nations peoples living in growth areas, representing a third of Melbourne’s total First Nations population. Almost 41.8% of people living in Melbourne’s growth areas

⁸ Australian Urban Observatory, 2024 Culture and Leisure Social infrastructure <https://map.auo.org.au/#>

used a language other than English at home in 2021 compared to 34.1% of the population of Greater Melbourne. We note that the City of Casey, together with Wyndham and Whittlesea have the largest Aboriginal communities in Melbourne. This presents an opportunity to work with these communities to support Aboriginal-led creative initiatives, develop new talent and bring First Nations stories to new audiences.

Outer metropolitan growth areas are where the next wave of Australia's diversity is being cultivated. In 2021, 33.4% of people in National Growth Areas Alliance (NGAA) were born overseas, compared with 27.7% across Australia. In Melbourne's growth area councils, more than half a million residents were born overseas (576,313 people). Around 42% of residents used languages other than English at home compared to 34% for Greater Melbourne, with more than 100 different languages represented. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of people born overseas increased by 168,554, with the largest changes in birthplace countries of the population in this area between 2016 and 2021 were for those born in India (+69,817 persons), Pakistan (+8,456 persons), Philippines (+8,302 persons) and Sri Lanka (+8,114 persons)⁹.

Investing in creative activities with communities in growth areas can tap into their abundant diversity and enrich Victoria's creative potential while supporting community cohesion and inclusion. This is already evident in the City of Casey where Bunjil Place is a co-producer and venue delivery partner for Cultivating Creative Cultures with Communities (4Cs); founded by Laitini Matautia-Ulugia, a teacher at Lyndhurst Secondary College, a program that has run for 17 years. The Annual Showcase brings together over 15 schools from Southeast Melbourne to share performances and cultural practices through song, dance, music, and art. The 4C's initiative has grown with prominent cultural groups in the student cohort include Māori and Pacific Islanders, Indian, Middle Eastern and African communities. The program elevates and celebrates the cultural diversity in the Melbourne's southeast and has expanded to other outer suburban schools in Greater Melbourne.

The populations of growth areas are also relatively more disadvantaged than other LGAs of greater Melbourne with some, like the City of Hume and the City of Melton among the lowest scoring LGAs on the SEIFA index of relative disadvantage in the state. It is important to ensure that funding for creative initiatives is sufficient to enable them to be provided at low cost or free of charge for participants. This is consistent with the community views expressed in the most recent 2022 National Arts Participation Survey¹⁰. When asked to about priorities for arts funding or investment the top priority was "Ensuring free or low-cost events are available", ranked in the top 3 priorities by 68% of the respondents.

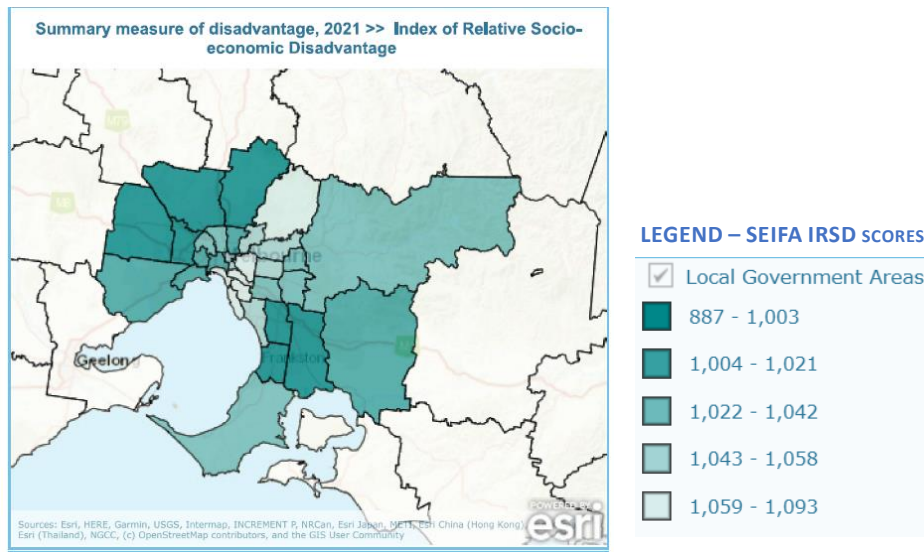
The second most frequently reported top 3 priority for investment in the National Arts Participation survey was "Ensuring children and young people have access to art and creative experiences to support learning and development". Here again, targeted investment in growth areas will have a more significant social impact because the growth areas have a younger age profile with a much higher proportion of their populations being children (aged 0-14 years). Moreover, the value of investing in creative activities for children learning will have a greater impact in growth areas because a greater proportion of children are vulnerable on one or more developmental domains. The Cities of Casey, Wyndham, Hume, and Melton have the highest numbers of children in this category of developmental vulnerability¹¹.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2016 and 2021, compiled and presented by .id (informed decisions).

¹⁰ Creative Australia 2023, [Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey - Creative Australia](#),

¹¹ Australian Early Development Census 2021 data, compiled by PHIDU Torrens University, Social Atlas of Australia 2024, <https://phidu.torrens.edu.au/>

Figure 1 Index of Relative Socio-economic disadvantage by LGA in Greater Melbourne, 2021



Source: PHIDU Torrens University, South Australia, 2024, *The Social Health Atlas of Australia*

Focusing Government effort in a constrained environment

We acknowledge that local governments also have responsibilities to provide local services to their communities, which is funded through a combination of rates and fee for service charging. Indeed, local governments make significant contributions to support engagement in creative arts for their communities. Our concern is that significant disparities exist in the revenue raising capacity of councils, especially growth area councils, because of variations in geographical location, size, and composition of population.

Councils across Australia raise approximately 3 per cent of the total taxation collected by all levels of government in Australia. Yet, councils are entrusted with the maintenance of more than 30 per cent of all public assets, including roads, bridges, parks, footpaths, and public buildings¹². Feedback from NGAA member councils indicates that they are increasingly responsible for delivering infrastructure and community services despite the funding streams remaining relatively constrained. These funding streams include:

- Rates, which make up about 38 per cent of total revenue, and are capped in Victoria
- User charges/sales of goods and services which represents about 28 percent of total revenue and
- Grants from federal and state/territory governments, including the Financial Assistance Grant (FAG), which represents about 14 percent of total revenue.

Other programs such as the Federal Government Infrastructure Investment Program, Blackspot Program, and Roads to Recovery Program provide funding for nationally significant infrastructure and the road and freight networks. While these are critically important programs, the funding is not used to deliver community services and community infrastructure that support engagement in the arts and creative industries.

¹² Cardinia Shire Council, [Council Budget 2024-2025 | Creating Cardinia](#)

The recently announced Federal funding of \$200 million for the Thriving Suburbs Program is designed to deliver investment in locally driven urban, suburban, and peri-urban community infrastructure projects. While NGAA member councils welcome this funding, they note that it is not specifically dedicated to growth areas, and significantly more is required to address the infrastructure deficit in Australia's growth areas. The lack of coordination between Federal and state grant funding means that the overall investment in growth areas is inconsistent and less efficient.

Pursuing new ways of working to achieve a greater impact

We agree that local governments are better placed to provide some types of public services directly to their communities because they have a better understanding of their specific needs and preferences. This model relies on other tiers of Government providing sufficient funding to deliver the breadth and scale of services required by local communities, and it is this aspect that NGAA member councils have raised concerns with.

The strength of our local government's expertise and knowledge of their communities is evident in their community engagement to develop their strategic planning, including their creative and cultural strategies and plan. Rather than reinventing the wheel, councils' existing plans and strategies should be the starting point for genuine collaboration between state and local governments in developing the next stage of actions for creative initiatives in growth areas.

Recommendation

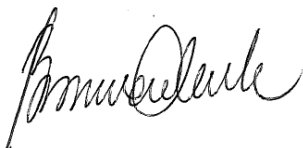
In the context of the issues noted above, NGAA argues that investing in outer metropolitan growth areas, as a priority for the next Creative State Strategy, will help to provide more equitable opportunities to engage in creative initiatives by our communities. The NGAA therefore recommends that:

1. The Victorian government through Creative Victoria, commit to genuine coordination with outer metropolitan growth councils to develop a dedicated investment pipeline for creative arts funding based on identified community needs and vision and aligned to growth.

Contact

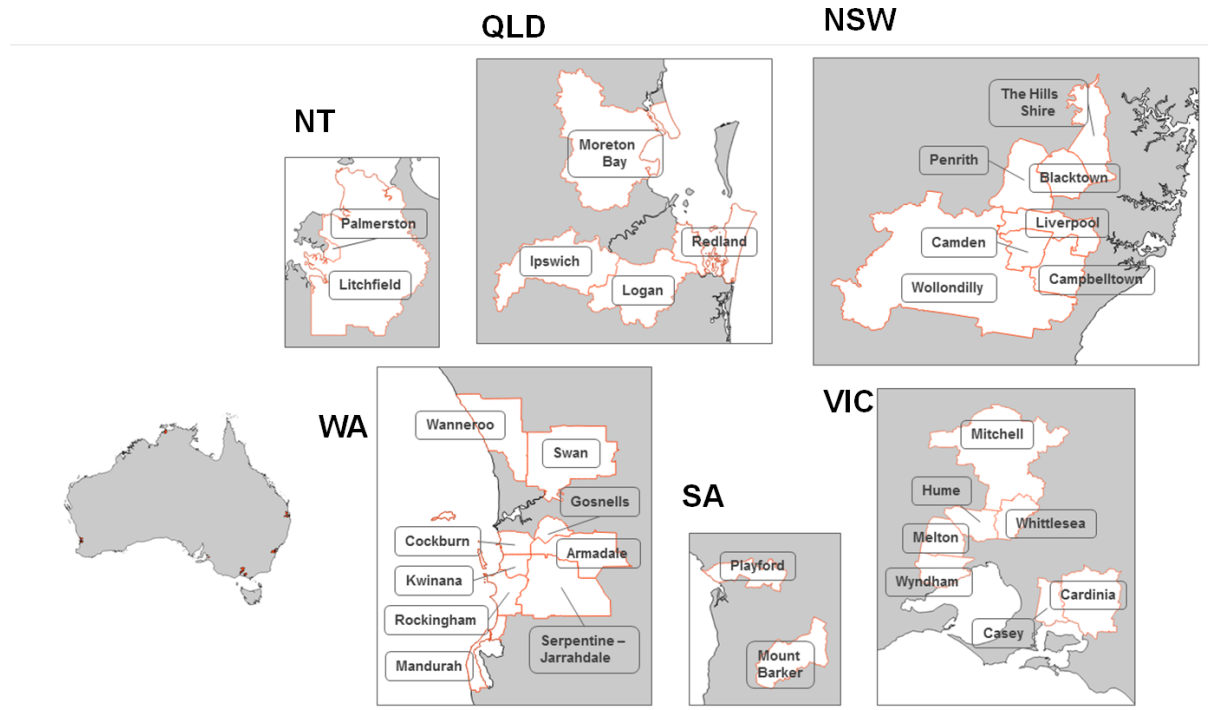
The NGAA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Victoria's next Creative State strategy Discussion Paper and support the advocacy of our growth areas. Should you wish to discuss any of the matters raised in this response, please contact me on bronwen.clark@ngaa.org.au.

Yours faithfully



Bronwen Clark
Executive Officer
National Growth Areas Alliance

Appendix 1: National Growth Areas Alliance members' map



Appendix 2: Distribution of access to culture and leisure social infrastructure by LGA in Greater Melbourne: **The Social Infrastructure Index Methodology** ¹³

The **Social Infrastructure Index** and subdomains are calculated based on a range of different measures that include Community Centres; Culture and Leisure; Early Years; Education; Health and Social Services; and Sport and Recreation. They include 16 individual service types and are based on the presence of service mix within threshold distances detailed in the table below.

Binary indicators were used to record the presence (=1) or absence (=0) for the 16 types of social infrastructure destinations within a distance threshold measure in metres.

The Cultural Infrastructure subdomain is derived from the Social Infrastructure Index includes access to museum/art galleries, cinemas/theatres, and libraries with a minimum score of 0 and maximum score of 3.

The different types of social infrastructure destinations within distance thresholds are shown in Table below.

Measure	Destination	Distance Threshold (m)
Community Centres	Community centres	1000
Culture & Leisure	Museum/Art gallery	3200
	Cinema/Theatre	3200
	Libraries	1000
Early Years	Childcare	800
	Out of school hours care	1600
Education	Government primary schools	1600
	Government secondary schools	1600
Health and Social Services	Residential aged care facilities	1000
	Dentists	1000
	General practitioners (GP)	1000
	Maternal, child and family health centres	1000
	Other community health care centres	1000
	Pharmacies	1000
Sport and Recreation	Public swimming pools	1200
	Sports facilities	1000

¹³ Australian Urban Observatory 2024, Culture and Leisure Social infrastructure, <https://map.auo.org.au/#> derived from Social Infrastructure Index, Davern M, Gunn L, Whitzman C, Higgs C, Giles-Corti B, Simons K, Villanueva K, Mavoa S, Roberts R, Badland H. (2017). Using spatial measures to test a conceptual model of social infrastructure that supports health and wellbeing; *Cities and Health*. vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 194-209.