

Statement from Ausdance Victoria

24th September 2020

Since the weekend, Ausdance Victoria has been receiving a lot of calls and emails concerning the state government's policy position on the definition and scope of 'Creative Studios' as it pertains to COVID-19 restrictions and Victoria's staged 'Roadmap to Reopening'. A small percentage of these communications have been of an abusive or accusatory nature and our staff have been at the frontline of trying to address all concerns as courteously and professionally as they can, while also acknowledging the frustration and heightened emotions behind them. We also acknowledge the good will many members of the sector have shown us, through various communications, and we are very grateful for their support.

As the peak body for Dance, Ausdance Victoria's policy is that all information it passes on to the dance sector is based on information we receive directly from primary sources. We maintain high-level relationships with multiple government departments, seeking direct advice from them, and we never distribute second-hand information.

Over the weekend, we received two communications from representatives of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) regarding the categorisation of Dance Studios under COVID-19 restrictions. The first communication was received on Saturday 19th September at 3.05 PM., advising that *"the term Creative Studios includes Dance studios"*. As has been our practice since the start of COVID-19, we promptly sent on this advice to Victoria's broader dance community and the members we represent because we knew how important this definition was to many people in the sector.

Unfortunately, a second communication from DJPR, which we received on Sunday at 4.48 PM, effectively contradicted the first and advised that *"(the advice pertaining) to dance studios was in regard to **professional dancers only**, who are considered part of the Creative Studios sector.....Under the Roadmap for Reopening, **dance schools** are included in the community sport and recreation sector and must adhere to the restrictions on indoor physical recreation facilities"*.

We promptly ensured this further communication from government was sent out to the dance community. Understandably, the change in advice created confusion, disappointment, and frustration among the community, which we know is already reeling from the extended impacts of the pandemic. It has been an emotional rollercoaster for us all.

We realise that everyone, including government, is operating in extraordinary circumstances and under immense pressure. We therefore remain committed to supporting open and clear lines of communication between the government and the dance community to ensure this vital sector can recover from the impacts of the pandemic and once again flourish in our state.

The impact of COVID-19 on Victoria's dance studio sector, which generates an estimated \$300 Million in revenue annually, and supports an estimated 10,000 paid positions, has been devastating. Our [Victorian Dance Studio Owner COVID-19 Business Impact Survey Report](#) (released on August 22nd, 2020) revealed that an alarming 92% of studio owners are concerned their business won't survive to March 2021.

As outlined in this report, and has consistently been our position, we have been lobbying the state government to provide practical avenues for financial support for the dance studio sector, many of whom have not been served by current programs of federal or state stimulus or recovery funding.

We have also been urging the state government to consider re-categorising dance and performing arts schools as educational businesses rather than gyms for the purpose of Restricted Activity Directions.

On Tuesday 18 August 2020, representatives from Ausdance Victoria met with Victorian State Government officials to present the results of the *Victorian Dance Studio Owner COVID-19 Business Impact Survey* and to discuss its recommendations.

The meeting, which included ministerial advisors to the Hon Martin Foley (Creative Industries) and Hon Jaala Pulford (Small Business), as well as departmental heads and senior policy advisors from Creative Victoria and the Experience Economy Recovery team, was productive and established open and constructive lines of communication. There was acknowledgement from government officials of the plight of dance studio owners, the urgent need for support, the problems sole traders are facing in accessing State Government business support grants, and a number of past issues raised under previous Stage 3 restrictions. It was agreed that State Government would work with Ausdance Victoria to:

- Ensure stage 3 restrictions better consider the needs of dance studio owners
- Consider other incentive schemes to revitalize the sector as we move into 2021
- Identify urgent and meaningful solutions that will support dance studio owners in crisis

Subsequently, Ausdance Victoria, in consultation with several sector representatives, submitted two proposals to government outlining a series of recommendations for its consideration. This work is ongoing, and the small team at Ausdance Victoria is working around the clock to ensure government is aware of the most urgent needs of the sector.

At the same time, it is important to note that, while all members of the dance community agree on the need for financial support, not all agree on fast-tracking the easing of COVID-19 restrictions. Several dance studio owners have expressed their concern with the risks associated with 'opening up' their studios too soon and the implications this may have for their health, and that of their staff and students. It is clear to Ausdance Victoria that the dance sector is far from homogenous. Despite this, Ausdance Victoria maintains a continuous campaign of advocacy in support of the sector as a whole.

Ausdance Victoria acknowledges the extremely challenging circumstances all players find themselves in, and encourages everyone to work carefully, respectfully, and patiently together in support of dance in Victoria. This is the passion we all share, and the one that binds us together.