

Arts and Cultural Engagement as a Vital Public Health Asset

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Context

Low levels of arts and cultural engagement are linked to reduced quality of life, weaker social connection, and limited personal development across the population. The physical health benefits of creative engagement are also being missed, contributing to rising dependence on clinical services, shorter life expectancy, increased long-term conditions, and a lack of prevention-focused healthcare.

These issues disproportionately affect groups disenfranchised from traditional systems, thereby widening health inequalities and deepening community isolation. Meanwhile, the creative and cultural sectors face rising mental health issues and economic underperformance.

This briefing outlines systemic barriers contributing to an underperforming creative health economy – that is, services and infrastructures that support health and wellbeing through arts, culture, and creativity.



Policy Recommendations

- Public-facing health promotion campaigns should highlight creative and cultural engagement as a proven contributor to health and wellbeing. This can reduce pressure on clinical services and build public understanding of the health value of everyday creative activity.
- People with lived experience of using creativity to support their health and wellbeing should be involved in designing and promoting services, to build trust and relevance within communities.
- To improve access and minimise the risk of incompatible service offers, the sector could develop a Creative Health Service Navigation resource. This would support effective engagement from both professionals and the public.
- Including creative health resources on public-facing and condition-specific webpages, such as NHS, can support personalised care, informed choice, and healthier behaviours.
- Commissioners from health and culture should work together to understand how funding models influence service design, identify shared risks, and explore innovative approaches to sustainable commissioning.

Sector Insights

- Where creative services have been integrated into healthcare systems, they have improved outcomes in areas such as falls prevention, mental health, lung health, and dementia care – among others.
- Awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of creative and cultural engagement remains low among both the public and many clinical professionals.
- Art is often perceived as specialist or elite – a view reinforced by social media and historical funding models, limiting public access and engagement.
- The current marketplace prioritises aesthetic and commercial value, rather than health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Inequities persist in funding distribution across art forms, cultural backgrounds, and geographic locations – though progress is being made.
- While evidence of positive health outcomes is strong, few reports explicitly outline the limitations of creative health delivery, making it harder for health systems to plan or promote with confidence.
- Creative health is often funded through short-term, project-based models, limiting the development of long-term relationships with communities and lay-person knowledge sharing.
- Failure to recognise creative health interventions as a skilled practice has contributed to poorly supported, volunteer-led delivery in some healthcare settings.
- Unclear commissioning responsibilities between health and cultural commissioners leads to inequities in funding and underutilised provisions from service-providers.
- The holistic and flexible nature of arts delivery often clashes with healthcare governance, evaluation practices, and system integration processes.

Further Resources

- World Health Organisation (WHO) (2019) *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being?* [Available here](#)
- National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH) and the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (2023) *Creative Health Review: How Policy Can Embrace Creative Health* [Available here](#)
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2024) *Culture and heritage capital: monetising the impact of culture and heritage on health and wellbeing* [Available here](#)
- Cultural Commissioning Programme (2017) *The art of the possible: A quick guide to commissioning arts and cultural providers for better health and wellbeing.* [Available here](#)
- Hearst, J. (2025) *A Creative Health Communication Framework: Addressing the Compatibility and Marketability of Mental Health and Wellbeing Services*. Routledge: London [Available here](#)
- Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance (2024) *Creative Health Quality Framework.* [Available here](#)

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