

Creative Health and Wellbeing



Foreword

The connection between creativity and culture and health and wellbeing has a long history. In both ancient and modern civilizations, deities and saints connected with healing were frequently patrons of the arts, music and literature, too – while the word “culture” itself carries within it the broader sense of nurture and care.

For its part, the Arts Council has long recognised the essential role that creativity and culture can play in the health and wellbeing of everyone, whatever their background and wherever they live. The publication of this plan is not, therefore, a revolution in our thinking, but rather a setting-out of our commitment to the evolving work in this field. It describes how the creative and health sectors can work in partnership to establish networks of collaboration, and how we will build on existing activity, including the work we are already supporting in the field of social prescribing. It also describes the actions we will take as the national development agency for culture and creativity in promoting creative health and wellbeing.

The importance of this work has been evident throughout the pandemic. In the face of adversity and isolation, people turned to creative and cultural activities to maintain and improve their mental wellbeing. Perhaps the most memorable manifestation of this was appearance, during the first, difficult lockdown, of hundreds of thousands of drawings of rainbows in the windows of homes up and down the country. Those rainbows, which were created by children and their families to show support for health workers on the frontline, stood as a tangible demonstration of the deep-rooted connection between creativity and wellbeing that exists in all of us – and it is in recognition of this connection that creative health and wellbeing forms such a crucial part of the Arts Council’s strategy. We believe that, by

ensuring that everyone in the country has access to high quality creative and cultural activities, they will, in turn, lead happier and healthier lives.

Sir Nicholas Serota
Chair, Arts Council England

Let's Create and Creative Health and Wellbeing

In **Let's Create** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate>), Arts Council England's 2020-30 strategy, we set out our vision for a country transformed by culture and creativity, in which people live happier, healthier lives. Delivering a plan for Creative Health and Wellbeing is a critical step in realising that ambition.

By “creative health and wellbeing”, we mean the connection between creativity and the health and quality of people's lives. We believe that creative and cultural activity must be viewed by society as a fundamental part of living well.

The plan presented here is driven by our strategy and embedded in our **Delivery Plan** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/delivery-plan-2021-2024>). We believe the concept of Creative Health will bring value to people, to communities, and to the creative and cultural sector, and will allow us to deliver more deeply and more effectively against the aims of **Let's Create**.

What we say in Let's Create:

By 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences

The three Outcomes focus on:

1. how people can develop personal creativity at every stage of their lives;
2. how culture is created by and with people in their communities, and how it shapes the places in which they live, work, learn and visit;
3. the development of the innovative, collaborative and internationally-facing professional cultural sector that will be needed over the next decade.

How Creative Health will support this:

We will promote creative health as a fundamental part of living well, for individual lives, in communities, and globally. This work will enhance our shared understanding of the importance of creativity in people's lives.

Our work on creative health will:

1. position creativity at the heart of people's lives, particularly those experiencing inequalities;
2. support the act of connecting people with their communities through creativity, particularly in places where access to culture is limited and where, in turn, health inequalities are often present;
3. support the creative innovations of professionals working in this sphere, and enhance the global reputation of the partnerships between our country's creative and cultural and health and wellbeing sectors.

Setting the scene

While **Let's Create** explicitly acknowledges the value Arts Council England places on the contribution of creativity towards health and happiness – a contribution which was proven to be essential during the Covid-19 pandemic - the journey towards this point began for us some time ago.

Back in 2007, we published a joint prospectus with the Department of Health to emphasise the benefits that access to culture and creativity can bring to public health, and to the wellbeing of communities across the country.

Between 2013 and 2016, we collaborated with the Baring Foundation to deliver a five-year programme entitled Arts in Care Homes. Following the success of that programme, we launched Celebrating Age: a more ambitious partnership which invested £1.5m into projects up and down the country that connected some of our most vulnerable and isolated communities to each other through participation in creative and cultural activities.

In 2017, we were a partner on the publication of 'Creative Health', the landmark report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Arts, Health and Wellbeing. Its findings continue to drive policymakers and practitioners working in the field, and 2021 saw the delivery of one of its key recommendations: the creation of a new National Centre for Creative Health. That report can be read in full **here** (<https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>).

We've also invested in the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, a sector support organisation whose regional champions play a vital part in disseminating good practice, sharing useful research, and cultivating a wider understanding of this area of work.

During the consultation for **Let's Create**, we published an **evidence review** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/arts-and-culture-health-and-wellbeing-and-criminal-justice-system-summary-evidence>) which captures the journey of this work in more detail. The latest publication on the role of creativity and culture during the pandemic can be found **here** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/role-arts-during-covid-19-pandemic>).

Finally, in all of this, we've worked with a wide range of key partners across the health and care landscape, including public bodies such as the Department for Health and Social Care, NHS England, NHS Improvement, and Public Health England (now the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities), as well as national charities such as Age UK, Mind, and Scope, in order to bring together and make the most of expertise from both sectors.

Current Context

To date, Arts Council England has worked with a partners from across the commercial and educational sectors, and in local and national government, in order to deliver against our shared objectives in the arena of health and wellbeing. The value of the projects these partnerships have produced has been felt by individuals and communities from all over the country – but we believe that there is more that could, and should, be done. The momentum that has been building in this field over the last decade has now reached a tipping point, thanks to the alignment of a number of factors that, taken together, have the potential to create systemic and lasting change.

As set out in our strategy, Let's Create, the Arts Council is committed to widening engagement with culture and creativity across this country, and in particular to supporting those who experience barriers of any kind in accessing them. Data around health outcomes reveal some of the deepest inequalities in our society and are a major indicator of those places and people with the least power and choice in their lives. We believe that, by using data around health inequalities to inform our plans and direct our resources, we will be able to identify and thus reach many more people who otherwise would be unlikely to access culture or explore their creativity - and that in doing so, we will contribute towards the improvement of health outcomes in communities. This way of working represents a fundamental shift away from 'health projects' as additional activity and moves us toward viewing health and wellbeing as an integral delivery outcome for our sector.

In addition to the backdrop provided by Let's Create, there are a number of wider points of context which reinforce the case for change. These include:

- The Government's Levelling Up agenda, which requires a multi-agency approach to place, and through which partners can work collectively to address health outcomes
- The Social Prescribing movement, which is rapidly building momentum and within which culture and creativity play a crucial role
- The growing recognition of libraries' position as critical community hubs, which reinforces their direct connection to this agenda through their five Universal Offers (<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/universal-library-offers>).
- The growing recognition, amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic, of a set of shared priorities across funders and the health and social care sector, particularly around youth mental health, loneliness and isolation.

Our Delivery Plan includes a number of actions that directly relate to these opportunities. We believe that, by working together with partners in higher education, research, funding bodies, and other arm's-length bodies, we have a real chance to deliver against Government agendas and health sector priorities by using culture and creativity to help people to live healthy, happy lives.

Working with the NHS

Working effectively with the NHS, by understanding its delivery model and long-term strategic planning, is critical for Arts Council England if we're to realise our ambitions in this area. The NHS is currently moving to a new model of delivery called

Integrated Care Systems, which is designed to enable place-based, multi-agency delivery. This system includes the creation of voluntary and community partnerships to support the shaping of local delivery – and it is here that the creative and cultural sector can play an important role. There are 42 Integrated Care Systems across England and you can find out more about them **here** (<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/integrated-care-systems-explained>).

Within the NHS's long-term plan, there is a commitment to personalised care, looking at how people are supported to make choices about their physical and mental health in the same way they would make other important decisions about their life. Social prescribing, which involves health professionals referring patients to support in the community, sits within this area of work, and is a key priority for the NHS. Under this system, GPs might prescribe individuals to participate in activities that make them feel better, such as joining a sports club, getting out in nature, seeking help with financial issues, or taking part in creative activities. In order to do this, they are supported by a link worker, who helps them make choices and get connected.

The National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), a new NHS-backed charity, is the delivery partner for this work. Our partnership with NASP forms the backbone of the relationship between the NHS and Arts Council England. This partnership includes a strong alliance with strategic partners across sport, heritage, nature and financial advice, and a formal connection to front-line health services through the growing cohort of social prescribing link workers.

In our current Delivery Plan, we are prioritising our work with NASP and social prescribing, and the work we can do to network and connect existing practice across the country. You can read more about these actions in the **Delivery Plan** section of this document (page 21). We also recognise, however, that

there are many opportunities we have yet to explore in collaboration with the NHS, such as the place of creativity in acute care settings, the work that might be done in using creative activities to support youth mental health, and the role of creativity and culture in combating isolation and loneliness, though we have worked in these areas independently. In all of these areas, and others, the creative and cultural sector has the potential to make a significant contribution, and we will continue to explore these possibilities in future.

By undertaking this work in partnership with the NHS, we will be able to model best practice in this area, and speak together to a global audience about how transformative a strategy focused on creative health can be.

Maximising our impact

We believe that creative health and wellbeing has a role to play at every level of public health in this country. In order to understand how this could happen, it's useful to envisage a series of interconnected cogs, each of which draws on a different element of the creative and cultural sector.

Being part of the health picture

Prevention: across every type of practise, the cultural sector can promote good habits, provide connections to other people, and instil positive behaviours

Treatment/Recovery: there are a vast range of specialist practitioners and organisations working in partnership with health bodies on more targeted interventions

Acute Care: whilst fewer in number, there are a range of organisations and programmes designed for and with patients in acute care settings

[On page 6 of the standard print version there is an image of three connected cogs turning in unison. They are labelled **Prevention, Treatment and Recovery** and **Acute Care**. The cog titles present the following information:

Prevention

- Healthy Habits
- Behaviours
- Social Connections

Treatment and Recovery

- Specialist providers
- Referral
- Planned Intervention

Acute Care

- NHS Delivery
- Hospital Care
- Residential Care]

Whilst there are opportunities at every level, we will focus initially on securing partnerships, supporting social prescribing, mapping regional networks, and connecting existing activity. This is borne out in our Delivery Plan: in particular, helping the creative and cultural sector connect with social prescribing will be a major strand of work.

We know social prescribing is already of real interest to many working in the creative and cultural sector. For those who'd like to learn more, we have created an **online creative health and wellbeing resource hub** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/arts-culture-and-wellbeing>) containing lots of information about social prescribing, including learnings and case studies. You can also take a look at the National Academy for Social Prescribing's introduction **here** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaFeWLgtP6M>).

Introducing the three strands

We will focus our efforts in those areas where we can have the most immediate impact and will be clear about how we will prioritise our resources.

Moving forward, we will deliver via three strands of work:

- Partnerships – working strategically with the health and social care sectors
- Place – embedding the work in our place-based approach
- Practitioners – focusing on skills development for creative practitioners

These strands align strongly with our current Delivery Plan themes, and will allow us to ensure that our ambitions, and those of our partners, can be fully integrated into our policy making, programmes, and operational delivery.

[The standard print version presents a Venn diagram on page 7 made up of three overlapping circles. The circles are labelled: **Partnership**, **Practitioners** and **Place**. The circle for **Partnerships** is red, the circle for **Practitioners** is blue and the circle for **Place** is green. In the centre of the three interconnecting circles is a symbol representing a person.]

In practice, of course, the strands will overlap - and our hope is that at the intersection between partners, place, and practitioners will be people.

Whilst the ambitions set out here are structured around three thematic strands of work, all of them should be viewed through the lens of individual experience. Health and wellbeing are, by their nature, profoundly personal experiences – and it is for this reason that it is people, and the relationships they have with their health, with others, and within their communities, that sit at the heart of this plan.

Many of us will make proactive choices about experiencing a cultural event or creative activity in order to improve our mental wellbeing, but we don't always take note of the everyday actions, such as reading or listening to music, that also make us feel better. It is important to acknowledge that we all experience creativity in a unique and personal way: sometimes through choice, sometimes led by others, and sometimes completely by chance. At the Arts Council, we think that, while this is how it should be, more could be done to reduce the 'luck element' if we work to improve access, increase choice, and embed an understanding of the benefits of including culture and creativity in our lives.

Partnerships

[The standard print version presents a Venn diagram on page 8 made up of three overlapping circles. The circles are labelled: **Partnerships**, **Practitioners** and **Place**. In the centre of the three interconnecting circles is a symbol representing a person. The circle for **Partnerships** is red. The circle for **Partnerships** is red]

What we want to achieve

- Strengthen our partnership with NASP
- Grow the recognition of the benefits of creativity and culture within the NHS and healthcare partners
- Identify and invest in research gaps to support advocacy and relationship-building
- Develop agreed ways of working with our partner arm's-length bodies in this field
- Strengthen the links between the network of funders with a focus on this work
- Deepen our relationship with local government public health leaders

How we will know we're progressing

- NHS co-investment in creative and cultural activity
- Partners publicly recognising the added value of creativity and culture in a health and wellbeing context
- Memoranda of understanding and terms of reference in place with strategic partners

We will be strategic and targeted in our relationship-building. In addition to our core partnership with the NHS, building strong relationships with public health bodies, social care systems, and the higher education sector will be central to this work. We will also work closely with the national bodies who represent the creative and cultural sector. Libraries, museums, and arts organisation networks and support structures, many of whom are already deeply engaged in this work, will be critical to success.

This **Partnerships** strand of work refers specifically to national and international bodies and delivery partners, whose recognition of, and contribution to, creative health will have demonstrable benefits that are widely felt. These partners can activate local delivery via their own systems and structures and potentially leverage increased investment and new collaborations. They will be critical in giving creativity and culture a place in long-term strategic planning relating to health and wellbeing. Our work in this area will be focused on where we can have the greatest impact, using our power to convene and catalysing our own expertise and evidence archive and those of key research bodies.

Place

[The standard print version presents a Venn diagram on page 9 made up of three overlapping circles. The three overlapping circles are: **Partnerships**, **Practitioners** and **Place**. In the centre of the three interconnecting circles is a symbol representing people. The circle for **Place** is green.]

What we want to achieve

- Develop our working knowledge of healthcare infrastructure
- Map existing networks and share place-based data internally and externally
- Integrate local health partnerships and projects into our place-based actions
- Promote the creative and cultural sector's buildings as assets to support health in communities
- Understand local needs through utilising health data in our analysis
- Build relationships with local health and social care leaders and deliverers

How we will know we're progressing

- Integrated care systems or public health professionals as members on local creative and cultural partnerships
- Creative and cultural representatives on integrated care systems boards, informing transformation
- Increased investment opportunities for the sector in local settings

The Arts Council has a strong and well-developed approach to place-based working. The Place strand is about weaving health and wellbeing outcomes into that work. These ambitions are an articulation of what is already in our DNA as a development agency. In practice, this strand of work will see us expanding

our existing data sets to include local health data, promoting health and wellbeing metrics as a valuable outcome for creative and cultural strategies, and seeking out partners locally who have the expertise we need to realise our goals.

Working in place will allow us to use local data and be driven by the needs of a particular population. It also ensures we can align with the priorities and agendas of our partners locally and scale the delivery to suit the place. Importantly, place is where we can foreground the vital connection between individuals and their communities. By scaling our work to fit a particular place, we can maximise the potential opportunities in a community and accessibility for those who live there.

Practitioners

[The standard print version presents a Venn diagram on page 10. The three overlapping circles are: **Partnerships**, **Practitioners** and **Place**. In the centre of the three interconnecting circles is a symbol representing people. The circle for **Practitioners** is blue]

What we want to achieve

- Grow ambition and support innovation through our existing funding programmes
- Build a skills development offer for practitioners
- Foster a networked approach to best practice and intelligence gathering and sharing
- Support and champion the protection of health and wellbeing of practitioners working in challenging settings

How we will know we're progressing

- New investment opportunities in partnership with other funders
- Increased focus on health and wellbeing-related practice in **Developing your Creative Practice** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/DYCP>) and **National Lottery Project Grants** (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/ProjectGrants>) applications
- Increased resilience and broader asset bases for individuals
- UK and global recognition of the sector's work

The **Practitioners** strand of work is focused on providing the individuals working in this field with the support, tools, and resources they need to deliver at their best. Creative health covers a vast range of practice across arts, libraries, and museums, and the opportunities and challenges related to being involved in this work will vary greatly. The nature of the work is broad too; some practitioners may be working in specialised care settings and be extensively trained, but others may be unknowingly providing a much-needed connection for a lonely and isolated person.

We are alert to this range of needs and will use this strand of work to convene and support initiatives and networks that help practitioners develop their work in this field. Importantly, we want to emphasise that the wellbeing and health of creative practitioners is a priority, and to ensure they are not viewed as a direct alternative to social care and health professionals. Our sector is an asset in improving health and wellbeing, but it is not a replacement for professional provision.

How we will use our resources

Much of this activity will be supported using our existing resources and capacity. Actions we will undertake to support our three strands of work include:

- Creative health and wellbeing actions being integrated into area planning processes from April 2023
- Developing funding guides for our rolling funding programmes
- Working with NASP and the National Lottery Community Fund to build on the Thriving Communities Fund

In addition, there are some new developments we will need to explore to support our ambitions over the coming two years. These include:

- Skills development programme:
 - **We believe there are opportunities to work with the NHS to develop training resources to help upskill both the creative and cultural sector and our own staff.**
- Data sharing agreements
 - **To ensure the inclusion of health disparity data in strategic planning locally and nationally, we will need transparent and compliant processes to share data with our partners.**
- Measuring public opinion
 - **We know that having a consistent surveying provision to measure public opinion could be highly beneficial in this work, and we will explore how this could be achieved.**

- Shared agreements
 - **We know our partner funding bodies have a number of shared priorities and we are interested in establishing shared commitments, where this is appropriate.**
- Strategic roles
 - **We believe it is beneficial to have senior creative and cultural posts with the right level of agency working with our strategic partners. We will actively pursue potential opportunities for this with NASP and the National Centre for Creative Health.**

Research and development

Underpinning our work across the three strands is a commitment to research and development, and supporting continued innovation in the creative, cultural and health space.

We are committed to maintaining and growing a strong connection between research, policy, and delivery, both internally and externally, and we will use our research and policy expertise to help us do this. We will commit to:

- sustained communications with a range of leading research institutions and advocates, including UK Research and Innovation and relevant research councils, and with health sector research gatekeepers
- collaborations with research partners to build a comprehensive evidence base and help those pioneering this work to create a fit for purpose evaluation framework for creative health and wellbeing activity
- continued conversations with agencies such as the Centre for Cultural Value to identify gaps in research that the Arts Council is positioned to address, and that would help the creative and cultural sector to make a better-evidenced case for investment

- identifying and promoting examples of innovation and good research practice in the creative and cultural sector, in particular where there is potential for scaling-up and sharing best practice
- helping to strengthen international exchange around creative health research, for example through our relationship with the Collaborating Centre for Arts and Health at the World Health Organisation.

In these and other ways, Arts Council England can support, disseminate and, potentially, initiate or co-produce research that will contribute to:

- sustainable and productive partnerships with the health and social care sector
- deepened engagement in place driven by evidence that increases the likelihood of investment from the health sector
- equipping practitioners with the means to make a stronger case for investment in their practice

Our Delivery Plan

Our Delivery Plan sets out the actions we will take to deliver our strategy over a three-year period, with the current iteration running from 2021 – 2024. In our 2022/23 refresh, to support the three strands of work set out in this plan, we're publishing a set of actions which establish the link between this plan and our strategy.

Delivery Plan Actions:

- **“We will publish a detailed plan that describes how we will work in the field of Creative Health. It will set out a commitment to strengthen partnerships with the health and care sector, embed healthcare priorities into our work in place, and support creative practitioners to grow their contribution to this area of work.”**

Measurable actions informed by this creative health plan will be included in our Delivery Plan refresh on an annual basis; these three are the first of those. We will review our progress as we start work on the 2024 – 2027 Delivery Plan and use that moment to refresh our approach and commitments.

- **“We will work in collaboration with strategic partners to develop capacity by delivering a project that increases connectivity in place, enabling local cultural networks and creative practitioners to gain access to health care partners and engage with Social Prescribing and associated opportunities.”**

As outlined in the **‘Resources’** section of this plan (page 16), our initial focus is on networks, connections, and social prescribing. We will be working alongside the National Centre for Creative Health to explore opportunities to map existing

networks and make connections between health and creative and cultural sector partners at a local level. It is our intention to have a programme in place later this year.

- **“We will support the infrastructure that can establish culture as a key intervention in the health and wellbeing of communities. We will do this through supporting a Senior post at the National Academy of Social Prescribing to represent Arts and Culture and by working with the National Lottery Community Fund to develop a potential pilot programme with up to seven Integrated Care Systems.”**

Over the past two years, we have been working with NASP and other partners to deliver the Thriving Communities Fund. To support the evolution of this fund and contribute to a better network for the creative and cultural sector to access and deliver social prescribing, providing expertise to NASP is critical. We also expect this role to link to the project with National Centre for Creative Health to ensure these programmes are complementary.

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England champions, develops, and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people’s lives.

Let’s Create, Arts Council England’s strategy for 2020-30, is built around three Outcomes and four Investment Principles. They are designed to work together to achieve our vision of a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences.

The Arts Council has offices in Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Leeds, London, Manchester, Newcastle and Nottingham. We are headquartered in Manchester, and over 70% of our staff are based outside of the capital. We are governed by a government-appointed National Council which is supported by five Area Councils, covering London, the Midlands, the North, the South-East and the South-West. We are an independent charity as well as an arm's-length non-departmental public body, and are accountable to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. We were established as a distributor of National Lottery funds under The National Lottery Act 1993. In 2011, our responsibilities were expanded to include the support and development of museums and libraries, alongside the arts. We are tasked with various statutory UK-wide responsibilities that enable objects and collections of special interest to be acquired, shared and protected for long-term public benefit. We work with the Department for Education to deliver a network of Music Education Hubs, ensuring every child in this country has access to a high-quality music education.

Our definition of culture

'Culture' means many things to many people and is often used to refer to food, religion and other forms of heritage. Here, though, we use it to mean all those areas of activity associated with the artforms and organisations in which Arts Council England invests: collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre, and the visual arts. By describing all of this work collectively as 'culture', rather than separately as 'the arts', 'museums' and 'libraries', we aim to be inclusive of the full breadth of activity that we support, as well as to reflect findings from the research we commissioned for our Delivery Plan, which showed that members of the public tend to use the words 'the arts' and 'artists' to refer specifically to classical music, opera, ballet or the fine arts. Similarly, we have used 'creative practitioners' rather than 'artists' as an

umbrella term for all those who work to create new, or reshape existing, cultural content.

Our definition of creativity

‘Creativity’ describes the process through which people apply their knowledge, skill, and intuition to imagine, conceive, express or make something that wasn’t there before. While creativity is present in all areas of life, in this strategy, we use it specifically to refer to the process of making, producing. or participating in ‘culture’.

We also recognise that the traditional boundaries between and around cultural activities are disappearing as new technologies and other societal changes alter the ways in which many artists, curators, librarians, and other practitioners work, as well as how culture is made and shared. We’re excited by these changes, which we expect to accelerate over the next decade – and in response, we will become more flexible about the range and type of cultural activities that we support over the years to come.

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