

## **Arts Council England's response to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan consultation**

### **July 2022**

Arts Council England (ACE) is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We invest public money from Government and the National Lottery to help support the arts, museum, and library sectors, and to deliver our 2020-30 strategy [Let's Create](#). The strategy sets out our vision for a country transformed by culture and creativity, in which people live happier, healthier lives. Our soon to be published Creative Health Plan positions creative health at the heart of individuals' and communities' wellbeing. It details how the three strands of partnerships, place, and practitioners, will work together to contribute to reducing health inequalities.

We know that creativity and culture can greatly contribute to positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Our recent [report](#) with UCL found that 68% of a UK representative sample of respondents, believed the arts affected them positively during the pandemic. The arts were found to facilitate connection, reduce loneliness, support emotional regulation, increase life satisfaction, and decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety.

As the national development agency for arts, museums, and libraries we promote creative health as a fundamental part of living well, for individual lives, in communities, and globally. We do this by working with stakeholders across the health and care landscape, including public bodies such as the Department for Health and Social Care, NHS England, NHS Improvement, and the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities, as well as national charities such as Age UK, Mind, and Scope.

Examples of our partnerships and projects supporting mental health and wellbeing include a joint prospectus with the Department of Health on the health benefits of culture and creativity and a £1.5m Celebrating Age programme connecting isolated communities through creative activities. We have also invested in hundreds of creative practitioners and arts organisations who deliver creative health work. Our investment in arts and health has increased from £4million to £16million via our National Lottery Project Grants since the Arts, Health, and Wellbeing APPG landmark [report](#) was published in 2018.

Below we outline the vital contributions that culture and creativity can make in addressing the consultation's six themes. We also offer some suggestions for further developing this work.

### **1. How can we all promote positive mental wellbeing?**

We welcome the reference to cultural activities helping to build and sustain people's wellbeing in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan discussion paper. We recognise the significant and persistent disparities in levels of wellbeing across the country and agree that work to promote positive mental wellbeing needs to actively address these disparities.

Taking a place-based approach is key to promoting positive mental wellbeing for all. At Arts Council, a place-based approach means that we consider and address the geographic dimensions of inequality. Our [Priority Places](#) and our support for the Government's [Levelling Up for Culture Places](#) enable us to work in depth in places where cultural engagement is low, and promote positive mental wellbeing through creative and cultural opportunities across a wider range of communities in these areas. Our methodology for selecting Priority Places and Levelling Up for Culture Places, includes use of data on the proportion of the population whose life is impacted by a disability or long-term health condition. This enables us to promote our work in areas which most need our support.

Another way to promote positive mental wellbeing is to increase individuals', communities', and organisations' knowledge of the positive contribution of culture to wellbeing. Our sector support organisation, the Culture, Health, and Wellbeing Alliance (CHWA) does just this, by providing networking, advocacy, and resources to support health and wellbeing for all through creative and cultural practice. Their work is supported by Regional Champions who grow collaborations and partnerships across the region and share information between grassroots practice and national policy. Such structures are effective in promoting positive mental wellbeing among a variety of partners, in a way that remains rooted and responsive to the needs of people doing this work on the ground.

## **2. How can we all prevent the onset of mental health conditions?**

Across every type of creative practice, the cultural sector can promote good habits, provide connections to other people, and instil positive behaviours, which all can contribute towards preventing the onset of mental health conditions.

[Research](#) shows that around 50% of mental health conditions are established by the time a child reaches the age of 14, and 75% by the age of 24. Prevention therefore needs to have specific focus on provision for children and young people. ACE works with Bridge Organisations and Music Education Hubs who play a key role in working with local authorities and schools, to support partnerships that jointly deliver health outcomes for children and young people. We are also working in partnership with the Youth Endowment Fund to undertake joint research into the links between creativity and improved mental health post-pandemic. These links are inherent in the work we are doing with the DfE and DCMS for the refreshed National Plan for Music Education (published in June 2022), and the upcoming National Cultural Education Plan. We are a named partner in the Government's CEP and hope that it will recognise the positive impact of creativity on the lives of children and young people.

To prevent the onset of mental health conditions we also need to support high quality creative work which supports individuals and communities who display 'risk factors' for mental ill-health. This may include drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness, sexual violence, and isolation. Examples of cultural sector organisations who work with at risk individuals and communities include: Cardboard Citizens who unlock the possibility of theatre and art with people experiencing homelessness, and Outside Edge Theatre Company who use

participatory arts to improve the lives of people affected by any form of addiction, including their families, carers, and champions.

### **3. How can we all intervene earlier when people need support with their mental health?**

We welcome the reference in the discussion paper to early intervention support not always needing to be ‘clinical’ and that arts interventions can be effective in improving mood and wellbeing. We also welcome the reference to libraries being ideally placed to identify people who may be struggling, and signpost them to early support. Support for the recruitment and training of volunteer community connectors will be important in enabling these connections to happen. The connections between cultural providers and health and social care services are vital in supporting early intervention. We need strong partnerships to encourage pathways from arts organisations to service provision. Embedding culture into local strategic planning will also help to enable this.

Arts and culture can also play a role in tackling stigma around mental ill-health, as well as fear and mistrust of sources of support. Some people may feel more comfortable working in a creative setting rather than a traditional health setting to access support. Vernacular language over “clinical” language can be helpful in early interventions.

### **4. How can we improve the quality and effectiveness of treatment for mental health?**

We welcome the Mental Health Plan wanting to ensure we have a diverse and wide-ranging support offer which meets the needs of our diverse population, with improved options and choice for treatment. We consider Social Prescribing to be a key effective treatment for mental health. The Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance [found](#) there is a social return on investment of between £4 and £11 for every £1 invested in arts on prescription.

Arts Council have invested £1.8 million into the Thriving Communities Fund (TCF) which is delivered in partnership with the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), Natural England and Historic England. The fund creates place-based partnerships that improve and increase available social prescribing community activities by working alongside social prescribing link workers. Since March 2021, 36 Thriving Communities projects have been offering vital social prescribing support to those facing some of Covid-19’s greatest challenges, including loneliness and isolation, and mental health issues. While the Thriving Communities Fund delivered diverse types of activities relating to nature, the environment and physical health, the [Interim Evaluation](#) of the Fund found that 100% of activity delivered by projects included an arts and culture element, demonstrating the effectiveness of arts and culture in this field of work.

To further develop the offering of culture and creativity within a social prescribing context, we plan to recruit a strategic role that will sit within NASP, and 7 new roles that sit within the 7 NHS regions, to work across the 42 Integrated Care Systems.

Their roles will include mapping local well-being delivery and will use local health inequalities data, to develop place-based partnerships and funding. Embedding cross-sector roles such as these will help to improve the quality and effectiveness of a diverse treatment offer.

An NPC [report](#) on social prescribing progress states that ICSs must commit to contributing funds to build community capacity where need is identified. Cultural venues have the potential to play a role in offering space and support for social prescribing community hubs to build this capacity. Capacity building will be particularly important in enabling us to take a whole community approach to social prescribing and improve the quality and effectiveness of treatment in areas that suffer the most from health disparities.

While we know that the cultural sector plays a role in improving health and wellbeing, we recognise that it is not a replacement for professional provision. 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 the practitioners strand of our Creative Health Plan to convene and support initiatives and networks that help practitioners develop their work in this field.

Another main way to improve the quality and effectiveness of treatment is to improve the data, research, and evaluation of work in this field. There is currently a lack of large-scale data and evidence for creative health. Projects are often short term with small sample sizes used in their evaluations. This does not lend itself to the type of evaluation that the health sector uses. Arts Council recommend the development of a shared data and evidence bank that can support stronger partnership working and case making between sectors.

## **5. How can we all support people with mental health conditions to live well?**

To support people with mental health conditions to live well, work in this area needs to leave a strong legacy. Co-production is a tool which can support the legacy of creative health work. For example, our Creative People and Places programme works with communities to support people to make their own decisions, as well as deciding what they want to see or experience on their own terms. This often leads to unusual partnerships, from rugby clubs and housing associations to haulage firms and a food bank. The [meta-evaluation](#) of six of ACE's place-based programmes cited a long-term outcome of the programme to be improved health and wellbeing. Working in this way with communities not only promotes mental wellbeing but also sustains it.

Similarly, CHWA recently published a [report](#) which contains recommendations on what needs to happen for creative practice and practitioners to be able to support mental health across the country. It recommends that all groups and stakeholders working in this field integrate co-production to make work realistic, effective, and embedded longer term.

Partnership working is critical in giving creativity and culture a place in long-term local strategic planning relating to health and wellbeing. Strong partnerships can also activate more local delivery via their own systems and structures. To better support the connection between cultural providers and health systems, we need to provide capacity to activate existing networks to engage with and/or be represented by culture and health.

## **6. How can we all improve support for people in crisis?**

Whilst fewer in number, there are a range of cultural organisations and programmes designed for and with patients in acute care settings. Organisations such as Hospital Rooms commission artworks for NHS mental health inpatient units across the UK. These support people in crisis through art's potential to provide joy and dignity and to stimulate and heal.

We need to make sure that the wide range of organisations who may be involved in responding to a crisis, including the NHS, voluntary and community sector, and wider public services, can coordinate effectively and have the right skills to ensure a person in crisis gets the best possible care and aftercare. To support the development of skills relating to crisis support, CHWA is currently developing a code of practice which outlines quality frameworks for creative practitioners in acute settings.

The Baring Foundation [report](#), *Creatively Minded and the NHS* gives an overview of participatory arts offered by the NHS for people with mental health problems. It advises that the role of Arts Coordinators in the NHS is key to improving support. Arts Coordinators are well placed to source and establish effective partnerships with relevant arts organisations that are based specifically on the local arts and mental health ecologies.

The examples throughout this consultation prove that creativity and culture make meaningful contributions to government policy agendas relating to mental health and wellbeing. We hope that the vital role of creativity and culture within this work is recognised in policy making and final Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan. The Arts Council would welcome further dialogue with The Department of Health and Social Care about this.

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