

Impact of Arts on Health

Arts and health initiatives are delivering real and measurable benefits across a wide range of priority areas for health, and can enable the Department and National Health Service to contribute to key wider Government initiatives. There is a wealth of good practice and a substantial evidence base.

Review of Arts and Health Working Group,
UK Department of Health, April 4, 2007.

Arts service users reported a number of benefits from their experiences of arts engagement. They experienced greater confidence, self-esteem and interest in life, particularly feeling more engaged and involved in general. They felt greater personal concern for health and well being, and felt more empowered to make choices in relation to health, as well as having greater capacity to cope with illness or infirmity.

Invest to Save: Arts in Health Evaluation Report, Manchester Metropolitan University Research, UK, 2007, Report for Department of Health and Arts Council England.

Arts Improve and Promote Health

Arts-based programs and activities and Creative Arts Therapies have been used as tools for improving and promoting health for more than a century in North America and many European countries. Arts and culture have been shown to:

- Lower costs and improve sustainability of health care systems; and
- Make substantial contributions to individual and community health.

Medical Treatment and Health Care Sustainability

Growing research and experience in other countries, and more recently in Canada, demonstrate that participation in arts activities has significant benefits for medical treatment and sustainability of health care systems, as it:

- Reduces use of pharmaceuticals and thus their costs and complications;
- Eases tension and fear during unpleasant or challenging medical procedures;
- Reduces the cost and completion time for many medical procedures and increases successful completion rates;
- Helps to manage persistent pain and other chronic health conditions, including mental health challenges;
- Reduces stress and burnout, and improves working conditions for health care workers;
- Improves communication between medical staff and patients, and among staff members.
- Contributes to insight and compassion on the part of health care professionals when arts are used in health care training.

In the United Kingdom, the arts have been employed in health care for many decades, demonstrating real and measurable benefits. A 2007 review of the UK experience confirmed the value of arts to health and renewed the commitment of the Department of Health to expanding their use.

In the United States, a major review of arts and health by The Joint Commission (the body that accredits American hospitals) and the Society for the Arts in Healthcare, released in September, 2009, found that half of American health care institutions now have arts programming, and 60% use their operating budgets to fund such programs. The review also found that the programs resulted in shorter hospital stays, reduced need for medications, and improved workplace satisfaction and employee retention.

Health Canada has identified 12 key determinants of health, at least eight of which (in bold print below) can be positively affected by the arts:

1. income and social status
2. **social support networks**
3. **education & literacy**
4. **employment/working conditions**
5. **social environments**
6. physical environments
7. **personal health practices & coping skills**
8. **healthy child development**
9. biology and genetics
10. **health services**
11. gender
12. culture

A Florida hospital slashed the time required to complete computerized tomography (CT) scans and echocardiograms (ECG) in children under the age of six from two to three hours down to 15 to 40 minutes. Using one Music Therapist instead of sedation reduced the cost of each procedure (for staff and medication costs) from \$354 per patient to \$16; and freed up for allocation to other urgent needs three hours each of a registered nurse, an RN anesthetist, and an anesthesiologist.

Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare & Florida State University,

Blair L. Sadler International Healing Arts Competition, Winner 2006

Individual and Community Health

Arts also contribute positively to maintaining or enhancing individual and community wellness, supporting at least eight of Health Canada's 12 key determinants of health, referred to opposite.

Participation in the arts, whether more passively as a spectator or more actively when engaged in creative expression, seems to activate known mental and physical mechanisms which reduce tensions, strengthen the immune system and protect against depression. Participation also widens social networks, reduces feelings of isolation and marginalization, giving a feeling of connection, or belonging to a group.

Overall, participation in arts-based activities and in creative expression has been seen to have stronger positive benefits for health than participation in many other types of activities, such as sports.

Contributions to individual and community health from participation in the arts include:

- Participation in the arts correlates with greater longevity and positive perceptions of one's health;
- Engaging in arts programs enables seniors to live independently longer, and reduces use of doctors, medications, and medical facilities while enhancing quality of life;
- Arts empower youth, especially youth-at-risk, to succeed in school and develop skills and relationships that contribute to success in later life (Health Canada finds that health status improves with level of education);
- Arts and Creative Arts Therapies provide avenues for healing for those who have suffered from trauma – war, other violence, neglect, accidents, natural disasters such as fires and hurricanes;
- Arts facilities, centres and programs are used in the UK and in the US to regenerate economically and socially depressed neighbourhoods;
- Arts activities provide vehicles to explore solutions to pressing social issues—addiction, drinking and driving, street racing, bullying, domestic violence, etc.

The effects of participating in the arts on specific health outcomes require ongoing evaluation, but evidence to-date is highly positive and globally recognized. Canada clearly has a lot to gain by investing in arts and health initiatives.