

# Status of Arts and Health in Canada

So I thought even when we have nothing left, there is always a song, there's always music, words and dance steps to bring us back to life, to bring us together and to provide hope. Art has the power to inspire, the power to heal, the power to transform, to rehabilitate, to bear witness, and to make us believe that there are better days ahead. . . Because art transforms despair and indifference into glimmers of hope and into action.

Governor General Michaëlle Jean, Art Matters forum, Calgary, Alberta, Jan. 25, 2010



[www.wabano.com](http://www.wabano.com)

Canada ranks third in the world behind the United States and Great Britain in neuroscience and research (in terms of impact of what is published) and, when it comes to work on music and the brain, Canada is the leader.

Dr. Rémi Quiron, Scientific Director, Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Montreal, Quebec, in Roundtable of Mental Health and the Arts, Canada's National Arts Centre, September 27, 2006

## A Flowering of Activity

There are effective and exciting arts and health initiatives underway from coast to coast to coast in Canada, and reports of an extensive flowering of activity since the first Canadian Forum on Arts and Health, held in 2005.

The examples below are merely illustrative of the diversity of activities across the country in hospitals, other care facilities, universities, theatres, concert halls, galleries, studios, community organizations, and on the streets of this country.

**In First Nations**, it has long been recognized that the strength of First Nations' culture is directly related to the health of individuals and their communities.

There is a resurgence in aboriginal culture underway across the country and incorporation of traditional practices in treatment programs for aboriginals. For example, the Wabano Centre offers "holistic, culturally-relevant health services" to Inuit, Métis and First Nations communities of Ottawa.

Some First Nations artists are also using contemporary as well as traditional art forms to address current issues. Wayne Curtis Clearsky uses hip hop and spoken word in his work with the Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association in Metro Vancouver.

**In Atlantic Canada**, Dalhousie University was the first medical school in Canada to create a Medical Humanities Program – HEALS. It focuses on Healing and Education through the Arts and Life-Skills, including Narrative Medicine programs, and medical student choirs.

The University of Prince Edward Island is the home of the Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing (AIRS) Research Environment. AIRS provides a virtual research environment for 65 scholars from different countries, and disciplines as disparate as psychology, computer science and audio engineering, to investigate subjects like the connections between singing and individual and community well-being.

The Alexander Society for Special Needs, based in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, uses creative arts programs to enhance the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of children who need special care. Artistic activities include storytelling, drama, movement, dance, music, painting, drawing and clay modelling.

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[www.touchedbyfire.ca](http://www.touchedbyfire.ca)

We wanted to support Touched By Fire for two key reasons. First, we believe deeply in the importance of supporting the arts in Canada. Second, this is an opportunity for Raymond James to support individuals and families who live with the many challenges surrounding mood disorders. Touched By Fire is a celebration of talented artists, but it is also a reminder to all of us, that there is hope and help for those affected by mood disorders.

Peter Kahnert, Senior Vice President,  
Raymond James (an international financial  
investment firm)

**In Quebec,** Montreal is home to Concordia University, which offers a Masters program in Creative Arts Therapies, with a Drama Therapy Option. Only four other countries offer such accredited Drama Therapy training. Across Canada there are seven institutions that offer degrees in music therapy; three offer degrees in art therapy, and other accredited institutions offer various diplomas and certificates.

McGill University has neuroscientists doing leading-edge research on music and the brain, including researcher and musician Daniel Levitin, author of the popular books: *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* and *The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature*.

The Montreal-based Art for Healing Foundation "is dedicated to bringing the healing power of art and art education to hospitals, hospices and shelters and to improving the welfare of . . . health care givers and patients." Since 2003, the Foundation has installed over 2,500 works of art in 31 Montreal area hospitals and centres. The Foundation also has supported professional art exhibitions in hospitals in Toronto, Ontario and St. John's, Newfoundland.

**In Ontario,** The Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto operates Learning Through the Arts and its outgrowth Living Through the Arts.

- Learning Through the Arts is an "arts-driven education program providing teachers with creative tools to engage all students in math, science, language arts and social studies." It is in 400 schools across Canada and 13 other countries, involving more than 100,000 students annually.
- Living Through the Arts' mandate is "uncovering individual and community potential by empowering through artistic self-expression and creativity."

The Workman Arts Project of Ontario (Workman Arts), was founded in 1988 as a professional arts company to support aspiring, emerging and established artists with mental illness and addiction issues and to promote greater understanding through film, theatre, visual arts, music and the literary arts. Workman operates in partnership with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Canada's largest mental health and addictions teaching hospital. Touched by Fire is a non-profit dedicated to the development and celebration of work by artists affected by mood disorders. It holds an annual show and sale and hosts a year-round online virtual gallery.

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Manitoba Artists in Health care is working to ensure that the creative arts are fully integrated into all hospitals, health care facilities and the community at large.

[www.mahmanitoba.ca](http://www.mahmanitoba.ca)  
Artist: Shari Johnston

(Painting) allowed me to live with the black times in my life. Art healed my life and I see the process go on in others.

Reg Knelson, homeless artist, paints at Wildrose Studio, at the Calgary Drop-in Centre



Mapping the Arts & Health 2006, An Inventory of Initiatives & Resources, Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

[www.affta.ab.ca/resources/Mapping.pdf](http://www.affta.ab.ca/resources/Mapping.pdf)

**In Manitoba.** Manitoba Artists in Healthcare (MAH) provides arts programming to CancerCare Manitoba, numerous hospitals and long-term care facilities. Individual musicians from MAH's Music to my Ears program play in high stress clinical areas, including chemotherapy, emergency, intensive care units, and palliative care; in patients' rooms; and throughout hospitals for the benefit of patients and their family members and to improve staff morale.

In 1986, at the Winnipeg Children's Hospital, the first therapeutic clown program was founded in Canada. There are now therapeutic clown programs in six provinces and a Canadian Association of Therapeutic Clowns (CATC), established in 2005. Therapeutic Clowns Canada, a non-profit foundation, was created in 1999 to help bring therapeutic clowning to all major pediatric facilities across the country. Having achieved its mandate to found programs from coast to coast, the Foundation transferred its resources to CATC and disbanded in 2007.

**In Saskatchewan,** Common Weal Community Arts, Inc. is a provincial organization that links professional artists with communities to promote cultural identity, social justice, and long-term positive social change. By linking professional artists with communities to engage in collaborative arts projects, Common Weal seeks to empower people, and their communities, to tell their stories in their own voices.

A National Film Board of Canada film, *A Year at Sherbrooke* (2009), documents the artist-in-residence work of two artists at Sherbrooke Community Centre, a long-term care facility in Saskatoon. The film explores how creativity can transform people's lives.

**In Alberta,** the Friends of University Hospitals in Edmonton, operates the McMullen Gallery, a permanent in-hospital public art space with rotating exhibits for the enjoyment of patients, their families, and hospital staff. The Gallery also sponsors free drop-in art workshops run by professional artists. Friends also runs Artists on the Wards, a bedside arts program that brings visual artists, writers, and musicians to the patients to support them in creative activities to lessen the emotional distress, boredom and physical discomfort patients often feel during hospitalization.

The Creative Arts / Integrative Therapies Research Group is part of the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Calgary. Founded in 1998, the centre publishes extensively on the ways arts-based activities and approaches and Creative Arts Therapies are used to promote healing, health, and quality of life.

## Status of Arts and Health in Canada

Provincially, the BC Arts Council has funded arts and health projects, under the Community Arts Development Program. The Coastal Health Authority in BC has also funded arts and health pilot programs under its SMART Fund.

Federally, the Canada Council has supported arts and health projects through the Artists and Community Collaboration Program, and Canadian Heritage has funded multi-cultural programs with health components.



[www.okanaganinstitute.com/artscare/index.php](http://www.okanaganinstitute.com/artscare/index.php)

I believe the greatest potential for the arts lies in the area of prevention and health promotion. Theatre work develops skills and abilities in people and awareness in the community that can influence behavior. Behavior changes can have a huge impact on community health.

Andrew Burton, Founder of Street Spirits, Prince George, B.C.

**In British Columbia**, a hot bed of arts activities to promote individual and community health, Headlines Theatre and TheatreWorks use drama-based techniques to address pressing social issues, such as domestic violence, street racing, poverty and addictions. Miscellaneous Productions uses theatre techniques to assist youth in trouble with the law and young crime victims.

A coalition of community, health and recreation groups in Vancouver and on the North Shore conducted a three year community-based pilot, The Arts, Health and Seniors Project: Healthy Aging Through the Arts, using arts to support vulnerable seniors, dealing with chronic conditions.

Vancouver-based Health Arts Society is a professional arts organization serving audiences in care. Since 2006, its ArtsWay program has delivered over 2,500 live music and spoken word events across British Columbia. See a Knowledge Network video segment on ArtsWay at <http://healtharts.org/images/Prescription-Music.wmv/>

### Physicians and the Arts

There is growing recognition among physicians in Canada of the powerful connections among arts and healing and health, not only for their patients, but also for their own well-being. Dalhousie's Medical Humanities Program includes Music-in-Medicine which actively involves medical students with professional musicians and the broader community. Medical schools at Queens University, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the University of Alberta have chapters in association with the Gold Humanism Foundation which involve students in organizing humanism in medicine projects each year.

In 2008, the Canadian Medical Association supported the establishment of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in Medicine Educational Interest Group. Their website provides Canadian medical schools with a venue to describe their arts-related, humanities, and social science activities. The *Canadian Medical Association Journal* includes a humanities column of artwork, reviews, poetry and prose offering reflections on illness, suffering, and caring. *ARS Medica* is a medical literary journal that publishes articles on the interface between arts and medicine. The College of Family Physicians of Canada has a database of stories on family medicine written by family physicians and patients.

In 2010, the theme of the Canadian Conference on Medical Education was "White Coat, Warm Heart: Integrating Humanism and Science."

# Status of Arts and Health in Canada

The Canadian Institutes for Health Research have shown willingness to look at arts and health proposals under one of their four themes, “social, cultural, environmental and population health”, and as part of their multidisciplinary research category.

I think having an Arts and Health Network for Canada is exactly what we need right now to help share information and best practices for arts and healing across Canada.

The arts are vital to the health and well-being of all Canadians and a network can help strengthen our resources and capacities for making great change in our communities.

Nicole Arends,  
Community Programs Manager,  
Living Through the Arts,  
The Royal Conservatory of Music, Toronto.



[www.artforhealingfoundation.org](http://www.artforhealingfoundation.org)

## Nonetheless, Canada is Dramatically Behind

Despite these recent advances, when compared with initiatives in the United Kingdom, the United States and other western countries, it is evident that Canada is well behind in benefiting from the contributions that arts can make to health and well-being—10 to 40 years behind.

## The Challenges in Canada

While arts and health activities in British Columbia and across Canada seem to be growing, they are still **little recognized** and their important contributions are not yet well known or appreciated.

As a result, both practitioners and researchers in arts and health are often **working in isolation**, without the knowledge and support from others doing similar work that could enhance their efforts. **Nor do most have the funding they need** to maintain their efforts on a consistent basis, or to evaluate their work and advance it. There is as yet no program in Canada that explicitly recognizes and funds arts and health initiatives.

Further challenges to the growth of arts and health in BC and Canada include:

- No one seems to have an accurate, comprehensive picture of the current types and level of activity across this country.
- Practitioners are often unaware of others who share their interests. For example, dialogues in British Columbia in 2006 and 2008 revealed that most participants who came to those meetings knew 25% or less of the people in the room, even where everyone lived in the same small city.
- There is very little training available in Canada, other than in Creative Arts Therapies, that is appropriate for those wishing to be active in arts-based approaches in medical treatment and in health promotion. Canadians have to travel to the United Kingdom, to the United States, or other countries for training and often do not return.
- There are no generally accepted methods in Canada for evaluating the health impacts of arts-based activities and programs or for defining best practices.
- Governments across Canada need a way to recognize the multi-disciplinary and integrative nature of arts and health and to create programs or mechanisms to fund such activities across disciplinary, ministerial and jurisdictional lines.

## The Opportunity in Canada

Experience in Canada is confirming what research and experience around the world has been demonstrating for many decades, that **investment and activity in Canadian arts and culture can have significant and far reaching positive impacts on personal and community health.**