

Association of Directors of Public Health and  
All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing

# Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing Report

Director of Public Health Briefing – July 2017

## Key Messages:

- **The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Arts, Health and Wellbeing has undertaken a major inquiry into the role of the arts in health and wellbeing**
- **The new APPG report, *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*, contains compelling evidence of ways in which arts engagement can improve the public's health.**
- **This includes helping with self-management, tackling obesogenic environments, improving mental health, promoting healthier ageing and tackling health inequalities.**

## Background

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Arts, Health and Wellbeing has undertaken a major inquiry into the role of the arts in health and wellbeing, to which the Association of Directors of Public Health, Public Health England and the Royal Society for Public Health have contributed. The associated report – *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* – contains strong evidence that creative and cultural activities can have a positive impact on health and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> This briefing sets out some of the findings and focuses on how arts and culture can help to tackle key public health challenges.

## Meeting Public Health Challenges

The APPG on Arts, Health and Wellbeing is part of a growing movement advancing the 'transformation of the health and care system from a hospital-centred and illness-based system to a person-centred and health-based system'.<sup>2</sup> *Creative Health* details various ways in which arts can enable people to enjoy better health and quality of life:

- **Chronic and long-term conditions:** Arts engagement can help with the self-management of chronic and long-term conditions. For example, there is evidence that art therapies diminish the physical and psychological suffering of cancer and the side effects of its treatment.<sup>3</sup> Studies have found that listening to music has beneficial effects on people with cardiovascular disease.<sup>4</sup> Singing has been shown to alleviate chronic respiratory conditions and cystic fibrosis.<sup>5</sup> The arts – including the culinary arts – have a positive impact on diabetes and its management.<sup>6</sup>
- **Obesogenic environments:** The participatory arts have a contribution to make to overcoming childhood obesity,<sup>7</sup> and the natural and built environments are crucial to health creation, as recognised by Newcastle City Council's decision to invest £1m of anti-obesity funding from the public health budget in the city's parks.<sup>8</sup>

3 See Bradt, J., Dileo, C., Grocke, D. & Magill, L. (2011). Music Interventions for Improving Psychological and Physical Outcomes in Cancer Patients. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews; Bradt, J., Shim, M. & Goodill, S. W. (2015). Dance/Movement Therapy for Improving Psychological and Physical Outcomes in Cancer Patients. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews; and Walker, J. Holm Hansen, C., Martin, P., Symeonides, S., Ramessur, R., et al. Prevalence, Associations, and Adequacy of Treatment of Major Depression in Patients with Cancer: A cross-sectional analysis of routinely collected clinical data. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 1 (5), pp. 343–50.

4 Bradt, J., Dileo, C. & Potvin, N. (2013). Music for Stress and Anxiety Reduction in Coronary Heart Disease Patients. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews.

5 See Clift, S., Skingley, A., Page, S., Stephens, L., Hurley, S., et al. (2017). *Singing for Better Breathing: Findings from the Lambeth and Southwark Singing and COPD Project*. Canterbury: Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health; and Irons, J. Y., Petocz, P., Kenny, D. T. & Chang, A. B. (2014). *Singing as an Adjunct Therapy for Children and Adults with Cystic Fibrosis*. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews.

6 Chapatti and Chat was a cookery and creative writing project developed by Oldham Council's arts development team between 2015 and 2016, which aimed to raise awareness about type 2 diabetes, particularly among South Asian families: [www.artshandwellbeing.org.uk/case-studies/chapatti-chat](http://www.artshandwellbeing.org.uk/case-studies/chapatti-chat). For a consideration of the management of type 1 diabetes in young people, see the film *I'm Controlling It!* at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OeXYIJeU\\_c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OeXYIJeU_c)

7 Cuyppers, K., De Ridder, K., Kvaloy, K., Skjei Knudtsen, M., Krokstad, S., et al. (2012). Leisure Time Activities in Adolescence in the Presence of Susceptibility Genes for Obesity: Risk or resilience against overweight in adulthood? The HUNT study. *BMC Public Health*, 12 (820).

8 Ungoed-Thomas, J. (26 February 2017). Newcastle Uses Public Health Cash to Save City Parks. *The Sunday Times*.

1 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing. (2017). *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* is available at: [artshandwellbeing.org.uk/appg/inquiry](http://artshandwellbeing.org.uk/appg/inquiry)

2 Crisp, N., Stuckler, D., Horton, R., Adebawale, V., Bailey, S., et al. (7 October 2016). Manifesto for a Healthy and Health-creating Society. *The Lancet*, p. 1.

- **Mental health:** There is ample evidence that the arts help to overcome mental health problems. Arts-on-prescription programmes can give rise to significant reductions in anxiety, depression and stress.<sup>9</sup> One such programme in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire showed that GP consultation rates dropped by 37 percent and hospital admissions by 27 percent, representing a saving of £216 per patient.<sup>10</sup> The Alchemy Project – a co-production between a dance company and the early intervention in psychosis team at South London and Maudsley NHS Trust – found that dancing alleviated the symptoms of mental ill health and the effects of medication while rebalancing the mind–body relationship.<sup>11</sup>
- **Ageing well:** There is evidence that the arts have a part to play in healthy ageing. For example, dance helps to prevent falls in older adults, with classes around the country proving both popular and effective.<sup>12</sup> Arts engagement can boost brain function and improve the recall of personal memories; it can also enhance the quality of life of people with dementia and their carers. In dementia care, colour, reflection and shadow can have an impact on mood and lead to better nutrition, hydration and engagement.
- **Health inequalities:** Engagement with the arts can play a role in mitigating health inequalities. Evidence has shown that engagement with the arts can influence maternal nutrition, perinatal mental health and childhood development; shape educational and employment opportunities and tackle chronic distress; enable self-expression and empowerment and help to overcome social isolation; and prevent illness and infirmity from developing or worsening.

### Recommendations Arising from the APPG's Inquiry

*Creative Health* makes a series of recommendations for action (please note that these are recommendations of the APPG and not the Association of Directors of Public Health). Two of these explicitly refer to public health:

- At board or strategic level, in NHS England, Public Health England and each clinical commissioning group, NHS trust, local authority and health and wellbeing board, an individual should be designated to take responsibility for the pursuit of institutional policy for arts, health and wellbeing.
- The education of clinicians, public health specialists and other health and care professionals should include accredited modules on the evidence base and practical use of the arts for health and wellbeing outcomes.

### Information and Contact Details

The APPG on Arts, Health and Wellbeing is chaired by Rt Hon. Ed Vaizey MP and Rt Hon. Lord Howarth of Newport CBE, and the secretariat is provided by the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing. *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* was researched and drafted by Dr Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt at King's College London.

For more information about anything in this briefing or for a copy of the report, contact Alexandra Coulter: [coultera@parliament.uk](mailto:coultera@parliament.uk)

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<sup>9</sup> Potter, S. (2015). *Arts on Prescription 2010–12*. Cambridge: Arts & Minds.

<sup>10</sup> Opher, S. (2011). *Cost-benefit Evaluation of Artlift 2009–2012: Summary*. Gloucester: Gloucestershire County Council and NHS Gloucestershire.

<sup>11</sup> The Alchemy Project: [www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/case-studies/alchemy-project](http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/case-studies/alchemy-project)

<sup>12</sup> A research paper by Public Health Leeds, Yorkshire Dance and the University of Leeds will be published in 2017.