

What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being in the WHO European Region?



Performing
arts

Arts interventions, such as singing in a choir to improve chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, are considered non-invasive, low-risk treatment options and are increasingly being used by Member States to supplement more traditional biomedical treatments.

The Health Evidence Network (HEN) synthesis report on arts and health, which will be **launched on 11 November 2019**, maps the global academic literature on this subject in both English and Russian. It references **over 900 publications**, including **200 reviews** covering **over 3000 further studies**. As such, the report represents the most comprehensive evidence review of arts and health to date.



Visual arts,
design and craft

The findings

The report finds evidence of the contribution of the arts to the **promotion** of good health and the **prevention** of a range of mental and physical health conditions, as well as the **treatment** or **management** of acute and chronic conditions arising across the life-course. The arts can be cost-effective solutions since they can frequently draw on existing assets or resources, although more research is needed into the health economics of this field.

The report also finds that the arts may help in providing multisectoral, holistic and integrated people-centred care, addressing complex challenges for which there are no current health-care solutions. As such, the arts could help countries reach the integrated targets of key global frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Thirteenth WHO General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, which aim to increase human capital, reduce inequity and promote multisectoral action for health and well-being.

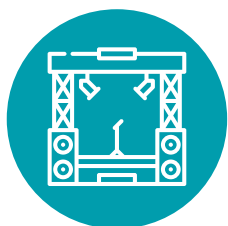


Literature

Prevention and promotion

The arts may:

- affect the social determinants of health (e.g. developing social cohesion and reducing social inequalities and inequities);
- support child development (e.g. enhancing mother–infant bonding and supporting speech and language acquisition);
- encourage health-promoting behaviours (e.g. through promoting healthy living or encouraging engagement with health care);
- help to prevent ill health (including enhancing well-being and reducing the impact of trauma or the risk of cognitive decline); and
- support caregiving (including enhancing our understanding of health and improving clinical skills).



Culture



Online, digital and
electronic arts

Management and treatment

The arts may:

- help people experiencing mental illness at all stages of the life-course (e.g. by supporting recovery from perinatal mental illness and after trauma and abuse);
- support care for people with acute conditions (e.g. by improving the experience of and outcomes in care for hospital inpatients and individuals in intensive care);
- support people with neurological disorders (including autism, cerebral palsy, stroke, degenerative neurological disorders and dementias);
- assist in the treatment of noncommunicable diseases (including cancer, lung disease, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases); and
- support end-of-life care (including palliative care and bereavement).



What the HEN report will consider

The evidence synthesized in the report provides suggestions for integrating the culture, social care and health sectors to support health and well-being throughout the life course.

Acknowledging the growing evidence base for the role of the arts in improving health and well-being, the HEN report:

- highlights arts interventions for which there is particularly promising evidence;
- shares knowledge and practice from the WHO European Region and around the world using case studies; and
- identifies areas within the arts and health where further research is still needed.

Recognizing the added health value of engagement with the arts, the HEN report:

- examines the health benefits of ensuring affordable and accessible provision of art to everyone across the life course;
- considers the benefits for arts and cultural organizations of making health and well-being an integral and strategic part of their work; and
- promotes public awareness of the potential health benefits of engaging with the arts.

Noting the cross-sectoral nature of the arts and health fields, the HEN report:

- reviews structures and mechanisms for collaboration between the culture, social care and health sectors, including co-financing between sectors;
- examines referral mechanisms from health and social care to community arts programmes (such as social prescribing schemes); and
- considers evidence for the benefit of including arts and humanities within the training of health care professionals.

Evidence for health and well-being in context

The WHO Regional Office for Europe and its Member States recognize the importance of culture in shaping health and well-being throughout the life course. Operating under the Evidence for Health and Well-being in Context initiative, the Cultural Contexts of Health and Well-being (CCH) project has been established as a cross-cutting initiative within the Regional Office and sets out to take a more systematic approach to research into how culture affects perceptions, access and experiences of health and well-being. By supplementing quantitative data with qualitative studies from the social sciences and broader health humanities, the CCH project aims to enhance our understanding of people's needs, values, perceptions and experience of the world around them in order to improve the health and well-being of all. The HEN report on arts and health was developed as part of this work. For more information, please visit: www.euro.who.int/en/cch

