



## National Centre for Creative Health Briefing – February 2022

### Embedding Creative Health in health and social care systems - A Creative Health Review

The mission of the National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH) is to advance good practice and research, inform policy and promote collaboration, helping foster the conditions for Creative Health to be integral to health and social care and wider systems. We have therefore welcomed the move towards greater integration as set out in the Health and Care Bill, which provides an opportunity to embed Creative Health at a system level through the ICS. During debates around the Bill to date, NCCH Chair, Lord Howarth of Newport, has advocated for further articulation of the role of Creative Health and non-clinical providers in health and social care. As the Bill enters report stage, we propose the addition of a clause that specifically recognises the value of Creative Health and commits the Secretary of State to a review which will consider the benefits of the approach and identify the resources and actions necessary to fully realise its potential.

**Details of the proposed new clause can be viewed here as amendment 114**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3022/stages/16122/amendments/91645>

Creative Health incorporates non-clinical approaches to health and the use of cultural, creative, natural and community assets (including artists, arts organisations, libraries, museums, heritage sites, green and blue spaces such as parks and coastlines, exercise-related assets and legal/debt advice services). Supported by a strong evidence base, we believe Creative Health is integral to improving population health and tackling enduring health inequalities and will contribute significantly to the government's agenda around levelling up and joined-up care. To make the most of this opportunity, it is vital that we establish the conditions for Creative Health to be fully and sustainably embedded into the healthcare system, and that this is reflected in legislation and policy.

### The benefits of Creative Health

- **There is a strong-evidence base for the use Creative Health in prevention, health promotion, and the management and treatment of disease**

There is strong evidence for the benefits of Creative Health. The '[Creative Health](#)' report produced by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing presents over 1000 studies demonstrating the ways in which engagement with the arts can contribute to health. Evidence has been synthesised in a recent WHO (Europe) review '[What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being](#)', which collates studies on the use of the arts in prevention, health promotion, and the management and treatment of disease. The case for the [positive health impacts of natural, green and blue spaces](#) is similarly well understood.

- **Creative Health approaches are effective for a broad range of physical and mental health conditions, including the NHSE key clinical areas of health inequalities**

Creative Health can be used for the prevention, treatment and management of conditions across the life course. These range from arts therapies for people with severe mental illness, the use of dance



## National Centre for Creative Health Briefing – February 2022

to improve balance, reduce frailty and prevent falls in the elderly, and the use of music to reduce blood pressure for people with cardiovascular disease. Further evidence has been provided to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in an [evidence summary of the role of arts in improving health and wellbeing](#), focusing on physical and mental health, youth development and social outcomes.

For example,

- [Melodies for Mums](#), part of the £2m Wellcome funded SHAPER Programme led by King's College London, provides singing and music sessions for mothers with postnatal depression and their babies in community Children's Centres, reaching over 300 mothers in Lambeth and Southwark. Delivered by [Breathe Arts Health Research](#), it tackles a mental health condition for which there are currently no adequate solutions due to low uptake of medication and therapy in this population. It has been found to be a good way to engage mothers from minority backgrounds who are less likely to seek professional support for their mental health post-birth. The wider research programme looks at how to upscale successful interventions such as these and embed them sustainably into clinical pathways.
- The [Singing for Health Network](#) has collated evidence around the benefits of singing for respiratory health (among other health benefits). Additionally, the East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust alongside the Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG Connect for Health social prescribing service has also been using singing to help long Covid patients improve their breath control. They have found that singing in groups not only supports breathing but also tackles social isolation and enables patients to support each other in managing the condition.
- Creative practitioners contributed greatly to supporting mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19. [Research](#) found that spending time on creative activities during the pandemic could have a positive impact on depression, anxiety and life satisfaction. A report by the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance '[How creativity and culture is supporting shielding and vulnerable people at home during covid-19](#)' features 50 case studies of arts, health and heritage organisations adapting their practices to support the mental health and wellbeing of those most affected by loneliness and isolation.

Creative Health is a holistic, patient-centred approach which, in addition to improving quality of life, can reduce reliance on healthcare services. This means it can be particularly beneficial for people with complex or long-term needs.

- **Creative Health can be applied effectively in social care settings**

The recent white paper on health and social care integration calls for joined-up care at place level and Creative Health has much to offer in this regard.



## National Centre for Creative Health Briefing – February 2022

For example, [Music for Dementia](#) provides a wealth of evidence and case studies for the use of music to enhance the quality of life of people living with dementia and their carers.

Those providing care can also need support with mental health and wellbeing, and this has been particularly so during COVID-19. Kingston Carers' Network (KCN) supports adult and young carers who provide unpaid care to relatives or friends with illness, disabilities or other support needs. Recognising the positive benefits of the arts on mental health, KCN is working with [Rosetta Life](#) to develop a range of arts activities including poetry, dance, art, photography and song-writing, as part of the [HeArt of Care programme](#).

### Creative Health, levelling up and reducing health inequalities

- **Significant health inequalities exist geographically, between thriving and deprived areas, and for particular populations and vulnerable groups. These inequalities impact individual life expectancy and quality of life, and place considerable burden on the NHS.**
- **Creative Health tackles inequalities at community or place level, addressing the wider social determinants of health, increasing social capital and building relationships and trust.**

Social, economic and health inequalities are intrinsically linked. The impact of the social determinants of health and widening gap in healthy life expectancy, exemplified and exacerbated by the pandemic, has been well demonstrated through the work of Prof. Sir Michael Marmot and the [Institute of Health Equity](#). It has been estimated that [socio-economic inequality costs the NHS £4.8 billion a year in hospital costs](#). The white paper on [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#) reports that during COVID-19, waiting lists in healthcare have increased by 55% in the most deprived 20% of areas, compared to 36% in the most affluent areas. Productivity is linked to health, and a [recent report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for 'Left Behind' Neighbourhoods](#) estimated that eradicating health inequalities in these areas could generate an additional £2.5bn a year in Gross Value Added.

Creative activities can mitigate the detrimental impact of stressful environments and reverse the negative health impacts of living or growing up in disadvantaged conditions. The [WHO scoping review](#) provides evidence that engaging in the arts can improve social cohesion, reduce isolation and loneliness and lead to a reduction in social inequalities when targeted in the most deprived areas. The arts can also be used to make positive changes to the built environment and to build skills and support to improve social mobility.

In response to the APPGAHW Report '[Creative Health](#)' Prof. Sir Michael Marmot has suggested that commissioners consider creative approaches in order to reduce inequalities;

*"It provides a substantial body of evidence showing how the arts, enriching the mind through creative and cultural activity, can mitigate the negative effects of social disadvantage. Creative Health should be studied by all those commissioning services."*



## National Centre for Creative Health Briefing – February 2022

At grassroots level, communities are using creative approaches to improve their local area and health outcomes. [East Marsh United](#), is a community group based in Grimsby, working in an area with multiple indicators of deprivation, and challenges related to housing, drugs, and poverty.

*“Our arts programme, funded by Creative Civic Change, is one of East Marsh United's key projects designed to nurture change and empower the community. Through grassroots initiatives; immersive arts days, creative writing workshops, community singing, arts and craft and outdoor activity in our local park, we want to encourage our community to use creative tools to come together, learn and flourish.”*

- **Incorporating Creative Health into place-based strategies has positive health impacts – This should be reflected in ICS and system-level decision-making**

Research by the [MARCH Network](#) tells us that people living in areas of higher deprivation are less likely to engage in community activities, but when they do, they experience more benefits to mental health than people in more affluent areas. Therefore widening access to community-based cultural activities can have positive population health impacts. Creativity can be used to engage local residents to co-produce initiatives that will improve their area, leading to a sense of ownership and increased ‘pride of place’, a key target of the levelling up agenda.

In Northumberland, Arts Council's [Creative People and Places 'bait'](#) programme has increased participation in the arts in those groups least likely to engage, delivering 193 projects (16,000 hours of activities) with 140,000 known engagements and 1.5m reached digitally. 72% of participants report an improved sense of wellbeing. Northumberland County Council, building on this learning, has placed Creative Health at the centre of its regeneration programme for the town of Blyth.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority's [Great Place action research programme](#) explored and developed the role of creativity and culture in improving health and reducing inequalities across the life course, in improving access and inclusion for all, and aimed to inform new approaches to regenerating towns and high streets.

Programme Manager Julie McCarthy said;

*“What we've achieved is to demonstrate that culture and creativity contribute to dynamic and healthy communities and can help address social and health inequalities. But culture isn't just a tool for change, it shapes our places, develops us as humans and is an essential part of the life force of the city region.”*

Local authorities are increasingly incorporating Creative Health into cross-sectoral strategies, strengthened by the provision of a Creative Health lead in areas such as Greater Manchester. This approach should be reflected within the ICS to embed Creative Health into healthcare decision-making at system-level.



## National Centre for Creative Health Briefing – February 2022

- **Creative activities can be used to express the lived experience of individuals and facilitate the co-production of services which better serve patients and communities.**

Co-produced services better meet the needs of specific groups, as well as fostering new skills and confidence in those who participate. Creative approaches are often used to facilitate this process. An example is London based [Outside Edge Theatre Company](#), which focuses on improving the lives of those affected by addiction and substance misuse.

On being awarded The Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance's Collective Power Award (2021), Artistic Director Matt Steinberg said;

*"Our co-production consultations helped to disintegrate the barriers between our creative recovery support group participants, freelance artist facilitators, management team and Trustees, because we focused on the holistic needs of our entire community and came up with solutions collectively that were grounded in our shared enjoyment of cultural activities and a shared belief in the power of lived experience to support recovery. The result of this was that our staff began to attend more sessions as participants and our participants began to lead more peer-support sessions as volunteers."*

- **Working with creative and community providers is essential to tackle health inequalities. Adequate and accessible support needs to be made available to these on the ground providers.**

The NHS Long-Term plan recognises the value of working closely with local government and voluntary sector partners to reduce health inequalities, and the ICS structure set out in the Health and Care Bill provides an opportunity for the NHS to do just that. In order for this to be successful, the value of Creative Health must be appreciated by senior leaders and systems established to facilitate sustainable long-term partnerships between commissioners and creative and community providers.

### Creative Health through Social Prescribing

- **Social prescribing and green social prescribing have been recognised as effective routes to improving health and have benefited from investment. This work should be scaled-up and expanded, with the conditions established to fully support providers of Creative Health**

Social prescribing, whereby patients are referred to community-based activities via a link worker, opens opportunities for people to improve their health and wellbeing through non-clinical avenues, and is a common route to Creative Health activities. The approach can be particularly relevant for patients with long-term conditions, complex needs, mental health conditions, or experiencing loneliness.

Social prescribing and engagement in non-clinical activities can empower individuals to take control of their own health. [Artlift](#) in Gloucestershire is a creative health charity working with people with mental health challenges, chronic pain and cancer. It has a long-standing Arts on Prescription



## National Centre for Creative Health Briefing – February 2022

programme, which has demonstrated positive health outcomes including in anxiety, depression and wellbeing.

One participant explains;

*"It started as just a concrete plan in my week, something I knew I had to get up and out for. Then my confidence in my creativity grew and my confidence that I could cope with my life grew. I realised that the only person judging me so harshly was me, and being gently encouraged to "have a go" by a wonderful Artlift artist and a supportive group was a great vehicle for letting go of that."*

Economic analysis indicates that social prescribing is cost-effective. Artlift has shown a 37% reduction in GP consultation rates and a social return on investment of between £4 and £11 for every £1 invested. Other cost-analysis studies have shown savings through reductions in use of healthcare services, as well as social return on investment due to wider social effects.

This has been recognised in the NHS Long Term Plan, as part of its comprehensive model of personalised care, which commits to expanding the use of social prescribing, aiming to refer over 900,000 people to social prescribing schemes by 2023/24. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) invested an initial £5m to establish the [National Academy for Social Prescribing](#) (NASP) to further advance its use, and committed an additional £6m for the next two years. A £5.77m project to increase the use of [green social prescribing](#) services, utilising natural assets to improve health, has also been initiated.

A specific 'Thriving Communities Fund' has been established through NASP to support partnerships including arts, heritage, creativity and culture to increase social connectedness and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. One recipient is [Green Close](#), a small third sector arts organisation which used this funding to further its work on mental wellbeing and resilience in partnership with Lancashire and South Cumbria (NHS) Foundation Trust. Working with other community partners the programme combined arts, nature and movement to improve access to mental health support services for rural communities and make the benefits of the natural environment accessible for those living in urban deprived areas. It was noted by the programme leaders that more sustainable funding mechanisms would help initiatives such as this fulfil their potential;

*"In areas of low cultural provision, small-scale and artist-led organisations often have the imagination and commitment to help transform the places where they live and work.... The North West has a significant amount of social deprivation and related health inequalities, which urgently need addressing through the levelling up agenda. An extension of the Thriving Communities funding for a sustained period of time (3-5 years) would significantly help to address cultural inequalities and provide positive pathways for locally produced change, enabling places to grow and flourish."*





## National Centre for Creative Health Briefing – February 2022

### Embedding Creative Health

- **It is vital that we establish the conditions for Creative Health to be fully and sustainably embedded into the healthcare system, and that this is reflected in legislation and policy**

A huge range of Creative Health assets operate at a neighbourhood, community or place level to provide innovative initiatives which meet the specific needs of their populations and improve health outcomes. Projects often rely on small-scale short-term funding and the complexities of local ecosystems and the commissioning process present challenges to the development of sustainable partnerships.

The Health and Care Bill provides the opportunity for greater integration of these non-clinical providers into the healthcare system. However, the system is not currently set up to deliver such strategies at scale.

The [National Centre for Creative Health](#), working with NHS England and NHS Improvement and four ICS pilot sites (Gloucestershire; West Yorkshire; Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin; and Suffolk and North East Essex) has started to develop models to support both commissioners and providers to develop successful and sustainable partnerships. Future research with University College London will further enhance our understanding of how Creative Health assets can be mobilised and scaled-up effectively, and how partnerships at a system level could be financed and sustained in the long-term.

A dedicated review of the role of Creative Health will ensure that its value is understood across the health and social care sector, and that appropriate conditions are established to ensure that its potential is fully realised.

### Further Resources

For further information please contact Hannah Waterson, NCCH Research and Policy Manager at [research@ncch.org.uk](mailto:research@ncch.org.uk). We will be happy to help with any extra information you require.

The full Creative Health report, produced as a result of an inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing can be found here:

[https://ncch.org.uk/uploads/Creative\\_Health\\_Inquiry\\_Report\\_2017\\_-\\_Second\\_Edition.pdf](https://ncch.org.uk/uploads/Creative_Health_Inquiry_Report_2017_-_Second_Edition.pdf)