

Creating Our Future: health and wellbeing

Wellbeing is a policy consideration growing in currency internationally, and Australians increasingly recognise the positive impact of arts and creativity on our wellbeing. The arts can save expenditure and provide returns on investment across health services and social care, helping meet major challenges such as ageing, loneliness, chronic conditions and mental health.

Arts and creativity can meet pressing challenges to our nation's health and wellbeing

The arts make our individual lives better and build stronger and more cohesive communities. The arts have been shown to improve quality of life in myriad ways, including: increasing mental wellbeing;⁸⁰ addressing loneliness, mental health and ageing;⁸¹ decreasing anxiety and depression; increasing wellbeing and social inclusion;⁸² positive wellbeing impacts for young people;⁸³ and treating PTSD and helping communities recover from trauma.⁸⁴

The creative arts and health sectors have significant and growing connections, covering primary care, acute and chronic hospital care, rehabilitation, respite care and general wellbeing. Techniques are used across art forms, including visual arts, music, dance and drama.⁸⁵

The arts can save future expenditure across health services and social care. In the UK doctors are literally prescribing arts experiences, providing up to £11 return on investment for every £1 invested, as well as employment and income for artists.⁸⁶

Footnote numbers correspond to those in the full *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey 2019 Report*.

80 Davies et al. 2015, 'The art of being mentally healthy: a study to quantify the relationship between recreational arts engagement and mental well-being in the general population.' *BMC Public Health* (16)15.

81 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts 2017, *Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*.

82 First reported in: Slawson N 2017, 'It's time to recognise the contribution arts can make to health and wellbeing,' *The Guardian*, 11 October 2017.

83 Patternmakers 2017, *ATYP Impact Evaluation*.

84 Baker et al. 2017, 'A systematic review of the efficacy of creative arts therapies in the treatment of adults with PTSD,' *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 10(6), 643–651, 2018.

85 For example, see Putland C 2012, *Arts and Health – A guide to the evidence, Background document prepared for the Institute for Creative Health Australia*; Fenner P, Rumbold B, Rumbold J, Robinson P, Harpur S 2012, *Is there compelling evidence for using the arts in healthcare? Health policy evidence brief*, Deeble Institute, Australian Healthcare and Hospitals' Association; and the National Arts and Health Framework 2014, Commonwealth Government, available at www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au

86 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts 2017, *Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*.

Australians increasingly recognise the impact of arts and creativity on our wellbeing

Results of the National Arts Participation Survey show that the proportion of Australians who agree that arts and creativity have a 'big' or 'very big' impact on **our sense of wellbeing and happiness** has increased 11 percentage points since 2016 (up to 56%),⁸⁷ as has the proportion of Australians who agree **the arts help us deal with stress, anxiety or depression** (up to 56%).

“I suffer from mental illness, when I'm making I'm outside of my own thoughts, I have something to look forward to. I'm being creative, I'm relaxed, so therapeutic.”

Focus group participant

Connection and wellbeing are two of the main drivers of arts attendance. More than four in ten Australians attend **to socialise and connect with others** (41%); and one in four attend **to improve their wellbeing** (25%). Compared to Australians overall, respondents with disability and respondents in remote areas are more likely to attend the arts specifically to improve their wellbeing.

Connection and wellbeing are also key benefits reported by Australians who attend arts events focused on their cultural background or community. More than half benefit from **spending time with family and/or friends** (51%, including 47% of CALD respondents) and four in ten benefit from **getting to know people in the community** (39%, including 41% of CALD respondents). One in three Australians who attend arts events to engage with their cultural background or community report **improved health and wellbeing** as a benefit (33%), particularly younger generations in CALD communities.

When it comes to public and private investment in the arts, more than half of Australians think funding should ensure that **arts and creative experiences are available to support people's health and wellbeing** (55% ranked this in their top three investment priorities).

⁸⁷ For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous *National Arts Participation Survey* report, *Connecting Australians*.

As well as enhancing social connections, arts activities such as music and dance have a demonstrable impact on quality of life as people age by enhancing memory, movement and mood, and by alleviating diseases and conditions of ageing such as Alzheimer's and dementia.⁸⁸ Many Australian museums and galleries run arts and craft programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of ageing Australians.⁸⁹ With an ageing population, arts can play an increasingly valuable role in supporting our national wellbeing.

In the months that followed the 2019 National Arts Participation Survey, Australia faced a devastating summer of bushfires and the momentous disruption, isolation and anxiety wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Arts and creativity have played an invaluable role in supporting the wellbeing of Australians during this unprecedented time, including relief concerts that united Australians while raising both spirits and funds.

While necessary distancing measures kept us away from theatres, galleries and venues, many Australians increased their online arts engagement.⁹⁰ Supporting wellbeing has been a key motivator for audiences participating in the arts online during COVID-19. Audiences who have engaged in online activities also report achieving a sense of connection during the pandemic – online arts have enabled Australians to transcend isolation.⁹¹

Further, three of the five most popular activities Australians did to stay connected and support their wellbeing during the April 2020 lockdown relied on the cultural and creative industries and the skills of artists: 'watching films/television programs or listening to the radio/podcasts' (72%), 'listening to music' (55%) and 'reading for pleasure or relaxation' (54%).⁹²

We have also witnessed impromptu choirs on balconies and seen the growth of online dance parties, gallery tours, creative classes and performances. And as we look to the future, in all its uncertainty, the ability of creativity to uplift and connect us seems now more important than ever.

Focus groups particularly highlighted the value of the arts in lives of older Australians, to connect them to their communities and support their wellbeing.

88 Rhea et al. 2016, The impact of community-based arts and health interventions on cognition in people with dementia: a systematic literature review, *Ageing & Mental Health*, 20:4, 337-351. Ting Choo et al. 2009, 'The effect of intuitive movement reembodyment on the Quality of Life of older adults with dementia: A pilot study,' *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias*. Staricoff L 2006, *Arts in health: a review of the medical literature*, Arts Council England.

89 For example, the Museum of Contemporary Art's *Artful: Art and Dementia program*, which has been found to enhance wellbeing for sufferers of dementia. See: MCA 2020, *Artful: Art and Dementia Report*.

90 Australia Council 2020, *Arts Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, based on Lonergan Research's Omnibus Survey, April 2020. Patternmakers 2020, *Audience Outlook Monitor: Australia Snapshot Report*, May 2020.

91 Patternmakers 2020, 'Fact Sheet: Online engagement,' *COVID-19 Audience Outlook Monitor*.

92 Australia Council 2020, *Arts Engagement During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, based on Lonergan Research's Omnibus Survey, April 2020. The other two most popular activities were 'keeping in touch with family and friends via phone or videoconferencing' and 'exercise/backyard activities'.

People that are older... they become isolated from the rest of the community... There's not a lot to do, you fade away and in the end you have to create your own little environment...

Focus group participant

Older Australians miss out a lot and mental health is becoming a big thing. If we had events for my age group, it's really great to be inclusive, to learn about other cultures.

Focus group participant

[Arts activities] connect people from different backgrounds and walks of life, like older people and younger people.

Focus group participant