

Executive Summary

The Creative Health Research Round-Up 2025 has been produced by the National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH) in partnership with the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH). It brings together a diverse body of research, evaluation and strategic documentation to make creative health evidence more visible and accessible to practitioners, commissioners, policymakers, researchers and community organisations alike.

Creative Methodology

This theme highlights research where creative practice is not simply a delivery tool, but a core method for generating knowledge. Its value lies in showing how creative methods can surface experiences, relationships and forms of understanding that are often inaccessible through conventional research alone.

Key papers in this section demonstrate how co-produced arts-based methodologies can bring structure to work with underserved communities; how digital storytelling and AI can generate live, non-intrusive evidence in youth wellbeing; how visual timelines can support more equitable narrative research with women facing multiple exclusion; how participatory creative processes can articulate pain, disability and illness from lived experience; and how creative engagement with objects, artefacts and zines can challenge dominant ideas of medicine, knowledge and care.

Creative Health Communication and Literacy

This theme focuses on how creative health is explained, understood and legitimised in public and professional contexts. Its value lies in strengthening creative health literacy — enabling people to recognise creativity as a determinant of health and to engage with it confidently and appropriately.

Key papers explore how communication frameworks can improve alignment between services and participants; how place-based models embed creativity into everyday life; how mental health narratives circulate on social media; how creative resources translate lived experience for practitioners and patients; how museums and heritage assets can function as public health tools; and how accessible publications can support reflection, dialogue and informed decision-making.

Co-Production, Co-Design, Co-Creation, Co-Curation, Co-Coding, Participatory Arts, and PPI

This theme brings together work that treats participation as a foundational principle rather than an add-on, demonstrating best practice in facilitating collaborative spaces. Its value lies in showing how power, care, trust and justice are actively negotiated through collaborative processes in research, services and systems.

Key papers examine multilingual co-production with refugee and migrant communities; co-curation as a form of care in hospital settings; participatory theory-of-change development for research readiness; co-produced toolkits for workforce wellbeing; action research models for inclusive community engagement; and justice-led approaches that move beyond access toward meaningful relational participation.

Equity, Accessibility, Cultural Relevance, and Lived Experience Insight

This theme explores how creative health can respond to structural inequality, navigating whose knowledge is valued, whose cultural frameworks are designed around, and whose access needs are considered. Its value lies in demonstrating that improving health outcomes requires attention to culture, identity, power and lived reality — not just activity.

Key papers explore the experiences of Black creative arts therapists; neuroinclusive approaches to grief; culturally rooted textile programmes; creative research with men seeking asylum; community-led approaches to access nature and culture; co-created maternity resources with Roma women; and system-level engagement that embeds lived experience into integrated care decision-making.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

This theme reflects one of the most prominent areas of creative health research. Its value lies in strengthening the evidence base for creative approaches that support mental health across clinical, community and workforce contexts.

Key papers include randomised controlled trials, mixed-methods studies and evaluations. Topics explored include art therapy for burnout; creative hobbies for recovery; artist residencies in hospitals; stroke ensembles; studio-based practice; and creative self-care environments — together illustrating both depth of impact and diversity of application.

Creative Ageing

This theme focuses on creativity across later life, including social connection, dementia and Parkinson's. Its value lies in demonstrating how creative engagement supports quality of life for older adults.

Key papers include a systematic review, mixed-methods studies, and practice evaluations. They examine online and in-person arts engagement; participatory dementia care; playwork in care homes; dance for Parkinson's; anxiety reduction; and a national directory that improves visibility and access to creative ageing opportunities.

Maternity, Perinatal Wellbeing, and New Family Connection

This theme explores creative approaches that support parents and families during pregnancy and early parenthood. Its value lies in showing how creativity can strengthen mental health, bonding and service accessibility at critical life stages.

Key papers include clinical trial work relating to community singing for postnatal depression; implementation studies; songwriting programmes; local evaluations; and a systematic review.

Children and Young People

This theme brings together work focused on early years, adolescence and youth transitions. Its value lies in demonstrating how creative engagement supports development, inclusion, confidence and wellbeing.

Key papers examine inclusive museum practice; school-based arts programmes; barriers to participation; creative strengths measurement; dance for autistic children; local evaluations; and a large-scale longitudinal programme (reporting on year 6 of a 25-year study).

Nature and Art

This theme explores the intersection between creativity, nature and health. Its value primarily lies in evidencing the synergy between creative practice and outdoor spaces. It also addresses wider ecological concerns.

Key papers include outdoor art therapy in NHS settings; nature soundscapes, photography and meditation; forest-based community art therapy; garden-based dementia care; and an analysis of programmes addressing planetary and human health together.

Toolkits, Frameworks, Scales, and Guides

This theme brings together practical resources designed to support implementation, evaluation and strategic development. Its value lies in translating research and best practice from the field into usable tools that can strengthen peer learning, governance and decision-making.

Key papers include a creative public health evaluation tool; a creative health impact framework; a competency model for working with global majority communities; a heritage for wellbeing toolkit; an evaluation of the Creative Health Quality Framework; and a series of 6 guidance documents created by the National Arts in Hospitals Network.

Strategy, Policy and Eco-Systems

This theme focuses on system-level change. Its value lies in showing how creative health is being embedded within policy, commissioning, workforce planning and place-based strategies.

Key papers include regional creative health strategies, public health reports, policy briefings/evidence submissions, infrastructure models, economic analyses, prevention insights, national workforce plans, programme evaluations, and insights into embedding creative health within Integrated Care Systems.

Using This Resource

The full Creative Health Research Round-Up 2025 is designed as a reference resource, with authors, themes, summaries, strengths, limitations, and links provided for every paper to support critical engagement and informed use. Readers are encouraged to explore the full report, share [feedback](#) on its design and usefulness, and contribute to the ongoing development of this collective evidence base by [submitting work to the 2026 edition](#).

