

Creative Health Associates Programme

Final report – July 2025



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**The Baring
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Introduction and overview

This report is the final report for the Creative Health Associates Programme, which ran from July 2023 to the end of March 2025 and was delivered by the National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH). The programme was funded by Arts Council England, with additional funding from The Baring Foundation for the Huddles activities. This report focuses on the activities, outcomes and outputs of the programme and should be read alongside the external evaluation report, which takes an in-depth look at how the Creative Health Associates roles operated within Integrated Care Systems (ICSs).

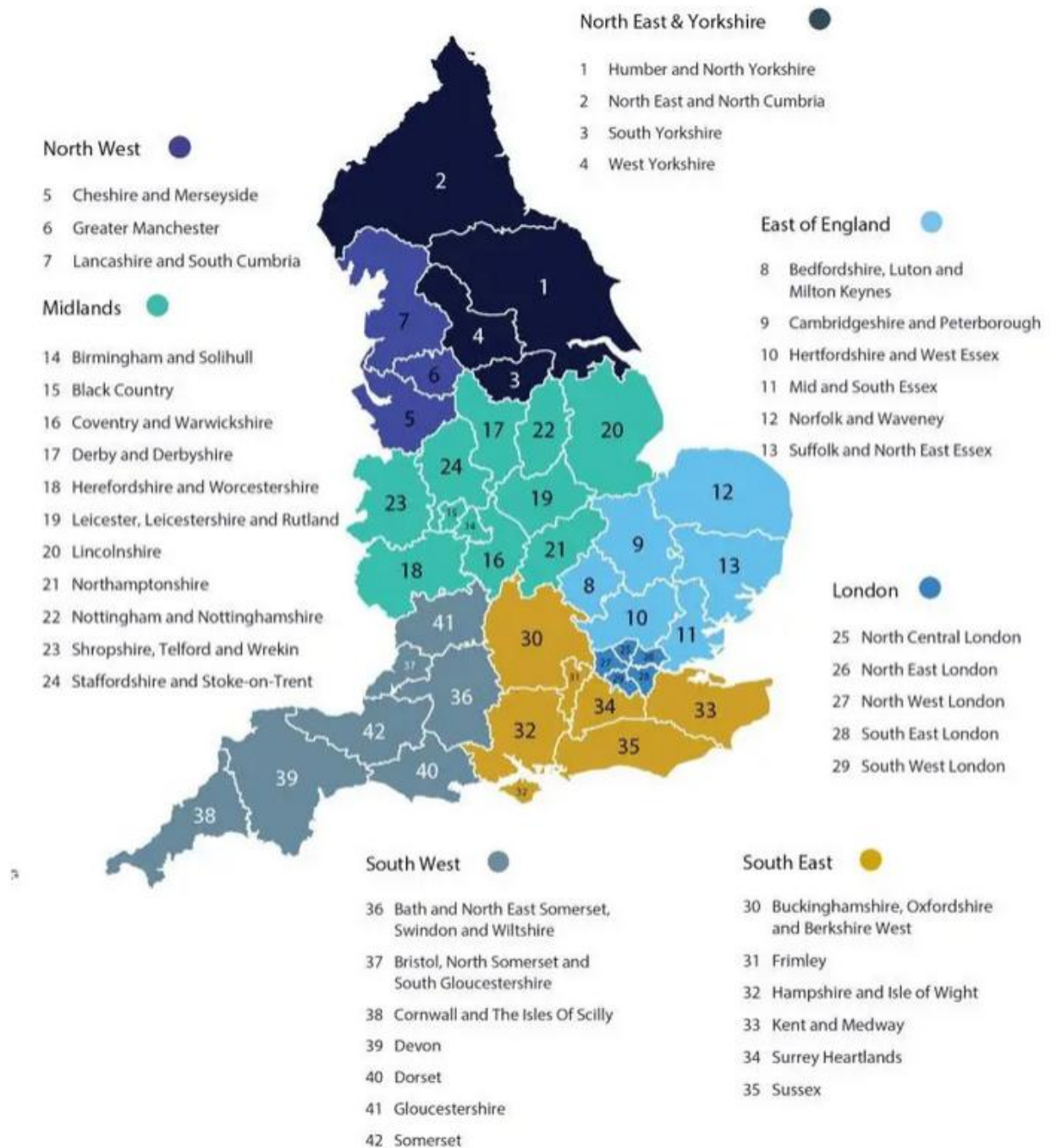
The Programme consisted of seven Creative Health Associates (CHAs) hosted by Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), one in each NHS region in England, supported by a Creative Health Programme Manager through peer support and leadership development.

| Region | CHA | Host ICB & team |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--|
| East of England | Olivia Dean | Norfolk & Waveney – initially Social Prescribing, then Health Inequalities |
| London | Conni Rosewarne | North East London – Health Improvement and Inclusion |
| Midlands | Jane Hearst | Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin – Personalised Care |
| North East and Yorkshire | Alice Thwaite | North East and North Cumbria – Transformation and Population Health Management |
| North West | Elaine Ryan-McNeill | Lancashire and South Cumbria – Population Health |
| South East | Esther Watts | Sussex – initially Personalised Care, then Population Health |
| South West | Penny Calvert | Devon – Population Health |
| | Jayne Howard | Programme Manager at NCCH |

The programme was scheduled to run between July 2023 and the end of October 2024; the end date was subsequently extended to the end of March 2025. Most Associates began their work in July 2023, with the South East Associate joining in October 2023, and all worked four days a week until the end of October 2024. At that point, two of the Associates (in anticipation that the Programme would be ending) had secured other work, so in the East and North West they worked for 2 days a week for the remainder of the Programme and we used the freed-up resource to buy in other support.

This programme was designed to support the NCCH's ambition to foster the conditions for creative health to be integral to health and care and demonstrate the power of culture and creativity to benefit the lives of individuals and communities. The role of the Creative Health Associates was to work within Integrated Care Boards and across Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) to identify the opportunities to embed creative health in the wider health and care system.

Map of ICBs by Region



Programme aims (from the original agreement)

- 1) Improved understanding about potential cultural sector contribution at a neighbourhood, place and systems level within health and social care
- 2) A range of signposting and learning opportunities to improve cultural sector understanding and engagement in health and wellbeing activity
- 3) Mapping of key providers, provision, networks, delivery partners and decision makers across each region
- 4) Sharing intelligence and knowledge and facilitating the development of relationships between cultural and health professionals/organisation
- 5) Collation of useful and useable data sets to inform local planning and support meaningful, well-targeted delivery
- 6) Support in embedding social prescribing across the cultural sector
- 7) Develop a Creative Health Maturity Framework for use in place-based working with ICSs

On commencement of the Programme, the CHAs and Programme Manager held an away day to develop a theory of change to link anticipated outcomes of the programme to the overall aims.

This is shown in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1 – Outcomes, activities and indicators linked to Programme Aims

| Anticipated outcomes and link to Aims | Proposed activities | Indicators of progress |
|--|---|---|
| Improved cross-sector understanding of creative health - links to aims 1, 2, 3 and 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect the creative/cultural sector with the wider Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector • Establish relationships across ICSs by identifying key individuals, teams, meetings and forums for engagement • Support Hospital Arts Managers in strengthening connections with the wider health and care sector • Map and disseminate information about existing networks and services • Develop cross-sector creative health networks • Create resources to enhance understanding of creative health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New creative health networks and forums are established • ICBs demonstrate increased understanding of how creative health addresses the health and social needs of their communities • Growth in the number of Creative Health Champions and regional networking • Recognition of the value of non-medical health models by ICBs • Greater awareness among health and care staff of creative health benefits • Network of sponsors in place • Cross-sectoral partnerships established • Links with Public Health, Higher Education and Local Authorities established |
| Integration of creative health in ICB and ICS policies and plans – links to aims 5 and 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of creative health strategies and integration of creative health within ICB/ICS plans • Share examples of how creative health can address local health priorities and link to the Joint Forward Plan • Work with Public Health colleagues to position creative health as a tool to reduce health inequalities • Co-produce a Creative Health Maturity Framework | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative Health Maturity Framework is being tested/used in some ICBs • Creative health is referenced in Joint Forward Plans and other strategic documents • ICBs/ ICSs have developed or are developing creative health strategies or delivery plans • Appointment of creative health managers or equivalent roles within ICBs/ICSs |

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| Enhanced role for creative health in social prescribing pathways – links to aim 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen ties between the creative/cultural sector and the wider VCFSE sector • Clarify use of SNOMED codes in promoting creative health in social prescribing • Collaborate with the National Academy of Social Prescribing (NASP) to highlight creative health as a valuable social prescribing intervention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative health is referenced in ICB social prescribing strategies • Joint initiatives with NASP on training and resource development are underway |
| Expansion of creative health activities and approaches across ICBs and ICSs – links to aims 1, 2 and 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop local Creative Health Huddles and share learning outcomes • Identify creative health training potential for existing and future health and care workforce • Facilitate creative health opportunities for staff and organisations • Support ICBs and ICSs in developing creative health partnerships, projects and programmes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New creative health activities, projects or programmes have started • Inclusion of creative health in workforce training and CPD • Integration of creative health into staff wellbeing strategies • Co-production and creativity feature in approaches to engagement within ICBs and ICSs • Increased funding for creative health work from non-arts sources • Creative health activities supported through ICB funding mechanisms |

Progress against anticipated outcomes

Improved cross-sector understanding of creative health – activities and impacts

This has been a major feature of the work of the CHAs as they have developed relationships with key individuals and teams across the health and care sector and the wider Integrated Care System, with a particular focus on public health teams and higher education links which can support the development of creative health.

Over the time of the programme the CHAs made connections with over 1500 individuals across systems, including:

- Directors and Deputy Directors of Population Health and Health Inequalities
- Directors of Public Health and Public Health Consultants
- Regional Personalised Care Leads
- Communications and Public Engagement leads
- Team Leaders in health inequalities and population health
- Strategic and clinical leads for dementia, health of refugees and asylum seekers, children and young people's mental health, women's health and maternity services, long-term conditions, mental health
- Primary Care Network GP Leads
- Allied Health Professionals Leads
- VCFSE sector leads in Integrated Care Systems
- Healthwatch Chairs
- Higher Education Academics

Key activities by region:

East of England

- Established sustained relationships with Norfolk & Waveney, Suffolk & North East Essex, and Hertfordshire & West Essex ICBs.
- Regular engagement with stakeholders across social prescribing, health inequalities and, towards the end of the Programme, commissioning and place leads.
- Embedded in Norfolk & Waveney ICB Health Inequalities Team and active in the Herts Personalised Care Collaborative.
- Strengthened system-level understanding of the cultural sector's potential in health.
- Facilitated cross-sector relationships and strategic planning incorporating creative health.

London

- High-profile events, including co-hosting forums with NHS leaders and academic partners.
- Authored a mapping paper for North East London (NEL) linking creative health to ICB priorities.
- Linked place-based health colleagues into local creative health networks.
- Elevated visibility of creative health within NEL ICB.
- Influenced strategy with lived experience-led arts engagement in the development of a homelessness health strategy.
- Supported embedding of creative health into workforce development.

Midlands

- Strategic outreach to Directors of Public Health, facilitating connections between them to elevate creative health in public health practice.
- Delivered presentations at a wide range of events and meetings, including cultural and health sector conferences, public health learning events.
- Facilitated a series of targeted roundtable events and thematic huddles to raise awareness of the value of creative health, develop understanding and influence future plans.
- Contributed to strategic thinking and capacity-building across the region.
- Forged partnerships across the Midlands, supported by engagement with national and regional networks.

North East and Yorkshire

- Contributed to North East & North Cumbria (NENC) ICB Health Inequalities Strategy with creative health case studies.
- Supported integration of creative health in hospital trusts and regional conferences.
- Shared best practice and resources across sectors.
- Enhanced strategic integration of creative health.
- Raised awareness of the role of creative health in developing Health Literacy.
- Encouraged NHS and VCFSE sector collaboration.
- Facilitated programme development for vulnerable populations.

North West

- Presented to Lancashire & South Cumbria (LSC) ICB population health team and national networks.
- Delivered Huddles on maternal mental health and mental health of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Strengthened grassroots and VCFSE visibility in the ICS.
- Developed a model of working through the Huddles which provided tangible examples of creative health in practice.
- Supported inclusive health research and strategy.

South East

- Convened Sussex Creative Health Roundtable with local authority and ICB leaders.
- Facilitated cross-sector collaboration in Hampshire, Kent and Medway.
- Led a Creative Health workshop in Hampshire with Public Health and cultural sector stakeholders.
- Improved regional cohesion and forward planning through cross-sector meetings.
- Facilitated strategic thinking and bid readiness across Sussex, Kent, Hampshire, and Surrey.
- Advanced public health engagement with creative health agendas.

South West

- Delivered targeted huddles and symposiums, including on dementia, hospital arts, and green prescribing.
- Engaged in strategic support for Creative Health Strategy development in Dorset and Cornwall.
- Facilitated collaboration between Devon ICB and Marjon University's postgraduate Creative Health course.
- Built strong intersectoral education and research partnerships.
- Introduced Creative Health to the Devon System Change Action Alliance and ran 4 experiential online sessions on creative health.
- Supported data-informed decision-making through academic partnerships and participatory workshops.

Creative Health Champions

Creative Health Champions are senior, board-level leaders from Integrated Care Boards, local authorities, NHS trusts and other health providers. They are an important network for supporting the delivery of our partnership work with NHS England and ICSs to embed creative health at a systems, place and neighbourhood level. Although the CHAs were not tasked with actively recruiting Champions, they were instrumental in highlighting the role of NCCH Creative Health Champion to the senior leaders that they connected with and the number of Champions increased from 69 at the start of the Programme to over 100 by its completion.

Higher Education connections

There were already well-established relationships with academic institutions specialising in creative health, especially with UCL, with whom NCCH partners on the MASc in Creative Health. CHAs were able to forge connections with academics working in the following institutions:

- University of Lincoln
- De Montfort University
- Teesside University
- Northumbria University
- University of Chester
- Eastern ARC (strategic collaboration between the universities of East Anglia, Essex, Kent and Sussex)
- Marjon University, Plymouth
- Wellcome Centre, Exeter University

Placement opportunities for health care students (nursing and Allied Health Professions) have been facilitated in the North East, South East and South West.

Integration of creative health in ICB and ICS policies and plans

One of the planned outcomes for the programme was for creative health to become more embedded in systems with an indicator of this being the development of creative health strategies for ICBs or ICSs, or the inclusion of creative health within existing plans and strategies.

At a national level NCCH ran a series of webinars focused on developing creative health strategies, which focused on different aspects:

- Use of data and information
- Creating the content of a strategy
- Evaluating progress
- Addressing health inequalities

These webinars included speakers from systems about their experience of developing creative health strategies and attracted health and care professionals

as well as creative health providers.

We intend to use the material from the webinars to inform the development of guidance for systems on co-producing creative health strategies across a system, together with intelligence gathered from work that CHAs supported locally.

Table 2 illustrates where creative health strategies or plans have been developed, or where creative health features in other plans within a system. Those highlighted in yellow were developed during the time of the CHA programme and links are provided if documentation is in the public domain..

Table 2 – Strategies and plans including creative health (May 2025)

Note: this is our current understanding and there may be more information of which we are currently unaware. Those highlighted were developed or progressed during the timeline of the CHA programme.

| Region and system | Comments |
|--|--|
| East – Norfolk & Waveney ICB | Commitment for Creative Health to be included as a Health Inequalities workstream. |
| East – Hertfordshire County Council | Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 'Lite Bite' (September 2024). Provides an overview of Creative Health, exploring the potential benefits of greater investment in arts and culture for national and local health outcomes. |
| East – Suffolk and North East Essex ICS | 'Thinking Differently Together' (June 2024). One of a series of 'Can Do Healthcare' publications focused on creative health. |
| East – Suffolk Council | Working with the cultural sector to improve health and wellbeing : Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023 |
| London – North East London Health & Care Partnership | 2024-5 Joint Forward Plan (July 2024). Includes as one of its key programmes of work: <i>Developing a strategy to embed creative health in services across the system with specific focus on addressing health inequalities</i> (p.52) |
| London – North East London ICB | Creative health included in the Personalisation Strategy Framework and the Health Improvement & Inclusion priorities business case for 2025-6. |
| London – London Borough of Waltham Forest | Cultural Action Plan (updated March 2025). Co-designed strategy, aligned to other strategies developed by the council including climate, public health, and the LBWF Mental Health Promotion Strategy . Creative Health is a key pillar of the action and is put into action through the council's Make It Happen grants scheme which will invest £100k into local creative health activities. Creative Health is seen as a tool for developing relationships with/for people who are typically underrepresented/excluded. |
| London – London Borough of Havering | Cultural Strategy 2025 – 2028: 'A Good Life' (June 2024). Strategy is specifically focused on creative health, addressing other council policies including children and young people, climate action, inclusive growth, and poverty reduction |
| London – London Borough of Hackney | Arts & Cultural Strategy 2019-2022 (March 2019). Health is included as one of the five 'dividends' of the Strategy. Although the strategy is now out of date, it has led to a |

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| | legacy of creative health activities and networks in the Borough, including Hackney Circle and the Creative Health Hoxton network. |
| London – London Borough of Croydon | Creating a Healthier Croydon – Director of Public Health report, 2024. Focused on creative health. |
| Midlands – Birmingham City Council | Creative public health programme addressing the health inequalities experienced by Birmingham’s communities. Includes having Public Health Research Officers in four cultural organisations, and the development of a creative public health evaluation tool. |
| Midlands – Coventry City Council | Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 -2026 – makes mention of the Coventry City of Culture (2021) and its impact on wider health and wellbeing. |
| Midlands – Derby City Council | Derby’s Culture Strategy 2020 – 2030 includes health and wellbeing outcomes. |
| Midlands – Herefordshire | Herefordshire Cultural Partnership’s Our Place programme secured investment from Herefordshire Public Health and the Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2025 – 2030 includes Creative Health as one of five priorities. |
| Midlands – Walsall | Walsall Cultural Compact has Personal Wellbeing as one of its key themes and the Black Country ICB is a partner. |
| North East and Yorkshire – North East & North Cumbria ICB | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of creative health within the Waiting Well service • Inclusion of creative health examples in a Health Inclusion paper for the Healthier and Fairer programme. • Inclusion of creative health in the Medicines Strategy to reduce overprescribing |
| North East and Yorkshire – North Yorkshire Council | North Yorkshire Cultural Strategy (November 2024). Includes creative health as one of the strategic priorities. |
| North East and Yorkshire – Northumberland County Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Creative Landscape: A cultural strategy for Northumberland 2018 – 2030 has Health and Wellbeing as one of its priorities. • Creative Health: Improving health and wellbeing through the arts, Director of Public Health Annual Report 2019 |
| North West – Lancashire County Council | Cultural Services Strategy 2024 – 2028 Includes health and wellbeing in overarching objectives. |
| North West – Blackburn with Darwen | Cultural Investment Plan 2023 – 2033 Makes reference to the value of culture on health and wellbeing (p.23) |

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| North West – Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership | Greater Manchester Creative Health Strategy November 2022 |
| North West – Blackpool Council | Cultural Strategy 2024 – 2030 (April 2024). Includes cultural engagement to improve health and wellbeing (p.14) |
| North West – Rochdale Council | How creativity got us through lockdown : Director of Public Health Annual Report 2020 – 2021 |
| South East – East Sussex Council | Creative Healthier Lives – Arts in Public Health (September 2023). This position paper sets out some of the approaches and ideas that have informed the Creative Health Programme. Creativity for Healthier Lives – East Sussex Director of Public Health Report 2023/4 |
| South East – Brighton and Hove City Council | The Art of Good Health – Brighton and Hove Director of Public Health report 2018 |
| South East – West Sussex County Council | Health and Wellbeing of West Sussex Coastal Communities: A Framework for Action to Reduce Health Inequalities (February 2024). Section 4 of the Public Health Approach (p.74 – 76) focuses on the role of creative health. |
| South East – Surrey Cultural Partnership | Surprising Surrey: Cultural Strategy 2024 – 2034 has an objective relating to wellbeing and includes social prescribing of creative health as a key action. |
| South East – Hampshire County Council | Hampshire's Vision for the Future 2050 spotlights the Brighter Futures and Stepping Stones programme which are both creative health programmes focusing on mental health of adults and young people respectively. |
| South West – Dorset Council | Cultural Strategy 2021 – 2026 has Health and Wellbeing as one of its key priorities. Work is also taking place across the ICS to develop a creative health strategy. |
| South West – Wiltshire Council | Cultural Strategy 2024 – 2030 has Health and Wellbeing as one of its key priorities. |
| South West – Cornwall Creative Health and Wellbeing Partnership | Creative Health Framework due to be published Autumn 2025, alongside new Cultural Manifesto. |

Creative Health Maturity Framework

One of the aims of the programme was to develop a Creative Health Maturity Framework, a resource to help embed creative health into health and care systems. The purpose of the Framework was to help ICBs and partners with a self-assessment tool to measure their progress on creative health. Some initial consultation was carried out with sponsors and the following principles were agreed:

- The Framework should be about quality improvement rather than performance management
- It should help ICBs and partners identify priorities for progressing creative health within their system
- It would be a self-assessment and progress-tracking tool
- It should provide prompts for wider discussion and action across the system

A suggested structure was also broadly agreed, which included:

- Five domains against which to assess maturity:
 - Leadership, governance and partnerships
 - Workforce
 - Policy, planning and commissioning
 - Digital technology
 - Evidence and impact

These domains mapped across to the Social Prescribing Maturity Framework, that was also in development with NHS England, and the NCCH's Creative Health Toolkit.

- Ability to assess maturity at neighbourhood, place and system level
- Four stages of maturity proposed: Emerging, Developing, Maturing and Embedded
- Links to resources to aid improvement e.g. Creative Health Quality Framework, Creative Health Toolkit
- Cross-referencing other NHS guidance and frameworks

This initial work was never progressed however, due to a number of issues:

- Lack of capacity and headspace within ICBs to engage in a co-production process
- Lack of capacity in the Programme Manager's time
- Changing landscape including the prospect of new assessment frameworks and a new plan for the NHS

It is still considered that the development of such a Framework would be useful to help embed creative health in systems and we propose that in any future development of creative health within systems that is supported by NCCH, there is a requirement for engagement in a co-production process to develop and test out a Framework. The original suggested domains would need to be reviewed in the light of new guidance and priorities for the NHS, and aligned with the aims and ambitions of the 10-year NHS Plan.

Creative health and social prescribing

It was anticipated that there would be close working and alignment with the work of the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), which would be enhanced by the appointment of regional leads within NASP who could relate closely to the Creative Health Associates.

The CHA team had a number of meetings with NASP colleagues, including the lead on arts and culture, and the healthcare integration lead. There were some significant changes at NASP however which caused this burgeoning relationship to stall – the decision was taken not to appoint to regional posts, the arts and culture lead post was discontinued and a number of staff in the healthcare integration team left – and it is only recently that we have been able to pick up that relationship again. There was also very limited sharing of intelligence from the Thriving Communities programme, which was disappointing.

Initial issues identified for joint working were:

- Training for link workers/social prescribers on the value of and evidence for creative health
- Sharing our understanding of creative health provision for social prescribing
- Development of resources to support the training

At local level however there was some progress in strengthening the role of creative health within social prescribing, although here too there were changes in the priority afforded to social prescribing which affected the CHA programme. Social prescribing within personalised care was increasingly seen as 'business as usual' rather than a priority for development, so dedicated teams and plans were restructured and re-prioritised. In two of the host ICBS, the CHA had been located within personalised care teams which were then disbanded. The CHAs were re-located elsewhere in the ICB – and perhaps to teams where they might have a wider impact – but this did impact on the progress they could make with social prescribing at a local level.

Social prescribing and personalised care activity by region:

East

- Influenced planning within Herts Personalised Care Collaborative
- Led a creative health activity session at the Norfolk and Waveney Social Prescribing Conference in December 2023 and wrote a Creative Health section of the Norfolk and Waveney ICB Social Prescribing Strategy (shelved without sign-off as Social Prescribing was restructured but may be used as part of Health Inequalities plans in future)
- Strong social prescribing focus in the Breckland and Chelmsford Huddles
- Developed relationships with key social prescribers in Ware, Great Yarmouth, Luton and Norfolk

London

- Distributed information and resources to social prescribing managers through presentations at Community of Practice meetings and through email cascade via the Personalised Care Programme Manager.
- Supported the development of cultural social prescribing in secondary care at Barts Hospital by introducing Vital Arts (resident arts team) to the Community of Practice Lead. This work has now linked into the Spotlight Youth Centre, which will focus on targeted creative health interventions for specific conditions.

Midlands

- Supported a major Social Prescribing conference in Lincoln in October 2023
- Co-hosted a Social Prescribing event in Birmingham in April 2024

North East & Yorkshire

- Attended and contributed to the Voluntary Organisations North East (Vonne) Social Prescribing meetings and shared creative health resources for their website.
- Organised meeting between South Tyneside Culture Partnership and social prescribing organisations in South Tyneside and with the North Tyneside Culture, Health Wellbeing Board.
- Met regularly with the VCFSE/ICB Strategic Health Partnerships lead in North East and North Cumbria ICB and supported the development of a paper on the need for a regional Shared Investment Fund.

North West

- Initial introduction to Thriving Communities leads for the North West and was able to build relationships which proved valuable in developing a social prescribing model for Sefton and a voluntary sector manifesto for Lancashire.
- Brought together a consortium of grassroots and voluntary sector organisations in Lancashire & South Cumbria and Cheshire & Merseyside for an application to the Power of Music Fund. Although ultimately unsuccessful in securing the funding, the relationships continue to bear fruit.

South East

- Delivered a webinar on Creativity and Social Prescribing in March 2025, with speakers from NASP, Well-City Salisbury and Hywel Da Health Board as well as Dr Simon Opher, sharing examples of social prescribing where the Creative Health activity is fully funded.
- Worked with West Sussex social prescribing commissioner to deliver a webinar for social prescribers on creative health
- Connected to the Community Engagement work at Pallant House Gallery.

South West

- Shared information on creative health and social prescribing within Dorset and Devon ICBs
- Drew up a survey to examine the confidence level of social prescribers in signposting people to Creative Health; 29 responses to date - could be reshared <https://forms.gle/n7otAdTCBeqTe3B77>

Huddles

Huddles are interdisciplinary learning activities for small groups to use co-production and creativity to explore and resolve challenges in healthcare settings. With creativity and lived experience at the heart, the Huddles bring together patients, participants, clinicians, artists and managers. Work on Huddles began before the CHA Programme, but the CHAs delivered the majority of Huddles work, shown in the table below. The Huddles provide an opportunity to build new relationships between sectors, suggest new ways of working in health and care settings and inform future working in Integrated Care Systems. The funding for this aspect of the CHA Programme was provided by the Baring Foundation.

| Region and location | Title | Key partners | Focus for Huddle |
|---------------------|---|---|--|
| East | | | |
| Chelmsford | Chelmsford Huddle | Culture Chelmsford; Anglia Ruskin Uni | Bringing mental health lived experience to the research on social prescribing |
| Stowmarket | Suffolk Huddle | | Improving the mental health of people experiencing long Covid |
| Thetford | Breckland Huddle | Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers (BFER) and the Restoration Trust | Ensuring mental health lived experience is well represented in Heritage for Wellbeing Partnership |
| Luton | Luton Huddle | Luton Creative Community; Luton Social Prescribing Service | Forging closer links between people with mental health lived experience, Luton Library Theatre and Social Prescribing in the NHS |
| Peterborough | Peterborough Huddle | Casson & Friends leading; wide range of community and NHS organisations | Bringing a creative approach to ShedHead – an event exploring experiences of older isolated men |
| Norwich | Experiences of NHS mental health services | Norwich Theatre Royal; Norfolk & Suffolk Foundation Trust | Exploring people's experiences of mental health services to inform improvements |
| Norwich | Jenny Lind project | Mind the Gap; Garage Theatre | Focus on health and wellbeing as part of this community development project – facilitation of lived experience voices |

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| London | | | |
| London | Homelessness Huddle | Cardboard Citizens; St Martins in the Field | Part of developing a health for homeless people strategy in North East London |
| Midlands | | | |
| Dudley | Mental Wellbeing after Brain Injury | Headway (Black Country and Herefordshire) | Mental wellbeing after Brain Injury |
| Birmingham | Mental wellbeing of Green Creative Practitioners | Birmingham Public Health; local community groups | Mental wellbeing of creative practitioners working in Handsworth |
| Derby | Hospital Staff Wellbeing | Derby Hospitals and the National Arts in Hospitals Network | Mental health and wellbeing of hospital staff |
| Leicester and Nottingham | Inspire | Nottingham Arts in Hospitals and Leicester Libraries | The place of play and expression in keeping us mentally well |
| North East & Yorkshire | | | |
| Redcar, South Tees | Mental health and wellbeing of healthcare staff | Tees Valley Arts; South Tees Health & Wellbeing Network | Mental health and wellbeing of healthcare workforce |
| North West | | | |
| Blackburn with Darwen | Photovoice Huddle | Lancs & South Cumbria NHS; BwD Council; Healthwatch | Mental health of refugees and asylum seekers |

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| Liverpool | Liverpool Women's Huddle | Cheshire & Merseyside ICB Improving Me programme; M-RIC at Uni of Liverpool; Liverpool Central Library | Maternal mental health |
| Clitheroe | Creative Huddle | Lancs & South Cumbria NHS; Healthwatch; Lancs CC | Recovery from mental health crisis |
| Liverpool | Workforce Wellbeing | Laughterhouse & Liverpool University Hospitals Trust | Staff wellbeing |
| South East | | | |
| East Sussex | East Sussex Community Panel | East Sussex Community Voice | Mental health of children and young people and of children with epilepsy |
| South West | | | |
| Online and in Paignton | Dementia, mental health and music | Live Music Now; Devon ICB; | Mental health of people with dementia and their carers (paid and unpaid) |
| Paignton and Barnstaple | Libraries as interactive creative spaces for young people | Torbay Libraries; North Devon Mental Health Alliance | Mental health of children and young people |
| Bristol | Viv Gordon Huddle | Viv Gordon Company; SW Creative Health Champions; SW Hospital Arts Network | Exploration of Child Sexual Abuse projects led by survivors to feed into national training programme |

Learning Programme

Underpinning the CHA programme was a learning programme for the team. This was co-designed by the team with the Programme Manager and included the following elements:

- **Action Learning Set**

This was for the Associates and was facilitated by the Programme Manager using the Action Learning principles and format. Although some members of the team were initially sceptical about the value of such an approach, it quickly became a popular and positive element of the programme. On finishing the programme the Associates were keen to continue to meet as an Action Learning Set in their new roles and this continues to be facilitated by the Programme Manager. Over the lifetime of the Programme there were six sessions held between December 2023 and January 2025.

- **Skills sharing**

This provided an opportunity for all members of the team to share skills and knowledge with the rest of the team. It was an approach which recognised the wide range of professional backgrounds and experience within the team.

Sessions included:

- Learning from hospital arts programmes
- Developing a communications framework
- Developing a creative health strategy
- Human learning systems
- Approaches to mapping activities
- Understanding social prescribing

- **Learning and development sessions**

- Using the Creative Health Quality Framework with ICSs and ICBs – delivered by Jane Willis
- Creative Writing for Wellbeing Sprint – delivered by Kiz Manley
- Inclusion training – delivered by Debs Teale
- Trauma-informed practice training – delivered by Kazzum Arts alongside colleagues from the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance (CHWA)
- Using Airtable and Flourish – delivered by Hannah Waterson

- **Team development**

The team met online weekly for an hour to discuss operational issues, share progress and challenges, and offer support to each other. Through this regular contact the team gelled very well and a trusting and safe environment was created. We also met in person for 5 team awaydays throughout the programme:

- September 2023 – getting to know each other and understanding the programme
- March 2024 – using Labyrinth methodology to reflect on the programme to date

- June 2024 – sharing soft intelligence, legacy and exit planning (following the SHAPER conference where we presented work from each of the Regions alongside the national SHAPER projects)
- October 2024 – creative activity session, priorities for remainder of the programme (as part of the National Arts in Hospitals Network conference)
- March 2025 – final reflections on the programme and what next for each of us individually and collectively

Resources developed

A number of the Associates developed new resources to support their work. Some of these resources were in hard copy only and used for specific events – these included posters outlining the evidence for singing on health and wellbeing, development of Systemaps and Labyrinth methodology. Other resources are available online:

- [Creative health at a glance booklet](#)
- [Creative health in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland booklet](#)
- [Creative health across the system video](#)
- [What is creative health? video](#)
- [Commissioning creative health: Co-creating a Trust approach to health inequalities video](#)
- [Commissioning creative health: Commissioning effective creative health delivery video](#)
- [Commissioning creative health: Commissioning creative health for better population health video](#)
- [Creative health in the south west online resource pack](#)
- [Creative health for Primary Care crib sheet](#)

In addition, many events and webinars were also recorded and can be accessed via the NCCH YouTube channel [here](#)

Events

As part of the CHA programme, Associates and the Programme Manager hosted and presented at a number of events - in person, online and hybrid events:

| Title of event | Date | In person bookings | Online bookings |
|---|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Programme Manager | | | |
| Presenting at CHWA Conference, Barnsley | October 2023 | 100+ | |
| Spotlight on Social Prescribing, Lincoln | December 2023 | 80+ | |
| Developing creative health strategies – data | June 2024 | | 63 |
| CHWA Regional Champs training: Health systems, structures and priorities | June 2024 | | 12 |
| CHWA Regional Champs training: Social prescribing, health inequalities and acute care | June 2024 | | 12 |
| International Social Prescribing Conference | June 2024 | 80+ | |
| Developing creative health strategies - Creating the roadmap | July 2024 | | 71 |
| Developing creative health strategies - Are we there yet? Evaluation | October 2024 | | 95 |
| Developing creative health strategies - Mind the Gap - Health Inequalities | October 2024 | | 89 |
| Working Together training: Health systems and structures | November 2024 | | 8 |
| Working Together training: Health inequalities and social prescribing | January 2025 | | 8 |
| East | | | |
| Social Prescribing Conference – Norfolk & Waveney | December 2023 | Not recorded | |
| Supporting creative health in the East | February 2024 | | 43 |
| Norfolk and Suffolk Mapping Launch | April 2024 | Not recorded | |
| Thinking Differently Together – Suffolk and North East Essex | June 2024 | Not recorded | |
| Essex Mapping Launch | March 2025 | Not recorded | |

| | | | |
|---|---------------|-----|-----|
| Creative health in the East celebration | March 2025 | | 30+ |
| London | | | |
| Supporting creative health in London | March 2024 | | 47 |
| Creative health in North East and South East London | March 2024 | | 17 |
| Creative Health in Policy, Systems, and Communities at International Forum on Quality and Safety | April 2024 | 5 | |
| Harnessing Creative Health & Community Assets to Tackle Inequalities - part of NEL ICB Health Equity Conference | November 2024 | 15 | |
| Getting Creative with Health and Care | February 2025 | | 55 |
| Creative Health in North East London Symposium | February 2025 | 205 | |
| Midlands | | | |
| Creative Health Lunch and Learn – in partnership with Leicester City Council Public Health | October 2023 | | 12 |
| Strengthening the Pathway Between the NHS and Creative Health Services - in partnership with Leicester Business Festival | November 2023 | 19 | |
| Celebrating Creative Health - in partnership with Aurora Wellbeing | January 2024 | 60 | |
| Creative Health Workshop - in partnership with Vibrant Shropshire | January 2024 | 24 | |
| Supporting creative health in the Midlands | February 2024 | | 41 |
| Queering creative health – in partnership with De Montfort University Pride | February 2024 | | 15 |
| The Impact of Cultural Compacts in Promoting Creative Health Activity - in partnership with University Centre Shrewsbury | April 2024 | 27 | |
| Celebrating creative health in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin – in partnership with the ICB | April 2024 | 43 | |
| Creativity and Social Prescribing: an introduction to the Creative Health Communication Framework and the Creative Health Body Map - in partnership with Birmingham City Council and Social Prescribing Solutions | April 2024 | 60 | |
| An introduction to 'Creative Health' and its application/ benefits to local communities - in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent Public Health and Social Care | April 2024 | | 25 |
| Workforce wellbeing and cultural change via creative health | June 2024 | 58 | |

| | | | |
|---|----------------|----|-----|
| Anti-Racism and Ethnic Diversity in Creative Health: Addressing Inequality | July 2024 | | 90 |
| The Place of Creativity in Public Health: perspectives from researchers and directors of public health | September 2024 | 83 | |
| Creative Health: A View from NCCH - in partnership with Coventry and Warwickshire Creative Health Alliance | November 2024 | 80 | |
| Startup Connections: Entrepreneurship and Creative Health - in partnership with Leicester Innovation Centre | March 2025 | 23 | |
| North East & Yorkshire | | | |
| Supporting creative health in the North East & Yorkshire | February 2024 | | 45 |
| North West | | | |
| Baby Week Labyrinth and Women's Mental Health Huddle launch | November 2023 | 14 | |
| Supporting creative health in the North West | February 2024 | | 40 |
| Singing for health | May 2024 | | 55 |
| Theatre for health | June 2024 | | 47 |
| Supporting creative health in the North West (Chester) | November 2024 | 22 | |
| Scoping the creative health ecology in Blackburn | December 2024 | 5 | |
| South East | | | |
| Supporting creative health in the South East | February 2024 | | 51 |
| Creative health in the NHS – Hospital Arts | May 2024 | | 79 |
| Tackling loneliness and creative health | September 2024 | | 32 |
| A creative health service? | September 2024 | 67 | |
| West Sussex creative health webinar | March 2025 | | 27 |
| Creativity and Social Prescribing | March 2025 | | 207 |
| South West | | | |
| Supporting creative health in the South West | February 2024 | | 27 |

| | | | |
|---|--------------|-----|----|
| South West Primary Care Network Conference | March 2024 | 250 | |
| How creative health supports the NHS Long Term Plan – A South West view | October 2024 | 38 | 61 |
| South West Hospital Arts | January 2025 | | 34 |

Work commissioned externally

The CHA programme identified some areas where we could benefit from external expertise and perspective in order to build on the programme in future and engage effectively with health and care systems.

Communications with health and care professionals

Through the programme our CHAs identified the need for more targeted communications to health and care professionals from NCCH – how do we get the information and messaging to those who do not know about creative health and would not look for this on a Google search? We commissioned a specific piece of work with the aim of driving engagement with people, organisations and networks in health and care systems at all levels:

- To identify the key audiences we should target within health and social care including professional bodies, networks, organisations and key individuals
- To identify appropriate channels for communication to key stakeholders
- To identify ways in which we can raise awareness of the contribution of creative health to system priorities with reference to evidence, examples, learning and resources of the NCCH and, in particular, its CHA programme

Following a competitive process, we appointed David Rose Consultancy to work with us and from that piece of work we now have a Communications Strategy for Health and Care Systems which includes the following elements all aimed specifically at health and care professionals:

- New section on our website
- Targeted monthly newsletter
- Series of webinars
- Suite of resources for time-poor staff
- Campaigns to engage professionals around a specific issue

Our South West Associate also set up a Creative Health workspace on the Future NHS hub <https://future.nhs.uk/creativehealthhub> – a platform to connect with others in health and care; share ideas, learn new skills, and collaborate on projects.

Research into commissioning processes

Another area of development identified through the programme was the need for a better shared understanding of the NHS Commissioning process and how to maximise the potential for commissioning of creative health provision as part of that process.

We commissioned NECS, a specialist NHS Commissioning Support Unit closely linked with one of our host ICBs, North East and North Cumbria, to carry out a piece of research to explore this. They interviewed a range of people involved in NHS commissioning as well as carrying out desk-based research into how non-clinical service provision is commissioned. Their report can be found [here](#). It emphasises the need for creative health providers to consider their relationship to other providers, both creative and wider VCFSE organisations, and to understand what might be required of them in order to become a sustainably commissioned service.

We will use the results of this work to help inform how we engage with ICBs and ICSs across England in a practical way.

External evaluation

Although an external evaluation was not required as part of the programme, we decided it would be useful to have an external perspective on the programme and its effectiveness, particularly looking at the challenges and opportunities within systems and what we could learn from the different experiences of the CHAs.

Following a competitive process, we commissioned Beth Crosland and Gemma Buckland to carry out this evaluation. They used a mixed methods evaluation methodology framed by systems thinking. This recognises various layers or systems of stakeholders as nested, with the CHA programme team at the core and the ICBs and ICSs around them within the context of the wider systems and society they operate within. Responding to this, it focused the most in-depth methodology—inductive qualitative interviewing—on the core team and then utilized progressively lighter-touch methodologies on each subsequent concentric layer of stakeholders.

Methods used were as follows:

- inductive qualitative 1:1 interviewing with the core team - the CHA programme team - 7 CHAs, the CHA Programme Manager as well as with two people carrying out similar roles - one in South East London funded by the GLA, some of the London boroughs and the ICB and one in South Yorkshire employed by the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance (CHWA)
- online focus group interviews with selected stakeholders - CHA sponsors and other key people within ICBs and ICSs
- online stakeholder survey across a wide range of stakeholders
- two online systems thinking workshops – one with the CHA team and one with strategic stakeholders to collectively make sense of findings and shape recommendations

Rather than repeat the findings here, you can link to three separate reports, in increasing level of detail:

- [Summary of findings](#)
- [Short report](#)
- [Full report](#)

Conclusion

Overall, we believe the Programme successfully achieved most of its objectives, despite operating in a challenging environment. Throughout its delivery, ICBs faced significant pressures to deliver additional financial savings and reduce staffing levels, resulting in varying degrees of organisational restructuring. Political uncertainty in the lead-up to the July 2024 General Election also created hesitancy around committing to longer-term plans, given the possibility of a shift in Government priorities.

Despite these challenges, the Programme was well-received by ICBs across all regions. Early discussions about future developments show encouraging interest in several systems. When asked to assess the level of interest among their ICBs, the CHAs reported that, out of 42 ICBs, 10 showed high interest, 21 medium, 7 low, and 4 had not yet been engaged.

This report demonstrates a clear appetite for creative health across the NHS and the wider system. The publication of the NHS 10-Year Health Plan: *Fit for the Future* now provides a stronger foundation for further progress, and we will continue to work with systems to explore how creative health can help deliver the Plan's ambitions.

The Programme has laid solid groundwork for the future, fostering new networks, connections, plans and strategies that will support continued growth and development and has also provided valuable insights into both the opportunities and challenges of embedding creative health in health and care systems. These lessons will inform NCCH's future work, including:

- Strengthening our communications specifically with the health and care sector
- Embedding the Programme Manager role within our core team to sustain work with systems
- Exploring our contribution to systems thinking and supporting wider system change

This report provides a summary of the Programme's outputs and outcomes. More detailed information from each region is available on request.

Acknowledgements

In addition to our funders – the National Lottery through Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation for the Huddles element of the Programme – we would like to thank our sponsor ICBs and their staff for their support to the Creative Health Associates during the Programme.