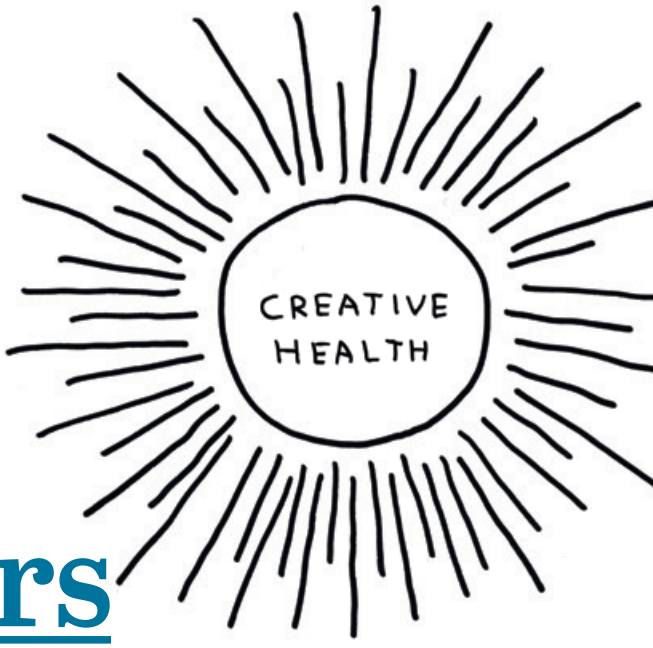
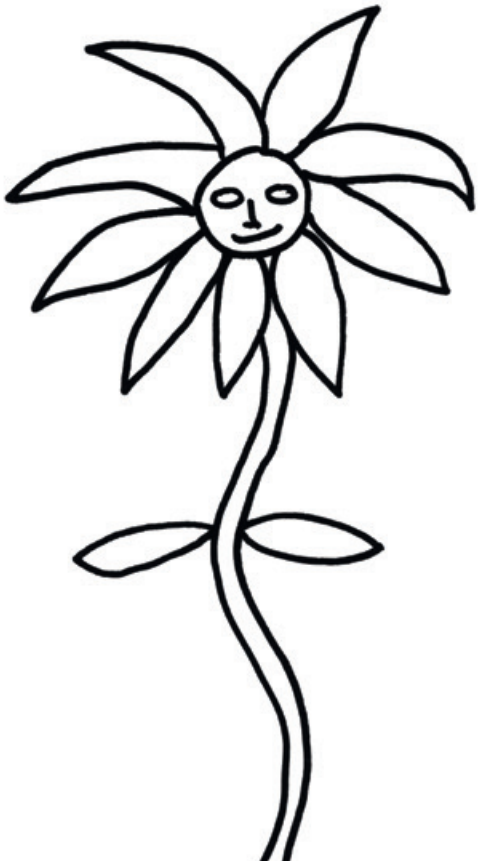
National Centre for Creative Health



Our Fourth and Fifth Years

Programmes, activities & achievements (2024-2026)





Creative Health illustrations: © David Shrigley

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Foreword

A message from our Chair and Director

The National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH) is delighted to present our second impact report, covering the period August 2024 – July 2026. This has been a time of considerable growth of our team, our activities and our profile in the creative health field.

Our objectives are to facilitate integration across health and social care, to promote collaboration, to shine a light on good practice, to advocate for the value of creativity, to inform policy and to influence and disseminate research. This report addresses each of these objectives in terms of our reach, our activities and the extent to which our work has led to change.

Partnerships are central to our success. We are extremely grateful to our core funders, Oak Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and The Baring Foundation, and to our project funders, Arts Council England, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and NHS organisations across the community, primary and acute sectors.

We would like to thank all those who have worked with us over the period covered by the report, in particular the many people across the country who use and provide creative health interventions. We also highly value our partnerships with the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance and the Lived Experience Network, as well as UK Research and Innovation, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and University College London, through the Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities research programme.

My heartfelt thanks go to our Board of Trustees for their selfless contribution to our work, as well as to our Advisory Group, Creative Health Champions and our growing Special Interest Groups. Most importantly I want to thank all of our talented and committed staff, led with passion by our Director Alex Coulter.

This report outlines our achievements in promoting the benefits of creative health for the health and wellbeing of the population. We are proud of what we have done so far and hope you are inspired to contribute to our on-going work.



Professor Martin Marshall CBE
Chair, NCCH

Following on from Martin's introduction, I would also like to thank our Board of Trustees, and Martin, for their support and leadership over the last two years, and our dedicated staff for their hard work and commitment to the organisation. We have a growing network of partners and allies who we have worked closely with to deliver the impact documented here. This report is organised under the six organisational objectives which together contribute to delivering our mission to advance good practice and research, inform policy and promote collaboration, helping to foster the conditions for creative health to be integral to health, social care and wider systems.

The key objective to integrate creative health into health and care systems focussed on the Creative Health Associates Programme and the evaluation has provided us with a systems change lens through which to view the impact of the programme at a local, regional and national level. This has informed the next phase of the work, the Creative Health Leads in Systems Programme, funded by Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation. Integration is supported by our Creative Health Champions network of senior health and care leaders and by the GP, Nursing and Pharmacy Special Interest Groups, who generate interest and momentum amongst health and care professionals across England and beyond.

Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging, as well as our commitment to promoting lived experience and co-production are underpinning themes throughout and are closely aligned with promoting good practice. We aim to support evidence-informed practice and recently launched an annual Research Round-up, which has been our most visited resource from the last year on the NCCH website. Roundtables delivered for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Creative Health have responded to national policy developments and we have informed strategies and policy at a regional and local level through our work. It is very encouraging to see how many cultural, public health and system wide strategies now have a focus on creative health. It has been a busy time as we mark 5 years since the charity was launched in 2021 and we are in a strong position to move forward into the next five years with confidence. Finally, our grateful thanks to all our funders including the Oak Foundation which has provided sustained support for the organisation since its inception.



Alexandra Coulter
Director NCCH

2024-2026 In Numbers

Our Key Achievements

2024-2026 has been an exciting period of development at NCCH. The success of our Creative Health Associates programme (2023-2025) led to the creation of a larger programme – Creative Health Leads in Systems – which will see up to 30 dedicated roles embedded into health and social care systems across England. With match funding of £1-million from both Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation, we expect this programme to lead to one of the largest investments in creative health from health and social care systems to date.

Since our last impact report, we have also invested in our communications capabilities, focusing on our target audience of health and social care leaders, but witnessing tremendous impact on the field more broadly.

We have developed our focus on translating research and practice into policy, including the creation of our annual Creative Health Research Round-Up (which started in 2025), which now informs our evidence submissions to parliamentary and health and social care inquiries, and continued work with the APPG on Creative Health.

Promoting Collaboration and Partnerships and Developing Co-Production

39

contributions from the field in our equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging survey

5

Masters students Co-Supervised

Facilitating Integrated Approaches Across Health and Social Care

100%

England NHS regions hosted a Creative Health Associate

86%

Integrated Care Systems are interested in hosting a Creative Health Lead

12

health and social care partners selected, so far, to host a Creative Health Lead

86%

Integrated Care Systems represented through our Champions Network

Advancing Good Practice, Including Lived Experience

380

members of our Special Interest Groups for GPs, Nurses and Pharmacists

24

members of the APPG on Creative Health

36

NCCH-hosted events

33

artists and lived experience representatives platformed within parliament

Advocating for the Value of Creativity for Healthy Lives

Over

90,000

new website views

Over

30,000

new YouTube video views

Over

11,000

followers on LinkedIn

3,315

recipients signed up to receive our newsletters

Informing Policy

Over

12,000

new views of the Creative Health Toolkit

Over

29,000

new views of the Creative Health Review

29

targeted briefings and evidence submissions developed

75%

of our select committee evidence submissions have been published by parliament and used to inform their work

Influencing and Disseminating Research

91

outputs, from research and practice, featured in our first Creative Health Research Round-Up

2

special editions of *Perspectives in Public Health*, co-edited with Arts Council England

10

journal articles and book chapters published

4

detailed implementation studies conducted with health systems

About Us

Our Vision – Creativity for Healthy Lives

NCCH was established in 2021 in response to a recommendation in the APPG on Arts Health and Wellbeing report Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, published in 2017.

Now 5 years into our work, the organisation continues to move from strength to strength, reflecting the scale of development in the UK creative health field more broadly.

What is Creative Health?

We define 'creative health' as creative activities and approaches that benefit our health and wellbeing. Activities can include visual and performing arts, crafts, film, literature, cooking and creative activities in nature such as gardening. Approaches include creative and innovative ways to approach health and care services, co-production, education and workforce development.

Creative health can be applied in homes, communities, cultural institutions, heritage sites and healthcare settings.

Creative health contributes to the prevention of ill health, promotion of healthy behaviours, management of long-term conditions and treatment and recovery across the life course.

Our Target Audiences

Our primary audiences are senior health leaders in Integrated Care Boards, Local Authorities and their constituent providers. We also work with audiences across social care, NHS Trusts, primary care, social prescribing and other health and social care networks. At the national level, we seek to influence policy across a range of government departments, including but not limited to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. We work particularly closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, via their Creative Health Lead.

We advocate with national and regional policymakers, research councils and funders to foster the conditions for creative health to be embedded in systems and work with academics and researchers to ensure our approach is rooted in evidence. We produce resources that are relevant to creative health and other creative and cultural providers, the wider voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, and people with lived experience of creative health to help them to make the case for creative health with their own networks.

Working Collaboratively

We work closely with other organisations to achieve our goals, including the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance, the Mayoral Authorities Creative Health Network, the National Arts in Hospitals Network and the Arts and Social Outcomes Network, amongst others.

We are committed to remaining connected across the four nations, whether it be via the dedicated meeting space hosted regularly by Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance, or through our advisory group which contains representatives from the Northern Ireland Creative Health Network, Arts Culture Health & Wellbeing Scotland, Arts Council of Wales, and Arts Council England.

We are also a key partner on the UK Research and Innovation-funded programme, *Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities*, working closely with the Culture Nature Health Research Group at University College London.

Our mission is:

To advance good practice and research, inform policy and promote collaboration, helping to foster the conditions for creative health to be integral to health, social care and wider systems.



Creative Health Illustration by David Shrigley©

Our Six Objectives

**Explore our forthcoming strategy to see how our objectives have evolved.*

1. Facilitating Integrated Approaches Across Health and Social Care	2. Promoting Collaboration and Partnerships and Developing Co-Production	3. Advancing Good Practice, Including Lived Experience	4. Advocating for the Value of Creativity for Healthy Lives	5. Informing Policy	6. Influencing and Disseminating Research
NCCH works closely with health and social care leaders through dedicated networks, roles, resources and communications, helping to translate the value of creativity into something that is intelligible to systems and their priorities.	NCCH views relationships as a key part of creative health infrastructure. We support the development of the relationships, networks, leadership and cultures needed for collective action and long-term systems change.	NCCH supports the development, synthesis and application of knowledge from research, practice, and lived experience to inform decision-making and systems change. This includes strategy development, implementation guidance, and advocacy of diverse types of knowledge.	NCCH translates the value of creativity into language that is intelligible to health and social care priorities. This includes accessible resources, economic evidence, and communications reaching senior leaders through events and digital content.	NCCH connects creative health evidence to policymakers, submitting evidence to national inquiries, convening parliamentarians through the APPG, and responding to government priorities. We also build policy capability and international recognition for the sector.	NCCH curates, synthesises and shares creative health research to help it reach and inform practice. This includes publishing peer-reviewed evidence, our annual Research Round-Up, and contributing to the Mobilising Community Assets programme.



Theory of Change 2020 to 2026

**Explore our forthcoming strategy to see how our theory of change has matured.*

Context

Creative health is beginning to be embedded in some Integrated Care Systems but is not widespread at a systems level.

Health and Care systems are under unprecedented pressure and financial strain.

The population is ageing and more people are living with multiple long-term conditions, the prevalence of mental ill-health in children and young peoples is worryingly high.

Health inequalities are among the worst in Europe the gap is widening.

Creative health improves wellbeing at community level, building social capital and social cohesion and through improving the environments in which people live, grow, work and age, interacting with the wider social determinants of health to address health inequalities.

An ever-strengthening body of research tells us that engaging with creativity and culture improves mental health and wellbeing and can be used in the prevention, treatment, management and recovery of physical health conditions.

Action

CH Associates support 7 ICBs to embed creative health in planning, delivery, and sustainable posts.

Creative Health toolkit is disseminated.

Creative Health maturity framework is developed with the participation of key partners in ICBs.

Huddles co-produced with service providers and people with lived experience of mental health services.

Knowledge sharing outputs and events on evidence from UKRI partnership and CH Associates programme. Building on CH Associates programme across 42 ICBs

Creative Health Review dissemination.

Specific policy briefings and tailored outputs for different audiences.

Intermediate Outcomes

7 host ICBs show impact of CH Associates programme in planning, delivery and sustainable posts.

Toolkit is used in other ICBs.

Creative Health maturity framework supports all ICBs to track progress on embedding creative health in systems.

Huddles influence use of co-production in design and delivery of mental health services.

Increased creative health activity is evaluated and further embedded.

Creative health approaches influence health service design and delivery in more areas.

More people benefit from access to creative health opportunities.

Creative health reduces need for health services and supports prevention, self-management and recovery.

Increased awareness and knowledge of benefits of creative health is reflected in health and care systems planning and delivery.

Evidence of cost benefits and money saving for systems is reflected in more sustainable funding models.

Knowledge sharing supports consortia development at a place level with a focus on tackling health inequalities.

Progress is seen on a cross-departmental strategy at government level and creative health strategies in 42 ICBs and within combined authorities.

CH Review report is widely respected and a useful reference document for the field.

Goals

Creative health is embedded and valued in health and care throughout systems and is available to all

Health and care systems are more person and community centred.

There is less pressure on the health system and money is saved

Creative health perceived as essential to thriving individuals, communities and society

Healthy and health creating society with people living healthier and happier lives

Gradient of accountability

Geographic Impact of our Work

GP Special Interest Group

Our founding Special Interest Group – the RCGP Special Interest Group for Creative Health - is about to celebrate their 5th year. They are 178 members strong, working to support patients, students and clinicians.

Nursing Special Interest Group

Our latest Special Interest Group - Nursing Special Interest Group for Creative Health - launched in December 2025, in partnership with the Foundation of Nursing Studies. It has quickly gained traction with 186 members, supporting knowledge mobilisation, education and workforce development.

Pharmacy Special Interest Group

Our Pharmacy Special Interest Group relaunched in February 2026, bringing together 16 members leading on pharmacy creative practice, strategic leadership, education, & research.

Creative Health Champions

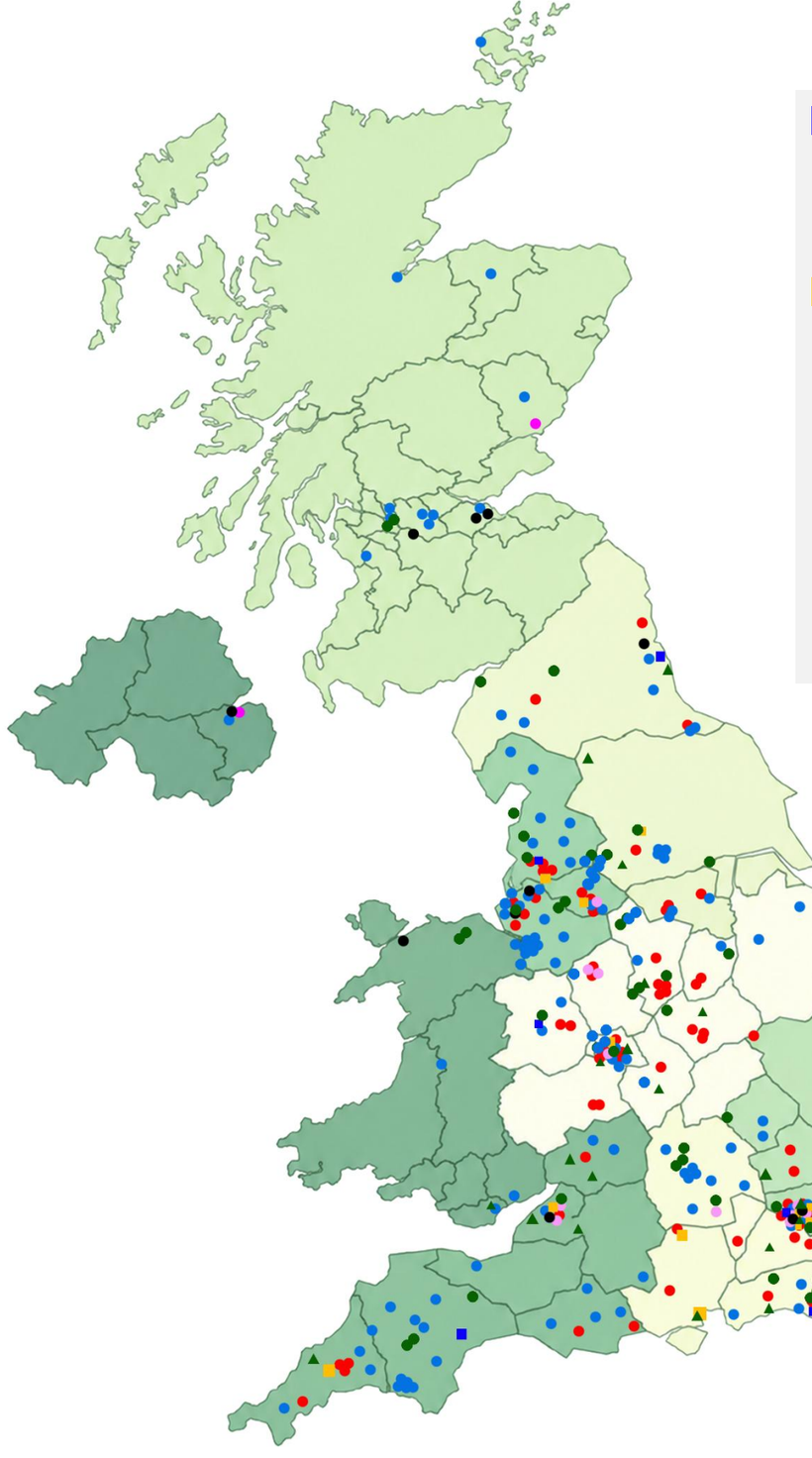
Our Champions Network of senior leaders from health and social care includes representatives from across 31/36 Integrated Care Systems.

APPG on Creative Health Members

NCCH provide the secretariat for the APPG on Creative Health, with 15 members from the House of Commons and 9 from the House of Lords.

Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities

The third phase of this UK Research and Innovation-funded research programme takes place 2024-2027, with 12 projects across the UK.



Creative Health Associates

Until March 2025, we hosted seven Associates, based across each of the NHS regions in England.

Creative Health Leads

In the first two rounds of the Creative Health Leads programme (March and May 2026) we selected 12 systems to host a Creative Health Lead.

Creative Health Associates and Creative Health Leads are both roles embedded within health and social care systems focused on bridging, convening, strategy development and knowledge mobilisation.

Objective 1

Facilitating Integrated Approaches Across Health and Social Care Systems

Creative Health Associates Programme

NCCH's Creative Health Associates programme continued to make impact during this reporting period, until its conclusion in March 2025. Funded by Arts Council England and supported by a Programme Manager, the programme embedded seven strategic roles within each NHS region via seven host Integrated Care Boards:

- North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (North East and Yorkshire)
- Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (North West)
- Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (East of England)
- Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board (Midlands)
- Sussex Integrated Care Board (South East)
- Devon Integrated Care Board (South West)
- North East London Integrated Care Board (London)

"The CHA's presence has raised awareness about the importance of creative approaches in improving health and wellbeing, influencing both organisational culture and individual mindsets"

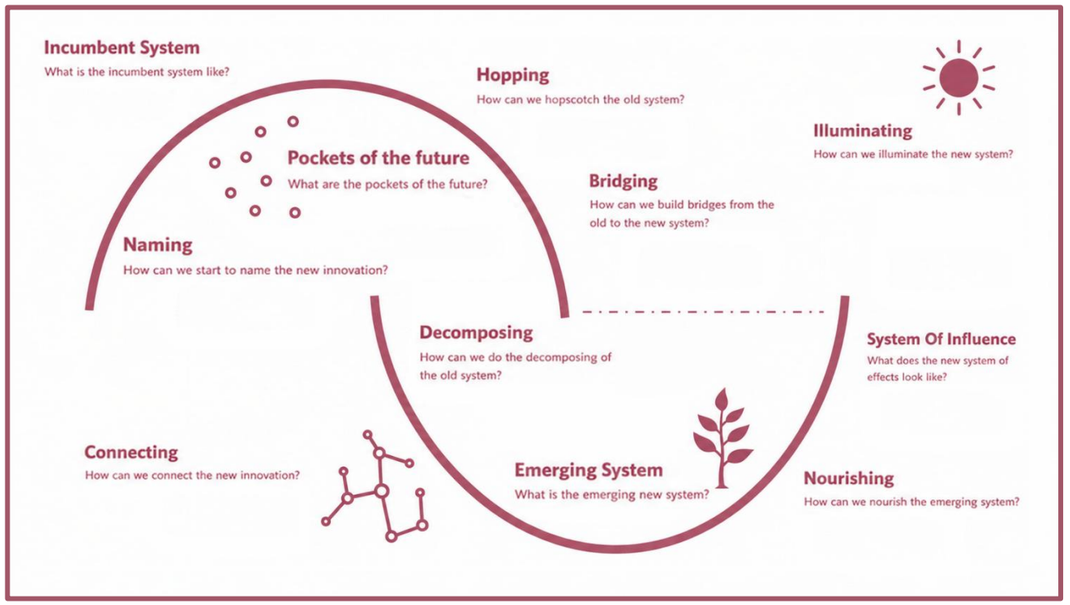
– Participant in stakeholder evaluation workshop

An independent evaluation of the programme used the Berkana Institute's 'Two Loops' framework to explore how creative health-enabling systems change occurred within the complex environments in which the Associates were embedded. It showed that the Associates helped identify and strengthen emerging approaches while building connections between existing health systems and new ways of working. Through activities such as mapping local assets, raising awareness of creative health, connecting stakeholders, supporting networks and creating opportunities for collaboration, the Associates contributed to an emerging movement for change within local, regional and national systems.

The programme demonstrated the value of dedicated creative health leadership roles within health systems. The learning generated through the programme directly informed the development of NCCH's Creative Health Leads Programme, launched in 2026. The evaluation helped identify the conditions, skills, relationships and organisational support required for creative health leadership roles to be most effective, enabling NCCH to build on the successes and lessons of the pilot phase.

"You've got health and you've got culture talking to each other. They're starting the process of narrowing that gap."

– Creative Health Associate



Creative Health Leads Programme

The Creative Health Leads programme will enable health and social care organisations across England to embed creative health into prevention, population health, clinical pathways and neighbourhood models of care.

The programme was made possible through a £1-million commitment, each, from both Arts Council England and The Baring Foundation. So far, this investment has helped to secure match funding of £1,169,298 from health and social care. We anticipate further investment of at least £1,114,560 from NHS and Public Health in the next 3 years. The programme represents a rare example of multi-million-pound investment in creative health from health and social care systems in England – a testament to the quality of the relationships, advocacy, and reputation NCCH has built since its inception.

"This programme represents an important step in moving creative health from inspiring projects to lasting system change."

– David McQuillan, Creativity & health programme manager, South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

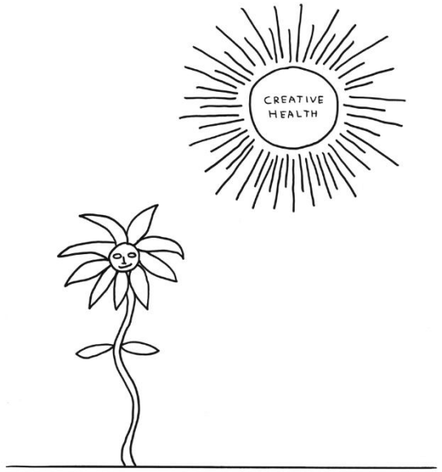
With 12 systems already engaged through our first and second rounds of health and social care applications, we anticipate 25–30 posts will be supported across England over the next three years. These will have a good geographic spread across England, with different posts operating across Integrated Care Boards, Local Authority Public Health, provider collaborator-led social care, and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. There is also a dedicated Creative Health Integration Lead working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and the South-West Region.

Creative Health Champions Network

Our Creative Health Champions network has been going from strength to strength, connecting, inspiring and enabling members in their endeavours to embed creative health in health and social care settings and communities across the country.

The network is for senior leaders and decision-makers within health and social care systems with the influence and ability to connect, share ideas and celebrate what is working well. They offer mutual support to enable all to advocate for, adopt and grow creative health across health and care systems with a confident, collective voice.

In 2025, Dr Jane Povey (previously chair of the Champions Network) helped NCCH to review what was working, whether the membership requirements remained appropriate, and how we could continue to support senior leaders moving forward. Her findings identified that NCCH's key support mechanisms were providing tailored communications, practical resources, webinars, networking opportunities, and audience-specific tools that enable advocates to promote creative health effectively within health and care systems. We create multiple routes for champions to contribute to the movement – from sharing stories, creating content and speaking at events, to recruiting new members, convening conversations, and amplifying creative health messages through their professional networks.



Our Champions Network now spans 31/36 Integrated Care Systems* in addition to national roles, with members drawn from:

- **Local Authorities (31%)**
- **Integrated Care Boards (27%)**
- **NHS Trusts (22%)**
- **Primary Care Networks (1%)**
- **Other (15%)**

** The equivalent to 34/42 of the previous ICB boundaries, which changed in April 2026.*

Special Interest Groups

NCCH's Special Interest Groups create opportunities for health professionals to share learning, champion creative health within their disciplines, and influence future practice. Each Special Interest Group is led by its own Steering Group, with responsibility for defining and driving its individual remit and areas of focus. All the Special Interest Groups are open to members across the UK's four nations.

The GP Special Interest Group, supported by the Royal College of General Practitioners, has continued to strengthen the profile of creative health within primary care since its inception in November 2021. It runs monthly webinars, online social events and two in-person study days per year, which play a key role in connecting members and providing a space to learn together and to share creative practice, as well as to help foster wider inclusion of creative health in education, practice and policy.

"A really rich and inspiring day."

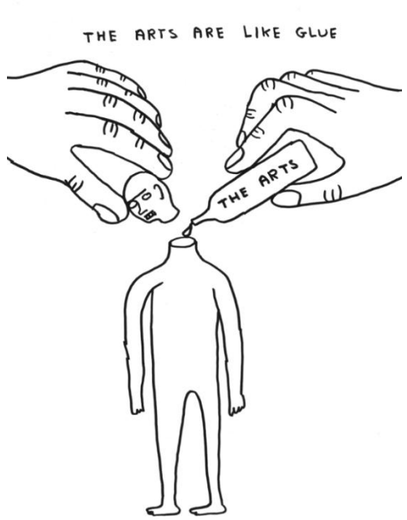
"I thank you all for bringing light to a difficult week."

– GPs Special Interest Group members

The Nursing Special Interest Group is delivered in partnership with the Foundation of Nursing Studies. Since its launch in December 2025, the Special Interest Group has rapidly established itself as a national platform for advancing creative health within nursing education, practice and leadership. Members are pioneering creative health placements and training pathways, as well as developing books and strategy papers.

"I found it really encouraging and has inspired me to look at other ways we can incorporate creative health in practice. It has inspired me to set up a local creative health group."

– A member of the Nursing Special Interest Group



The Pharmacy Special Interest Group remains a smaller but growing network, bringing together pharmacists, educators and researchers interested in the role of creativity within pharmacy practice and workforce wellbeing. The group provides a forum for professional exchange and is helping to build awareness of how creative health can contribute to more person-centred and preventative approaches to care, as well as creative approaches to pharmacy practice, strategic leadership, education and research.

Training and Communicating with Health and Social Care Leaders

Alongside our networks and roles, NCCH communicates directly with health and social care leaders to help translate the value of creativity into language that speaks to their priorities. This includes a dedicated newsletter, implementation resources and at-a-glance guides, and social media content tailored to leaders' priorities and commissioning requirements.

We also deliver training directly to health and social care audiences, building practical understanding of how creative health can support their priorities. This has included training delivered in Manchester on health inequalities, helping participants apply creative approaches to their own practice and commissioning decisions.

Objective 2

Promoting Collaboration and Partnerships and Developing Co-production

Collaboration, partnerships and co-production remain central to NCCH's approach to systems change. Through illustrative examples we show how this contributes to more inclusive decision-making, a stronger sector and long-term systems change.

Informing a More Inclusive and Representative Creative Health Movement

During the reporting period, NCCH undertook a sector consultation exploring belonging and inclusion within creative health. Participants consistently described creativity as universal, relational and deeply human, while also highlighting barriers created by language, systems, professional cultures and unequal representation. Many called for greater recognition of lived experience, accessibility, cultural diversity and different ways of participating within creative health.

This feedback has shaped our emerging work on creative health communication and belonging. We are increasingly interested in how communications, leadership approaches and creative practice can help different people feel welcomed, represented and able to participate, while recognising that there is no single creative health offer that works for everyone. As part of this work, NCCH is exploring how creativity can help reach underserved audiences, broaden whose knowledge is valued within healthcare conversations and strengthen relationships between clinicians, patients and communities.

Creating More Equitable and Collaborative Spaces

NCCH seeks not only to bring people together, but also to create environments where different forms of expertise can contribute more equally to discussion and decision-making. Through creative facilitation techniques and participatory approaches, we aim to foster collaboration across professional, organisational and lived experience boundaries. Here are a couple of examples of what that can entail:

At a spring 2026 event delivered in partnership with King's College London, participants selected postcards from a curated collection and explored how the images could act as metaphors for their work. Rather than beginning with professional roles or organisational responsibilities, the activity encouraged conversations around interpretation, communication and personal meaning, helping to establish a more open and balanced foundation for collaboration.

"We are deeply grateful to the National Centre for Creative Health […] for sponsoring places on the [anti-racism in creative health] course and making this space of reflection and growth accessible to a wider group of practitioners."

– Jemilea Wisdom-Baako, Director, Writerz and Scribez

A similar approach was used by one of our Creative Health Associates during the development of an Integrated Care Board health strategy for the homeless. Individuals with lived experience of homelessness participated alongside senior system leaders in a theatre-based activity that deliberately shifted traditional assumptions about expertise within the room. By creating a different starting point for conversation, participants were able to engage more openly with one another, strengthening the resulting strategy through lived experience insight and shared ownership.

These approaches reflect NCCH's wider commitment to creating collaborative spaces where a broader range of perspectives, experiences and forms of knowledge can influence decision-making.



Find out more in: Season 2, Episode 7 of The Voices of Creative Health podcast 'Belonging at the Heart of Creative Health'

Strengthening Connections Across the Creative Health Ecosystem

NCCH continues to play an active role in connecting and convening people, organisations and systems across the creative health landscape. Throughout this reporting period, we contributed to strategic partnerships and knowledge-sharing meetings, with collaborators such as Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance, Lived Experience Network, Arts & Social Outcomes Network, the Mayoral Creative Health Network, Arts Council England, National Arts in Hospitals Network, Royal Society for Public Health, Northern Ireland Creative Health Network, Arts Culture Health & Wellbeing Scotland, Wales Arts Health & Well-being Network, London Arts & Health and Jameel Arts & Health Lab. We also participated in events and discussions hosted by organisations including NHS Confederation, National Academy for Social Prescribing, The King's Fund, Royal College of General Practitioners and British Medical Association. These activities help reduce fragmentation across the field, strengthen opportunities for collaboration and enable learning, evidence and innovation to travel more effectively between places, sectors and disciplines.

In 2026, NCCH also introduced patrons as a new way of strengthening advocacy and cross-sector engagement. Our patrons – Dr Phil Hammond, Baroness Lola Young OBE and David Shrigley OBE – bring expertise spanning health, policy, culture and public engagement, helping to amplify creative health through trusted voices, established networks and broader representation across policy, cultural and clinical conversations.



Figure 2: Neighbourhood Health and Creative Health Roundtable, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Creative Health, organised in collaboration with NCCH. Credit: Jane Hearst



Figure 1: NCCH's Creative Health in Neighbourhoods event, during Healing Arts Birmingham. Credit: Jane Hearst

Supporting Leadership for Long-Term Systems Change

A core part of NCCH's role is supporting the leaders, partnerships and cultures that enable creative health to become more embedded within health and social care systems. This work extends beyond individual projects or interventions and focuses on creating the conditions for long-term change.

Across our networks, events and partnerships, we work alongside leaders who recognise the potential of creative health but are often operating within complex environments shaped by competing priorities, resource pressures and organisational change. By creating opportunities for shared learning, honest discussion, creativity, hopefulness and collaborative problem-solving, NCCH helps leaders explore more preventative, relational and community-connected approaches to health and wellbeing.

Through this convening role, we have helped to strengthen relationships across sectors, build confidence in creative health approaches and support the development of leadership communities capable of sustaining change over time.

Objective 3

Advancing Good Practice, Including Lived Experience

Creative health often entails delivering provision that has nuanced and personal outcomes, achieved via mechanisms that are multifaceted. Similarly, integrating creative health into health and social care systems requires navigating their intricate, dynamic and localised natures, against the backdrop of fast-paced policy windows.

This is the context in which NCCH operates and – drawing on the Cynefin Framework (pictured right) – we believe that working in this context requires us to recognise that 'best practice' is not always the optimum goal, as it can entail simplifying complex phenomena and contexts into that which can be readily made sense of, or limiting action around only that which can be wholly known. Instead, we seek to advance 'good practice' and, at times, 'emergent practice'.

In our vision of maturity, the field of creative health balances the tangible with the intangible; the clinical with the human. Delivery entails cross-sectoral collaboration, local innovation and adaptation, and the utilisation of community assets.

Clear



Sense Looking at incoming data, cause-and-effect relationships are self-evident, stable and predictable.

Categorise Place it in a recognised categorisation or label, informed by previous knowns.

Respond Execute the established rules of **BEST PRACTICE**

Complicated

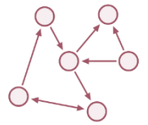


Sense Assess the facts and gather information. Cause and effect exists, but the answer is not immediately obvious.

Analyse Study the data, investigate options, consult the broad stakeholders that shape phenomenon for hidden nuance.

Respond With known unknowns still present, expert judgement is needed to identify the right form of **GOOD PRACTICE** for the current context.

Complex

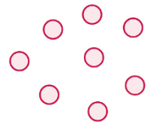


Probe Instead of analysing the problem upfront, leaders run small safe-to-fail experiments. They interact with the system to see how it shifts.

Sense Leaders watch the results of their probes, looking for patterns and weak signals to interpret further.

Respond Based on patterns, leaders amplify what works and dampen what fails to discover **EMERGENT PRACTICE**

Chaotic



Act Turbulence necessitates the need to act immediately, with decisive intervention, ahead of experimentation. Acting seeks to introduce the stability required to make-sense-of in a more meaningful way.

Sense Look out for where order is beginning to emerge in response to action, and where action remains ineffective.

Respond Adjust according to what is learnt via **NOVEL PRACTICE** with a view to moving into a complex or complicated domain.

This perspective shapes how we identify, interpret and share good practice from across the creative health field. Alongside academic research, we draw upon practitioner knowledge, strategic insight, evaluation findings, implementation science, and lived experience perspectives. By bringing these different forms of expertise together, NCCH helps the sector develop a more layered understanding of value, impact and evidence. Our role is not simply to gather examples, but to support collective sense-making and help translate learning into systems-ready action.

"That is the nicest bit of collective health evidence I've read in a while - well done to the authors [NCCH]. Showcasing community orgs, and partnership."

– Anonymised social media comment

We value ongoing collaboration with peers across the field who bring different perspectives on how good practice should be identified, interpreted and applied. This includes organisations such as the International Network for the Critical Appraisal of Arts and Health Research, which champions methodological rigour and critical appraisal, alongside networks such as Lived Experience Network which advocates for the value of lived expertise within health and care decision-making. By building on one another's strengths and constructively challenging one another's assumptions, we believe we can create a more mature, reflective and impactful creative health field.

Our Impact Supporting Strategy and Systems Development

At NCCH, we have supported local and national stakeholders to understand how creative health can contribute to challenges facing health and social care systems, while ensuring that discussions remain grounded in the realities of delivery and implementation. Nationally, this has included the synthesis of evidence and curation of expert insights to aid a range of strategic discussions. Locally, our influence and support have shaped the development of networks and strategies. Together, this has strengthened the conditions for creative health to become more embedded within policy, strategy and service delivery.

Case study:

Herefordshire Cultural Partnership's development of the Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2025–30 demonstrates how local cultural leaders are increasingly embedding creative health within wider place-based strategies. Following participation in an NCCH knowledge-sharing event on cultural compact leadership, and through ongoing exchanges about creative health implementation in other systems, Herefordshire drew on emerging national learning while shaping a distinctly rural approach that positions creative health as one of five strategic priorities and an ambition to become an exemplar for rural creative health practice by 2030. One of NCCH's Creative Health Associates contributed to the strategy's consultation process, supporting local partners as they developed a collaborative vision linking culture, wellbeing, economic development and community participation.

Our Impact Capturing Learning About Implementation

A growing area of NCCH's work focuses on understanding not only whether creative health works, but how it can be implemented successfully within real-world systems. While evidence of impact remains important, implementation often determines whether successful approaches can be sustained, adapted and scaled.

During the reporting period, NCCH has increasingly focused on capturing learning from places that have successfully integrated creative health into health and care systems. This includes detailed case studies exploring the development of creative health infrastructure, partnerships and delivery models, including work undertaken in Gloucestershire and Birmingham. Ongoing learning about implementation has informed NCCH's growing range of practical resources designed to support practitioners, commissioners and system leaders.

Our Impact in Advocating for a Broader Recognition of 'Expertise'

NCCH has sought to continuously maintain the role of lived experience within its work. This includes supporting lived experience contributors to participate in strategic discussions and helping ensure that policy, practice and system development are informed by those most affected by decisions. Examples include contributions from lived experience representatives within APPG discussions and wider engagement activities, helping to broaden whose perspectives are recognised within national conversations.

Alongside this work, NCCH has continued to explore how belonging, identity and representation influence participation within creative health. This has supported the sharing of good practice in relation to topics such as anti-racism, LGBT+ health and men's health, via resources and evidence submissions to national inquiries. This work reflects a wider commitment to ensuring that conversations about good practice are informed by diverse experiences and perspectives, while recognising that there is no single pathway into creative health and no single model that works for every community.

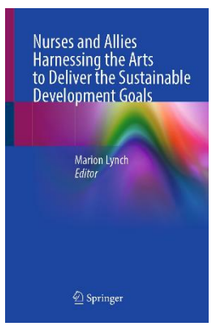
Strengthening the Infrastructure for Good Practice

The ability to identify and share good practice depends upon having effective mechanisms for capturing and organising knowledge. Throughout the reporting period, NCCH has continued to strengthen its internal approaches to collecting diverse evidence and case studies from across the sector, through dedicated databases. These structures help us to broaden whose work we refer to in evidence submissions, policy briefings, and industry resources, enabling a fairer approach to representation.

As creative health continues to evolve, NCCH has begun to explore the implications of emerging technologies for the field – including digital referral systems, delivery via CreaTech, and AI-enhanced data analysis – considering good practice in ethics and safety. While this remains an emerging area of work, it reflects our commitment to understanding how future developments may shape both creative health practice and the wider systems within which it operates.

"Inspired by today's [APPG] contributions including […] our very own Laura Porter and other lived experience voices that keep us honest."

– David Moss, Locality Director, One Weston and Woodspring, NHS Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board



Read more about creative health strategies in England in our dedicated book chapter within *Nurses and Allies Harnessing the Arts to Deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.*

Objective 4

Advocating for the Value of Creativity for Healthy Lives

A central part of NCCH's role is to advocate for the value of creativity to healthy lives, and to translate that value into something that is intelligible to health and social care systems and their priorities. We find that advocacy is most effective when it meets decision-makers where they are, using the language of prevention, place, population health, and value for money. Across this reporting period, NCCH has strengthened the resources and communications that help creative health speak clearly, credibly and accessibly to the people who hold the power to shape health and care.

Accessible Resources for Busy Decision-Makers

Recognising that health and social care leaders rarely have time to read lengthy reports, NCCH has developed a growing suite of 'Creative Health in Practice' resources, which are concise, one-to-two-page summaries designed to give a quick, reliable orientation to a topic. These resources distil complex material into a form that can be easily digested. They can be used to brief a commissioner, helping creative health travel more easily into the settings where decisions are made.

Making the Case for Value

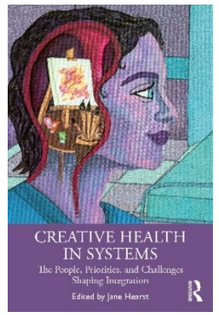
As health and care systems face sustained financial pressure, the economic case for creative health has become an increasingly important part of NCCH's advocacy. NCCH has helped to support work from the creative health economics workstream of the Mobilising Community Assets programme, which is building a more robust economic and business case for creative health. This has included webinars and expert review of the initial drafts of the work by commissioners and policymakers.

Alongside this, NCCH has commissioned and supervised research on the funding and commissioning of creative health, to strengthen the evidence available to the field.

By developing this type of evidence with participants and reviewers from across health and culture, Mobilising Community Assets and NCCH are helping to position creative health not as an additional cost but as a contributor to prevention, reduced demand, and better use of existing community resources.

"The outputs from NCCH are the highlight of my week. Each time I see an update email I want to open it, and the content always motivates me to do more and learn more. […] Your curating and motivating skills shine through and I am deeply grateful for the sense and joy you bring to my world."

– Marion Lynch, CEO and Founder of Art of Nursing CIC; co-lead of NCCH's Nursing Special Interest Group for Creative Health.



Over the reporting period, our Research and Policy Manager edited the book *Creative Health in Systems: The People, Priorities, and Challenges Shaping Integration.*

Informing Strategic Value

NCCH's advocacy has directly informed the strategic decisions of partners across the system. The Creative Health Associates programme, in particular, demonstrated how sustained, credible advocacy at a regional level can shape strategic priorities, with Associates contributing to strategy development within their host systems.

"Our associate has been really critical in engaging with our Integrated Care Board directors and making the case for how creative health can help on some of the NHS spending platforms"

– Anonymised participant in stakeholder evaluation workshop

The recently released book *Creative Health in Systems: The People, Priorities, and Challenges Shaping Integration* was inspired by the Creative Health Associates programme, capturing and sharing the insights it generated with a wider professional and academic audience.

Reaching Audiences Through Events, Blogs and Digital Content

NCCH's events, blogs, briefings, short-form videos, and newsletters help our most important work reach different types of people and inform their thinking and reflection. Our YouTube content continues to draw significant engagement, including our videos *Workforce Wellbeing and Cultural Change, via Creative Health* which has over 14,000 views, and *Flourishing in Healthcare* which has almost 6,000. As we seek to impact new audiences, we have begun to engage with public speaking opportunities, such as a TEDx talk aimed at entrepreneurs and the general public, and podcast interviews, such as The Voices of Creative Health, by Jennifer Leslie, and Laidback: The Arturo Zinga Podcast, by Arinzechukwu Ude.

"It is very interesting, informative and impressive to see the activity and information and evidence sharing being led by the NCCH at the moment. Thank you for the work you are putting in on behalf of the creative health sector around this."

– Douglas Noble, Strategic Director Music in Health, Live Music Now

Across our two newsletters we have 3,315 subscribers, with an average open rate of 39%. In the last year, our LinkedIn posts have received 504,354 impressions and 31,240 clicks through to content. Over 50% of our followers are classified as Senior Leaders or Directors. Our website has received an average of 3,789 user visits per month, which equates to over 45,000 visits per year (21,000 of which are from the UK). Top performing content from 2026 has included our Creative Health Leads programme announcements, our 2025 Creative Health Research Round-Up, and implementation resources from the Mobilising Community Assets programme 'deep dives'. Per month, we continue to see an average of 1,213 views of our 2023 Creative Health Review, illustrating its lasting impact on the field.

"The resources on the NCCH website are always so generous. Thank you for that. It makes keeping up to date with what's going on so much easier."

– Jade French, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow, Loughborough University.



Catch our Research and Policy Manager in her TEDx talk, '*Creative Ways of Staying Alive*'

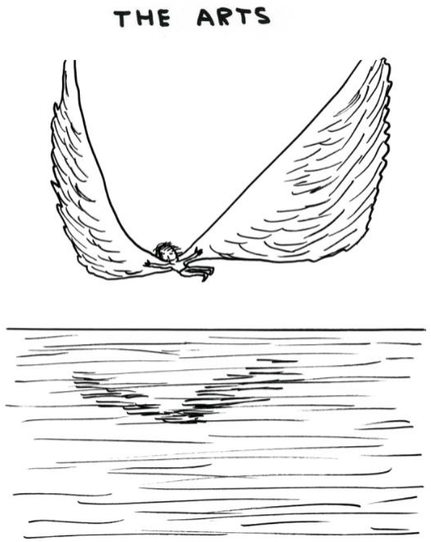
Special Interest Group-mediated Advocacy

Our Special Interest Groups are helping to shape conversations about the future of medical education, exploring how creativity can strengthen clinical training and deepen understanding of patient experience.

Members of the GP Special Interest Group have contributed to national events, panels, webinars and journal publications, while sharing practical examples of how creativity can support whole-person care, reflective practice, and staff wellbeing within GP surgeries and Primary Care Networks.

"I can always tell when members have attended a health or social care event – whether it be presenting or networking – because I get a flurry of enquiries about their Special Interest Group in my inbox. They do a really good job of advocating for Creative Health to their peers."

– Alexis Butt, General Manager, NCCH



The Pharmacy Special Interest Group is exploring how creativity can help transform pharmacy spaces into more inclusive, person-centred healthcare environments that promote health and wellbeing while supporting pharmacy teams to deliver best practice.

The Nursing Special Interest Group was responsible for the *Being Seen, Being Heard, Being* summit and exhibition at Kensington Palace, delivered in partnership with the Art of Nursing, which helped to raise the visibility of nurses' creative practice and its contribution to health and wellbeing.

"Attending in Kensington has had a significant impact on my future practice. It reinforced the importance of seeing patients as individuals with unique experiences, interests, and emotional needs, rather than focusing solely on their medical conditions. […] The event demonstrated how creative approaches can help improve communication, reduce anxiety, promote social connection, and enhance quality of life for people of all ages and backgrounds. This has encouraged me to consider more holistic approaches to care and to recognise the value of non-clinical interventions alongside medical treatment."

– A member of the Nursing Special Interest Group



Figure 3: World Cafe Activity, at *Being Seen, Being Heard, Being* summit and exhibition at Kensington Palace

Objective 5

Informing Policy

NCCH plays a distinctive role in connecting creative health to the policy process. Informed by training from the Institute for Government, our approach acknowledges three types of policy stakeholders: 'influencers' (the people who shape the conversations and remit), 'decision-makers' (who shape the direction of policy and resource allocation), and 'implementers' (who translate policy into practice on the ground). We connect evidence and logic models to all three, providing credibility to the creative health approach, translating its value into existing agendas, and convening the right mix of people to act upon findings.

Providing Evidence to National Inquiries

NCCH regularly submits evidence to select committees and NHS and Department of Health and Social Care inquiries, ensuring that creative health is represented in the formal processes through which national policy is scrutinised and shaped. These submissions synthesise research, practice and lived experience into accessible, policy-relevant contributions, helping decision-makers see how creative approaches can support their objectives across a range of health priorities.

"These documents are so very useful - really appreciate them being so easy to access and share."

– Gemma Alldred, Creative Health Lead, The Arts Development Company, and Co-Director, CoCreate Dorset

Over the last year, 100% of our select committee submissions were chosen to inform the outputs and outcomes of committees, demonstrating our increasing success and impact. We've also sought to encourage others from the field of creative health to submit evidence alongside us, helping to create a more collective and well-represented voice. This approach has seen good success so far, with the recent Children and Young People's Mental Health Inquiry seeing a broad selection of creative health submissions chosen as evidence to inform the committees' work.

All of our evidence submissions and policy briefings are added to the NCCH resources page once they are available for public sharing. We have received positive feedback from policy stakeholders across the four nations, who are looking for concise overviews of how we view the relationship between creative health and familiar government agendas. This means our impact is able to extend beyond the outputs original uses into broader policy contexts.

"It's great that you've done all of the strategic thinking already; that concise overview is exactly what we need."

– Alison Clarke, Wales Centre for Public Policy

There have been 29 targeted policy briefings and evidence submissions created in the reporting period:

1. Arts Council England Hodge Review
2. NCCH Darzi Report Key Messages
3. 10-Year Plan (NCCH response)
4. 10-Year Plan (Mobilising Community Assets response)
5. 10-Year Plan (briefing)
6. How creativity supports children's mental health and wellbeing in schools
7. Creativity for Health and Wellbeing in the Education System (Roundtable briefing)
8. POSTnote on Children's wellbeing and behaviour in schools
9. Men's Health Strategy (Select Committee)
10. Shaping the National Cancer Plan
11. Creative Health and Older Adults
12. Creative Health and Combined Authorities (CH Review)
13. Get Britain Working White Paper – Links to Creative Health (Department for Work and Pensions)
14. Creativity and Children and Young People's Mental Health (APPG)
15. Curriculum and assessment review
16. Creative Health and Prevention
17. Mental Health Strategy (Department of Health and Social Care)
18. Casey Commission: Adult Social Care
19. Youth Creative Health
20. LGBT+ Health Review (NHS)
21. Creative Health and the Future of Nursing and Midwifery (NHS)
22. Creative Support for the Early Years (Select Committee)
23. Creative health and the 10-Year Workforce Plan (Department of Health and Social Care)
24. Creative Health and Neighbourhood Care (APPG)
25. Dance and Movement for Healthy Ageing (Select Committee)
26. Children and Young People's Mental Health (Select Committee)
27. Digital Health and CreaTech (APPG)
28. Briefing on Creative Health for MPs
29. return on investment of Creative Health (Department of Health and Social Care)

To see our latest briefing and evidence submissions, visit: https://ncch.org.uk/resources/briefings

Convening and Informing Parliament

Through the APPG on Creative Health, for whom we provide the secretariat, NCCH has created regular opportunities for policymakers and system leaders to engage directly with creative health evidence and with the people delivering/ receiving it. Our policy briefings are designed to be clear and immediately usable, balancing different stakeholder perspectives and policy priorities. They have been recognised by audiences for their quality and accessibility.

NCCH have led 6 parliamentary roundtables with the APPG on Creative Health during during the reporting period, in addition to supporting a plethora of other creative health-themed APPG events hosted by our network.

The roundtables we have hosted respond to prominent policy topics in national Government:

1. Inaugural meeting and Annual General Meeting
2. Roundtable on Prevention and Creative Health
3. Roundtable on Creativity and Children and Young People's Mental Health
4. Roundtable on Neighbourhood Health and Creative Health
5. Annual General Meeting
6. Roundtable on Digital Health and CreaTech

Find out more about the APPG on Creative Health, including playback recordings of our roundtables, via: https://ncch.org.uk/appg-on-creative-health

We've been pleased to see our APPG roundtables and briefings lead to other policy-forward work in the field. A recent example is NCCH's work on CreaTech and digital creative health, which went on to shape the lens through which p_ART_icipate assembled their own Parliamentary roundtable, report and recommendations. Another example is an evidence briefing from NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) North East and North Cumbria, on the benefits of creative activities for the wellbeing of children and young people, which cites our APPG briefing on Creativity and Children and Young People's Mental Health. Additionally, we have seen how our role in inviting creative health practitioners to Parliament has had a positive impact on roundtable contributors. A great example of this comes from Noise Solution, whose involvement in our APPG helped them secure large investment into their work.

"It was a privilege to be invited to the House of Lords to share our creative wellbeing project [...] many thanks to […] the National Centre for Creative Health for arranging such a positive and energising event, and for the warm welcome"[n]

– Sara Hadi, Creative Director, Mimar Collective CIC

Responding to Government and Partner Priorities

Increasingly, stakeholders in government approach NCCH directly for evidence and briefings that speak to live policy questions. During this reporting period, NCCH produced tailored content for four government departments, translating broad and complex policy challenges into coherent narratives that show how creative health can contribute to priorities.

Examples include our briefing, Youth Creative Health, which was tasked to connect the impact of creativity on prevention/ mental health, placemaking, and skills development/ employment, with a focus on young people not in employment, education or training.

Another example is NCCH's support of the new Creative Health Lead in the Department of Health and Social Care who asked us to collate evidence on return on investment across a range of public health priority areas: smoking, physical inactivity, obesity, alcohol consumption, health in work, mental health, vaccination, screening uptake, genomics, and best start in life. We worked closely with Arts Council England, and a range of other creative health partners, to develop a credible dataset.

Building Policy Capabilities in the Sector

NCCH has recently turned our attention to strengthening the pathway between research and policy via knowledge-sharing and capacity-building in the sector. Our Research and Policy Manager has contributed to expert panels, such as a British Academy-funded panel at the Health Humanities Hub, Loughborough University, to support early-career researchers to upskill their policy impact. The success of this work, so far, has led to the development of online resources, which will launch shortly after this reporting period.

International Leadership

The UK is increasingly recognised as an international leader in creative health, and NCCH is becoming widely acknowledged as a significant influence on that leadership. This was reflected in a statement made this year at a Parliamentary Roundtable led by the Jameel Arts and Health Lab, where NCCH's role was explicitly recognised for how approaches are mirrored elsewhere in the world. We feel incredibly honoured to have been recognised for this achievement and endeavour to uphold and build upon these standards in the next iterations of our work.

"In addition to the countless organizations I'm confident you inspire and engage in the UK, you are also having impact 'across the pond'. Thank you for your work and for leading by example."

– Shelley Lepp, Chief Executive Officer, Writers Collective of Canada

Objective 6

Influencing and Disseminating Research

NCCH occupies a distinctive space between research and practice. Our function is to translate research into action for health and social care audiences – moving from theory to application, supporting spread and adoption of good practice, promoting place-based, community-asset-informed design, aligning and translating evidence to health and social care policy, and turning findings into actionable business cases and frameworks. In doing so, we help ensure that a growing and increasingly rigorous evidence base does not remain within academia, but reaches the people who can act on it.

Curating and Publishing Evidence

A significant milestone in this period was our two special editions of *Perspectives in Public Health* journal, co-edited with Arts Council England. This opportunity brought together high-quality peer-reviewed research and frontmatter articles from industry, to raise the profile and credibility of the field within the public health community.

"We had an extraordinary response to the call out for articles. The breadth of the topics covered shows how these ideas are taking root across both the health and creative and cultural sectors."

– Darren Henley, Chief Executive, Arts Council England, and Alexandra Coulter, Director, National Centre for Creative Health, from their Special Edition editorial 'Putting creativity at the heart of public health'

The Creative Health Research Round-Up

Our inaugural Creative Health Research Round-Up – delivered as both a report and an event, in collaboration with the Royal Society for Public Health – has become a valued resource in the field. Receiving a fantastic response of 109 submissions from across the field – 91 of which made their way into the published report – it has become our most visited resource from the last year on the NCCH website, which yearly receives over 90,000 visitors. The January 2025 launch event featured six speakers from different career stages and corners of the UK, whose work appeared within our Round-Up report. Combining live and on-demand viewers, the event has now been watched by almost 1,000 people.

"This is a phenomenal piece of work […] Thank you for blending the art and science of healthcare so beautifully. This is what we need."

– Ananta Dave, Chief Medical Officer & Consultant Psychiatrist, NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board

NCCH's approach to the Round-Up is built on equity between academia and practice, and with a view to help translate research into action. Every submission is distilled into a plain-language summary, so findings are accessible to people across the sector. Our focus on UK-based work means the evidence we gathered can translate directly into UK policy and systems change. Our launch event stimulated powerful discussions from a range of participants and the report was celebrated by those featured as an important recognition of their work in the field.

"There's so much great stuff being released about creative health at the moment, I struggle to keep up. So, I find your synthesis documents so useful for keeping up to date and knowing where to focus my attention. The research round-up is a great example of that!"

– Angela Whitecross, Programme Manager for Creative Health, Greater Manchester Combined Authority



Read our 2025 edition of the Creative Health Research Round-Up .here

Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities

NCCH continues to partner with and contribute to the research of the Mobilising Community Assets programme. In the reporting period, our research contribution has focused on implementation research, including findings from pioneering systems such as Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board and Birmingham City Council's Creative Public Health team. Our Gloucestershire report is the 6th most visited webpage on the NCCH website and it regularly appears within our policy briefings and evidence submissions, showing just how important this information has proved to the field and to policy.

"I am trying to understand what barriers exist between policy vision and institutional implementation. […] I wanted to say how valuable I have found the Gloucestershire creative health embedding work. […] [It] has given me a great deal of insight and has become one of the key cases informing my PhD thesis."

– Yushu Dong, PhD Researcher in Design, Lancaster University

In addition to implementation science work, NCCH has supported the Mobilising Community Assets programme to disseminate findings to health and social care audiences, through our website, events and communications. This work helps to ensure that the incredible learning that the programme has gathered reaches beyond the research community and into strategy and delivery.

"I've really appreciated the openness and care with which you all approach this work – it's a pleasure to be part of."

– Danny Sherwood, Co-create

Supporting the Wider Research Community

NCCH contributes to research through a number of other supporting roles, including participation in research interviews, supervision of MASc students via our partnership with University College London, and through the peer-review of specialist book proposals. These activities seek to nurture the next generation of creative health researchers.

We have begun collating useful information for the field, such as Creative Health Research Centres in England and Creative Health Higher Education Courses in England, making it easier for the field to connect, collaborate and grow. We hope to build upon this convening and supporting role in the coming years through the creation of a dedicated research network and newsletter.

"[I] wanted to acknowledge all the brilliant work you're doing to bring research and researchers together; it feels like a massive step change."

– Victoria Hume, Executive Director, Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance

Our mission to advance research is supported by our Special Interest Groups, with members regularly contributing to academic journals and professional books. They are also able to provide expert insights to our team and our partners. For example, in this reporting period, members of the Nursing Special Interest Group supported NCCH's response to the Nursing and Midwifery Strategy consultation.

"It has validated this area of work further and joining with others [nurses] to share stories and research journeys has been insightful. I particularly enjoyed the policy advancement overview and am considering how to become more involved in this group."

– A member of our Nursing Special Interest Group



Click here to read the first of our two special editions of *Perspectives in Public Health*, released July 2026.

The NCCH Team

Our Core Staff Team

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Professor Martin Green OBE (until January 2026)

Rt Hon. Lord Howarth of Newport CBE (in memoriam)

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