

4.2 Leadership and Strategy

Creative health requires creative leadership. This may involve new ways of working, and a distinct form of leadership, described as ‘collaborative and distributed’ in our roundtable on leadership and strategy. As an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach, creative health thrives on strong partnerships between different parts of society, professions and sectors. Research has shown that in order to provide more coordinated care across health, social care and community services, leaders must play a critical role in modelling collaborative behaviours⁴⁷¹. Building this collaborative approach requires the development of safe, inclusive and trusting environments in which everyone can contribute, establishing and maintaining healthy relationships and setting out a shared purpose and decision-making process⁴⁷².

Partnerships develop in response to local need, and will vary depending on local assets, relationships and priorities. However, there are actions that can be taken at all levels of the system to create the conditions in which innovative creative health solutions can emerge, develop and flourish. National policy choices strongly influence local health-related partnerships⁴⁷³. National level strategy and adequate investment in the public services involved in the partnership can support place-based collaboratives to meet their objectives. In this section we highlight examples where cross-sectoral approaches to creative health have been established at different levels in the system, resulting in improved health outcomes.

National level leadership for creative health

At national level, policymakers have the power to legitimise investment in creative health approaches and remove barriers to cross-sectoral working. A very successful example of this is found in Wales, where a combination of forward-thinking legislation in the form of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the development of effective and sustainable partnerships between the Arts Council of Wales and the Welsh NHS Confederation has led to the establishment of an Arts and Health Coordinator post in every health board, with demonstrable positive impacts for both patients and the healthcare system.

Creative health in combined authorities

Combined authorities are collaborations of two or more local authorities, often led by a directly elected Metro Mayor. There are currently ten combined authorities within England, covering 40% of the population. Devolution deals transfer decision making powers across a range of policy areas from the centre to the combined authority. These powers are different in each combined authority but they commonly include a focus on local economic growth and cover areas such as skills, transport, planning and housing. Combined authorities are well placed to strategically address cross-cutting issues such as health inequalities and the social determinants of health, by recognising local priorities and coordinating a joined-up approach between local cross-sectoral partners.

Many of the issues intersecting with creative health are devolved to combined authorities, and this provides an opportunity for Metro Mayors to draw on their local powers to integrate creative health into their strategies to improve population health. Responses will be bespoke in each region, but combined authorities are already aligning creative health with regional strategies to meet locally identified priorities.

The Greater London Authority, has recognised the value of creative health, and is developing a strategy for a ‘Creative Health Capital City’⁴⁷⁵. The vision for the Creative Health Capital City has been co-produced with those who will most benefit from it. As part of the GLA’s commitment to make London a healthy place to live for all Londoners, the creative health approach will focus on



The strength of creative health is that it operates in the space between, so our leadership and responsibility for the strategy should also be about that space in between and come from all the different sectors involved”

Carol Massey, Ministry of Others, Leadership and Strategy Roundtable

Wales – Enabling arts and health capacity building at national level



The **Arts and Health Capacity Building Programme** is a strategic initiative designed to grow arts and health practice in Wales and raise awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of the arts within the NHS. In 2017, a Memorandum of Understanding was formed between the Welsh NHS Confederation and Arts Council Wales (ACW) which facilitated the appointment of an Arts and Health Coordinator (AHC) in each of Wales's seven integrated health boards, jointly funded by the health boards and ACW. These posts, which embed a specific creative health post within the health board, allow coordinators to understand the challenges facing the healthcare system and align with strategic priorities, providing effective support to meet the needs of individuals, staff and the system. They also provide an infrastructure to support the creative health ecosystem and form a national network that can work together on key priorities such as the **Arts & Minds** programme (co-funded by the Baring Foundation and ACW) which aims to embed creative activities within NHS mental health services in Wales.

“The MOU is much more than a written agreement on a shelf. It's really enabled us to take action together in partnership, and has led to a lot of practical and tangible things over the last six years to respond to the current and previous pressures that the healthcare sector, and the arts sector, have faced” – Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Assistant Director, Welsh NHS Confederation, Leadership and Strategy Roundtable

An independent evaluation of the programme found it to be a ‘successful and relatively low-cost intervention in stimulating and supporting the role of the arts in achieving positive health and wellbeing outcomes’⁴⁷⁴. The partnerships have resulted in the establishment of substantive, permanent posts in most health boards, and the conversation is now turning to how to translate the benefits into long term strategies.

The evaluation also finds positive impacts on health and wellbeing in relation to prevention, mitigation, treatment, and recovery, benefiting patients, the wider population and systems. Greatest impact has been seen where AHC have been able to align with the priorities and strategic aims of the host health board. For example, where discharge has been a particular challenge, arts and health coordinators have been able to think about how to use the arts to support people to return home.

Over the last six years Nesta Lloyd-Jones describes:

“...a shift from a push from the arts to a pull from the NHS, because the NHS can really see the health need and how creative solutions can respond to current healthcare challenges.”

The programme has benefited from ministerial-level commitment, and long term strategic partnerships established between the Welsh NHS Confederation and ACW. Furthermore, legislation such as the Wellbeing for Future Generations Act (2015), which requires public bodies to work towards long term wellbeing targets, including a healthier Wales and a Wales of vibrant, thriving culture, has also opened opportunities for arts and health providers to think differently and work together. The Act provides a framework for partnership working between cultural and health sectors, with an obligation to improve social, cultural, environmental and economic wellbeing.

Moving forward, the programme is looking to further embed the model into mainstream commitment in the NHS long term strategic plan.

“The ambition has shifted from a single individual for arts and health, to talking about an arts and health service within health boards”. – Nesta Lloyd-Jones

Greater Manchester – Towards a Creative Health City Region



Building on a long history of arts and health work, Greater Manchester (GM) has set forward its ambition to become the world's first Creative Health City Region. In 2022, GM launched its [Creative Health Strategy](#), taking a population health approach and outlining how culture and creativity can help to address health inequalities in the city region by building on recommendations developed with the Institute of Health Equity as part of the Build Back Fairer in Greater Manchester Framework⁴⁷⁶.

The strategy aligns creative health with the priorities of the Combined Authority's Greater Manchester Strategy, positioning creative health as a key part of GM's mission to become a greener, fairer and more prosperous city region where everyone can live a good life; grow up, get on and grow old.

Leadership is one of six key pillars of the strategy, which recommends a strategic lead for creative health at combined authority level to connect the creative health ecosystem, with further development of cross-sectoral leadership across local government, health, VCSE, cultural and community sectors.

To facilitate the alignment and delivery of health and local government strategies, staff often work across both organisations and in close partnership with locality colleagues and this is true of the GM Creative Health lead, meaning that creative health can be integrated into locality, public service reform and health strategy and delivery.

The Creative Health Strategy is now incorporated into the [GM Joint Forward Plan for 2023-2028](#), which sets out how health and care will be delivered across the region. In Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership, creative health is a key pillar of Live Well, a whole system approach to improving personal and community wellbeing, resilience, and social connection. It has also been integrated into clinical areas such as young

people's mental health and dementia care and has demonstrated good results.

"As the first city region to publish its own Creative Health Strategy, Greater Manchester Combined Authority is leading the way in realising the potential of creative health to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents."

Creative Health is part of Greater Manchester's wider commitment to addressing health inequities through community led health and wellbeing and as part of that approach, we will be working to develop a sustainable creative health infrastructure including training and support for practitioners and support for communities to develop and explore their own creative health practice.

"In Greater Manchester we are proud of our cultural richness and creativity and we know that this is core to us becoming a healthier city region".
- Paul Dennet, Salford City Mayor, Deputy Mayor for Greater Manchester and portfolio holder for Healthy Lives and Homelessness.

Alongside this strategic implementation of creative health, the Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities funded research programme '[Organisations of Hope](#)', led by the University of Manchester, brings together multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral stakeholders into a creative health coalition. The research is mapping existing creative health assets across GM and working to understand how these might be better used to improve health and wellbeing and increase equity.

cultural social prescribing and improving access to arts and culture in primary health care and communities, on ensuring London is a dementia and age friendly city and the promotion of better mental health, particularly for young people.

In Greater Manchester the combined authority holds devolved powers on health and social care. The Greater Manchester Creative Health Strategy is therefore integrated into the Integrated Care Partnership Joint Forward Plan, and has a specific focus on addressing health inequalities.

Where health has not been devolved, combined authorities can both benefit from and support creative health through a focus on the local creative economy, skills development and the role for creativity and culture in addressing the social determinants of health. Aligning with the ICS around these issues can create the conditions for creative health to thrive.

In West Yorkshire, where the Integrated Care System (ICS) has a longstanding commitment to creative health, there is synergy with the combined authority's creative industries strategy, which prioritises the role of culture in boosting the local economy and increasing skills. The region is currently hosting several place-based 'years of culture'. These initiatives will contribute to levelling up, and improving the health and wellbeing of the population, and can also support the further development of the creative health sector.

The Levelling Up the UK white paper considered devolution as key to its aim to level up the UK, including a reduction in health inequalities⁴⁷⁷. It committed to the negotiation of a devolution deal for all geographical areas, and a strengthening of local power in existing combined authorities. With some negotiations already underway, the number of devolved authorities can therefore be expected to increase in the near future. It will be important to understand the value that can be added by combined authority involvement in a creative health strategy, and the levers that each combined authority can use to support it. Establishing routes for peer learning and exchange between combined authorities will also help to spread and scale creative health more widely.

Integrated Care Systems

ICSs are partnerships of organisations that come together to plan and deliver joined-up health and care services. They are made up of Integrated Care Partnerships (ICP), an alliance of partners concerned with improving the care, health and wellbeing of the population, responsible for producing an integrated care strategy on how to meet the health and wellbeing needs of the population, and Integrated Care Boards (ICB), responsible for managing the NHS budget and arranging provision of health services in the area. ICSs therefore hold the convening power to bring together stakeholders and provide a framework through which creative health providers can be better integrated as strategic partners.

In partnership with NHS England, NCCH has worked with Integrated Care Systems in Gloucestershire; West Yorkshire; Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin; and Suffolk and North East Essex to explore models for integrating creative health at a systems level. Based on this work, a Creative Health Toolkit has been developed which will support ICSs across the country to embed creative health⁴⁷⁸.

In systems such as West Yorkshire and Gloucestershire, the value of creative health in helping the ICS to improve healthcare and population health outcomes, tackle inequalities, enhance productivity and value for money and support broader social and economic development is well recognised. Other systems are at varying stages of maturity in respect to embedding creative health. A national level Creative Health Strategy would support system leaders to explore the benefits of creative health and help to ensure that it is available and accessible to patients and communities across all 42 ICSs.

Local authority and place-based creative health

Many of the components that contribute to a healthy society fall under the remit of local authorities. Creative health initiatives also commonly operate at place or community level. Supportive leadership within local authorities and communities is therefore vital. Strategies are emerging within local authorities which recognise the wider health benefits of creativity and culture. Health outcomes are being incorporated into cultural strategies, and creative health has featured in a number of



Creative health in East Sussex County Council

East Sussex Public Health now consider arts and creativity as a key component of their prevention approach, improving quality of life and reducing the gap in healthy life expectancy for the population of East Sussex. This thinking is articulated in the [Arts in Public Health Position paper - Creating Healthier Lives, 2023](#), which sights three key strategic priorities:

1. Creative Health and the Individual (micro) - Utilising creative health approaches to improve people's health and wellbeing.
2. Creative Health and Community (meso) - In collaboration with partners in the culture, arts, heritage, health, and social care systems, to build and support creative health across East Sussex localities and communities.

3. Creative Health, Systems, Networks and Partnerships (macro) - Work with the ICS and wider cross sector partners to embed and champion creative health across a wide range of service offers and settings, backed up with robust approaches to research and evaluation.

A Creative Health Delivery Action Plan is currently being developed, which sets out a range of key actions and activities that seek to establish, embed and support a sustainable and impactful creative health programme across the East Sussex system linking into the key statutory and voluntary and community systems, partnerships, networks and frameworks.

reports by Directors of Public Health, also informing Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Health and Wellbeing Plans, which will feed into ICS strategies.

In Torbay, for example, harnessing the health and wellbeing benefits of culture is a key aim of the Cultural Strategy⁴⁷⁹. Torbay Culture has worked with health sector partners to develop pilot projects including singing for wellness choirs for COPD, dance for falls prevention, and mental health and wellbeing projects for both children and young people and older adults. In other councils, the impetus has come from Public Health. South Tees Public Health have been developing their creative health programme, and the Creative Health Strategy will form an integral part of their wider Health & Well Being Strategy, which will be published in March 2024. Birmingham City Council Public Health Division have formulated a three-year programme, 'Creative Public Health' which is dedicated to assessing the landscape, gathering data and identifying the current initiatives and delivery, as well as opportunities for development and growth.

The Local Government Association Commission on Culture and Local Government recommended that 'local government, regional bodies, cultural arms-length bodies and national government work together with cultural organisations and communities to take immediate action to safeguard the future of local

cultural infrastructure in the context of rising costs'. This should be followed by a longer-term action plan to include 'a strategic approach to health and wellbeing in place that recognises the preventative and health benefits of culture in supporting our national recovery'⁴⁸⁰.

Supporting community leadership

Community-based initiatives, with strong local knowledge, existing connections and established relationships, are often best placed to identify priorities and design appropriate solutions. Throughout this report, we have highlighted instances of innovative, creative solutions developed by communities based on their own assets and needs, and we have emphasised how these initiatives can be supported by systems, whilst maintaining their independent and creative spirit. National and local level networking and infrastructure organisations such as the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance's regional champions⁴⁸¹, and regional sector support organisations, such as Arts and Health South West⁴⁸² and London Arts and Health⁴⁸³, can help community providers and artists to make links with health systems and local authorities and they are an important part of the creative health ecosystem.

Within the healthcare system, Primary Care Networks (PCNs) can be a vital facilitator of

Redesigning GP services to meet community need in Bensham, Gateshead

Developing innovative ways of working closely with communities has helped a GP practice in Bensham, Gateshead, to overcome the challenge of a high number of patients with pressing social needs, exacerbated in recent years by COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis.

To achieve this it was necessary to meet patients in the 'liminal space' between systems and communities, working together to develop personalised approaches to care. The GP practice supported this work, redesigning its workforce around population need and using quality improvement methods to learn on the go. Care navigators (now known as link workers and established in GP practices across the county) were introduced to support people with their specific social needs, and links were made to the VCSE sector and community assets which could help people to improve their health and wellbeing, for example through a community allotment, or through the provision of community clubs. These spaces have proved important to opening up different kinds of conversations with patients. As the work developed, patients became volunteers,

creative health. For many people, a GP practice will be their first point of contact with the healthcare system. 3500 social prescribing link workers are already in place in GP practices and are able to identify where a social activity might benefit a patient, and direct them to an appropriate community resource. There is a focus on personalisation and integration in primary care, as elsewhere in the NHS, and multidisciplinary teams, working at neighbourhood level, will be increasingly important in joining-up care for patients, and supporting PCNs to work more closely with their communities.

“Throughout the stocktake, we heard that the PCNs that were most effective in improving population health and tackling health inequalities, were those that worked in partnership with their people and communities and local authority colleagues. This

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In my practice, we have turned a burning platform into a burning ambition to engage with creativity to meet the crisis... By being creative in this way, we are managing demand, we are growing, we are surviving, we are thriving, and what we are doing is actually working with communities in a very different way”

Sheinaz Stansfield, Managing Partner, Oxford Terrace and Rawling Road Medical Group, Leadership and Strategy Roundtable

building their own skillsets and eventually taking control of the running of a community centre, providing support for their peers. New activities such as insect spotting walks and creating bee-friendly areas are emerging from the allotments, linking patients with nature and the local environment.

Working in this way has not only benefited patients, but there has been a decrease in demand for both A&E and GP services, and the practice now has improved links to carers.

partnership focuses on genuine co-production and personalisation of care, bringing local people into the workforce so that it reflects the diversity of local communities, and proactively reaching out to marginalised groups breaking down barriers to accessing healthcare”. - Fuller Stocktake Next Steps for Integrating Primary Care⁴⁸⁴

Many PCNs are already taking a proactive approach to recognising community assets and working with their communities to build these into their offer to patients, as part of a holistic understanding of health and wellbeing.

The introduction of ICSs indicates a switch to a collaborative approach between healthcare system and the VCSE sector, people and communities. Since their introduction, cross-sector partnerships have progressed, and some funding has been made available for partnership building⁴⁸⁵. Nevertheless,

West Yorkshire – Strategic system level support for place-based creative health



West Yorkshire has a long history of creative health, with roots in co-produced, creative approaches to mental health, led by organisations such as [Creative Minds](#), which co-funds and co-delivers projects with communities. With supportive leadership across local and regional authorities and healthcare systems, the approach has been taken forward within the ICS, which is committed to creative health, and the combined authority, where creative health is aligned with regional priorities.

The successes to date have led to the inclusion of ‘Creativity and Health’ in the NHS West Yorkshire ICB’s [Joint Forward Plan](#), which, alongside the ICP’s Integrated Care Strategy, sets out how the system will support its population over the next five years. The plan sets out West Yorkshire’s commitment to an active, vibrant, creative health sector and states:

“As a national leader in creativity and health, we already have good examples of where we have made a real difference through using a creativity and health approach, for example our Calderdale Creativity and Health Programme working with South West Yorkshire Partnership Foundation Trust and Creative Minds. We know that expanding this learning could help us create stronger, healthier, more resilient communities through working at a population health level. We know that it will support us in delivering targeted interventions addressing the greatest health disparities and importantly, be part of a transformation in the way health and care services look and work for everyone.”

West Yorkshire ICS will work closely with the West Yorkshire Mayor’s Office to develop a sustainable creative health infrastructure, aligning with the combined authorities’ aims to stimulate the local economy and boost skills through the creative and cultural industries. The combined authority can also support creative health in areas such as transport and social infrastructure, ensuring everyone is able to access creative opportunities.

This cross-sectoral approach extends to academic, health and cultural sectors.

The creative health ecosystem in West Yorkshire is made up of five distinct local authority ‘places’ each with a strong local identity, and a network of health providers and cultural organisations. There is support from the five local authorities. West Yorkshire is investigating the development of a Creative Health Collaborative, with a Creative Health Hub at ICS level responsible to ensuring a coherent approach to strategy, communications and research, and a Creative Health Lead in each place to enable the place-based ecosystem to develop in response to local need. This will ensure bottom-up, grassroots approaches are supported strategically from the top-down.

A Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities research project led by the University of Huddersfield, in partnership with Creative Minds, South West Yorkshire Partnership Foundation Trust and regional creative partners, is building the evidence-base and infrastructure for integrating creative health, looking in particular at how this work can reach those who need it most, and support the ICS to meet its targets in relation to health inequalities. A Creative Health Living Lab is planned at the University of Huddersfield to support learning and innovation to bring about the systems changes needed, underpinned with education, training and skills development to ensure a pipeline for the creative health workforce.

A series of cultural events over the coming years (Kirklees Year of Music 2023, LEEDS 2023, CultureDale - Calderdale’s Year of Culture 2024, Our Year – Wakefield District 2024 and Bradford UK City of Culture 2025), as well as ongoing work in communities and within healthcare settings, will cement West Yorkshire’s reputation as a pioneer of creative health and will provide important learning as to how this work can be spread and scaled in other systems.

there is still work to be done to establish an infrastructure across all health systems which provides long term support for capacity building within communities, with funding models which allow resources to reach grassroots initiatives in a sustainable way.

Key Messages

Wales shows us that a coherent approach at national level has facilitated partnerships across every part of the system, which has in turn enabled the development of creative health initiatives, in partnership with communities, to meet local need. This has had a positive impact on population health and has helped health systems to meet their key targets.

In England, creative health initiatives are proliferating from the bottom up, and, in forward-thinking systems, this process has been aided by supportive cross-sectional leadership. Creative health strategies are emerging which align creative health with local and regional strategic goals and set out clear ambitions and targets for this work. However, there is still work to do to embed creative health across all 42 ICS in England and ensure that the benefits can be felt by all.

Cross-departmental leadership from the Government will legitimise and support creative health. A dedicated national Creative Health Strategy will convene governmental stakeholders to develop a shared language and outcomes framework for creative health. It will provide the architecture

through which all government departments can recognise the levers through which they can contribute to creative health, and the ways in which this will help them to meet their specific targets, while maximising the impact on population health and its related economic advantages. Removing barriers to integration and cross-sectoral working will create the conditions locally for innovative, grassroots work to thrive and for the learning from this work to be shared and built on across the country in response to local priorities.

Many of the components for such a model are already in place. Creative and cultural assets are already working well within communities, and place-based and regional strategies to support creative health are emerging. Nationally, we have seen a shift towards greater integration of services, and a focus on person-centred care, with a recognition of the link to health inequalities. We propose that bringing together these developments as part of a formalised Creative Health Strategy will have a significant impact on population health and wellbeing.