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Landmark report shows creative health could help ailing NHS health and social care systems

- Creative health is fundamental to a healthy and prosperous society, and its benefits should be available and accessible to all.
- Creative health should form an integral part of a 21st-century health and social care system – one that is holistic, person-centred, and which focuses on reducing inequalities and supporting people to live well for longer.
- Creating the conditions for creative health to flourish requires a joined-up, whole system approach incorporating health systems, local authorities, schools, and the cultural and VCSE sectors.

Today, Wednesday 6 December, the **National Centre for Creative Health** and the **All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing** have published a major report, the [Creative Health Review: How Policy Can Embrace Creative Health](#), evidencing that **creative health needs to form an integral part of a 21st-century health and social care system** to reduce health inequalities, increase life expectancy and build social capital.

Creative Health – defined as creative approaches which have benefits for our health and wellbeing, and can include activities such as visual and performing arts, literature, or creative activities in nature as well as innovative approaches to health and care services – is shown to help prevent ill-health and support the management of long-term conditions, offering patients effective, non-clinical approaches that reduce reliance on healthcare services and result in cost savings, as well as improving quality of life. The *Creative Health Review* **outlines the immense benefits of creative health and advocates for its immediate, widespread adoption.**

The report makes **crucial recommendations** to support the UK Government, elected mayors and policymakers in maximising the potential of creative health, with a dedicated cross-departmental Creative Health Strategy at the centre.

“We want government to recognise that creative health should be part of the bigger picture not just for health and social care, but across a wide range of its responsibilities including education, justice, levelling up and the economy. Creative health isn't limited to one sector; it's about working together.” - said **The Rt Hon. Lord Howarth of Newport CBE**, Chair of the National Centre for Creative Health and Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing



The report demonstrates, through growing evidence and by showcasing innovative approaches and activities, that creative health proactively prevents illness, promotes wellbeing, and helps to manage long-term conditions.

It outlines the profound significance of creative health in addressing the formidable challenges our health and social care systems face, and shows where creative health can assist. The prevalence of mental ill health in children and young people is worryingly high, and mental health conditions are causing more adults than ever to be unable to work. Health inequalities are among the worst in Europe and the gap is widening, with life expectancy falling in some of the poorest areas of the country. These issues should be addressed as a matter of social justice, but there are also broader implications for the economy, through increased costs to the health and welfare system and a loss of productivity. The report sets out a roadmap for policymakers to provide a more creative and healthier future for all. These challenges demand a new approach. One that is forward-thinking, preventative and person-centred.

“Our western approach to health is dominated by sickness with the assumption that health is the absence of ill-health, not needing attention or resources. But health is always a combination of physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing, all of which should be nurtured and encouraged.

“There is overwhelming evidence that engagement with creative activity can do much to heal mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety, as well as countering loneliness. A government that embraces this is itself being creative as well as contributing responsible, practical measures to reduce the impossible costs of ill-health.”

Monty Don OBE Garden writer and broadcaster. **Creative Health Review Commissioner**

The case studies in the report show how creative health can reduce pressure on health and social care services both by preventing the onset of ill health and by supporting the management of long-term conditions, offering patients effective, non-clinical approaches that reduce reliance on healthcare services and result in cost savings. For example, 96% of participants in Gloucestershire’s Artlift Living Well with Chronic Pain creative programme in 2022-23 reported a statistically meaningful improvement in general wellbeing and there was an average 16% increase in ability to self-manage pain.

The report examines successful models across the UK where partnerships between arts, health, social care and education are yielding positive results without high costs.

The Rt Hon. Lord Howarth of Newport CBE, continues:

“Creative health demands effective and sustainable partnerships across government, including local authorities, healthcare systems, grassroots organisations, and the cultural and VCSE sectors.



“Many of the policy opportunities to secure the benefits of creative health are devolved to combined authorities, and this allows Metro Mayors to use their local powers to integrate creative health into their strategies to improve population health. For example, in Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire we are seeing admirable partnerships emerging with creative health as key in a whole system approach to improving personal and community wellbeing, resilience, and social connection.

“Our ambition is for creative health to be integral to health, social care and wider systems, including education. I look forward to creativity being recognised by the general public, healthcare professionals and policymakers as a resource to support health and wellbeing across the life course, and its benefits being accessible to all.”

- End -

Note to Editors:

Read the Report in full:

Preview of the Report is available on request. The Report will be launched on 6th December 2023 and will be available [here](#).

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A collection of images to support this article is available [here](#).
The caption to credit the images are noted as the named file.

What is Creative Health?

Creative activities and approaches which have benefits for our health and wellbeing. Creative health activities can include visual and performing arts, crafts, film, literature, cooking and creative activities in nature, such as gardening; approaches may involve creative and innovative ways to approach health and care services, co-production, education and workforce development.

More information about the Creative Health Review is available here
<https://ncch.org.uk/creative-health-review>

Our panel of expert commissioners is:

- **Tracy Brabin**, Mayor of West Yorkshire, former Shadow Minister for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Shadow Minister for Cultural Industries.
- **Madeleine Bunting**, Author of Labours of Love: The Crisis of Care and former associate editor at Guardian.



- **Tracey Crouch CBE**, Conservative MP, Co-Chair of the APPG on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, former Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage and Minister for Loneliness.
- **Dame Caroline Dinenage DBE**, Conservative MP, former Minister of State for Social Care and for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and is currently Chair of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport.
- **Professor Baroness Ilora Finlay, Baroness Finlay of Llandaff**, Independent Crossbench Peer, Professor of Palliative Medicine and past President of the Royal Society of Medicine.
- **Monty Don OBE**, leading garden writer and broadcaster.
- **Dr Darren Henley CBE**, CEO, Arts Council England
- **The Rt Hon. Lord Howarth of Newport CBE**, Labour Peer, Chair of NCCH and Co-Chair of APPG AHW, former Schools Minister and Minister for Higher Education and Science; Employment, Equal Opportunities and Disabled People.
- **Professor Sir Michael Marmot**, Professor of Epidemiology at University College London, author of the Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England: *Fair Society, Health Lives* and *Health Equity in England: Marmot Review 10 Years On*.
- **Professor Martin Marshall CBE**, Chair of the Nuffield Trust, former Chair Royal College of General Practitioners, and practising GP in Newham, East London.
- **The Rt Hon. Baroness Estelle Morris of Yardley**, Labour Peer, former Secretary of State for Education and Minister of State for the Arts.
- **James Sanderson**, Director of Community Health and Personalised Care, Community and Personalised Care Directorate at NHS England
- **Rob Webster CBE**, CEO NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board and former CEO of NHS Confederation.
- **Alice Wiseman**, Director of Public Health, Gateshead
- **Baroness Lola Young of Hornsey OBE**, Independent Crossbench Peer, former Head of Culture at the Greater London Authority and Chair of judging panels for Caine Prize for African Writing, Orange Prize for Women's Fiction, and Man Booker Prize.

Quotes from expert commissioners:

“Working with the Integrated Care Board and other partners, we’re pioneering West Yorkshire as a region of creative health, boosting inward investment, world-class research and good, well-paid jobs. Our Years of Culture in Calderdale and Wakefield throughout next year, building to Bradford UK City of Culture 2025, will highlight how our thriving creative industries are supporting health and wellbeing across the region. I’m confident that our focus on creative health will deliver healthier, happier communities within a stronger, brighter West Yorkshire.”

Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire

“I have advocated the need for a more co-ordinated strategy to improve wellbeing for some time now. The Creative Health Review is another excellent piece of research that proves why



and how we can do more to prevent ill health by investing in more than just pharmaceutical products. Every MP will have a brilliant organisation in their constituency doing something creative to support the wellbeing of others and with just a small amount of additional support could be transformational for our local health services.”

Tracey Crouch CBE MP

“When human beings live well, they get the chance both to explore their own creativity and to connect with artists, arts organisations, museums and libraries. So, this review is both timely and vital. Its recommendations build on our increasing investment over the past five years and the growing recognition of the benefits of creative health. When creative professionals and health professionals work together, we can make real change happen, helping more people, in more places, lead more fulfilled, healthier, happier lives. And surely there can be no greater reason for investing public money than that?”

Dr Darren Henley CBE, CEO Arts Council England

“Bertrand Russell was quoted as saying: ‘the idea that the poor should have leisure has always been shocking to the rich’. Evidence shows that cultural and creative activities are good for mental and physical health. To reduce health inequalities, then, we need to create the conditions for the benefits of cultural and creative activities to spread to all members of society. It should form a key part of breaking the link between relative poverty and poor health.”

Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Professor of Epidemiology at University College London

Modern medical interventions have achieved so much but they have little or no impact on the social determinants of our health. There is growing scientific evidence that social interventions, in particular ones that draw on the innate creativity of people and their communities, are effective for individuals and can also reduce the financial and workload challenges facing the NHS. This report shines a light on what creative health interventions are currently achieving and on their great potential for the future. I urge all those committed to improving the health of our nation to make the time to read it”

Professor Martin Marshall CBE, Chair of the Nuffield Trust and former Chair of the Royal College of GPs

“Creative health should be a central part of every strategy for improving the health and wellbeing of the nation. The evidence and the good practice across the country demonstrate the potential impact we could have through creativity. Perhaps now the time is right for us to implement a national strategy, delivered through the infrastructure of integrated care systems, backed by local government and local arts organisations. Here in West Yorkshire we share that ambition and stand ready to deliver jobs in the creative industries, and better outcomes for our citizens.”

Rob Webster CBE, CEO NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board

“When people hear the word health, they often think about health services. Healthcare, while it is vitally important, only accounts for around 10-20% of health outcomes. Creative

health provides an evidence-based approach to prevention at every point on a pathway, at every stage of the life course and in many different settings. The evidence set out in this review is irrefutable and needs to be considered as part of the mainstream approach to health and care. Creative health is in addition to traditional medicine and offers opportunities for improving outcomes as well as reducing costs.”

Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health, Gateshead

Case studies and evidence supporting creative health:

Theme: Health Inequalities

Case study/vignette in report: East Marsh United – a resident-led community group from the East Marsh of Grimsby, page 61

Where: Grimsby

Photo: East Marsh United © Kelly McLaughlin, Through My Eyes Photography

Quote:

“With all my struggles with dyslexia and mental health, I never thought I could be settled. Three years later, it’s my safe place. Photography & Creative writing is my medication.” Kelly McLaughlin, Creative Health Review Lived Experience Panel (available for interview)

Artwork by Kelly: <https://ncch.org.uk/health-inequalities-creative-response>

Theme: Mental Health and Young People

Case study/vignette in report: The Horsefall Creative Space and Gallery – which forms part of 42nd Street, a mental health charity for young people aged 13-25 in the Greater Manchester area, page 47

Where: Manchester

Photo: No

Quote:

“I am a young female artist, researcher, mental-health facilitator, and change-maker. After benefitting from using creativity to enhance my own mental wellbeing, I am now passionate and driven to use this lived experience to embed Creative Health within service provision more broadly and for all.” Gemma O’Brien, Young Artist, Creative Health Review Lived Experience Panel (available for interview)

Theme: Mental Health and Adults

Case study/vignette in report: Hip Hop HEALS is the UK’s first Hip Hop Therapy organisation, page 50

Where: Birmingham

Photo: Yes (credit on image)

Quote:

“I harness the power of lived experience to promote people-powered change. I am the UK’s first Hip Hop Therapist.” Kiz Manley, Creative Health Review Lived Experience Panel (available for interview)

Theme: Health and social care – Stroke



Case study/vignette in report: Stroke Odysseys, page 25

Brain Odysseys is a 12-week performance programme for people living with the effects of stroke and brain injury delivered by Rosetta Life in hospital and community settings. It has been evidenced to improve mobility, cognition and self-esteem. The related programme Stroke Odysseys is part of the SHAPER research programme, looking at how effective arts interventions can be scaled up and embedded into clinical pathways.

Where: London

Photo: Stroke Odysseys, Rosetta Life © Foteini Christofilopoulou

Theme: Creativity for Health and Wellbeing in the Education System

Case study/vignette in report: Branching Out: Tackling mental health inequalities in schools with Community Artscape, Page 53

Where: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough - Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination (CCI)

Photo: The Fantastical Forest, an on-going public art project celebrating creativity, nature and community. © Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination, 2022

Quote:

“Providing time and space early on for children to reconnect (or connect for the first time) with nature and art is the actual ‘medicine’ that’s required. Giving children a fresh start, with the adults seeing them a-new with talents that were previously under the surface, is huge. Think of what could be achieved if more children worked with CCI! And think of the money that would potentially be saved in staff time, paediatrician referrals, expensive therapy...” – Paula Ayliffe, Co-Headteacher, Mayfield Primary School

Theme: Creative Health in Social Care

Case study/vignette in report: Plus One – A Cultural Gateway for care-experience young people, page 74

Where: Derby

Photo: Plus One © Eartha Johnson

Quote:

“As a queer, care experienced and working class creative practitioner from the Midlands, I take pride in using my lived experience of participating with Plus One to champion underrepresented narratives through my artistic endeavours” Lucy James, Creative Health Review Lived Experience Panel

Theme: Cost Effectiveness, Evidencing Value for Money and Funding Models

Case study/vignette in report: Commissioning Creative Health – One Gloucestershire’s approach, page 96

Where: Gloucestershire

Photo: Mindsong Music Therapy, Gloucestershire Creative Health Consortium

© Ruth Davey

Quote:

“What has been key to me, as a senior leader within my system, to build commitment to the programme, has been about building evidence at scale and over time... the key has been



about building confidence in a sustained way, influencing through the dataset but also the testimonies and stories...and then building confidence around their place in the clinical intervention and the health benefits we can demonstrate.” – Ellen Rule, Deputy CEO/Director of Strategy and Transformation, Gloucestershire ICB, Cost-effectiveness, Evidencing Value for Money and Funding Models Roundtable

Results:

Ninety-six percent of participant in Artlift’s Living Well with Chronic Pain creative programme in 2022-23 reported a statistically meaningful improvement in general wellbeing and there was an average 16% in ability to self-manage pain. Over two years, 37% reported a decrease in GP attendance.

Arts on referral schemes such as Mindsong’s Breathe In Sing Out programme in Gloucestershire use singing techniques to support people with breathlessness through conditions such as COPD, asthma or anxiety. Their pilot programme saw a statistically significant increase in reported mental wellbeing scores, a 23% decline in A&E admissions and a 21% decline in GP appointments in the six months after referral compared with the six months before.

Artwork by members of the Lived Experience Panel

Phillipa Anders: <https://ncch.org.uk/end-of-life-care-and-bereavement-creative-response>

Mah Rana: <https://ncch.org.uk/social-care-creative-response>

David Tovey: <https://ncch.org.uk/cost-effectiveness-evidencing-value-for-money-creative-response>

Surfing Sofas: <https://ncch.org.uk/leadership-and-strategy-creative-response>

About the National Centre for Creative Health

The National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH) aims to advance good practice and research, inform policy and promote collaboration, helping to foster the conditions for creative health to be integral to health and social care and wider systems.

Find out more about the National Centre for Creative Health at <https://ncch.org.uk>
@TheNCCH

About the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPG AHW)

The APPG AHW was formed in 2014 and is a cross party group of parliamentarians with a shared interest in the field of arts, health and wellbeing. The aim of the APPG AHW is to raise awareness of the benefits that the arts can bring to health and wellbeing and to stimulate progress towards making these benefits a reality across the country. The APPG AHW led a two-year inquiry 2015-17, which resulted in a report, *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*.



The National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH) has data processing responsibility for the APPG AHW. The [Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#) hosts information about the APPG AHW [here](#).

Report Methodology

The Review began in Autumn 2022. We identified key policy areas where creative health can make a real difference and have run a series of online roundtables on each of the themes, with an invited panel representing expertise across lived experience, practice, research, commissioning and leadership and policy. We have explored innovative practice and the barriers and challenges to implementation, and discussed what is needed to further embed creative health in each of the key areas:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Health inequalities
- The education system
- Social care
- End of life care and bereavement

We also looked at the current creative health infrastructure and what will be needed to sustainably spread and scale creative health. To do this we hosted further roundtables on:

- Cost-effectiveness, Evidencing Value for Money and Funding Models
- Workforce Training, Development and Wellbeing
- Leadership and Strategy

In total, eight public roundtables were held, featuring 85 expert speakers and attended by 1450 audience members. Our audience also contributed to the discussion through the Q&A. These sessions were supplemented by several further knowledge exchange sessions which helped to steer our thinking.

Our panel of expert commissioners met after each session and supported us to develop recommendations based on the findings from the roundtable. Commissioners also received summaries of the latest evidence and policy context based on desk research carried out during the Review.

An advisory panel of lived experience experts met with us throughout the drafting of the review to help ensure that recommendations for policy were developed with those who have personal experience of the issues addressed, and who represent the population our recommendations are intended to benefit.



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