

Arts participation

Indicator overview

VicHealth Indicators Survey

VicHealth Indicators are used to measure community wellbeing with a focus on social determinants of health.

Survey topic areas include: wellbeing, healthy eating and sedentary behaviour, use of green space and safety, smoking policy, alcohol, using of social networking, participation in arts activities and the community, social attitudes, and work, life and time.

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November 2012
ISBN: 978-1-922133-94-6
Publication number: K-040-KN

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Promotion Foundation 2012

Introduction

Many Australians are involved in a broad spectrum of arts activities, ranging from 'passive consumption' (such as attending an exhibition, theatre or live music show, or a literary, screen or cultural event) through to active participation (such as playing a musical instrument, dancing, painting or writing). Recent estimates suggest that nine in 10 Australians participate in arts activities (including reading literature and listening to music), while four in 10 participate creatively in the arts (Australia Council for the Arts 2010). The same report states that most Australians support the arts, believing that they contribute to a richer and more meaningful life and encourage a better understanding of those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Health benefits

The health benefits of arts participation are well documented. Through reducing social isolation and increasing social and community connections, arts participation improves mental health by decreasing stress, anxiety and depression (Cuypers et al. 2011). Research has also found links between arts participation, increased longevity, better health (Bygren et al. 1996), and higher life satisfaction (Cuypers et al. 2011). Participating in a single arts activity (including watching a film, attending a concert or art exhibition, or singing in a choir) each week for two months can result in better health, vitality, and improved interactions with other people (Bygren et al. 2009).

Participation in arts activities is not only good for individuals, but also for community health and wellbeing; the role of the arts in exploring and communicating societal concerns can give voice to hidden issues such as those surrounding sexual health, mental health and obesity (Daykin et al. 2008). As well as providing a unique setting in which people come together to create objects or performances, the arts create opportunities for people to expand their social networks and develop new friendships that can provide social support and impact positively on health (Barraket et al. 2005). Arts participation can provide a vehicle for individual and collective expression. There is evidence that the arts can have an important impact on community cohesion and the collective efficacy of a community to 'have its say' (McQueen-Thomson and Ziguras 2002).

The Australian Council for the Arts (2010) suggest that arts participation has significant benefits for the whole community, including:

- a more creative society
- a society that is more socially tolerant, engendering a sense of belonging to the community
- helping to define identity and what it means to be Australian.

Find out more

More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts, Australia Council for the Arts, Sydney.
www.australiacouncil.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/71257/Full_report_More_than_bums_on_seats_Australian_participation_in_the_arts2.pdf

Beyond attendance: a multi-modal understanding of arts participation, National Endowment for the Arts.
www.nea.gov/research/2008-SPPA-BeyondAttendance.pdf

Getting in on the act: how arts groups are creating opportunities for active participation, The James Irvine Foundation.
<http://irvine.org/images/stories/pdf/grantmaking/Getting-in-on-the-act-2011OCT19.pdf>

Cultural Development Network.
www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/

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McQueen-Thomson, D & Ziguras, C 2002, *Promoting mental health & wellbeing through community & cultural development: a review of literature focussing on community arts practice*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.