



The arts and creative industries in health promotion

This Evidence Brief is based on the findings of an Evidence Check rapid review brokered by the Sax Institute.

Key messages

- The arts, creative industries and cultural sector (the arts) can make an important contribution to people's health and wellbeing, however, these benefits are not shared equally across the population.
- This research review found increasing evidence of the positive impact arts interventions, programs and activities can have on healthy eating, physical activity, preventing tobacco use and preventing harm from alcohol.
- This complements strong evidence of the benefits of the arts on people's mental wellbeing and social health.
- Diverse and meaningful strategies are needed to ensure those who face barriers to arts engagement – including young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people with disabilities, among others – are given equal opportunities to benefit from the arts.
- It is important to develop, design and deliver arts interventions in a way that is responsive to the health profile, knowledge, attitudes and preferences of local and/or prioritised communities, to maximise their benefit.
- Cross-sector partnerships play an integral role in the effective use of the arts and creative industries for health promotion.
- Local councils can play a significant role in establishing and/or brokering these partnerships, for example partnering with arts/creative industries and health promotion organisations to promote health messages.
- There are many strategies local councils can adopt to promote better health through the arts, including: expanding the diversity of people engaging with the arts; using the arts as a communication tool to increase awareness, knowledge, attitudes and health behaviours; and promoting health-enhancing policies in arts initiatives (e.g. providing healthy food and drinks at venues).

What is the issue?

It has long been recognised that the arts, creative and cultural industries (the arts) can have a positive impact on people's mental, physical and social health.

Recent research has estimated people need **at least two hours per week** of arts engagement for good mental wellbeing, with arts engagement ranging from active involvement like participating, performing and creating art to receptive involvement such as attending, listening and viewing art.

While the arts have a place in the lives of **98%** of Australians according to an Australia Council of the Arts 2017 survey, most people don't spend enough time engaging in arts activities to achieve health benefits.

It is also recognised that **not all people have equal opportunities** to engage in the arts due to factors including a lack of knowledge, support, familiarity, skills, cost, access, distance and apprehension to take part. Strategies are needed to increase arts engagement in priority groups.

What did we do?

VicHealth commissioned a rapid review of the research to answer three questions, to help inform future planning for its Arts Strategy:

1. What approaches have been effective in improving arts participation, particularly for priority groups?
2. What programs or activities using the arts have been effective in increasing awareness, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in VicHealth's five priority areas?
3. Which of the programs, activities and approaches identified in the above questions could be implemented by local councils?

Reviewers assessed the evidence from 56 studies and reviews published since 2015.



People need at least **2 hours per week** of arts engagement for good mental wellbeing

What strategies can improve arts participation?

While there are varying levels of evidence to support the use of each of the following strategies for the general population and/or priority groups*, some of the best ways to increase arts engagement include:



Ensuring arts events or activities **resonate** with the target group's preferences, priorities and lived experience



Using **strength-based approaches** that celebrate, reinforce and embrace culture



Using **experienced professionals** who participants respect, trust and want to learn from to deliver activities



Providing opportunities for **childhood and school-based** arts experiences



Arts and events activities should be **engaging, enjoyable, respectful, relevant, non-judgemental** and provide opportunities for self-expression and creativity



Giving participant **ownership** of the arts activities and outcomes



Utilising **partnerships** with the local community, health professionals and other organisations to link to participants and improve the relevance of activities



Strengthening local arts **infrastructure** and **resources**



Reducing participation and attendance **costs**



Developing **relationships, trust** and **rapport** with the community and Elders (in the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples)

There is also some evidence to support other strategies including, but not limited to: utilising local community partnerships; increasing people's confidence to engage in the arts; addressing issues like transport and parking; and promoting the benefits of arts engagement to the community.

* The review focused on young people (12–25 years), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, refugees and new arrivals, people with a disability, and socially isolated people as priority groups.

What arts activities work to increase health awareness, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours?

The arts and creative industries have a positive impact on increasing health awareness, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours across VicHealth's five priority areas as detailed below:

HEALTHY EATING



There is emerging research to show the arts can be used to promote healthy eating including through: festivals; performing arts programs; multi-art-form programs; museum exhibitions and installations; policy and enviro-structural change; and a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.



The arts can have positive impacts on healthy eating, physical activity, mental wellbeing and social health, as well as on preventing tobacco use and harm from alcohol.

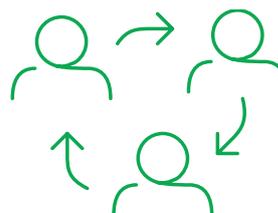
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:



There is moderate to strong evidence that dancing can directly improve physical activity across a range of priority groups.



There is also emerging evidence that other artforms can increase regular physical activity including: visual arts, design and craft program interventions (e.g. painting, drawing, murals); performing arts programs; multi art-form interventions, museum exhibitions and installations and focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.



Cross-sector partnerships play an integral role in the effective use of the arts and creative industries for health promotion.

PREVENTING TOBACCO USE



There is emerging evidence that a range of approaches can help prevent tobacco use including: visual arts, design and craft interventions; performing arts programs; multi art-form interventions; arts-health marketing and health messaging at arts events.

PREVENTING HARM FROM ALCOHOL



One paper looked at using the arts to prevent harm from alcohol, finding that a music program in a high school setting increased awareness of the risks of using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

IMPROVING MENTAL WELLBEING AND SOCIAL HEALTH:



The review confirmed that a wide range of art forms can successfully increase mental wellbeing and social health – including social networks, connection, social cohesion, inclusion and reducing loneliness – across priority groups.



Emerging evidence



Moderate evidence



Strong evidence

What approaches can local councils adopt?

There are a number of arts approaches, programs and events that local councils can implement to increase arts engagement and promote better health across priority areas. Councils can:

- get to know local creatives in their community to discuss shared goals, opportunities and possible partnerships
- consider the health profile, knowledge, attitudes and art preferences of local community members and priority groups, to guide decisions on arts programs and achieve maximum health and wellbeing benefits
- endorse everyday creativity (i.e. the arts in everyday life).
- implement or support arts programs, events or activities in which people can participate either actively, or receptively
- partner with the creatives, local schools and childcare organisations to develop children's arts programs, encouraging a lifelong connection with the arts
- utilise funding agreements and/or licences and permits to promote health-enhancing policies at art and/or cultural events or activities (e.g. providing healthy food and drinks at venues or alcohol-free events)
- partner with creatives and health promotion organisations to promote health messages and information to the general population and priority groups.



Local councils can promote better health through the arts by expanding the diversity of people engaging in arts activities.

Conclusion

There is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates the important contribution the arts can make to the health and wellbeing of the general population as well as to priority groups.

Local councils can play a key role in adopting a range of strategies to increase arts engagement and to use the arts to promote awareness, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours across priority areas of health prevention.

The **Arts and creative industries in health promotion** Evidence Check was brokered by the Sax Institute for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and conducted by:

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VicHealth acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government

© VicHealth 2020
September 2020
<https://doi.org/10.37309/2020.C1877>



VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.