The growing movement of integrating the arts and arts-based therapies into health care environments—such as hospitals, rehabilitation centers, outpatient clinics, assisted-living communities, hospices, veterans homes and mental-health facilities—is propelled by the many benefits of engaging in creative experiences or activities. For patients in clinical environments, creative and expressive arts therapies can be used to attain specific treatment or rehabilitation goals. Meanwhile, artist-led and self-directed exposures to creativity—such as hands-on workshops, bedside art carts and healing gardens, to name a few—foster a greater sense of agency, awareness, purpose and social connection, all of which facilitate healing as well as pain management and improved quality of life. The arts even aid medical professionals, enhancing their training, practice and longevity.

State arts agencies (SAAs) are primed to be leaders of a paradigm shift in health care that embraces the arts as an efficacious and cost-effective treatment approach. This strategy sampler summarizes the many ways state arts agencies can foster creative engagements in health care environments. Based on a review of research, SAA program materials and conversations with SAA staff, it lifts up model practices and considers the evidence of how the arts support people of all ages in medical settings. It concludes with tips for how SAAs can begin or advance their support of arts-based efforts in health care as well as a set of recommended resources for designing and planning programs.

**Continuum of Arts-Supported Health Care**

*Creative arts therapies*—respectively, art, dance, drama, psychodrama, music and poetry—are six professions with distinct methodologies and creative processes that contribute to medical or rehabilitation treatment plans.

*Expressive arts therapy* is a profession that combines multiple art forms to foster expression and imagination in conformance with treatment plans.

*Arts in health* is a strategy to integrate creative engagements into clinical settings to improve patient experiences and outcomes as well as the resiliency of medical professionals, family members and other caregivers.
Benefits of the Arts in Clinical Settings (back to Table of Contents)

There is substantial evidence attesting to the health and wellness benefits of the arts. It is helpful to draw on this knowledge base when making the case specifically for funding projects integrating the arts into health care environments or, in general, for public support of the arts. Here are some of the most noteworthy outcomes of health care efforts incorporating the arts.

PHYSICAL HEALTH (back to TOC)

The arts promote physical health and expedite medical recovery for people of all ages. They facilitate the healing of ill and injured people; provide comfort for and increase the quality of life of people living with chronic or terminal illnesses; and are conducive to wellness and other care models such as holistic and patient-centered health. In addition, creative arts therapies can improve sensory-motor functions such as helping people with Parkinson’s disease walk more steadily. Arts engagement in clinical contexts can alleviate patients’ stress while increasing their sense of agency and resilience, which facilitates the recovery process. It also has been associated with reducing the length of hospital stays, health care related infection rates and the need for pain management. For members of the military community, in particular, the arts have been shown to be an effective tool for treating the physiological impacts of traumatic brain injuries, which are the hallmark wounds of contemporary warfare.

COGNITIVE HEALTH (back to TOC)

Engaging in the arts has brain health benefits, particularly for older adults who are at greater risk of experiencing cognitive decline through a stroke or Alzheimer’s, Parkinson's and other forms of dementia. Creative arts therapies are effective interventions for treating, preventing and mitigating symptoms of cognitive decline. Music therapy, in particular, has demonstrated a capacity to help people recover from brain injuries and manage memory loss. Adults who participate in other types of arts activities also experience greater memory and cognitive functioning than those with don’t engage in the arts.

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH (back to TOC)

The mental and emotional health benefits of creativity are well documented. Creative arts therapies reduce stress while also

Cleveland Clinic's Arts & Medicine Institute

The Cleveland Clinic's Arts & Medicine Institute (AMI) began as an effort to curate enlivening and inspiring displays of art as part of the hospital's mission of delivering world-class comprehensive health care. In 2008, the initiative added a robust creative arts therapy program that uses the tactile and performing arts in treatment plans to help patients attain emotional and physical healing goals. Both certified creative arts therapists and professionally trained teaching artists assist medical staff through the design and delivery of arts experiences that benefit patients and caregivers alike. In 2018, AMI received funding from the Ohio Arts Council’s ArtsNext program, which awards grants of $5,000-$20,000 to fund projects that take innovative approaches to challenging issues. In addition, the Ohio Arts Council—working with Arts Cleveland—sponsored the 2014 Creative Minds in Medicine Conference featuring AMI’s efforts, which are built on the knowledge that "fine art is good medicine."

Designing Clinical Environments

Through architecture, interior design, landscape design, wayfinding signage and display of artwork, the arts can make the interior and exterior spaces of clinical environments more welcoming, functional and humanized, which can improve the health care experiences of both patients and caregivers.

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Arts in Clinical Settings page 2
Arts and Military

The physical, cognitive and emotional benefits of engaging with the arts in clinical settings can be particularly efficacious and cost-effective for active-duty service members, reservists and veterans, especially the more than 500,000 who live with traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder. Patients at the National Intrepid Center of Excellence at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, for example, rate art therapy among the four best (out of 40) health interventions offered.

Serving the special needs of military service members and veterans diagnosed with traumatic brain injury and psychological health conditions is the goal behind Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network, which is a partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs and 11 state arts agencies. The project is supporting creative art therapies in clinical sites, a telehealth program to reach rural areas and related innovation projects. It also is developing community based support networks and technical assistance resources.

NASAA’s State Arts & Military Initiatives Strategy Sampler looks at how SAAs can support members of the military continuum through their policies, programs and partnerships. Also available is a NASA survey report of what SAAs are doing to serve military communities.

cultivating self-esteem, self-awareness, social skills and emotional resilience. Participating in the arts helps reduce stress, anxiety and depression as well as alleviate symptoms of post-traumatic stress as well as psychiatric disorders like schizophrenia. Creative therapies and engagements are particularly effective with adolescents and children dealing with behavioral health issues. Furthermore, the arts ease the emotional burden of chronic disease and life-threatening ailments by enabling hospital and hospice patients to communicate otherwise inexpressible emotions and experiences.

CAREGIVER BENEFITS

The arts help doctors, nurses and other health care professionals provide the best care over a long career. Exposure to the arts fosters caregivers’ self-awareness, empathy and interpersonal communication abilities, while it also helps medical professionals in training develop clinical diagnosis skills. In addition, arts programming in clinical environments enables caregivers to engage in creativity and self-expression. This can help mitigate stress, exhaustion, depression and “compassion fatigue”—a challenge that faces many medical professionals, especially those working with hospice patients and older adults with dementia—which can contribute to low productivity, high turnover, medical errors, low patient satisfaction and associated expenses.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

As relatively low-cost yet effective interventions, arts based therapies and other arts programming in clinical settings can help reduce the financial burdens of health care. Research shows that exposure to creativity can shorten the length of hospitalization, reduce the amount of medication prescribed, encourage patient compliance with treatment regimens and prevent health care complications. Arts based treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, for example, could save more than $1,000 in health care costs per veteran, adding up to $1.7 billion in total savings. There is also significant opportunity for cost savings from integrating the arts into the health care of older adults as 10,000 people turn 65 every day and tens of millions of baby boomers will reach retirement age within the next decade. Beyond patient care, arts-supported health care programs can boost the morale and improve the capabilities of medical professionals, helping to avoid expenses associated with high turnover and low productivity.
THE FUTURE OF HEALTH CARE (back to TOC)

The cost-efficiency and -effectiveness of arts-supported health programs is central to why health care administrators and other medical professionals increasingly welcome them. For example, integrative health, which is a strategy that leverages the strengths of conventional medicine with complementary approaches such as the arts and alternative medicine, is becoming more prevalent. Furthermore, health care consumerism is a growing trend, and health care is evolving from a model "driven by the protocols of disease" to a patient-centered system based on "caring for the whole person in order to sustain high quality of life throughout treatments and to better manage ongoing care." The health care labor force also is changing, and there is greater reliance on adjacent professionals and outpatient services. As health care becomes more holistic and distributed and as life expectancies grow longer, there will be expanded opportunities for the arts to contribute to health, healing and aging.

State Arts Agency Support of Arts in Clinical Settings (back to TOC)

GRANT PROGRAMS (back to TOC)

Many state arts agencies financially support efforts to present inspiring arts activities and experiences in health care settings. Some SAAs specifically design a grant program to support such work, recognizing it to be an effective way to benefit vulnerable and underserved populations. A greater number of SAAs, however, leverage project grants or other grant programs to facilitate the delivery of creative engagements in clinical settings. Examples of both strategies follow.

Grants Focused on Arts in Clinical Settings

- The Minnesota State Arts Board's Partners in Arts Participation program awards grants of $5,000-$25,000 to health care and human-service organizations with the aim of helping them use the arts to achieve their service goals and to foster the well-being of their patients and clients.

- The New Hampshire State Council on the Arts has an Arts in Health project grant program that supports—through grants of $500-$4,500—participatory arts activities, creative aging projects and artist residencies that take place in health care facilities. The goal of the program is to enhance the quality of health care experiences by cultivating clinical environments that are not only conducive to patients' well-being but also supportive of health care professionals.

- The North Carolina Arts Council’s Military and Veterans Healing Arts grant supports arts projects that serve active-duty military personnel, veterans and their families. The program awards grants of $5,000-$15,000 in an effort to foster individual health and well-being as well as community connections for people affected by military service.

Oregon’s Arts Build Communities

Through its Arts Build Communities program—which awards $3,000-$7,000 to arts groups and other nonprofit organizations for projects that address community problems, issues or needs through the arts—the Oregon Arts Commission funded ArtsCare, a program of Samaritan Health Services that integrates art and music into the healing process with the help of specially trained teaching artists.

Employees and patients view an exhibition of art therapy patients' art work in the Cleveland Clinic. Courtesy Cleveland Clinic Photography
associated with the armed forces. It prioritizes collaborations between nonprofit arts organizations and military bases, VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) medical centers and other providers of veterans’ services.

- The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA), in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Rhode Island Teaching Artists Center, funds projects that bring the arts to hospitals and other health care facilities through its Project Grants in Healthcare. The program awards up to $10,000 to projects led by teaching artists in coordination with licensed nonprofit health care providers that primarily serve children and young people under the age of 21. RISCA encourages grantees to design projects that incorporate professional development for caregivers.

Project Grants and Other Awards that Can Support Arts in Clinical Settings

- Through its former Honoring Our Servicemembers Grant, which was available in fiscal years 2013-2014, the Arizona Commission on the Arts aimed to support arts therapy and participatory arts and culture experiences for active-duty service members, reservists, veterans and their families. Health and human service organizations, schools and school districts, and other local government agencies were eligible to receive awards of $750-$7,500.

- The Arkansas Arts Council’s Collaborative Project Support program awards grants of $1,000-$10,000 for partnerships between two or more organizations and efforts that reach underserved communities, including hospital patients and clients of other health care organizations.

- The Florida Division of Cultural Affairs has a Specific Cultural Project grant that funds arts activities in hospitals, eldercare facilities and senior centers through its Arts in Education category. Grants of up to $25,000 are available.

- The Arts Build Communities program supports projects that address civic challenges and community issues, including health care. It is a collaboration of the Iowa Arts Council, University of Iowa’s Office of Outreach and Engagement, Iowa State University College of Design, and University of Northern Iowa. The program offers technical assistance as well as up to $10,000 in grant funding.

- The Kansas Creative Arts Industries Commission, through the Innovative Partnership category of its Arts Integration grant program, awards grants of up to $15,000 in support of innovative programming between arts organizations and non-arts organizations—including hospitals—that address needs in a number of realms including health and human services.

Teaching Artists vs. Art Therapists

While many teaching artists lead activities in health care settings that contribute to the healing process and foster general well-being, they are not typically qualified to design and undertake clinical treatment of patients. Creative and expressive arts therapists, meanwhile, receive formal training and accreditation to support their practice of incorporating creative therapy into medical treatment plans and working in collaboration with doctors to attain specific recovery goals. It is important to equip teaching artists with the tools and training attuned to the special needs of the health care environment, although this is not a substitute for the knowledge and credentials of certified creative and expressive arts therapists. (The Arts in Healthcare Certification Commission is developing training materials and a certification process for artists working in clinical settings.) Nonetheless, the efforts of therapists and teaching artists are complementary, and some successful programs—such as initiatives supported by the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs and the Ohio Arts Council—integrate their efforts to strengthen patient care and outcomes.
• Through its Arts in Social Service program, New Mexico Arts offers grants of up to $15,000 to arts groups and social service organizations for arts projects that address social issues. Arts in health care projects are eligible.

TEACHING ARTISTS (back to TOC)

Teaching artist rosters can be leveraged to support arts activities and experiences in hospitals, care facilities and other health care settings. The New Hampshire State Council on the Arts maintains an Arts in Health Artist Directory that is designed to help health care providers locate professional artists who can engage their residents and clients in hands-on arts activities and/or provide related training to their staff. To be eligible for the roster, artists must have experience or training conducive to working in health care settings. The Artist Directory of the North Carolina Arts Council (NCAC) includes artists who have the knowledge and skills to work in health care environments. A former poet laureate of North Carolina became a teaching artist who integrates poetry into veterans' care and, with NCAC assistance, subsequently became the first writer in residence at the VA Medical Center in Asheville. The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, meanwhile, is developing an Artists in Healthcare Roster as part of the statewide Arts and Health initiative it is leading with the Rhode Island Department of Health. To be included on the roster, teaching artists have to demonstrate understanding of and the ability to work in health care environments.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (back to TOC)

Technical assistance is another asset state arts agencies can offer to artists, arts organizations and health care institutions working to enable creative engagements in clinical settings. Informally, SAA staff can advise through one-on-one interactions on how to handle the challenges facing projects integrating the arts into clinical environments. To that end, the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts (NHSCA) has a staff position responsible for supporting arts in health projects. Formally, SAAs can draw on their organizational capacity to convene stakeholders to share information and facilitate connections between them in order to foster opportunities for integrating arts into clinical settings. NHSCA has cosponsored two events, one in 2013 and the other in 2018, that brought together health care practitioners, artists and arts groups. The 2016 annual conference of the Virginia Commission for the Arts, meanwhile, featured a panel discussion on arts and military issues that included the director of the Graduate Art Therapy and Counseling Program at Eastern Virginia Medical School. And the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities worked with a local nonprofit to present a Healing through Art panel discussion that featured a music therapist as well as the director of the Creative Arts Program at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

PARTNERSHIPS (back to TOC)

The nature of integrating the arts into clinical contexts is collaborative, and an effective strategy for state arts agencies promoting arts-supported health care is to form partnerships with entities that offer complementary expertise and resources. Potential partners include other state agencies—such as the department of health or the veterans' affairs agency—as well as...
hospitals, residential care facilities, outpatient clinics, nonprofit health care organizations and related groups. Examples of such partnerships include:

- The **Georgia Council for the Arts** (GCA) has launched a [pilot program to loan art](#) from the [State of Georgia Art Collection](#) to a select number of hospitals in rural communities. Through the program—which envisions rural hospitals as centers of community well-being as well as care facilities—participating hospitals mount one-year exhibitions of pieces from the state collection. GCA works with hospitals to display the artwork in locations that can contribute to reducing stress and anxiety. GCA also reaches out to community partners to organize complementary programing from local arts groups.

- The **New Jersey State Council on the Arts**, in partnership with the ArtPride New Jersey Foundation and Stockton University, created an online resource, [Art Matters NJ](#), to enable a broad array of cultural stakeholders—including health care providers—to communicate the importance of the arts within their field. It features a number of videos that highlight the health and wellness benefits of the arts.

- Since 2016, the **Rhode Island State Council on the Arts** and the Rhode Island Department of Health have led a statewide [Arts and Health initiative](#) supported by an advisory group including teaching artists, health care practitioners, state agency staff, researchers and other stakeholders. The initiative aims to better understand how the arts can facilitate positive health outcomes and contribute to effective clinical environments. To that end, it has mapped the evidence of arts based health care interventions and is developing an in-depth evidence database that is to become publicly available. In 2019, the initiative released the **Rhode Island State Arts and Health Plan**—the first such state plan in the country—which outlines a public health strategy for fully integrating the arts and art based therapies into health care and community settings through innovative and sustainable policy, practice and research.

- The **Virginia Commission on the Arts** (VCA) is supporting a [Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network](#) clinical site at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story by developing an arts therapy coalition led in part by the Art Therapy and Counseling Program of Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS). The Virginia Department of Veterans Services has contributed $50,000 to the effort to contract licensed arts therapists and fund arts therapy training programs. VCA also helped facilitate a separate [collaboration](#) between EVMS and the Department of

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**University of Florida Health Shands Arts in Medicine Program**

The **Florida Division of Cultural Affairs** (DCA) is a longtime partner of the [University of Florida Health Shands Arts in Medicine Program](#) (AiM), which is one of the nation’s pioneer initiatives for integrating the arts into health care. With support from DCA, AiM has evolved from a volunteer activity to a robust, professionalized health care program with arts therapists and artists in residence in six separate facilities.

With AiM’s Center for Arts in Medicine, DCA has helped develop the [Arts in Healthcare for Rural Communities Toolkit](#) and together they have worked with a state veterans’ home and the NEA’s [Creative Forces](#) initiative to incorporate arts therapies into a telehealth program for patients living in isolated communities. DCA also funded the Center for Arts in Medicine’s [Florida Arts & Wellbeing Indicators](#) initiative, which developed a paradigm for measuring associations between arts participation and well-being at the community level. The indicators—designed to collect data on arts participation, access, value, infrastructure and investments; health and quality of life; and civic involvement, social capital and community satisfaction, among other things—can be replicated in communities around the country. Two related resources, the [Data Collection Toolkit](#) and [Data Analysis Toolkit](#), are available for free online to that end.
Veterans Services that is providing group and individual art therapy to veterans and military service members transitioning to civilian life.

**RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**

To better understand how to support the integration of the arts into health care settings, state arts agencies can undertake field research—through surveys, focus groups, town hall meetings and other formal and informal means—and can evaluate existing efforts. Such evidence based research is key to facilitating improvements in health care systems. The Montana Arts Council surveyed medical care providers, health administrators, artists and arts organizations. Its findings include an inventory of existing arts in health activities. A survey deployed by the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts assessed the support for and results of arts-supported health care efforts in New England. The resulting survey report recommends supporting capacity building, encouraging collaborations, and facilitating networking and information sharing, among other things. Through the statewide arts and health initiative, the Rhode Island Department of Health, Brown University School of Public Health and Rhode Island State Council on the Arts convened an advisory group consisting of teaching artists, health care practitioners, state agency staff, researchers and other stakeholders that mapped the evidence of arts based health care interventions. A forthcoming evidence database will make this research available to teaching artists, health care professionals and policymakers. Finally, the Minnesota State Arts Board is developing an on-line dashboard enumerating how the arts benefit state residents. One of the dashboard’s indicators is the percentage of Minnesotans who cite the arts as a reason for improved health and well-being.

**Tips for State Arts Agency Programming**

Partner with state agencies—such as departments of aging, health or veterans affairs—as well as with foundations and nonprofit organizations to amplify the funding or expertise available to support arts in health activities.

Expand eligibility criteria for and conduct outreach about resources and services—such as project grants, teaching artist programs and technical assistance—so health care providers and arts groups working in clinical settings can benefit from them.

Understand and propagate a common vocabulary. One of the challenges arts in health programs face is coordinating efforts between stakeholders from professions with specialized terminology. Ensuring partners are speaking the same language can help ensure project success.

Foster awareness of the health and wellness benefits of enabling arts engagements in clinical environments. The strategy of harnessing the arts in support of health care is not yet well known in either the health care industry or in public discourse.

Incorporate cultural awareness when designing an arts-supported health care program, especially when working with a community with specific cultural traditions.

**Arts in Medicine in Kanas**

In partnership with Emporia State University (ESU), the Kansas Creative Arts Industries Commission is undertaking an Arts in Medicine program to promote the role and facilitate the practice of art therapy in health care settings, including those in rural communities without previous experience in this area. The program’s participants—a children’s hospital, an assisted living and memory care facility, an organization providing day and residential services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, an incubator space for artists and creative industries, and a community organization—worked with the faculty and graduate students of ESU’s art therapy program to design and implement projects responding to the needs of patients and caregivers alike.
**Foreground accessibility** when supporting work in clinical environments, as the abilities of participants may vary and not all facilities have similar space or resources. Projects may need to adjust accordingly as they proceed.

**Disseminate knowledge and best practices** about bringing the arts into health care environments, including what is learned from academic research, firsthand experiences and anecdotal reporting.

**Respect and ensure the safety of participants.** Patient privacy and dignity is important as is compliance with a health care facility's safety regulations, which may limit the use of certain art forms or materials.

**Recommended Resources**

**NATIONAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS, PROGRAMS AND TOOLKITS**

- American Art Therapy Association
- American Dance Therapy Association
- American Music Therapy Association
- American Society for Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama
- Arts in Healthcare for Rural Communities Toolkit
- Arts in Healthcare Research Resources of the National Endowment for the Arts
- The Arts in Health Field in the United States
- The Center for Health Design
- Cleveland Clinic's Arts & Medicine Institute
- Code of Ethics for Arts in Health Professionals and Standards for Arts in Health Professionals
- Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network
- International Expressive Arts Therapy Association
- National Association for Poetry Therapy
- National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies Associations
- National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military
- National Organization for Arts in Health
- North American Drama Therapy Association

**NASAA's Arts and Health Care Resources**

For more information about how state arts agencies can support arts based efforts to foster health and well-being for older adults and people misusing opioids, see NASAA's Creative Aging and Arts and the Opioid Epidemic strategy samplers.
• University of Florida Health Shands Arts in Medicine Program

ARTS IN CLINICAL SETTINGS RESEARCH (back to TOC)

• Addressing the Future of Arts in Health in America, National Organization for Arts in Health, 2018
• Art Therapy Outcomes Bibliography, American Art Therapy Association, 2017
• Arts, Health and Well-Being across the Military Continuum, National Initiative for Arts and Health in the Military, 2013
• Arts, Health, and Well-Being in America, National Organization for Arts in Health, 2017
• Arts, Health, & Wellness, Americans for the Arts, 2015
• Arts in Medicine Literature Review, Grantmakers in the Arts, 2017
• Creative Minds in Medicine, Community Partnership for Arts and Culture, 2014
• Music and Health Care, WolfBrown and Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, 2011
• Music Therapy with Specific Populations: Fact Sheets, Resources & Bibliographies, American Music Therapy Association
• Rhode Island State Arts and Health Plan, Rhode Island Arts and Health Advisory Group, 2019

For More Information (back to TOC)

For more information, contact NASAA Research Manager Paul Pietsch, who researched and wrote this strategy sampler in 2018-2019.

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is the nonpartisan membership organization that serves the nation's state and jurisdictional arts agencies. NASAA helps state arts agencies fulfill their many citizen service roles by providing knowledge services, representation and leadership programs that strengthen the state arts agency community. NASAA also serves as a clearinghouse for data and research about public funding and the arts. For more information on the work of state arts agencies, call 202-347-6352 or visit nasaa-arts.org.

Citations (back to TOC)


