



The Arts and Health

Evidence for the Arts

Strengthening Health Outcomes

State arts agencies are primed to be leaders of a paradigm shift in health care that embraces the arts as a pathway to healthier individuals and communities. A growing body of research demonstrates that the arts offer innovative solutions to existing and new health challenges.

The arts provide direct health benefits across a range of key health concerns. Evidence increasingly shows that arts participation improves the outcomes of some of the most salient and intractable health challenges, including noncommunicable diseases, loneliness and isolation, mental health, and healthy aging.

- ▲ Noncommunicable diseases, also known as chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, cancers and diabetes, account for approximately 75% of [preventable deaths each year globally](#). A [2023 systematic review](#) demonstrates Latin **dance improves cardiovascular health, muscle strength, flexibility and balance**. A [2020 systematic review](#) demonstrates that dance can also be a **powerful tool for improving motor impairments related to Parkinson's disease (PD)**, specifically balance and motor symptom severity in individuals with mild to moderate PD.



Photo courtesy of CATA and Community Music School of Springfield

- ▲ The [mortality risks of being socially disconnected](#) are comparable to smoking up to [15 cigarettes a day](#), and exceed other risk factors such as obesity and physical inactivity. A [2023 analysis](#) finds that when compared to not engaging in the arts, **doing one or more school based arts activities was associated with 59% higher odds of high social support**. Participation in arts activities was also associated with 28% higher odds of reporting high social support one year later, irrespective of previous social support or other variables. A [2019 longitudinal analysis](#) finds **participation in arts activities such as visiting museums, galleries and exhibitions is associated with lower odds of loneliness in older adults over time**.

The arts facilitate healthy aging. [Evidence shows](#) that arts participation improves the emotional well-being of older adults, supports good health, strengthens social bonds and brings a heightened experience of purpose and joy to our lives as we mature.

- ▲ Regularly engaging in the arts can **reduce the risk of developing depression in older adults** [by as much as 48%](#).
- ▲ The physical side effects of isolation among older adults—including increased risks for stroke, heart problems and dementia—account for an estimated [\\$6.7 billion in excess Medicare spending annually](#). But the arts offer a supportive solution. Older adults who participate in the arts report [lower rates of hypertension and higher levels of cognitive and physical functioning](#).



Photo courtesy of Virgin Islands Council on the Arts

The arts offer especially powerful benefits for veterans. [Clinical research](#) demonstrates that creative art therapies improve physical, psychological and social outcomes for veterans. Art therapies are uniquely positioned to meet the needs of veterans.

- ▲ Research examining the relationship between various art therapy modalities and veteran populations has found that creative art therapies [reduce chronic pain, reduce symptoms related to traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder, improve emotional processing, and decrease social isolation](#).
- ▲ Art therapies also benefit the families of veterans by helping to [foster resilience, deepen familial bonds](#) and [promote social connectedness](#).

Prescribing the arts strengthens economic and social outcomes. [Emerging evidence](#) suggests that arts based prescription programs can provide significant economic benefits.

- ▲ A 2024 report from the [Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing](#) finds that every dollar invested into social prescribing programs may return \$4.43 to society through improved well-being and reduced costs incurred by the health system and government.
- ▲ Music therapy [has been shown](#) to ease postoperative and chronic pain and reduce the need for pain medications. This has important economic implications given that the U.S. health care system spends almost [\\$800 billion per year](#) on pain management, much of which is shouldered by Medicare and Medicaid.