



## DOES ARTS AND CREATIVITY HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN IMPROVING HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN OLDER ADULTS?



### What is arts and creativity?

“Any creative or interpretive expression (whether traditional or contemporary), in whatever form” (Arts Act, 2003).

Arts and creativity encompass a diverse range of activities and mediums through which we can express ourselves.

It includes performance arts, like dance, music, singing, drama and theatre, and the visual arts, like painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, and crafts.

It also extends more broadly to incorporate literature, writing, reading and poetry, as well as museums, art exhibitions, and galleries.

### Why is this important?

Having cognisance of the fact that the population is benefitting from living longer lives, there has been a growing emphasis within policy and programmes on how we can best promote health and wellbeing and active ageing in later life.

Statistics indicate a low rate of participation in the arts among adults which decreases with age. In Northern Ireland 31% indicated that they had participated in an arts activity at least once within the previous year. This was slightly less in Ireland, with 25% indicating that they had participated in at least one arts activity within the year.

“The arts play a major role in the prevention of ill health, promotion of good health, as well as the treatment or management of illness across the lifespan.”



## What did the review find?

This review assessed 73 studies from 18 separate countries. It found that taking part in group arts and creative activities can help improve physical, psychological, and social health and wellbeing outcomes in older adults. The overarching conclusion is that group arts and creativity interventions can help to support the physical, mental, and social aspects of ageing.

### Health and wellbeing benefits of the arts in older adults



Dance is particularly beneficial for improving balance, mobility, strength, flexibility, physical activity as well as improving cognitive function.



Music and singing also provide improvements in cognitive function and improved mental wellbeing.



Both music and singing and visual arts can help improve quality of life, social connections and a sense of wellbeing.



There is also some evidence of improved wellbeing and self-esteem for those participating in drama and theatre.



## How does this relate to public health?

These findings have significant implications for both public health and the arts and creativity sector. It suggests the benefits of taking part in arts and creativity should be more widely promoted within public health. This review also found that more research is needed in a wider range of art forms to develop further understanding of the evidence of health benefits for older adults.

## Where can I find more information?

An executive summary and a full report of this evidence review is available online at [www.publichealth.ie](http://www.publichealth.ie).

To support this work, an additional review looked at the economic return on arts and creativity programmes for older people – this review can be found at [www.publichealth.ie](http://www.publichealth.ie).