

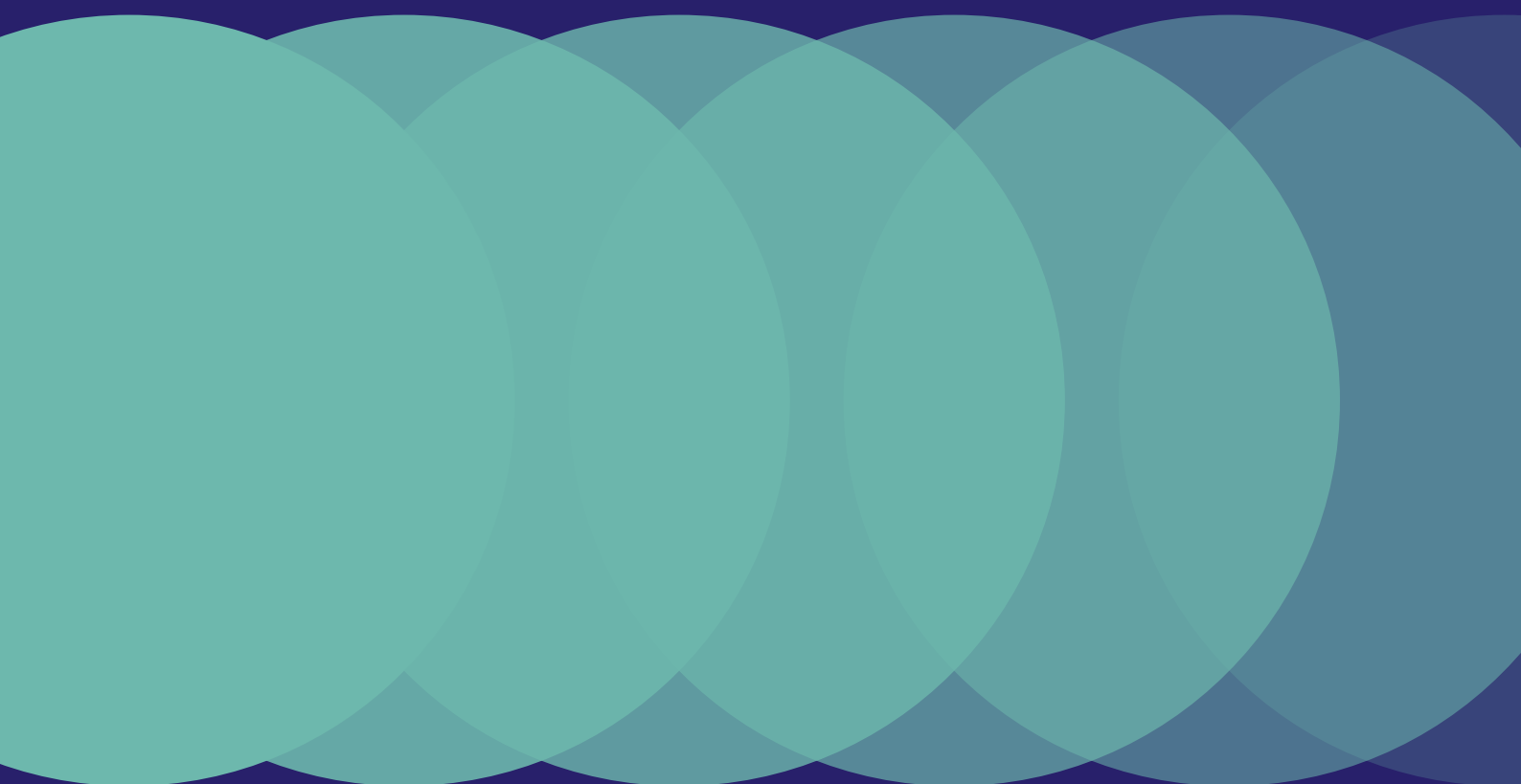


Clár Éire Ildánach  
Creative Ireland  
Programme



# Strategic Action Plan for Creative Arts and Health 2025

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# 1. Creative Arts & Health – the rationale for a joint policy approach

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There is a growing body of international evidence that participation in creative and cultural activity is a positive health behaviour that contributes to our social, physical and mental health and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

By international standards Ireland has a very strong community of practice in what is generally termed 'arts and health'. This community has grown over a number of decades and includes not just creative practitioners, but health and social care professionals throughout our health system and, increasingly, local government. Based on outcomes and evidence built at this local level there are organisations such as healthcare bodies and Local Authorities that have identified creative and cultural participation as a priority and are successfully embedding it within their operating models.<sup>2</sup> There is also research evidence for the importance of participation in cultural and creative activity for better health outcomes. For example, the 2023 [TILDA report](#)<sup>3</sup> found clear evidence of a positive association between creative engagement and health and wellbeing across all of the life course. This dimension is being further developed for Wave 7 of TILDA.

Supported by funding from Creative Ireland, the Department of Health and the Arts Council in recent years – and with the very close involvement of the HSE – there is now a strong appetite for the provision of access to creative and cultural activity across the healthcare system, from health promotion and social inclusion in the community, to illness prevention and acute care.

Funding for arts and health in Ireland has focused on individual projects and pilots led by local champions. This approach has been very effective in building the intuitive case for the benefits of arts and health, demonstrating a huge diversity of creative activity and creating a wealth of lived experience and expertise – though also a significant level of expectation as to what more could be achieved. However, this ad hoc approach has also created limitations for the continuity, sustainability and scalability of interventions.

Therefore, at this point, it is clear that while we have a significant body of evidence for the benefits of arts and health, we do not yet have the sustainable delivery model, underpinned by a research and evaluation framework, necessary to embed arts and health in a systematic way in Ireland. It is this model that we need to develop to realise potential of participation in creative and cultural activity as a positive health behaviour in a way that is systematic but not prescriptive.

This provides the rationale for the next step in the arts and health policy partnership. That is why this Strategic Action Plan identifies the inter-sectoral, structural, issues that need to be addressed from a cross-cutting policy perspective and breaks these down into a set of objectives and actions. It is envisaged that the principles and methods of the [Action Plan for Designing Better Public Services](#) will be a key to our work.

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1 WHO Network Synthesis Report 67: *What is the evidence of the role of the arts in improving health and wellbeing?* 2019

2 For example, the Mercer Institute for Successful Ageing (MISA) at St James's Hospital has a creative and cultural programme for both staff and patients and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council continues to develop its creative and cultural initiatives to support older people, particularly those living with dementia and their carers.

3 <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2023/06/20230608-TILDA-report-wave-6.pdf>

## 2. Building an arts and health policy partnership in Ireland – 2020-2024

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The RENEW group was established at the end of 2020 as a partnership between Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media (Creative Ireland Programme), Department of Health (Healthy Ireland/Sláintecare Programme), the HSE and the Arts Council. Based on an MoU signed in December 2020, the group's remit included:

- promoting awareness of benefits of creative activity for health and wellbeing
- facilitating an ecosystem of collaboration
- funding projects
- enabling research and evaluation
- identifying barriers to participation
- concentrating on promoting health and wellbeing through the arts and creativity for those most impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic.

The group met on a quarterly basis with the Creative Ireland Programme providing the secretariat for the group.

The main focus of the group was on **funding projects** (see Annex I). This grant funding has been administered by the Creative Ireland Programme on behalf of the group. However, these operational processes required ongoing, and at times intensive oversight, from the members of the group. While positive outcomes did result from these projects, their operational demands precluded a structured contribution by the group on strategy and policy development.

**Evaluation** was required by each project. Third party evaluation has produced very useful results, notably for the 2 year Traveller Health and Wellbeing pilot. However, it was beyond the capacity of the group to develop a systemic **research** framework.

The work of the group has contributed to **promoting the awareness of the benefits of creative activity for health and wellbeing**, though this has not been underpinned by a formal or strategic communications plan. A National Symposium on the Art of being Healthy and Well was hosted by the Renew group partners in the RCSI in June of 2022 and addressed by Ministers Martin and Donnelly. The event [report](#) aligns closely with the recommendations of this report, demonstrating how the work of the group has carried forward these findings. Network Gatherings of Creative Ireland, Healthy Ireland and HSE Health & Wellbeing officers in November 2023 and May 2024 have been key to further developing awareness and embedding operational expertise. Funding through schemes and partnerships has been the principal way in which this part of the remit has been progressed.

In addition, the Group has developed as a source of expert advice for funding initiatives developed and delivered by the Creative Ireland Programme. In particular the CI funded €1.2m [Local Authority Health & Wellbeing in the Community scheme](#) launched in 2024, which is supporting 2 year collaborations between the Creative Ireland and Healthy Ireland teams in Local Authorities along with the relevant HSE Local Health and Wellbeing officers. The contribution of the expertise of the members of the group, and through them their wider organisations, has also been key to the very successful Network Gatherings – in fact the Local Authority scheme was born out of the first of these in November 2023, which was followed by a second, knowledge sharing, event in May 2024. In this way, the group has made an important contribution to **facilitating an ecosystem of collaboration**. As part of this dimension of its work, the group has contributed greatly to a better understanding of the **barriers to participation**. While there is much still to do, the partnership developed through the group is now seen by international colleagues as a strong example of best practice.

### 3. Vision

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Building on our work through 2022- 2024, our vision for this arts and health policy partnership is that:

*People living in Ireland have access to creative and cultural activity as part of an holistic health journey throughout the life course, supporting better health and wellbeing outcomes and enriching the creative and artistic landscape*

## 4. Strategic Objectives 2024 – 2025

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Building on the work of the Renew Group, the strategic objectives and actions set out here are focused on delivery by mid-2025. As the first iteration of a joint policy statement for creative arts and health in Ireland, the priority is to establish the key building blocks necessary to achieve our vision. Longer term actions will be developed on an ongoing basis as we build on the progress made.

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### **Objective 1: Policy**

**to articulate a joint policy position on arts and health in Ireland and ensure coordinated input to international policy making**

This Strategic Action Plan, developed by Creative Ireland and the Department of Health in close consultation with the Arts Council and the HSE, is the foundational action for this objective. It will in turn inform Ireland's input to the work of the EU Open Method of Coordination Group on Culture and Health and the development of the agenda for the Irish Presidency of the EU.

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### **Objective 2: Evidence**

**establish a research and evaluation framework for arts and health in Ireland to build the evidence base for sustainable project design and funding**

Gathering data and building evidence for the benefits of arts and health is a critical objective, and one that is shared internationally. A key action under this objective will be the support of research on the impacts of participation in creative and cultural activity across the life course, through support for Wave 7 of the Trinity Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), a WHO Collaborating Centre.

The results of evaluations from funded projects, such as the Health and Wellbeing in the Community Scheme, which supports collaboration between Creative and Healthy Ireland teams in Local Authorities, will feed into the development of structured evaluation framework aligned with the principles of the Action Plan for the Design of Better Public Services.

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### **Objective 3: Capacity**

**provide training and support to equip creative and healthcare professionals to work together to embed creative and cultural activity in the health service in Ireland**

Priorities under this objective include the development of a module on arts and health for medical undergraduates for piloting in the 2025/6 academic year and scoping of how to leverage existing expertise, and build on them, to support creative practitioners in the field of arts and health.

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**Objective 4: Delivery**

**prioritise suitable projects or pilot initiatives  
and design sustainable delivery mechanisms  
for their scaling**

The focus here is on building on the success of initiatives and take them beyond the pilot phase to a sustainable delivery model. Building the success of its pilot phase, and its showcase in November 2024, the HSE and the Arts Council will develop and implement proposals for an expanded Traveller Health and Wellbeing through Creativity Scheme in 2025-2027. Proposals will also be developed for the next phase of the Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community Scheme. The creative and cultural dimension of the National Social Prescribing Framework will be reviewed, with a report on the current availability of such activities to be completed in 2025. The HSE will complete its Guidance Documents on Arts and Health Interventions for Older People and People with Disabilities.

To note: this work will sit alongside the ongoing Arts Council Funding for arts and health.

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**Objective 5: Governance**

**design and implement governance and reporting  
arrangements to support a joint policy approach**

With a budget of €600,000, the implementation of this Plan will be driven by the Creative Arts & Health Working Group. The WG will report to the Creative Arts & Health Steering Group, consisting of senior managers in DTCAGSM, DoH, the Arts Council and the HSE.

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**Objective 6: Communications & Engagement**

**develop and implement an engagement strategy  
to ensure open dialogue with all stakeholders  
and support effective implementation**

Stakeholder engagement will continue on an individual basis, with stakeholder briefings facilitated by Creative Ireland, and collectively, with stakeholder involvement in group events such as the Creative Health & Wellbeing in the Community Network Gatherings and participation by WG members in external events. A workshop with senior health policy makers will be held in 2025.