Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

National Creative Arts and Health Strategy 2026–2036







Cover Image
Take 5.
Donegal County Council.
Photo: Alan McLaughlin.

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Foreword from the Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport

Ireland has the potential to be a world leader in creative arts and health. We know from international evidence that access to creative and cultural engagement is essential to wellbeing.

It is vital that we provide all people living in Ireland, regardless of health status or ability, with safe spaces to explore and expand their creative abilities, collaborate and make new friendships in a meaningful way. This ten-year strategy will help to embed art and creativity in communities and healthcare settings across the country.

Both my own department and that of my colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy, have collaborated closely with the HSE and the Arts Council to ensure that this strategy drives forward and scales up the delivery of creative programmes targeting wellbeing outcomes across the country.

In order to deliver on our potential as a world leader in this field, we need to support the professional development of our skilled creative practitioners and healthcare workers; provide sustainable funding; address health inequalities; and build awareness of both the benefits and availability of creative wellbeing programmes.

In this strategy, we have outlined what we need to do next to achieve our national ambitions, identified where further research is needed and set clear actions to deliver on our aims.

We are already well advanced in delivering successful programmes such as Live Music Performances in Residential Healthcare Settings and Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community.

In preparing this strategy, the National Creative Arts and Health Steering and Working Groups met with and listened to creative practitioners, senior healthcare leaders, arts policymakers, patient advocates, local authorities, and many other interested stakeholders. We have conducted robust evaluations and heard from thousands of participants in our community-based programmes throughout the process.

We will continue to communicate and engage with stakeholders as we develop the subsequent action plans to be delivered under this strategy. This is what true collaboration across our arts and health sectors, and across government, looks like. It involves taking the time to listen to and learn from the lived experiences of those who have delivered and participated in creative arts and health projects across the country.

Engagement in culture and creativity means moments of joy, laughter and genuine connection for the people involved. As Minister, I have met people of all ages living in Ireland who have described to me the difference that engagement with our country's exceptional creative arts and health programmes has made to their quality of life.

This strategy is our plan for the future, ensuring that people living in Ireland have continued and increased access to creative arts and health as part of living well.

Patrick O'Donovan TD

MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNICATIONS AND SPORT



Foreword from the Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy

As Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy, I am delighted to welcome the publication of the **National Creative Arts and Health Strategy 2026-2036**. This strategy is a significant milestone in our ambition to improve health, wellbeing and quality of life for people across Ireland through greater access to creative arts and cultural participation.

Health is shaped by far more than healthcare services alone. Our wellbeing is influenced by the communities in which we live, the connections we make and the activities that bring purpose, meaning and enjoyment to our lives. Increasingly, national and international evidence demonstrates that engagement in creative and cultural activities can play an important role in supporting physical, mental and social wellbeing.

This strategy recognises the contribution that creative arts and health can make to some of our most important national priorities, including prevention and health promotion, mental health and wellbeing, healthy ageing and reducing health inequalities. Artists, health professionals, community organisations and local authorities are using music, singing, visual arts, dance, creative writing, storytelling and many other forms of creative participation to support people to live healthier and more connected lives.

I am particularly proud of the strong partnership that has underpinned the development of this strategy. The Department of Health has worked in partnership with the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Arts Council on the development of this strategy. This collaborative approach reflects the very nature of creative arts and health itself, bringing together a shared commitment across disciplines and sectors.

Over the next decade, this strategy will provide a framework for expanding access to high-quality creative arts and health opportunities, strengthening the evidence base, supporting professional development and embedding creative arts within national policies. Through successive action plans, our focus must be on practical delivery and on ensuring that opportunities are accessible to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities, including those who may currently face barriers to participation.

I look forward to working with our partners across the arts, health, and community sectors to realise the ambitions set out in this strategy and to ensure that the benefits of creative arts and health are experienced by people across Ireland for generations to come.

Jennifer Murnane O'Connor TD

MINISTER OF STATE AT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH, WELLBEING AND THE NATIONAL DRUGS STRATEGY

Executive Summary

Engagement and participation in high-quality creative arts and cultural activity is increasingly recognised as a positive health behaviour and an enabler of health, wellbeing and social connection. Activities such as music, singing, dance, visual arts, craft, writing, drama, storytelling and wider cultural participation can support connection, confidence, emotional wellbeing, quality of life and community belonging.

The **National Creative Arts and Health Strategy 2026–2036** sets out a ten-year plan to make creative arts and health more accessible, better coordinated and more sustainable in Ireland. Its aim is to ensure that more people, in more communities and across all stages of life, can benefit from high standards of creative engagement and participation in the arts as part of living well.

The strategy strives towards excellence and sustainability and provides national direction for the sector. It supports a joined-up approach across government, the health service, the arts and culture sector, local authorities, community organisations and higher education and research institutions.

This strategy builds on decades of work by artists, healthcare staff, communities, cultural organisations, researchers and advocates[1]. It is informed by stakeholder engagement and advances the work of the Strategic Action Plan for Creative Arts and Health which was published in 2025[2]. The policy partnership is led by the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport and the Department of Health, in collaboration with the HSE and the Arts Council.

The strategy recognises that health is shaped by more than healthcare alone. Social connection, creativity, culture, belonging and access to meaningful activities all play an important role in supporting wellbeing. For this reason, creative arts and health can contribute to national priorities in prevention, addressing inequalities, mental health promotion, healthy ageing, social inclusion, community resilience and quality of life, while also enriching the creative arts landscape.

The strategy aligns with key national policies in the area of health and culture, such as the **Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2025, Pathways to Wellbeing – National Mental Health Promotion Plan 2024–2030,** the **HSE Public Health Strategy 2025–2030**, and **Arts Council Strategy Making Great Art Work 2016-2025**[3] (extended to end 2026). In alignment with the national cultural policy **Culture 2025**, the strategy takes a rights-based approach and positions creative arts and health as a practical, evidence-informed enabler of more equitable access to the arts.

Over the next ten years, the strategy will achieve the following objectives:



Objective 1: Delivery
Develop sustainable and scalable creative arts and health programmes that improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Reduce inequalities in access to creative participation and prioritise groups that experience barriers to participation.

Objective 2: Policy
Embed creative arts and health within national health, wellbeing, culture and community policy.

Objective 3: Evidence
Build a robust evidence base demonstrating impact, value for money and contribution to public health objectives.

Objective 4: Professional Development
Strengthen creative arts and health expertise and support continuous professional development

Objective 5: Communications
Increase awareness, understanding and support for creative arts and health.

The strategy will be delivered through five two-year Action Plans for Creative Arts and Health which will focus on the above five priority objectives. By 2036, Ireland will have a more connected and sustainable creative arts and health sector. The plans will define and set measurable outcomes to ensure strategic delivery of these objectives. More people will have access to creative and cultural opportunities that support their health, wellbeing and quality of life, and creative arts and health will be more firmly embedded in national health and culture policies.



Take 5.
Donegal County Council.
Photo: Alan McLaughlin.

Creative Arts and Health Ecosystem



Diagram based on Dr. Daisy Fancourt's original infographic.

Section 1

Creative Arts and Health



Music in the Moment.
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.
Photo: Fintan Clarke.

What is Creative Arts and Health?

Creative arts and health[4] is the use of creative and cultural activity to support health, wellbeing, quality of life and social connection. Creativity is a natural human capacity. It enables people to express themselves, make meaning, imagine possibilities, solve problems and connect with others.

Creative arts and health includes a wide range of arts and cultural practices such as music, singing, dance, theatre, storytelling, visual arts, craft, film, circus, architecture, heritage, design and multi-disciplinary work.[5]

Health is shaped by the conditions in which people live, learn, work, play and connect. People's wellbeing is influenced by relationships, housing, income, education, employment, culture, environment, community, identity, belonging and access to meaningful activity. Creative arts and health is integral to this broader understanding of health. It can support prevention, recovery, resilience, social inclusion, mental health promotion, healthy ageing and quality of life.

Creative participation can be particularly valuable because it reaches people in ways that formal services may not always do. It can create safe, welcoming and non-clinical spaces where people can connect, express themselves and take part in something meaningful.

Creative participation can contribute to:

biological wellbeing, for example through movement, breath, sensory stimulation, relaxation or pain distraction

psychological wellbeing, by supporting self-expression, confidence, emotional processing, joy, meaning and hope

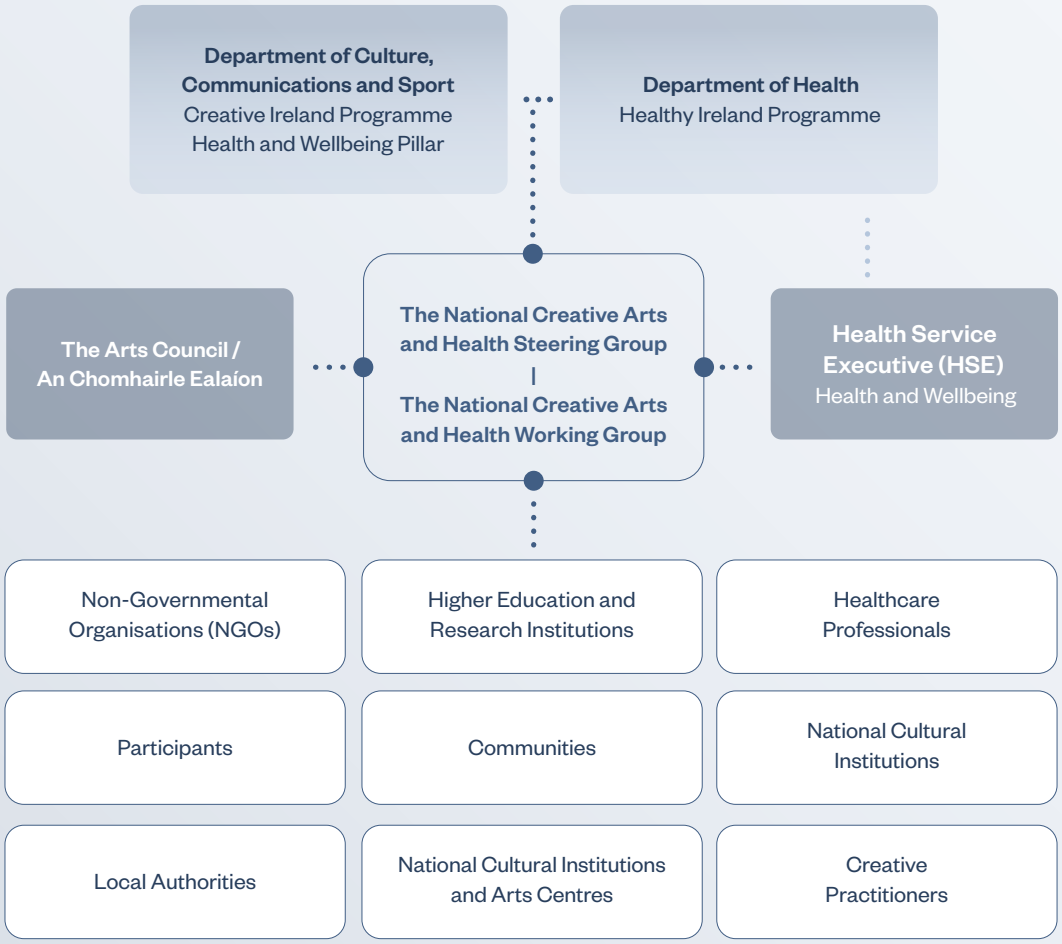
social wellbeing, by reducing isolation, strengthening relationships, building community connection and supporting cultural participation

In this policy, creative arts and health is understood as a field of practice that brings together the arts, culture, health, social care, community development, public health and research sectors. Creative arts and health can include participatory arts programmes; performances; exhibitions or cultural experiences in healthcare or community settings; artist residencies in hospitals, care settings or community services; creative programmes that support mental health, ageing well, social connection or recovery; environmental enhancement such as improving healthcare spaces through art, design, sound, colour or architecture; and community-based arts and health initiatives linked to public health, prevention or social prescribing.[6]

Creative arts and health programmes[7] provide a community-based context for engagement in meaningful cultural activities. The field also provides increased and more equitable access to and engagement with the arts; work opportunities for creative practitioners; a context for artform development; opportunities for collaboration at local, regional and national levels; and the potential for increased support for and investment in the arts.

Ireland has made significant achievements in creative arts and health over the last few decades. This strategy sets forth a national pathway to build on those achievements, and to support the expertise of our creative practitioners, in order to fully realise our national potential for excellence in this growing field. Best practice means delivering high-quality, professional, non-clinical arts experiences, which are integrated respectfully into both healthcare and community settings. Collaboration is the key to best practice, requiring close working partnerships between artists, participants, and staff and the maintenance of artistic integrity while prioritising participant wellbeing, safety, and ethical standards.[8] The context for best practice positions creative and cultural engagement as an essential contributor to wellbeing, and defines measurable outcomes to assess the effectiveness of targeted, wellbeing-focused engagement.[9]

Creative Arts and Health Roles



International Context and Evidence Base

> "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits."[10]
>
> **Article 27 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was published in 1948, community-based art has become a recognised means to encourage active citizenship, drive social change and promote a holistic approach to wellbeing.

In 2019, Dr. Daisy Fancourt and Dr. Saoirse Finn published their seminal World Health Organisation report[11], which formally scoped and reviewed global evidence on human engagement in culture from 2000 on, providing a definitive body of evidence on the wellbeing value of creative arts and health. Recent WHO policy briefing[12] has also documented that creative arts approaches can help make climate and health issues more tangible and accessible.

Culture and Health: Time to Act

Across Europe, culture and health is increasingly recognised as an important field within public health policy. The EU Open Method of Coordination report **Culture and Health: Time to Act**,[13] published in September 2025, identifies a growing body of evidence that participation in cultural and creative activity can support health promotion, prevention, treatment, mental wellbeing, social inclusion and community resilience.

The report positions cultural engagement as a positive health behaviour across the life course and argues that culture and health can contribute to more innovative, equitable and sustainable responses to contemporary public health challenges.

Irish Policy Context

Culture 2025[14] states that a healthy cultural and creative life is important for both the individual and for society. A governing principle of Culture 2025 is that everyone has the right to participate in the cultural and creative life of the nation.[15] Work is now underway on a new culture policy, for which this strategy will provide essential guidance.

The Arts Council's strategy **Making Great Art Work 2016–2025**[16], now extended out to 2026, provides an important foundation. It identifies the artist and public engagement as central priorities and sets out a vision in which more people across diverse communities can make, experience and participate in the arts.

This National Creative Arts and Health Strategy builds on these cultural policy commitments by focusing specifically on the relationship between creative participation and health and wellbeing. It acknowledges that access to culture is part of how people express identity, maintain connection, experience joy, make meaning and participate in society.

The strategy is strongly aligned with the direction of Irish health policy. It supports a shift towards prevention, population health, wellbeing, early intervention, community-based care and action on the wider determinants of health. The **Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2025**[17] provides the overarching national policy context for improving health and wellbeing. Its goals include increasing the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life, reducing health inequalities, protecting the public from threats to health and wellbeing, and creating an environment where every individual and sector of society can contribute to a healthier Ireland. Creative arts and health can contribute to these goals by creating opportunities for people to connect, participate, express themselves and engage in meaningful activity in healthcare, community and cultural settings. The **Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2025** is being updated, with a new framework to be published in 2026.

This strategy also aligns with **Pathways to Wellbeing – National Mental Health Promotion Plan 2024–2030**,[18] Ireland's first cross-government mental health promotion plan. That plan aims to promote positive mental health for everyone through universal and targeted supports for people most at risk of experiencing mental health difficulties. Creative arts and health can support this agenda by strengthening social connection, reducing isolation, supporting emotional expression and creating inclusive spaces for participation. This strategy is also aligned with **Ireland's Strategy to Reduce Suicide and Self-harm Connecting for Life: 2026-2035,**[19] and its focus on preventing suicide by embedding mental health promotion and suicide and self-harm reduction into broader health and wellbeing policies and initiatives.

Furthermore, the strategy is relevant to **Sláintecare**,[20] which aims to deliver the right care, in the right place, at the right time, with a stronger focus on prevention, community-based care and equal access based on need rather than ability to pay. As part of this, the strategy supports **Delivering an Age-Friendly Health System**[21] (2025) which focuses on transforming health and healthcare for older persons in Ireland. Creative opportunities for older persons provide a patient-centric approach to health and are particularly relevant and valuable in residential care.

The **HSE Public Health Strategy 2025–2030**[22] further reinforces the relevance of this work. The strategy prioritises population health, prevention, health equity, action on the wider determinants of health, reducing inequalities across the life course, and using evidence and innovation to improve health outcomes. Creative arts and health offers a practical way to act on these priorities in settings where people live, receive care and connect with others.



Music in the Moment.
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.
Photo: Shane O'Neill. Coalesce.



Music in the Moment.
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.
Photo: Shane O'Neill. Coalesce.

Section 2

Ten-Year Vision and Plan



Clinical Creativity Workshop by
NCAD / CFA in collaboration with UCD [23]
Photo: Sasko Lazarov, Photocall Ireland.

Creative Arts and Health Vision

Engagement in creative and cultural activity has proven benefits for health, wellbeing, social connection and quality of life. Everyone, regardless of age, background, health status, disability, income or place of residence, should have opportunities to access, participate in and enjoy creative and cultural life.

The vision for this strategy is:

People of all ages living in Ireland experience better health and wellbeing through access to creative and cultural engagement, which also enriches our creative and artistic landscape.

By 2036, this vision will guide Ireland towards a more sustainable, visible and accessible creative arts and health sector. Success will mean that creative engagement is better understood, more widely available, and more consistently supported as part of health, wellbeing, culture and community policy.

Our Aim

The aim of this strategy is to ensure that more people, in more communities and across all stages of life, can benefit from high standards of creative engagement and participation in the arts as part of living well.
In order to achieve this aim, we will promote and increase engagement in creative and cultural activity as a contributor to health and wellbeing, through sustainable delivery models in a coordinated way across government, health services, the arts and culture sector, local authorities, communities and practitioners.

Our coordinated cross-government approach will entail:

- universal approaches, which increase opportunities for everyone to participate in creative and cultural activity as part of living well
- targeted approaches, which improve access for people and communities who experience barriers to health, wellbeing or cultural participation



Roam Cork. Cork City Council.
Photo: Julie Forrester.

Guiding Principles

The following principles will underpin our creative arts and health strategy and guide the delivery pathway set out in our action plans:

- A rights-based approach to access to participation in cultural life
- Partnership and intersectoral collaboration
- A population-based, whole life-course approach
- Addressing health inequalities through targeted supports
- A wider-determinants-of-health-based approach
- Evidence-based policy
- Continuing skills development and sharing best practice
- Sustainability and scalability



Music in the Moment.
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.
Photo: Shane O'Neill. Coalesce.

Strategic Objectives

The strategy is organised around five strategic objectives. Together, these objectives set out what needs to be developed and strengthened by 2036 to realise the potential of creative arts and health in Ireland.



Objective 1
Delivery

Develop sustainable and scalable creative arts and health programmes that improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Reduce inequalities in access to creative participation and prioritise groups that experience barriers to participation

The focus of this objective is to move beyond pilot projects and establish sustainable delivery models that support participation, wellbeing and social connection. Building on existing programmes including the Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community, Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity and Live Music Performances in Residential Healthcare Settings schemes, delivery will be expanded through partnerships across government departments, the HSE, local authorities and the arts community.

This objective will be achieved through:

- identifying what works in healthcare and community settings
- a proportionate, universalist approach to health inequalities[24]
- building on proven approaches such as with Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity as a model for targeted, culturally appropriate and community-led practice
- embedding and scaling creative, innovative and sustainable approaches
- supporting delivery models that are adaptable to local need and context
- strengthening partnerships between the Healthy Ireland initiative, the Creative Ireland Programme, the HSE, the Arts Council, local authorities and community organisations



Objective 2
Policy

Embed creative arts and health within national health, wellbeing, culture and community policy

The focus of this objective is to strengthen the policy foundations required to support the long-term development and sustainability of creative arts and health in Ireland. This objective will support the integration of creative arts and health within national and local health, wellbeing, culture and community policies. This objective will be achieved through:

- implementing this strategy and its five two-year action plans
- aligning key creative arts and health priorities and actions between the Department of Health, Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, the HSE, the Arts Council and other partners
- integrating creative arts and health into relevant national and local policy processes
- developing stronger links with EU and international culture and health policy developments
- increasing recognition across government of creative and cultural participation as a contributor to health, wellbeing and quality of life



Objective 3
Evidence

Build a robust evidence base demonstrating impact, value for money and contribution to public health objectives

The focus of this objective is to strengthen the evidence foundation required to support the long-term development and sustainability of creative arts and health in Ireland. This objective will advance research, evaluation and data collection to improve understanding of the contribution of creative arts and health initiatives.

This objective will be achieved through:

- developing and implementing stronger metrics and evaluation frameworks
- conducting an Irish health economics study for creative arts and health
- continuing research partnerships with higher education and public health partners
- using lessons from lived experience and practice-based evidence
- disseminating and communicating learning across the sector

Objective 4
Professional Development

Strengthen creative arts and health expertise and support continuous professional development

Creative arts and health depends on skilled people. Creative practitioners require training and support to work effectively in health and community settings. Healthcare professionals also need a better understanding of how creative arts and health can contribute to person-centred care, wellbeing and service experience. By 2036, the aim is to have clearer professional development pathways and stronger supports for both creative and health-sector partners. This objective will be achieved through:

- developing and evaluating interdisciplinary creative arts and health modules for medical, health and social care education
- training and supporting professional development for creative practitioners working in health and community settings
- building shared language and cross-sectoral competencies
- recognising the central role of creative practitioners within the sector

Objective 5
Communications

Increase awareness, understanding and support for creative arts and health

Clear communication between policymakers, service providers, practitioners and the public is needed to explain what creative arts and health is, why it matters, where it happens, and how people can engage with it. By 2036, the aim is to achieve stronger national awareness of creative arts and health and a higher international profile for Ireland's work in this field. This objective will be achieved through:

- developing and implementing a communications plan aligned to this strategy
- promoting best practice through relevant platforms
- sharing examples of impact and learning from across Ireland
- creating opportunities for stakeholder engagement and shared learning
- strengthening Ireland's contribution to international culture and health policy conversations



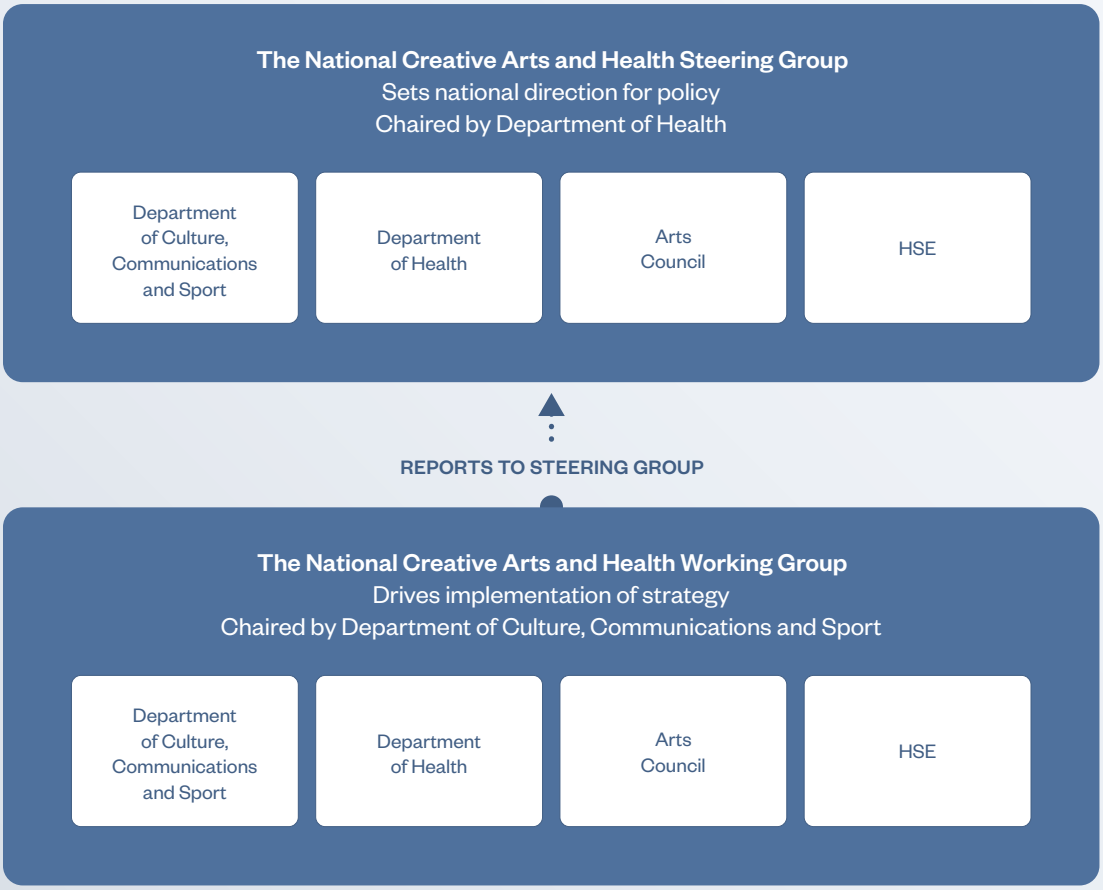
Impact of the National Creative Arts and Health Strategy 2026–2036

By 2036, full implementation of this strategy will support a stronger, more connected and more sustainable creative arts and health sector in Ireland.

In practical terms, this means more people will have the opportunity to experience the benefits of creative participation — whether through a hospital arts programme, a community singing group, a social prescribing referral, a Traveller wellbeing initiative, or creative activity in older persons, disability, mental health or primary care settings.

The action plans delivered under this policy will include measurable outcomes under each objective, for monitoring both progress and impact on delivering on the vision and aim of this strategy.

Governance Structure



Governance

Strong governance will be essential to deliver this strategy over ten years.

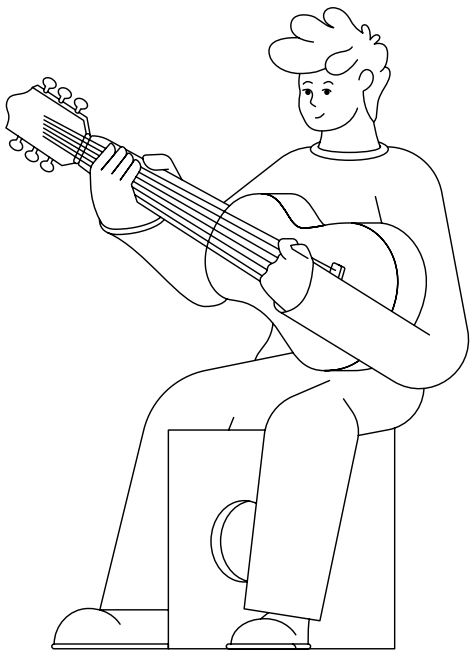
The National Creative Arts and Health Working Group, chaired by the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, will support the implementation of the actions set out in the biennial action plans. The working group will report to the National Creative Arts and Health Steering Group, chaired by the Department of Health. The steering group will set the national strategic direction for policy development. The working group will meet on a monthly basis, and the steering group will convene on a quarterly basis. The governance model will be reviewed every two years to ensure it remains fit for purpose as the sector develops.

The governance structure will support identification of barriers and opportunities, engagement with key stakeholders, communication of progress, shared learning and accountability and cross-government and interagency coordination as well as monitoring of progress against biennial action plans and alignment with relevant health, culture and community policies, which will in turn feed into the ongoing development of this strategy.

Project Spotlights

The below examples demonstrate an Irish context overview of how creative arts and health initiatives, including the projects developed and delivered under Objective 1 of this strategy, can contribute in a biopsychosocial context to key health targets such as, positive mental heath in acute settings, social connection, and reducing structural barriers to better mental health.

The projects below are a selection of best-practice examples of creative arts and health initiatives which were developed with the participant at the heart of their design, have impacts across different stages of the life course and demonstrate strong links to national health and culture policy objectives around access, addressing inequalities and delivering a better designed public health service.



Project Spotlight

Title **Soothing Sounds**

Health Target **Positive Mental Health in Acute Settings**

Soothing Sounds at Children's Health Ireland is a music project aimed at bringing live music to children in hospital. Arts in health musician Gwendoline Douglas, supported by colleague Mary O'Donnell, provides weekly musical sessions at the bedside for inpatients and their families in CHI Crumlin and CHI Tallaght. The sessions provide an opportunity for patients to sing, smile, laugh and dance. Parents reflect that their children were both happier and more relaxed over the course of the sessions, recognising a transformation in their child's mood following the engagement.

"Long term patients like L deserve to have a song that they can bring with them through life to reflect on their time in hospital. Gwendoline created something really special with this project, and we are extremely grateful to have been chosen to be part of it."

Mary, L's mum



Soothing Sounds.
Photo: Orla Butler.



Soothing Sounds.
Photo: Orla Butler.

Project Spotlight

> "This was more than an art class. It gave me space to express myself and connect with others."
>
> **Creative Life, MISA, St James's Hospital, participant**

Title **Creative Life**

Health Target **Social Connection**

The Creative Life pillar selected Emma Mc Keagney, as Artist-in-Residence at the Mercer's Institute for Successful Ageing, St James's Hospital. The artist collaborated with older adults through a clay-making workshop series exploring intergenerational learnings through stories as part of an integrative artist in residence programme.

In these socially prescribed workshops, participants explored expressive creativity and therapeutic art-making, while fostering human connections and empathy through storytelling in a safe environment. Older adults who joined in described a sense of achievement, shared meaningful conversations, in-the-moment experiences and the opportunity to learn something new as a group.



Participants attending a workshop at Creative Life, MISA.
Photos: Anthony Edwards.



Participants attending a workshop at Creative Life, MISA.
Photos: Anthony Edwards.

Project Spotlight

Title **Re-Imagining Life on the Road**

Health Target **Reducing structural barriers to better mental health**

This Galway Traveller Movement (GTM) storytelling and song initiative was funded to promote both wellbeing and connection. The project aimed to respond to structural inequalities, disadvantage, poverty and barriers to social inclusion. Creative programme elements included reminiscing about culture through storytelling and song and participating in other cultural and creative activities rich in heritage.

> "The thing coming back to me is why we need more projects like this, why we need to reconnect with our roots and the best way to do [that] is to come back to where our families would have been, like in camps."

Community Development Worker, Nora Corcoran



Reenacting Life on the Road.
Photo: Kathleen Ward.



Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity.
Galway Traveller Movement.
Photo: Emilija Jefremova.



Fuaim na Cuimhne / Sound of Memory.
Kilkenny County Council.
Photo: Ellen McCahill.



Fuaim na Cuimhne (Sound of Memory).
Kilkenny County Council.
Photo: Freddie Greenall.

Annex 1
Stakeholder Engagement in the Development of This Strategy

This strategy has been informed by stakeholder engagement across the creative arts and health sector. Engagement commenced in 2025 and included:

- a joint workshop led by both the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport and Department of Health which brought together policymakers, HSE service delivery leads and patient advocates
- in-depth interviews with leaders in both the culture and healthcare sectors
- six focus group sessions conducted by the Arts Council with artists and creative practitioners, both online and in person

Stakeholders highlighted the need for a clearer, more coordinated and better resourced national approach to creative arts and health. Key insights which have informed this strategy included the following:

- Creative arts and health should be embedded within high-level policies, including Healthy Ireland and Sláintecare.
- People and communities should be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes.
- The lived and experiential value of arts practice, the importance of equality of access to the arts, artistic expertise and the intrinsic value of the arts must remain central to policy and planning.
- Multi-annual and pooled funding models are needed to support continuity, shared ownership and long-term impact.
- Further stakeholder engagement and communication is needed on actions under the Strategic Action Plan for Creative Arts and Health 2025.[25]
- Stakeholders require greater clarity on roles, responsibilities and leadership across the Irish arts and health sector.
- Artists, creative practitioners and healthcare partners need stronger professional development, support and recognition.
- Evidence and evaluation should be strengthened without reducing the value of creativity to narrow clinical measures alone.

These insights have helped shape the direction, priorities and implementation approach set out in this strategy.

Annex 2
Roles in Irish Creative Arts and Health

The National Creative Arts and Health Steering Group

The steering group consists of senior managers in the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, the Department of Health, the Arts Council, and the HSE, and sets the national direction for creative arts and health policy development.

The National Creative Arts and Health Working Group

The implementation of this strategy will be driven by the National Creative Arts and Health Working Group. The working group will report to the National Creative Arts and Health Steering Group.

Department of Culture, Communications and Sport

The Creative Ireland Programme is a whole-of-government culture and wellbeing programme led by the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (DCCS). The programme aims to inspire and transform people, places and communities through participation in creative and cultural activity, with the vision that every person in Ireland has access to creative opportunities to realise their creative potential. First established in 2017, the programme is now in its second phase, which is due to complete at the end of 2027. Creative Ireland has invested €39.9 million to advance its ambition of inspiring and transforming people, places and communities through creative and cultural participation. In 2025, €1 million was invested in 15 creative health and wellbeing projects under the Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community scheme.

The programme is a successful national model for promotion of engagement in culture and creativity to maintain wellbeing and reduce risk factors associated with negative health outcomes. Through a community-centric approach, this programme targets isolation through a forward-looking biopsychosocial model, and evaluations to date are demonstrating the positive health, wellbeing and social benefits of this approach.

The Creative Health and Wellbeing pillar of the programme provides strategic direction, policy, leadership and ongoing collaborations to strengthen and sustainably develop Ireland's creative arts and health sector. The programme funds various strategic pilot projects and initiatives through the National Creative Arts and Health Working Group.

The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon

The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon is the national government agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts in Ireland. The Arts Council's role is to advocate, advise, invest and partner with others, to cultivate a vibrant arts environment at the heart of Irish society. The Arts Council believes that every person living in Ireland has the right to create, engage with, enjoy and participate in the arts. The values of diversity and freedom of thought and expression are at the core of its work.

The Arts Council has supported the practice of arts and health since the late 1990s through the provision of funding for individual artists, arts organisations, local authorities and through a range of research, development and policy initiatives. Since 2008 it has directly funded arts and health projects to the value of €5.5 million, in addition to the provision of indirect funding through local authorities, festivals, and other arts organisations that support the development of arts and health as part of their programmes.

The first Arts Council policy on arts and health was published in 2010 following extensive consultation with the sector and building on arts and health practice and expertise developed over several decades. The area of arts and health continues to develop and expand. In 2025 an Arts and Health Manager was appointed by the Arts Council and a new Arts Council Arts and Health Policy Statement will be published in 2026.

Department of Health

The Department of Health plays a crucial role in the arts and health sector by providing strategic direction and funding for arts and health initiatives. Within the department, the Health and Wellbeing unit is part of the National Creative Arts and Health Working Group and a Department of Health Deputy Chief Medical Officer chairs the steering group

Healthy Ireland is a government-led initiative that seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Ireland. To support its implementation the government has created the Healthy Ireland Fund, which enables local authorities to fund projects and programmes aimed at enhancing health and wellbeing outcomes at an individual and community level. To support the implementation of the Healthy Ireland Strategy, each local authority has a Healthy Ireland Coordinator. Their role is to work to improve health and wellbeing outcomes, and address health inequalities through working with different partners, groups and communities to address the factors that determine our health including, for example, transport, access to green and blue spaces, education. Healthy Ireland Coordinators collaborate with local authority Arts Officers, Creative Ireland Coordinators, Creative Communities Engagement Officers, Community Engagement and Biodiversity Officers and others in their support of creative arts and health programmes.

The Sláintecare Healthy Communities (SHC) Programme is a cross-government initiative, which aims to improve the long-term health and wellbeing of people living in some of Ireland's most disadvantaged communities. Launched in 2021, the programme provides health and wellbeing services and community development initiatives in 24 community areas across Ireland where health inequalities are most evident. Targeted health initiatives are provided by the HSE and locally commissioned community organisations, while Local Development Officers within local authorities coordinate local activities and support efforts to address the broader social determinants of health.

Health Service Executive (HSE)

The HSE's vision is for a healthier Ireland, with a high-quality health service valued by all.

The HSE Corporate Plan priorities are:

- Healthy communities
- Receiving the right care
- Receiving care in the right place
- Receiving care at the right time

The aim of the HSE is to work collaboratively to deliver excellent services and ensure a person-centred approach for all. Creative arts within the health service supports this aim by contributing to person-centred care and promoting wellbeing across healthcare settings.

Within the HSE there are seven HSE Arts and Health Coordinators which are linked to a number of specific hospitals, and one community area. Their role is to progress creative arts within the HSE and within communities. They achieve this through managing participatory arts projects, creative performances, and visual art collections and installations, in collaboration with patients, staff, communities and key external stakeholders.

Healthcare Professionals

Healthcare professionals engage with the arts in three main ways:

Arts participation e.g. facilitating artist-led sessions with patients

Receptive engagement, e.g. hosting live events

Environmental enhancement[26]

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs in the creative arts and health sector integrate creative practice into both healthcare and community settings to enhance mental health, physical wellbeing, and overall quality of life. NGOs also facilitate a grass-roots self-selected approach to communities accessing the arts.

Higher Education and Research Institutions

Higher education institutions provide creative arts and health skills development opportunities for healthcare and arts professionals. Research institutions contribute insights into the impacts of creative arts and health initiatives. The Professional Diploma in Arts and Health is delivered through the Creative Futures Academy; a partnership between the National College of Art and Design, University College Dublin, and the Institute of Art, Design and Technology. The Trinity College Dublin Medical and Health Humanities Initiative brings together researchers from a wide range of disciplines including, but not limited to, history, philosophy, sociology, politics, drama, health sciences, religion, cultural studies, arts, literature and languages. Munster Technological University has a number of courses in place, and UCD Medical School introduced a mandatory module for medical students in September 2026.

National Cultural Institutions and Arts Centres

Cultural institutions, including museums, galleries, libraries, theatres and arts centres all offer the community access to the arts.

Participants

People accessing health services, families, carers and communities all have the potential engage in creative arts and health projects.

Endnotes

1 See annex 1 for information on stakeholder engagement.
2 www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2025/06/Strategic-Action-Plan.pdf
3 The successor to this strategy is currently in development.
4 Creative arts and health and creative art therapy are related, but distinct fields of practice. Creative arts and health is rooted in creative arts practice. It promotes collaborative, non-clinical activity focusing on facilitating life-enhancing opportunities for creative expression. Art therapy involves the use of art to achieve individualised clinical goals within a therapeutic relationship. It is rooted in psychotherapy, focusing on and exploring complex issues for individuals through art making and discussion, in the context of a clinical treatment plan.
5 This is a non-exhaustive list.
6 See Arts and Health Ecosystem infographic.
7 For information on the Irish stakeholders, roles and programmes in an arts and health context see Annex 2
8 www.artsandhealth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Arts-Council-Arts_and_health_policy_strategy-2010_2014.pdf
9 Arts in Health, Designing and Researching Interventions, Daisy Fancourt, Oxford University Press, 2017
10 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights
11 iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/e1cc8536-773d-446f-9822-8ae376f41415/content
12 Role of the arts and culture in addressing the health impacts of climate change: Behavioural and Cultural Insights policy brief series who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2026-13261-53035-82772
13 European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and *Culture, Culture and health – Time to act*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/0432398
14 Culture 2025 www.gov.ie/en/department-of-culture-communications-and-sport/publications/culture-2025/
15 And public bodies have a statutory duty to have regard to human rights and equality... The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (the Duty) is contained in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. It places a statutory obligation on public bodies to have regard to human rights and equality considerations in the performance of their functions. www.ihrec.ie/public-sector-duty
16 artscouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Making_Great_Art_Work.pdf
17 www.gov.ie/en/healthy-ireland/publications/healthy-ireland-framework-2019-2025
18 www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/pathwaystowellbeing
19 www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/irelands-strategy-to-reduce-suicide-and-self-harm-connecting-for-life-20262035
20 about.hse.ie/our-work/slaintecare-our-strategy-for-improving-irelands-healthcare-system/
21 assets.gov.ie/static/documents/c3f509d8/Delivering_an_Age-Friendly_Health_System_-_A_Blueprint_to_Transform_Health_and_Healthcare_for_Older_Adults.pdf
22 about.hse.ie/publications/the-public-health-strategy-2025-2030
23 The Clinical Creativity in Arts and Health module for UCD undergraduate medical students is delivered in partnership with National College of Art and Design (NCAD) and the Creative Futures Academy. The aim of Clinical Creativity is to introduce undergraduate medical students to the field of arts and health via a dedicated module, exploring the potential benefits of creative approaches for patients and the ways in which design thinking can enhance clinical practice, service design and healthcare delivery.
24 The resourcing and delivering of universal services at a scale and intensity proportionate to the degree of need. Services are therefore universally available, not only for the most disadvantaged, and are able to respond to the level of presenting need.
25 www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/blog/first-joint-strategic-action-plan-for-creative-arts-and-health-2025
26 See approaches section of realta.ie/why-arts-health







An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health



An Roinn Cultúir, Cumarsáide agus Spóirt
Department of Culture, Communications and Sport

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland Programme