



## What is Arts and Health?

**Arts and health** is a diverse, multidisciplinary field dedicated to transforming health and healing by connecting people with the arts at key moments in their lives. This field integrates literary, performing, and visual arts and design into a variety of healthcare and community settings for therapeutic, educational, and expressive purposes.

The field of **arts and health** has five areas of focus:

- **Patient Care** | The integration of the arts into the patient experience has a positive impact on health outcomes. The arts aid in physical, mental, and emotional recovery by relieving anxiety and decreasing a patient's perception of pain. In an atmosphere where a sense of control is often lost or minimized, the arts serve as a therapeutic and healing tool, reducing stress and loneliness, lessening pain and the need for pain medication, reducing the length of hospital stays, and improving compliance with physician recommendations. This translates into substantial financial savings for both patients and health organizations.
- **Healing Environments** | The arts create safer, supportive, and more functional environments in health facilities and community centers. Healing architecture, art installations, natural lighting, and access to healing gardens all help to decrease patient and caregiver stress, improve outcomes, enhance patient safety, improve way-finding, and increase overall quality of care. The physical environment also plays a critical role in improving the health and safety of staff and reducing errors in providing care while increasing effectiveness and job satisfaction.
- **Caring for Caregivers** | Arts programming for caregivers creates a more normative environment within which care can be provided. Both professional and familial caregivers are faced with the realities of human suffering, illness, and mortality on a daily basis, and the arts offer caregivers an opportunity for self-expression, allowing each a safe place to understand their experiences and emotions. The arts also help to overcome barriers by embracing diversity, reinforcing the family's supportive role in the healing process, and changing the culture to one that is person-centered.

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- **Community Well-being** | Arts and health benefit communities by engaging people in programs aimed at prevention and wellness activities and sharing information to improve health literacy. The arts can have positive effects on quality of life and have been shown to foster mental, physical, and social benefits as well as result in fewer doctors' visits, reduced use of medications, lessened anxiety and depression, improved memory and socialization skills, and increased levels of independence in a variety of populations and settings.
- **Education** | Medical and nursing schools in a number of countries see the value of integrating arts courses to help students develop observation, diagnostic, communication, empathetic, and other essential skills. Through the arts, future medical professionals can understand patients using different methodologies and connect with them on a more personal level. Although clinical decision-making has traditionally been based on intuition, opinions, assumptions, and experience, current evidence-based medicine now supports combining the individual's clinical experience with the best available external evidence in making medical decisions. In addition, arts and health coursework is a growing component of education for artists, architects, social workers, administrators, and allied health professionals.

The arts contribute to what it means to be human—from the beginning of recorded history to now—especially in times of illness. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the expansion of knowledge clearly outpaces its adoption and utilization, many professionals in the health and healing fields seek ways to meet basic human needs for safety, community, and culture. A growing body of documented research, both qualitative and quantitative, provides evidence of the benefits the arts have when applied to the focus areas laid out above. We believe, and research continues to show, that the arts have a critical and indispensable role to play in the present and future of health and healing services around the world. This is the heart of the arts in health movement.