

Arts as a Factor in Health Promotion

Document addressing the theme “Arts: A Profound Source of Healing,” for the Arts Caucus meeting held February 26, 2013

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” World Health Organizationⁱ

As part of [The Value of Presenting](#) study,ⁱⁱ the Canadian Arts Presentation Association (CAPACOA) has conducted an exhaustive review of research literature on arts and health. Here's an overview of the main findings as they relate to the performing arts and to dance in particular.

Attendance of the performing arts has several health benefits

According to studies conducted in Norway, Sweden and the United States, even after controlling for other factors, attendance of theatre and concerts is positively correlated with:

- Higher self-reported health^{iii,iv}
- Lower anxiety scores^v
- Lower depression scores^{vi}
- High self-rated vitality^{vii,viii}
- Higher longevity^{ix,x}

A recent Canadian study based on data from Statistics Canada's 2010 General Social Survey found similar associations between participation in 18 cultural activities and eight indicators of health and well-being (such as health, mental health, volunteering, feeling stressed, and overall satisfaction with life). As an example:

- People who attend theatre, pop music concerts or cultural festivals are up to 32% more likely to report very good or excellent health, even accounting for other factors.^{xi}

Participation in dance activities yields a range of health benefits

Few of the above quoted studies examined dance or opera as distinct disciplines. In *The Arts and Wellbeing in Canada*, dance and opera were amalgamated with “other kind of cultural performance,” a category which had statistically significant associations with better health, mental health, and high satisfaction with life.^{xii}

There is however a growing body of literature on the health effects of dance as a participatory activity, from childhood to old age:

- Recreational dance can improve cardiovascular fitness and bone health of children and young people and can contribute to preventing or reducing obesity.^{xiii}
- Amateur dancing has emotional, as well as physical, social and spiritual benefits. In addition, there are also positive benefits linked to self-esteem and coping strategies.^{xiv}
- Reading, playing a musical instruments and dancing are associated with a reduced risk of dementia. On leisure activities that most contributed to the delay in onset of Alzheimer’s disease for those at risk of the disorder, dance is at the top of the list.^{xv}

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ⁱ Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946.

ⁱⁱ Inga Petri (2012): [Literature Review On the Value and Benefits of Performing Arts Presentation](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ Koenraad Cuyppers et al. (2011): [Patterns of receptive and creative cultural activities and their association with perceived health, anxiety, depression and satisfaction with life among adults](#), *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*.

^{iv} Anna Wilkinson et al. (2007): [Are variations in rates of attending cultural activities associated with population health in the United States?](#), *BMC Public Health*, 7:226.

^v Koenraad Cuyppers et al., Patterns of receptive and creative cultural activities.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} L.O. Bygren et al. (2009): [Cultural participation and health: a randomized controlled trial among medical care staff](#), *Psychosomatic Medicine* 71:4, 469-473.

^{viii} T. Theorell et al. (2009): [A note on designing evaluations of health effects of cultural activities at work](#), *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, 1:1, 89-92.

^{ix} Lars Olov Bygren et al. (1996), [Attendance at cultural events, reading books or periodicals, and making music or singing in a choir as determinants for survival](#), *BMJ*, 313:1577.

^x Lars Olov Bygren et al. (2009): [Attending cultural events and cancer mortality: A Swedish cohort study](#), *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, 1:1, 64-73

^{xi} Kelly Hill (2013): [The Arts and Individual Well-Being in Canada](#), *Statistical Insights in the Arts*, 11:2.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Jan Burkhardt & Cathy Brennan (2012): [The effects of recreational dance interventions on the health and well-being of children and young people: A systematic review](#), *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, 4:2, 148-161

^{xiv} Cynthia Quiroga Murcia et al. (2010): [Shall we dance? An exploration of the perceived benefits of dancing on well-being](#), *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, 2:2, 149-163

^{xv} Joe Verghese et al. (2003): [Leisure Activities and the Risk of Dementia in the Elderly](#), *New England Journal of Medicine*, 348:25, 2508-2516.