

Arts

Strategy 2019–2023

At a glance

Participating in the arts has multiple benefits for health and wellbeing: it reduces social isolation, strengthens community connection and builds self-esteem, as people pursue creative activity alone or in groups.

Over the past six years

Since 2013, VicHealth has led a research agenda to build the evidence for arts-based health promotion, reflecting the need to know what works, how to measure it and the importance of communicating the benefits of arts for health and wellbeing. Our [Arts Strategy 2017–19](#) explored the role that arts can play in addressing complex social issues such as social isolation, youth mental wellbeing, gender equality and local identity.

2019–2023

Four-year goal: We will focus on promoting the health and wellbeing benefits of the arts by:

- increasing participation and diversity in the arts
- embedding the arts and creative industries across our work
- harnessing arts and cultural settings as powerful enablers to influence awareness, attitudes and behaviour.

In 2013, we released our [Action Agenda for Health Promotion](#), which set our strategic direction for the 10 years to 2023. During this time, our three arts strategies have driven a broad range of innovative collaborations and investments to enhance health and wellbeing.

Our [Building Health Through Arts and New Media Strategy 2013](#) provided significant knowledge on the needs of local government in establishing sustainable arts activity through [LEAP Localities Enhancing Arts Participation](#), tested approaches that raised awareness about race-based discrimination in local communities through [Arts About Us \(I & II\)](#) and piloted innovative media platforms to build participation and community engagement through the [Technology, Arts and Social Connection](#) program.

The [Active Arts Strategy 2014–2017](#) established partnerships between premier arts organisations and councils to activate selected spaces in local communities, with some becoming permanent sites for physical activity through the [Community Activations Program](#). This work was complemented by investments in mass community-participation events such as [White Night](#), [Fun Run](#), [Big Dance 2018](#) and [The Gallery Workout](#).

Our [Arts Strategy 2017–19](#) delivered programs that explored the role that arts can play in addressing complex social questions such as youth mental wellbeing, resilience and [gender equality](#). A partnership with Creative Victoria and other Victorian Government departments and creative agencies was established to help tackle some of the big social challenges that affect social isolation and gender equality through the [Future Makers for Change](#) program.



What we aim to achieve

FOCUS AREA

Increasing participation and diversity in the arts

While we seek to improve the health of all Victorians, engaging hard-to-reach audiences who have poorer physical and mental health than the general population is critical to creating greater opportunity for health, wellbeing and fairness in health outcomes. Research shows that the more people participate in the arts in their everyday lives, the better their health outcomes (Davies et al. 2016).

Over the next four years, we will:

- strengthen our collaboration with local government, research partners and the arts sector to increase access for everyone to everyday creativity and its health benefits
- build the capacity of arts organisations and local government to co-create activity with marginalised communities.

What will success look like?

Strong partnerships with a range of organisations to increase access to everyday creativity.

More co-creation opportunities for arts organisations and local government to provide marginalised communities with access to arts activities with health benefits.

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Embedding the arts and creative industries across our work

There is clear evidence that the arts have a range of benefits for health and wellbeing (Australian Government 2014).

Evidence for the strong interrelationship between participation in the arts and positive individual and community health outcomes continues to evolve through our new focus on aligning arts investment with our five strategic imperatives: alcohol, healthy eating, mental wellbeing, physical activity and tobacco.

Through the arts, we aim to improve population health and reduce health inequities by promoting healthy lifestyles, discussing sensitive health issues, communicating health-related concerns and increasing health literacy. Over the next four years, we will:

- review and publish evidence of the contribution that the arts, cultural activities, environments and creative industries make in addressing diverse health issues
- support new partnerships with arts organisations and sectors that involve the public in solutions to prevent harm from mental health conditions, gender inequality, alcohol, physical inactivity, tobacco and unhealthy eating.

What will success look like?

Dissemination of the evidence that arts-related activities can help to address a range of health issues.

Encourage new and diverse partnerships that encourage the public and stakeholders to address health issues.

FOCUS AREA

Harnessing arts and cultural settings as powerful enablers to influence awareness, attitudes and behaviours

The arts and cultural settings are important environments that can support a range of preventive health strategies. In the next four years, we will:

- collaborate with local government, the arts, and cultural settings to influence and embed policy and practice to provide healthier food and drink options and environments
- design and test programs that help create healthier arts and cultural environments.

What will success look like?

Healthier food and drink options and environments in more local government, arts and cultural organisations.

Successful trials and new evidence of what makes for healthier arts and cultural environments.

Supporting Evidence

Our longstanding commitment to the arts is based on our knowledge that participation in the arts and cultural activities has a positive impact on health and wellbeing. The arts provide an important community setting for health promotion, a partnership model for the co-design and delivery of initiatives, a unique participatory experience with the potential to build connection and a vehicle to inform and create behavioural change. This understanding paves the way for our Arts Strategy over the next four years.

The evidence for the benefits of participation in the arts across the life cycle is strong:

- In early childhood, participation is associated with positive social and emotional development, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Menzer 2015).
- For young people, participation is associated with strong social and emotional skills, including better peer interaction and self-confidence (DSG 2016).
- Younger Australians (aged 15–24 years) create and experience the arts at the highest rates (Australia Council for the Arts 2017a).
- For older people, participation is associated with positive cognitive, mood and quality of life outcomes (Noice et al. 2013).
- Arts programs can lead to improvements in parenting, mental health, social inclusion and ability to absorb health information (Ings et al. 2012).
- Arts projects can lead to greater empowerment and social inclusion and better mental health (Everitt & Hamilton 2003).

The evidence for the benefits of the arts for health and wellbeing continues to evolve, including the frequency of arts participation required for health benefit. People with 100 or more hours per year of arts engagement (at least two hours a week) were found to have significantly better mental wellbeing than those with no or lower levels of engagement (Davies et al. 2016).

While participation in the arts is known to play an increasingly powerful role in promoting social cohesion (Australia Council for the Arts 2017b), promising research has indicated that small participatory arts projects in disadvantaged areas of London also resulted in 55 per cent of participants reporting an increase in healthy eating, 76 per cent an increase in physical activity and 85 per cent feeling more positive (Ings et al. 2012).

Consolidating what we know and building new knowledge in these areas will form the major focus of our work in 2019 and beyond.

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