



# Arts and public health: exemplars from the Nordic region and future strategies

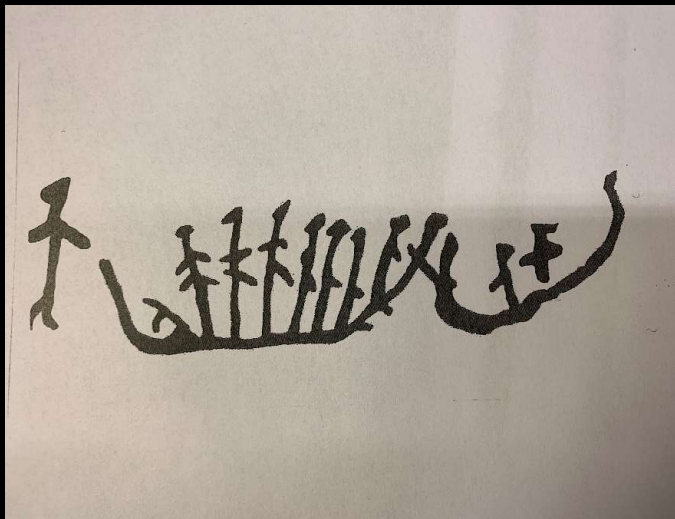
## **Culture, Community and Health**

Building Healthy Communities through Arts and Creativity

June 22nd 2023

Évora, Portugal

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University



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Rock art depicting drumming, dancing, and performative activities (masked and tailed figures), have reminded relatively constant throughout prehistory, showing that the arts have played an important role in the ritual healing practices (and entertainment) of the people living in the North.

# Shamanism

Shamanistic healing rituals was practiced by all our ancestors.



# Arts & Public Health in Scandinavian

Examples of dance, music, arts on prescription, visits to museums and galleries, visual arts, literature and theatre encompass the variety of arts and culture activities that are used for improving mental health in the Scandinavian population.

Benefits are identified as the **improvement of psychosocial skills**, including: **coping, self-esteem, resilience and communication**, as well as **developing relationships**.

## REVIEW

### Arts and public mental health: exemplars from Scandinavia

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction** There is growing research evidence, both globally and in Scandinavia, to suggest that engagement with arts and cultural activities has a positive effect on mental health and well-being.

**Methods** Through a scoping review using a five-stage method, this article identifies examples of arts practice that is supported by research for mental health and well-being in Scandinavia, exploring how engagement in arts and culture activities may be good for the mental health of the public through the different stages of life: childhood and youth, working life and older age.

**Results** Examples of dance, music, arts on prescription, visits to museums and galleries, visual arts, literature and theatre encompass the variety of arts and culture activities that are used for improving mental health in

the Scandinavian population. Benefits are identified as the improvement of psychosocial skills, including coping, self-esteem, resilience and communication, as well as developing relationships.

**Conclusion** By embracing and recognizing the added health value and impact of arts engagement, policies could include access to arts and culture activities, targeting people with mental ill-health as well as public health promotion. Research suggests that arts engagement in Scandinavia is important for mental health and well-being throughout life. Therefore, it is crucial for public mental health and well-being strategies to be linked to regional and local policies to ensure appropriate implementation for local communities.

**Keywords:** ARTS AND HEALTH, ARTS AND CULTURE ACTIVITIES, PUBLIC MENTAL HEALTH, SCANDINAVIA

## INTRODUCTION

In this article we provide a scoping review of arts and health research and practice, and explore the use of arts activities for improving public mental health, using exemplars from Scandinavian countries to illustrate the potential benefits and weaknesses of such an approach. We refer to the term "creative public mental health," by which we are explicitly referring to examples of how the public may benefit from forms of cultural and arts participation. Creative expression is fundamental to human existence across all cultures and civilizations. There is increasing evidence worldwide that not only are such activities intrinsic to being human, but they are also a contributing factor to health and well-being. While an element of this occurs through being part of an audience, and epidemiological research from the Scandinavian countries has found significant positive associations between going to the cinema, theatre, concerts etc. and perceived health, improved

life satisfaction and reduced anxiety and depression (1, 2), the emphasis in this paper is on participatory creative and expressive artistic activities for public mental health.

Even though Scandinavians may score highly on the various happiness surveys, mental health problems and social inequality in health are increasing in the region. In a report commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers titled *The Shadow of Happiness*, researchers found mental health to be one of the most significant barriers to subjective well-being (3). The report is based on data collected over five years, from 2012 to 2016, and concludes that 12.3% of people living in the Nordic region are struggling or suffering (according to the Cantril Scale used to assess general life satisfaction). It is particularly young people and people over 80 years old who are having mental health problems.



# Nordic epidemiological studies

**Sweden** (Bygren et al., 1996; Konlaan et al., 2000; Johansson et al., 2001; Bygren et al., 2009; Jensen et al., 2023)

**Norway** (Cuypers et al, 2010; Hansen et al., 2015; Løkken et al., 2021)

**Finland** (Hyppä et al., 2001; Väänänen et al., 2009)

**Denmark** (Ekholm et al., 2019; Santini, 2023; Jensen submitted)





# Education and network

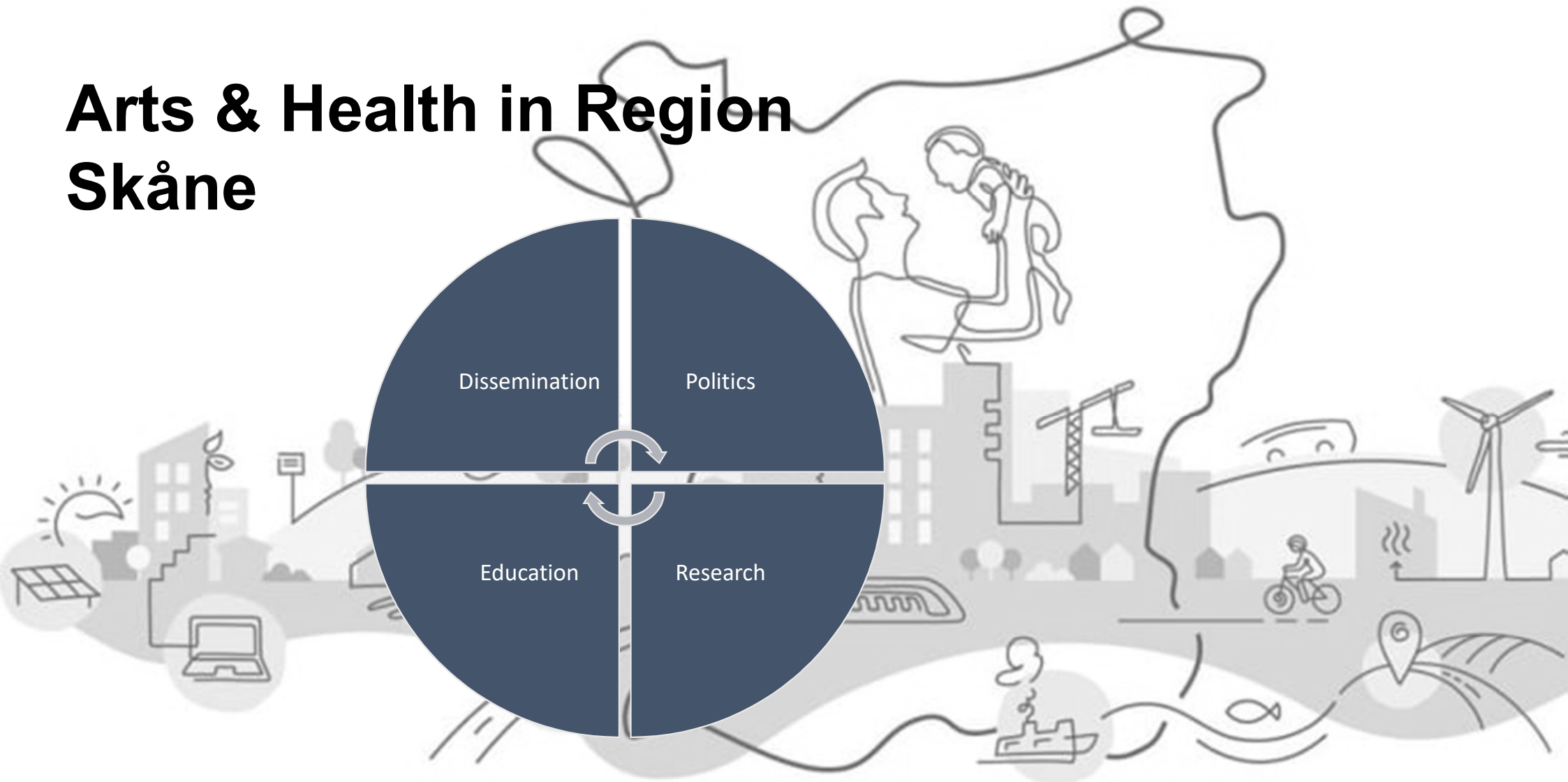
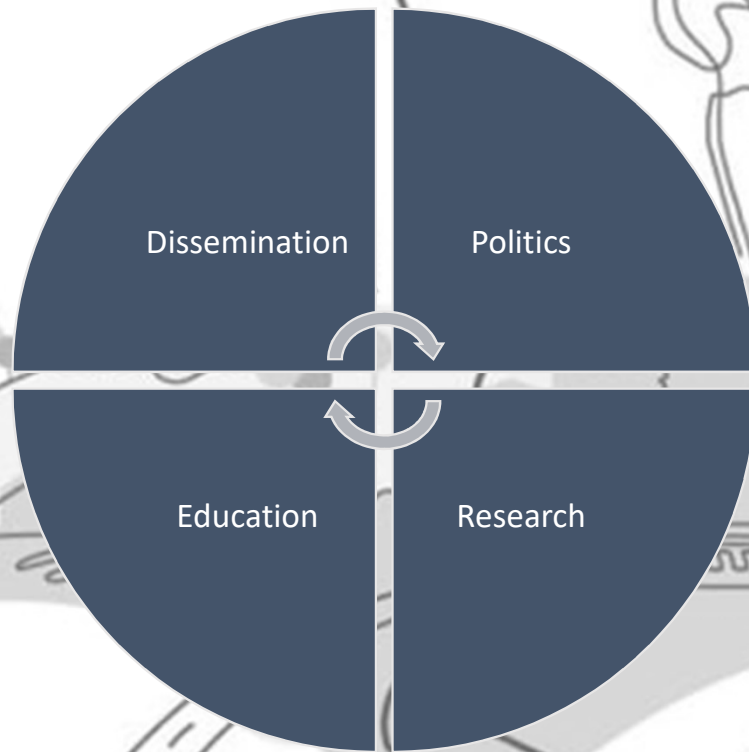
- University courses across the Nordic Region
- Nordic Arts & Health Research Network: a forum for exchange and collaboration of Arts & Health researchers within the Nordic area

# Challenges

- Political silos
- Common language/perspectives across sectors and disciplines
- Sustainability



# Arts & Health in Region Skåne





# The whole person, the whole life

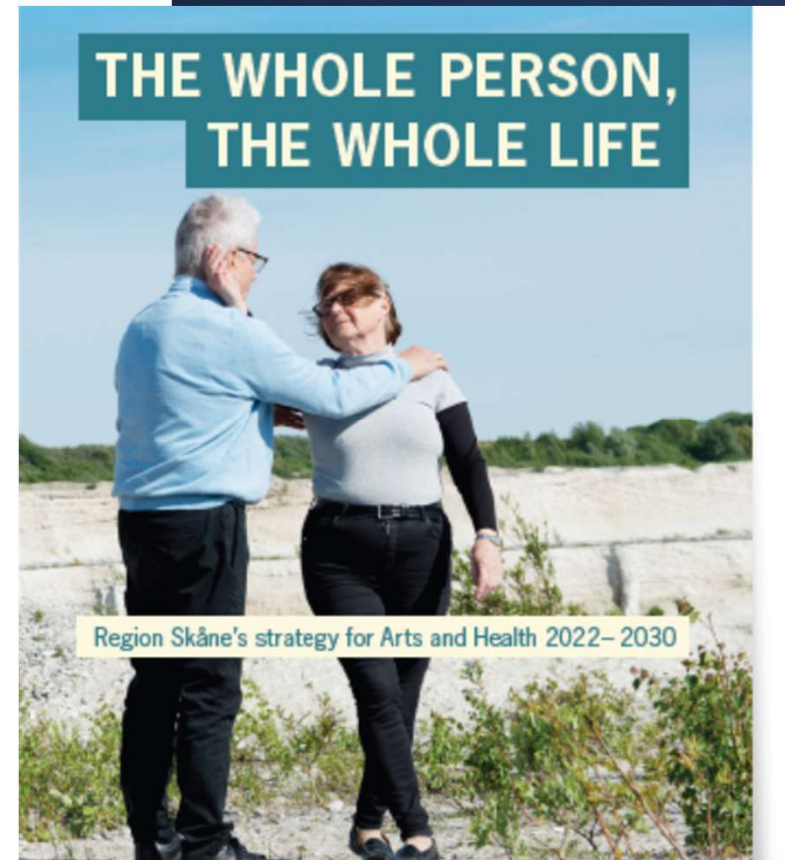
## Region Skåne's strategy for Arts and Health 2022-2030

**A common strategy between the Healthcare Committee and the Arts & Culture Committee**

Focus areas:

1. Knowledge and evidence driven arts and health activities (for internal and external knowledge building)
2. Arts and health initiatives established, embedded and financed in Region Skåne (to ensure accountability)
3. Arts and health activities in broad cross-sectoral collaboration (to stimulate collaborations)
4. Method development and new arts and health practices with a diversity of stakeholders (to increase activity and transparency)

[Region Skåne – Arts and Health Strategy 2022–2030 \(skane.se\)](https://www.skane.se)



# Research

IN PRACTICE

## In Practice

### Arts on prescription (AoP) in primary healthcare in Sweden

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#### BACKGROUND

In Sweden, primary healthcare centres offer basic primary care such as access to general practitioners (GPs), practice nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists and so on. The primary healthcare staff

interdisciplinary collaborations on a practical level.

#### PROGRAMME SET-UP

Seven medical centres across Malmö were invited to become part of the project and collaborations with cultural institutions were established. Representatives from all participating organisations were invited to a seminar prior to starting the programme; the project plan and research results were presented, and mental health awareness training was provided. Patients with



Jensen and Bungay *BMC Health Services Research* (2021) 21:1277  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-021-07258-7>

BMC Health Services Research

RESEARCH

Open Access



## Swedish primary healthcare practitioners' perspectives on the impact of arts on prescription for patients and the wider society: a qualitative interview study

Anita Jensen<sup>1\*</sup> and Hilary Bungay<sup>2</sup>

#### Abstract

**Background:** There is growing evidence that participating in arts activities are beneficial for mental health and wellbeing. Many patients attending primary care services have mental ill-health or social issues that healthcare practitioners currently do not have adequate ways of supporting. This study set out to explore the perspectives of primary healthcare practitioners on Arts on Prescription (AoP) as an additional referral pathway.

**Methods:** A qualitative exploratory descriptive approach within an interpretive framework using semi-structured interviews was used to explore healthcare practitioners' perspectives and experiences of AoP programmes in Sweden. Ten interviews were conducted with healthcare practitioners in primary care. Data were analysed using an inductive thematic approach.

**Results:** The healthcare practitioners interviewed, recognised the need for more holistic approaches to care for those with mental health issues. They perceived that AoP is beneficial for patients in terms of motivation, creating routines, providing social interactions, and increasing self-esteem. In addition, AoP was felt to have the potential to impact upon current service provision and wider society. However, whilst the opportunity to refer patients to AoP in conjunction with conventional treatments was valued, participants reported that time pressures on practitioners and the continuing dominance of the medical model of care were barriers to wider acceptance amongst practitioners at the present time.

**Conclusions:** AoP enabled primary healthcare practitioners to offer an additional pathway for patients that is an adjunct to the traditional care pathway. However, the programmes tend to be project-based and often time limited. For programmes to be sustainable and be included as part of a wider range of interventions available to healthcare practitioners' suitable levels of funding would be required.

**Keywords:** Arts on prescription (AoP), Arts on referral, Primary healthcare, Social prescribing, Mental health, Healthcare practitioners, Wellbeing

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Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 1–10

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Arts and culture engagement and mortality: A population-based prospective cohort study

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#### Abstract

**Aims:** The aim of this study was to investigate associations between having visited the theatre/cinema and an arts exhibition during the past year and all-cause, cardiovascular disease (CVD), cancer and other-cause mortality. **Methods:** The 2008 public health postal survey in Scania, Sweden, was distributed to a stratified random sample of the adult population (18–80 years old). The participation rate was 54.1%, and 25,420 participants were included in the present study. The baseline 2008 survey data were linked to cause-of-death register data to create a prospective cohort with 8.3-year follow-up. Associations between visit to the theatre/cinema, visit to an arts exhibition and mortality were investigated in survival (Cox) regression models. **Results:** Just over a quarter (26.5%) had visited both the theatre/cinema and an arts exhibition during the past year, 36.6% only the theatre/cinema, 4.9% only an arts exhibition and 32% neither of the two. Not visiting the theatre/cinema during the past year was associated with higher all-cause and CVD mortality. Not visiting an arts exhibition was associated with higher all-cause and other-cause mortality. The combination of having visited neither the theatre/cinema nor an arts exhibition during the past year was associated with higher all-cause, CVD and other-cause mortality. **Conclusions:** There is an association between attending arts and culture activities and a reduced risk of CVD and other-cause mortality but not cancer mortality, although model imperfections are possible.

**Keywords:** Arts and culture activities, visit to theatre/cinema, visit to arts exhibition, social participation, mortality, cardiovascular mortality, cancer mortality, public health, Sweden



As an example of the work, in one particular 10-week programme, the participants met twice a week (Tuesday and Thursday) for approximately 2 h and engaged in various activities including choir singing, where a choir leader guides them through different songs while playing the piano; "Shared Reading" at the library with a reading guide who reads for the participants and then facilitates a discussion about the text; participation in guided walks of public arts in the city hosted by Malmö

#### ACTIVITIES

already exist in the person the activities are held out settings and are hosted by institutions who plan and activities. While some act "receptive" (listening to music, artwork, listening to spoken others are "active" (creative walking and so on) with it stimulating participants in

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# Prescribing aesthetic experiences as healthcare: AoP programme

- The aim of the study is investigating the psychosocial effect of participating in the arts programme on parameters including wellbeing, salutogenic health and social health
- Patients with mental health issues (anxiety, stress, depression, social isolation/loneliness) are referred by primary healthcare practitioners from 16 medical centres
- Patients participate in various art activities for ten weeks, twice a week, for about two hours each time, in a group of up to 12 people
- The arts activities are led by arts officers/music pedagogue /librarians and other arts professionals at the nine cultural institutions involved in the project





# Education

- Arts, Culture and Health 7,5 ECTS
- Health prevention module for doctors (residents)



FRAMTIDENS  
SPECIALISTLÄKARE

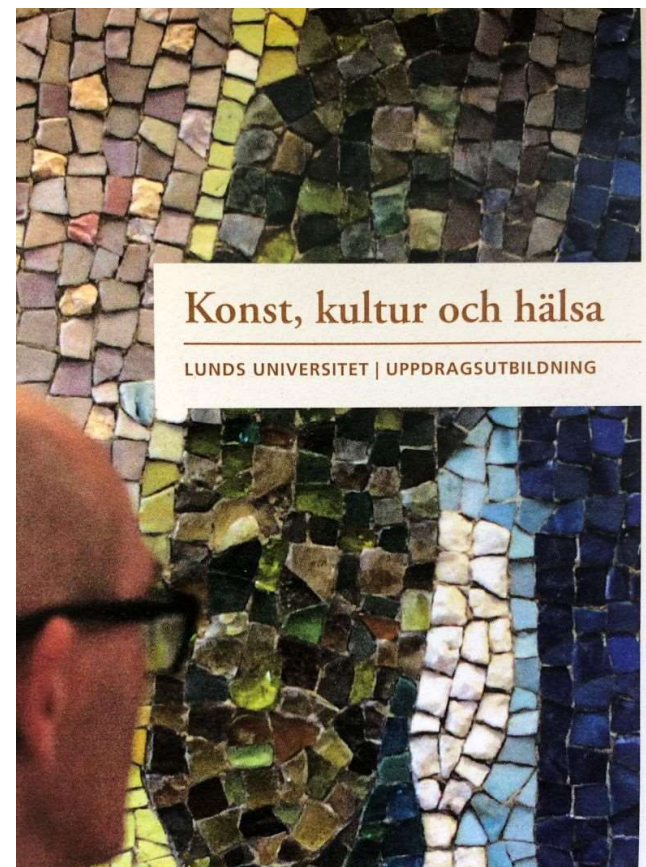
Sjukdomsförebyggande Arbete

## Arts and culture



Image by David Shingley

- Art can help us to emotionally navigate the journey of battling an illness or injury, to process difficult emotions and be a motivating factor in recovery.
- The arts help promote holistic wellbeing
- Benefits are seen across several markers, including **health promotion, the management of health conditions and illness, treatment and recovery**

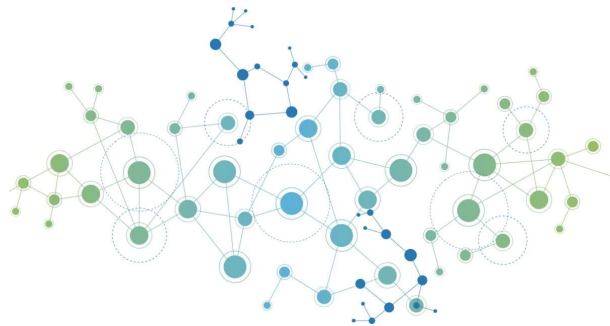


[Konst, kultur och hälsa | Institutionen för kulturvetenskaper \(lu.se\)](https://www.kulturvetenskap.lu.se/)



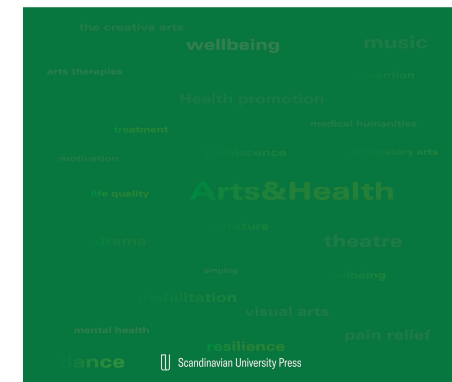
# Dissemination

- Flyer for senior citizens
- Network for Arts in Care for old people
- Arts and Health Network for local government staff
- Nordic Journal of Arts, Culture and Health



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## NORDIC JOURNAL OF ARTS, CULTURE AND HEALTH



**Thank you  
very much  
for your  
attention!**

