

Joint Press Release: 25 September 2023

## Ground-breaking research series on health benefits of the arts announced on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly



Above: WHO Chief Scientist, Sir Jeremy Farrar, speaking at Carnegie Hall in New York as part of UNGA Healing Arts Week 2023. Photo by Fadi Kheir

NEW YORK—The Jameel Arts & Health Lab in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) have announced a forthcoming *Lancet* global research series on the health benefits of the arts.

The [Jameel Arts & Health Lab - Lancet Global Series](#), which kicked off on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), builds on a [2019 WHO Report](#) that presented evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being. The report identified the contribution that the arts may have in promoting good health and health equity, preventing illness, and treating acute and chronic conditions across the life-course. These activities can range from dance programmes for people with Parkinson's Disease, music therapy for pain management, and drama therapy to support social-emotional development, among many others.

"For too long we have seen Science and the Arts as separate endeavors," said Sir Jeremy Farrar, Chief Scientist at the WHO. "But these silos were not always so. Through much of human history, the creative interface of different disciplines has been a catalyst for both innovation and healing. So I am delighted that this Jameel Arts & Health Lab - *Lancet* global series will show the scientific basis of the arts' role in health with rigor, and help position artists and scientists as necessary partners towards health and wellbeing for all."

The research series will be grounded on a novel conceptual framework on the important role of the arts in supporting health. It will focus on noncommunicable diseases, a leading cause of death and disability worldwide. It will also raise awareness about the existing evidence base and offer recommendations to improve global policy guidance on topics such as scaling up promising interventions through [social prescribing](#) and [intersectoral collaboration](#) between the arts, health, education, and social care sectors.

“The Lancet is pleased to convene this series on the centrality of the arts in health— a topic that has been too long neglected by the health sector and donors. The arts must be seen as both central to the human experience and important in the maintenance of good health. This *Lancet* Series will hopefully provide the foundation of evidence needed to ensure that the arts will be viewed as essential, in particular, to prevent and support people with noncommunicable diseases,” said Dr Miriam Lewis Sabin, North American Executive Editor, The Lancet.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, where balcony performances and home window exhibits inspired hope and connection, there has also been high-profile engagement from major cultural institutions, artists, and media platforms calling attention to the relationship between the arts, culture, and health.

“When we remember the WHO definition of health, which states that health is more than merely the absence of disease and infirmity, but the attainment of the highest level of physical, mental and social well-being, then the value of the arts becomes apparent,” says WHO Arts & Health Lead, Christopher Bailey. “Our measures should reflect this holistic approach, focusing not solely on reduction of symptoms but on how the arts may help us cope, achieve our potential, be productive, and active members of a community. This special Lancet series will look at the health benefits of the arts and creative expression not solely from a medicalized view, but a holistic asset-based approach as well.”

The Jameel Arts & Health Lab - *Lancet* global series was announced on 20 September 2023 at a special WHO75 Wellbeing Concert and Reception at Carnegie Hall as part of UNGA Healing Arts Week. It featured performances by multi-Grammy award-winning Mezzo-Soprano [Joyce DiDonato](#), and Metropolitan Opera pianist Howard Watkins.

Clive Gillinson, Executive and Artistic Director of Carnegie Hall commented, “Through our own experiences with Carnegie Hall’s music education and social impact programs, we’ve seen the positive impact that the arts can have on people’s health and well-being, building stronger family bonds and overall sense of community. We’re delighted to partner with the Jameel Arts & Health Lab, the WHO and the *Lancet* to welcome researchers, policymakers, and members of the healthcare and cultural communities to Carnegie Hall to put a spotlight on this important area of study.”

The concert was followed by a meeting of over 50 researchers from universities around the world at New York University Steinhardt to start the series, which is anticipated to be published in late 2024.

“Through this collaboration with *The Lancet*, we are bringing together researchers from 18 countries to examine if and how engaging in the arts and arts therapies, be it in a clinic, a classroom, a concert, or in a community, can improve health outcomes for people across the life course.” said Dr. Nisha Sajjani, Founding Co-Director at the Jameel Arts & Health Lab, Associate Professor at NYU Steinhardt.

### **WHO75 Healing Arts Program**

The Jameel Arts & Health Lab’s UNGA Healing Arts Week is one of the global events marking the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WHO. It is implemented under a broader WHO75 Healing Arts programme that has been running since January 2023, with events in Dublin (Creative Brain Week), Lagos (National Arts and Health Week Nigeria), and Geneva ([WHO75 Healing Arts Concert](#)). From October, the programme will come to Cairo/Alexandria (Global South Arts and Health Week), Copenhagen (Music and Motherhood), Riyadh (Healing Arts Arabia Summit) and Dubai (COP28 Healing Arts Week).

## Collaboration for Health

The Jameel Arts & Health Lab was launched in January this year following the signing of agreements between the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the Steinhardt School at New York University (NYU), [Community Jameel](#), and [CULTURUNNERS](#). Focused on overlooked and underserved communities, the lab coordinates and amplifies scientific research into the effectiveness of the arts in improving health and well-being to drive policy implementation across 193 UN Member States.

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### Related links:

[Jameel Arts & Health Lab](#)  
[WHO75](#)

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