



Caucus Report

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How Do We Realize the Potential of the Arts to Support Health and Wellbeing in the United States?



Key learnings from the Arts and Health Caucus held in advance of Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Summit on Arts and Culture in our Communities, co-hosted by the **White House Domestic Policy Council** and the **National Endowment for the Arts**



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How Do We Realize the Potential of the Arts to Support Health and Wellbeing in the United States?

This report is published by the Jameel Arts & Health Lab in collaboration with NYU Steinhardt, Harvard University, and the University of Florida's Center for Arts in Medicine. Report Design by Culturunners.

It presents a summary of key learnings from the Arts and Health Caucus held in advance of Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Summit on Arts and Culture in our Communities, co-hosted by the White House Domestic Policy Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Report prepared by Tessa Brinza, Nicole Morgan, Alex Rodriguez, Nisha Sajnani, Jill Sonke, and Lisa Wong

Healing: Arts and Health

Maria Rosario Jackson
Chair, National Endowment for

Vice Admiral Vivek H. M.
U.S. Surgeon General

HEALING, BRIDGING, THRIVING





the Arts
Murthy

A Summit on Arts and

On January 30, 2024, *“Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Summit on Arts and Culture in our Communities”* was co-hosted by the White House Domestic Policy Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. This day-long event was a first-of-its-kind convening to share insights and explore opportunities for arts organizations, arts practitioners, and artists to contribute to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, invigorate physical spaces, fuel democracy, and foster equitable outcomes. Keynotes, panels, and performances garnered support at these intersections and built on the momentum of President Biden’s 2022 Executive Order focused on promoting the arts and humanities in the United States (US) as **“essential to the wellbeing, health, vitality, and democracy of our Nation.”**

Image: Surgeon General of the United States, Vice Admiral Vivek H. Murthy in conversation with Chair Maria Rosario Jackson at the Healing, Bridging, Thriving Summit held on January 30, 2024. Image courtesy of Jameel Arts & Health Lab.

Terms

Arts and Health

Within this report, the concept of Arts and Health refers to an ecosystem populated by people whose artistic practices generate individual and community health and wellbeing. This includes the many ways in which we engage in the arts in our everyday lives as well professional practices including those of artists, whose teaching, performing, and facilitating may generate health, wellbeing and positive social change in communities; Creative Arts Therapists and Expressive Arts Therapists who are Master's level clinicians with training in the arts and psychotherapy; Arts in Health practitioners who use the arts to enhance human health and wellbeing in diverse institutional and community contexts; and educators, community organizers, and healthcare providers who use the arts to advance clinical and public health objectives. Our use of the term 'Arts and Health' in this report also includes applied neuroaesthetics, which explores the intersections of arts, design, technology, and neuroscience.

Policy

"Policy" in this report refers to both "Big P" policies that operate at the national or state level, as well as the "Little P" policies or norms of organizations, agencies, institutions, and communities.

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NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln, Artwork Arantxa Rodriguez. Image courtesy of NYC Health + Hospitals Arts in Medicine department.



Introduction

On January 29th, an **Arts and Health Pre-Summit Caucus¹** convened national leaders at the National Endowment for the Arts Headquarters in Washington, D.C. to envision tangible steps to value the arts as a part of how we understand health in the United States.

The session was designed and led by Drs. **Nisha Sajnani**, Associate Professor of Drama Therapy at NYU Steinhardt, Chair of the NYU Creative Arts Therapies Consortium, and Founding Co-Director of the Jameel Arts & Health Lab; **Jill Sonke**, Director of Research Initiatives at the Center for Arts in Medicine at the University of Florida and Director of National Research and Impact, One Nation/One Project; and **Lisa Wong**, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Associate Co-Director of the Arts and Humanities Initiative at Harvard Medical School,

with technical support from Sunil Iyengar, Research Director for the National Endowment for the Arts. Participants were from federal agencies, national membership based professional organizations, academic research institutions, and the private sector.²

The pre-summit caucus was organized around one central question: *What is one idea or action that you think could help us realize the potential that the arts have in clinical and public health in the United States?*

The sub question was: *From your unique professional perspective, what opportunities exist in the policy arena to realize the potential that the arts can have in the pursuit of good health and wellbeing in the United States? What do you see as your role in that?*

The presence of leaders from distinct sectors – health, the arts, education, as well as those at this intersection– allowed for multiple vantage points to come into dialogue around distinct and overlapping considerations. The conversation centered on the need for public awareness about the role of the arts in promoting wellbeing and managing illness, conducive policy possibilities, as well as practical pathways forward for this work.

This report is a summary of salient themes and insights that arose throughout the day. The views are solely the authors’ and do not represent the views of the National Endowment for the Arts.

“Thinking of the arts as medicine, arts as healing is innate... In indigenous languages in the country, to my understanding, there is no specific word for art because we live it. How do we remove these institutional silos and recognize the interconnectedness? How do we reconnect what has been disconnected? We operate in these different capacities. We’re all part of a living, connected system. We can’t segment the spirit from the body, from the being, from the community.”



Image: Joyce DiDonato performs alongside Howard Watkins, WHO75 Wellbeing Concert as part of UNGA Healing Arts Week 2023, Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute. Photo by Fadi Kheir (2023). Image courtesy of Carnegie Hall.



Image: Little Amal Walks NYC. Photo courtesy of The Walk and St. Ann's Warehouse.

“What if we thought of health and healing more holistically? What if we better enabled and compensated artists, culture bearers, and cultural organizations for contributing to health and healing at a national scale?”

Maria Rosario Jackson

Chair, National Endowment for the Arts³

The Healing, Bridging, and Thriving Summit. January 30, 2024.

“We design our programs and interventions to support the financing and regulatory requirements of our healthcare partners.

While new payment models for social prescribing would be a boon to healthcare consumers and providers, current policy does make room for these types of programs. To access existing funding sources, we must design models that fit within the current system and solve the problems of healthcare partners.”



Policy

Integrating the Arts within Current Policy

Recognizing the challenges presented in enacting policy change and the need to adapt programming to work within existing structures, participants discussed how arts and health might be integrated into current policy frameworks in addition to the possibility of future policy changes. For instance, discussion focused on creating inroads to greater health care coverage for arts interventions within public agencies like the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This was considered an important avenue to establish the future direction of social prescribing^{4,5} in the US. It was noted that some state level agencies and organizations that are already working to provide arts interventions via social prescribing, such as the Massachusetts Cultural Council's CultureRx Initiative and Art Pharmacy, have created programs that have the ability to fit within funding parameters of current health policies.

“We design our programs and interventions to support the financing and regulatory requirements of our healthcare partners. While new payment models for social prescribing would be a boon to healthcare consumers and providers, current policy does make room for these types of programs. To access existing funding sources, we must design models that fit within the current system and solve the problems of healthcare partners.” *Chris Appleton, Art Pharmacy*

Participants also emphasized the need to leverage other existing funding pathways and to make government funding more approachable.

“The public is excited about health and wellbeing in general and would welcome arts interventions that are noninvasive, non-pharmaceutical, and low cost.”

Renée Fleming

Kennedy Center Artistic Advisor & World Health Organization Goodwill Ambassador for Arts and Health¹

The Healing, Bridging, and Thriving Summit. January 30, 2024.



Policy Change

Participants discussed several ways in which municipal, state, and federal policies in the US could make it easier for people to access arts experiences as well as the services of skilled professionals when more targeted care is needed. Nationally recognized licensure for Creative Arts Therapists and paths to professionalization for Arts in Health practitioners would provide validation for these careers in the wider health sector and help professionals in gaining and sustaining employment.^{6,7}

In considering career sustainability, establishment of career pipelines was brought forth as a necessary step in the development of careers at the intersection of arts and health. This form of infrastructure would require additional training opportunities for artists, social workers, educators, health practitioners, and public health advocates.

For example, new processes could include instruction on how to integrate an understanding of arts and health in pedagogy and practice as well as expanded opportunities for training in the Creative Arts Therapies and Arts in Health. Creating career pipelines would also require expanding job architecture, including opportunities for internships and professional development, which would require investment from academic, health, and social service institutions. Also discussed was the need to engage in ongoing reflection about the scope of practice for the various practitioners working at the intersections of arts and health.

“One impactful strategy to harness the arts for clinical and public health benefits in the United States is to establish “artist-in-residence” programs in hospitals and healthcare spaces where artists are employed to sit at the decision-making

table to collaborate on solutions to the most pressing questions facing the collective wellbeing of the organization. [...] By integrating artists into healthcare settings, we can leverage their unique perspectives and creative approaches to contribute to problem-solving, patient care, and the overall wellbeing of both patients and healthcare professionals.”
Yazmany Arboleda, NYC’s People’s Artist, Civic Engagement Commission; Founder & Chief Artistic Officer, The People’s Creative Institute; Senior Artistic Advisor, Community Arts Network

More broadly, participants shared the need to integrate the evidence for the health value of arts engagement at the outset of policy development at the city, state, and federal level. This includes developing arts related sections for priority health areas, such as healthy aging and early childhood development, in both public health and funding plans.

“Among top HHS priorities are reducing health costs, tackling health disparities, emphasizing health equity and strengthening behavioral health.

For each of these priorities, there is a definitive role for artists and cultural institutions who are already doing much of this work in their daily activities.”

Admiral Rachel L. Levine
Assistant Secretary for Health
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services¹
The Healing, Bridging, and Thriving Summit. January 30, 2024.



Communications

Increasing Public Understanding of the Arts as a Health Resource

Several caucus participants identified the need for a national shift in public perception of the arts as a luxury to a recognition of the holistic health benefits of arts and cultural activities. Targeted communication efforts directed at both the public and influential decision-makers were suggested to increase collective recognition of arts engagement as a health behavior and as an underutilized resource for health promotion. Participants suggested that this perspective, which is overlooked in a deficit-oriented biomedical paradigm of healthcare and public health, has the potential to encourage funding and the implementation of arts and health programs, professionals, and practices at national, state, and local levels. It can also support existing initiatives that are already working to make the arts more accessible and culturally inclusive by engaging local artists and resources. Some participants also raised the importance of recognizing synergies between the momentum behind the arts and health and arts education, which share a commitment to human development and wellbeing.

“We have known for some time that the arts can be an effective tool to promote health. But are the arts and creativity actually an intrinsic part of our wellbeing?”

An increasing body of evidence suggests that participating in the arts and creative practice may help us cope, improve our abilities, and help form bonds of community and help form bonds of community doing much of this work in their daily activities.”

Christopher Bailey
Arts & Health Lead: World Health Organization
Founding Co-Director: Jameel Arts & Health Lab

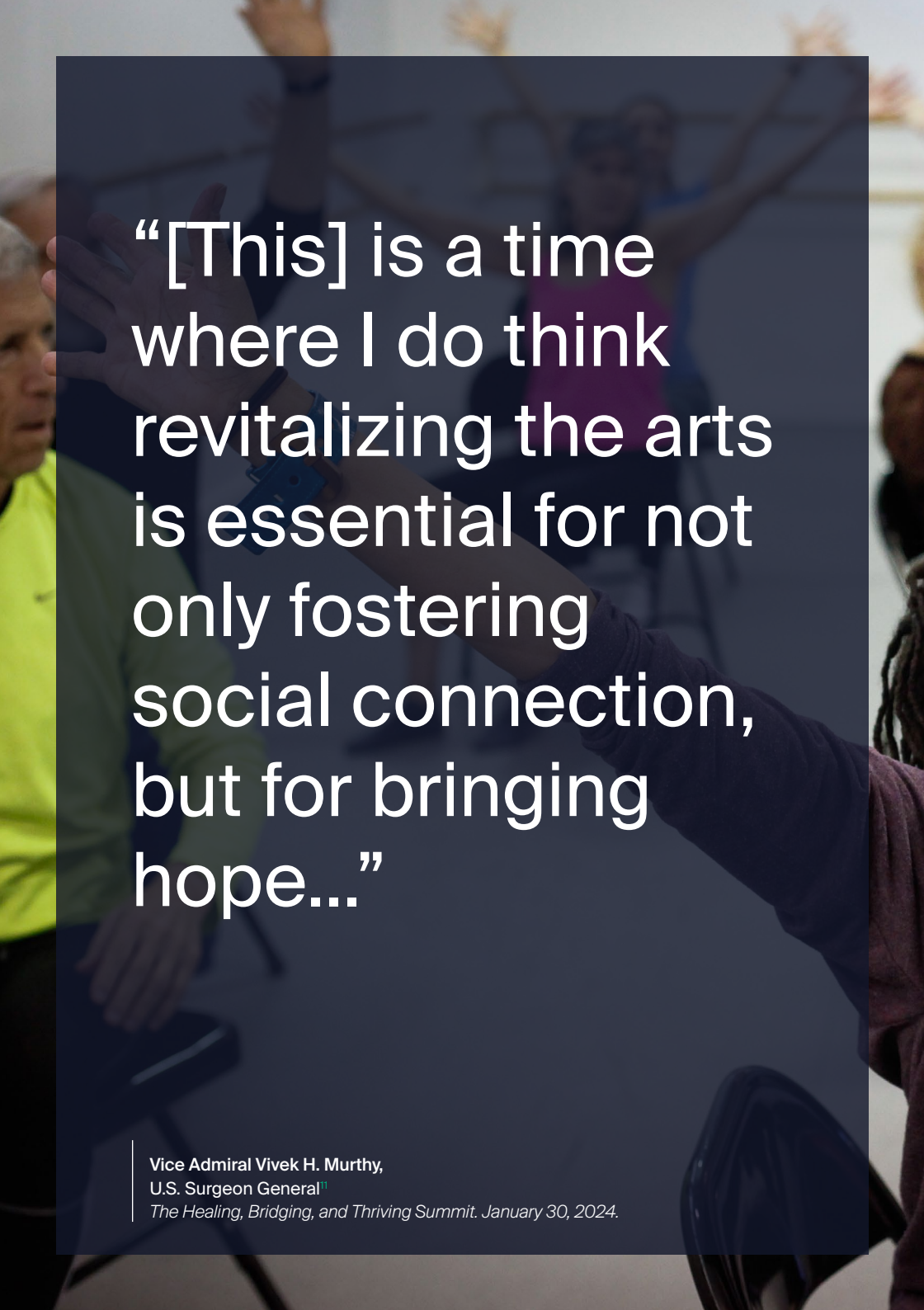


Research

Leveraging New and Existing Evidence to Further the Field

Participants stressed the need to amplify the research base of arts and health, which already contains a wealth of evidence drawing connections between the arts and positive health outcomes.¹⁰ Evidence related to the impact of the arts on pressing public health concerns like loneliness, mental health, and healthy aging could be of particular interest to the general public, policymakers, and funders. Also discussed was the importance of research that highlights the ability of the arts and arts therapies to impact the progression of diseases such as Alzheimer's and other dementias, and to support educational and human development outcomes.

With an understanding that access to the arts is a social determinant, or social driver, of health, it was noted that future research could also focus on identifying and addressing disparities in arts access. Attendees emphasized a need for strategies that increase the capacity for researchers, practitioners, and community partners to collect data about the processes and outcomes of arts and health interventions. This, in turn, could document evidence that challenges resistance to the acceptance and uptake of the arts as an integral and effective component of healthcare and public health strategies—evidence that would be persuasive to funding entities like CMS and other governing agencies.



“[This] is a time where I do think revitalizing the arts is essential for not only fostering social connection, but for bringing hope...”

Vice Admiral Vivek H. Murthy,
U.S. Surgeon General¹

The Healing, Bridging, and Thriving Summit. January 30, 2024.





Image: Nikki's Last Painting at Shands, 2024. Featuring Nikki Evans (patient) with Molly Kempson (UF Health Arts in Medicine practitioner) in the burns unit of UF Health Shands Hospital, Gainesville, Florida. Photo courtesy of Sarah Hinds.



Pathways Forward

This convening identified several possible pathways to moving towards a culture of health in which arts engagement is truly understood as a health behavior and a vital area for investment. While not an exhaustive list, several of these ideas have been summarized together with perspectives from the caucus organizers below.

Increase pathways for inter-sectoral collaboration at the federal level

Consistent with global calls for intersectoral collaboration between arts and health agencies¹², realizing the potential of the arts to support clinical and public health in the US will require ongoing collaboration and coordination across departmental silos and agencies at every level of governance.

At the federal level, the new Interagency Working Group on Arts, Health, and Civic Infrastructure chaired by NEA Chair Jackson and HHS Secretary Becerra could convene appropriate representatives to co-create an American Arts and Health Plan that leverages existing evidence. Further, this work could support integration into the nation's long term public health plans, including [Healthy People 2030](#) and future iterations.

Increase pathways for inter-sectoral collaboration at the state and municipal level

Intersectoral collaboration must also occur at the state and municipal level. There is value in creating a forum for state and city representatives to discuss the inclusion of the arts in plans for public health, healthy aging, and mental health, amongst other health priorities. This could be enabled, for example, through collaboration with the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), Americans for the Arts, and the National League of Cities (NLC). A state level forum would also enable an exchange on the value of integrating the arts in health settings as well as expanding licensure along with Medicare/Medicaid coverage,

to Creative Arts Therapists. A first step in this direction could be to document state-level and city-level policies pertaining to the arts and health in the United States.

Expand licensure for Creative Arts Therapists and training for artists

Increased licensure, private insurance, and Medicare/Medicaid coverage for creative arts therapists, as well as training for artists working in healthcare settings would provide pathways to recognize and remunerate the contributions of artists working in healthcare, schools, and community settings. These policy changes would not only establish greater job security for Creative Arts Therapists and artists but also greater access to these services.

Launch a national communications campaign

A national communications campaign would demonstrate the value of arts and health to the public and develop a shared language across the ecosystem of arts and health. Focused efforts amongst policymakers, health professionals, and the general public are necessary to shift perspective and increase awareness of arts engagement as a health behavior.



Build infrastructure for research

Greater infrastructure and funding is needed for multiple forms of research to thrive, including large scale clinical trials, as well as collaborative, arts-based and qualitative science that centers on people's lived experience, to evaluate the cultural considerations, mechanisms, and outcomes associated with arts-based interventions, approaches to implementation, and the social return on investment.

Integrate artists into health-related agencies

Integrating artists within health related agencies such as US Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Community Living, CMS, the Veterans Affairs Administration, the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) and related state and city level counterparts would enable artists to lend their unique skills as communicators, creative problem-solvers, and visionaries while ensuring that the arts and the work of artists and allied arts professionals are represented in policy decisions. Collaboration with organizations like CAIR Lab and related agencies may be useful in advancing this work.

Propose a call to action for the integration of the arts in addressing the epidemic of loneliness and social isolation from the U.S. Surgeon General

A call to action from the U.S. Surgeon General to acknowledge how the work of artists and Creative Arts Therapists can support social connection would raise awareness of the connection between art and health at national and state levels, and also create momentum toward funding initiatives at this intersection.

Establish ongoing opportunities to convene

This caucus presented a unique opportunity to gather together a group of committed individuals and organizations to exchange insights and encourage continued momentum towards realizing the full potential of the arts in clinical and public health in the United States. Similar virtual and in-person opportunities would enable wider public consultation towards identifying the multiple opportunities and challenges present in mobilizing relationships between the arts and health in training, research, and implementation in partnership with public and private sectors.

Participant List

Chris Appleton
Art Pharmacy

Yazmany Arboleda
The People's Creative Institute

Christopher Bailey
World Health Organization;
Jameel Arts & Health Lab

Tessa Brinza
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Notes

- 1 Sajnani, N., Sonke, J., Wong, L. (2024). *Healing, Bridging, Thriving: A Reflection from the Arts and Health Caucus*. National Endowment for the Arts.
<https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2024/healing-bridging-thriving-reflection-arts-and-health-caucus>
- 2 A list of participants may be found in the appendix.
- 3 Quote from the *Healing, Bridging, Thriving Summit*.
- 4 Golden, T.L., Bantham, A., Mason, K., Sonke, J., Swaback, K., Kuge, M.N., Lokuta, A.M., Caven, J., Shan, M., Clinesmith, R., Keene, K., Manhas, N. (2023). *Arts on Prescription: A Field Guide for US Communities*. Mass Cultural Council / University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine.
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<https://socialprescribingusa.com/>
- 6 National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies. (n.d.).
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- 7 National Organization for Arts in Health. (n.d.) Professionalization Initiatives.
<https://thenoah.net/professionalization-initiatives/>
- 8 Quote from the *Healing, Bridging, Thriving Summit*.
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- 10 Fancourt, D. & Finn, S. (2019). What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and wellbeing? A scoping review. WHO Regional Office for Europe.
<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/329834>. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO
- 11 Quote from the *Healing, Bridging, Thriving Summit*.
- 12 World Health Organization. (2019). *Intersectoral action: the arts, health and wellbeing: sector brief on arts*. WHO Regional Office for Europe.
<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/346537>



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