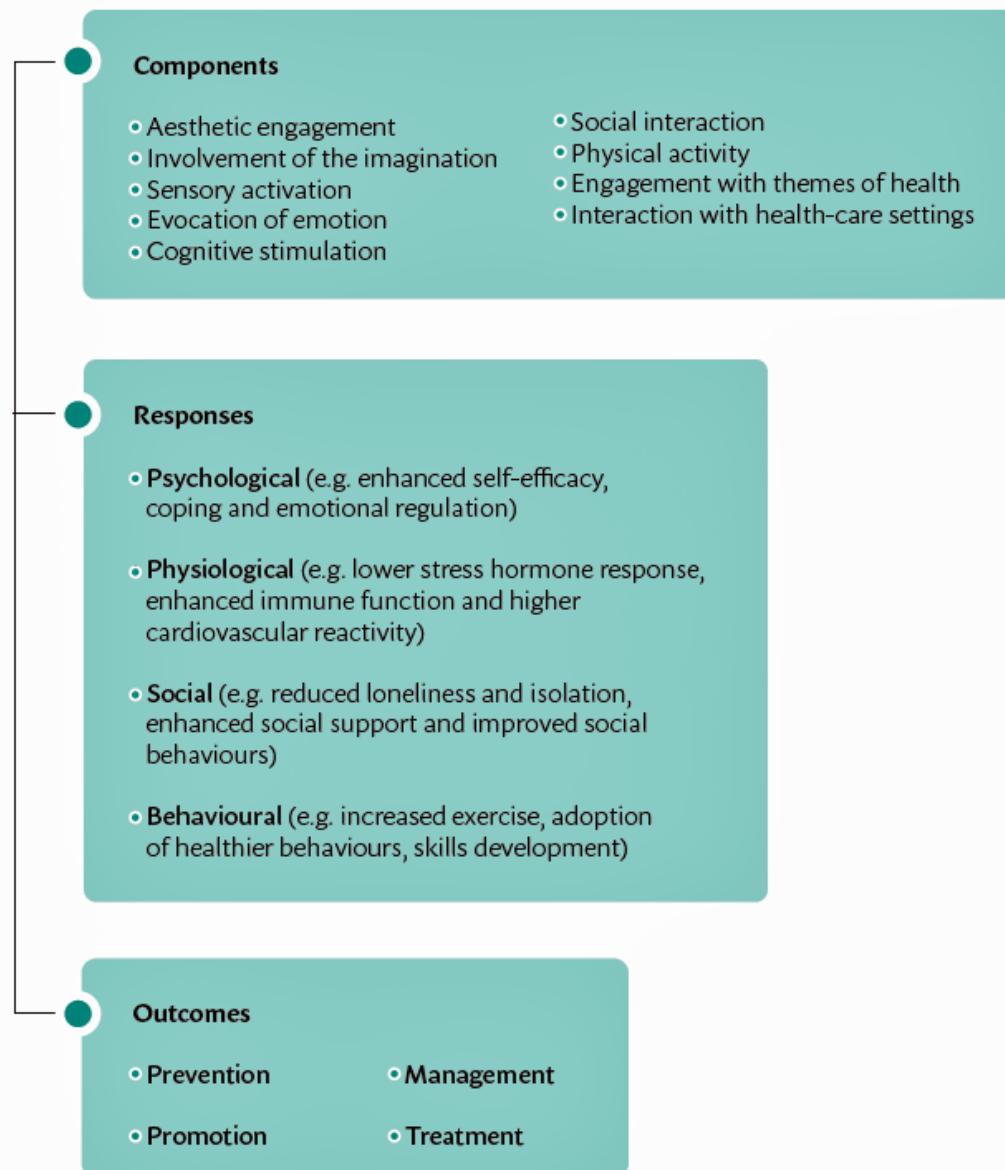


## Art As Medicine – WHO Weaves the Evidence for Arts' Role in Improving Health

Posted: 15 Nov 2019 10:50 AM PST

Fig. 1. A logic model linking the arts with health



“What’s the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being?” asks **a report from the World Health Organization’s Europe region team (WHO-Europe)**.

There's a lot of proof supporting arts-as-medicine, WHO details in this paper, which synthesizes research published in over 3,000 studies.

The first chart illustrates the logic model that bridges arts to health in three segments:

1. “Components” of arts programs, including but not limited to cognitive stimulation (e.g., learning a new arts skill such as painting, drawing or journaling), social interaction (e.g., participating in theatre), physical activity (e.g., dance), and evocation of emotion (e.g., listening to music);
2. “Responses” that can be psychological, physiological, social and/or behavioral; and,
3. “Outcomes” for disease prevention, health promotion, disease management, or treatment of a condition.

These outcomes were the results considered across the studies, falling into the two categories of prevention and promotion, and management and treatment, shown in the second chart from the report.

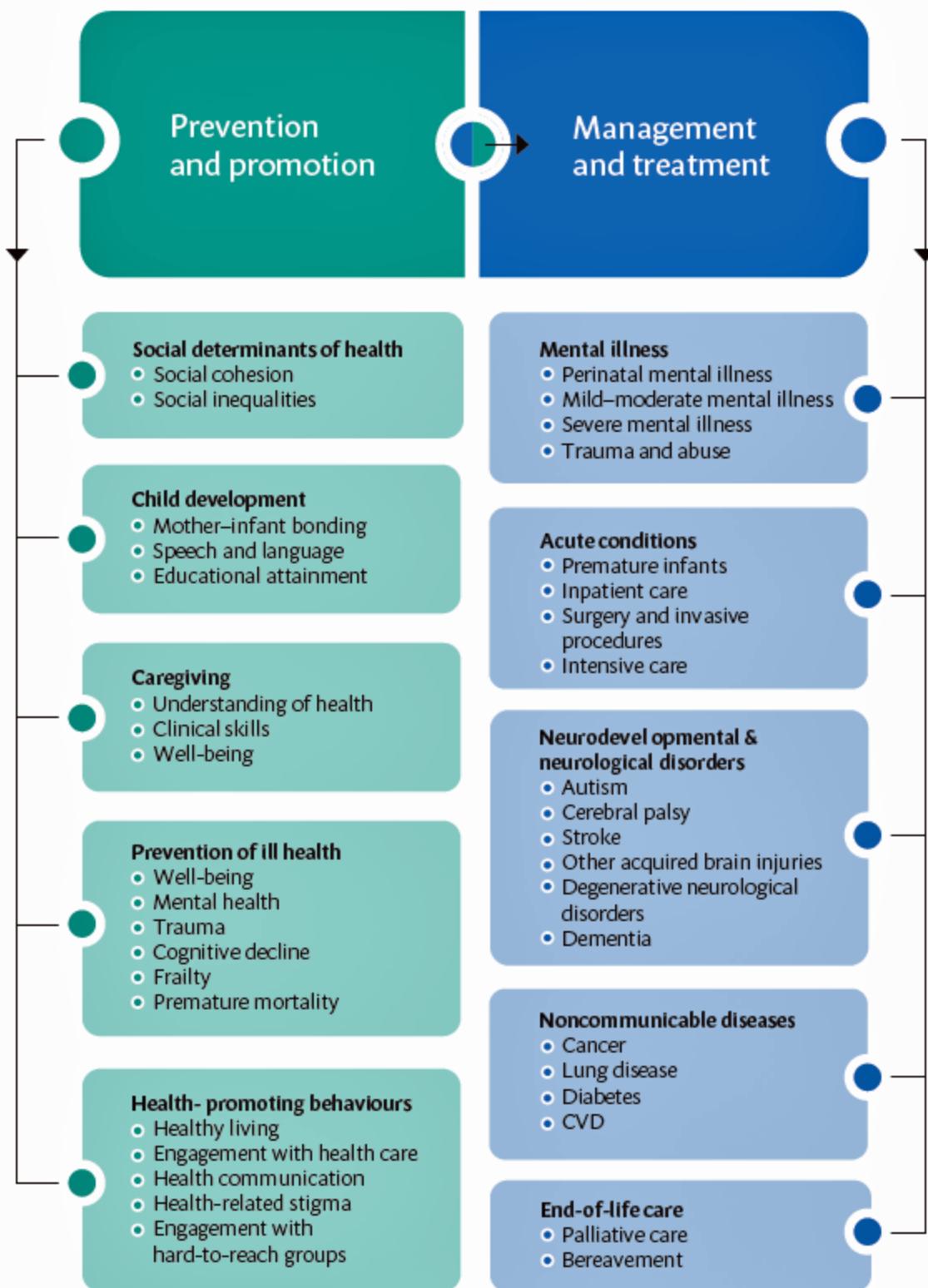
Prevention and promotion covered social determinants of health (such as social cohesion and inequities), child development (like mother-infant bonding or speech-language building), caregiving (e.g., clinical skills to support parents safely aging at home), prevention of illness, and health-promoting behaviors (such as engaging with hard-to-reach groups or ridding stigma from conditions where there are taboos).

Management and treatment covered mental illness, acute conditions, neurodevelopmental and neurological disorders, noncommunicable diseases, and end-of-life care.

Drawing from the thousands of studies, the WHO Europe team developed several recommendations:

- First, to acknowledge the growing case for arts to improve health and well-being, especially to adopt evidence-based programs such as employing recorded music for patients pre-surgery, and deploying various arts media with people dealing with dementia and mental health issues. In addition, to share best practices across regions, countries and health stakeholder communities, as well as support research continuing to prove out arts' beneficial relationships to health and well-being.
- Second, to recognize the added health value of arts engagement, ensuring culturally diverse forms of arts are available in communities, nudging arts/cultural organizations to bake health and wellbeing into their programs, and promoting public awareness of the health-power of engaging with arts across all forms.
- Third, to recognize and leverage the cross-cutting nature of arts and health breaking down siloes between the two sectors, bringing the arts-health evidence into medical and arts education, and bolstering arts-humanities education overall.

Fig. 2. Thematic content for prevention and promotion and management and treatment

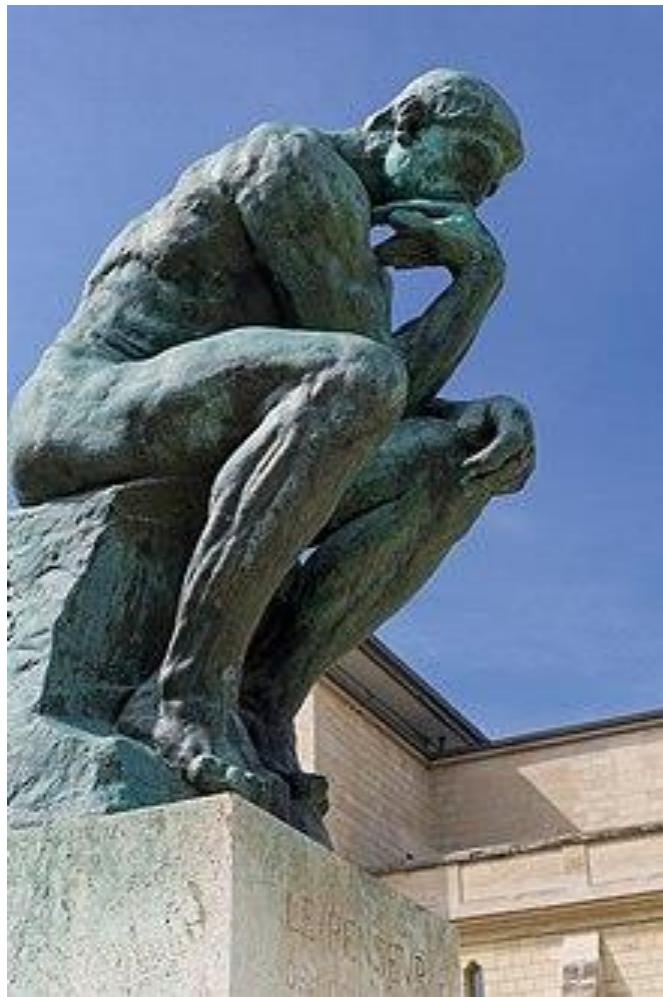


The report provides case studies in each of the thematic areas listed in Figure 2. For example, addressing the Prevention and Promotion pillar, Sistema Europe provides musical training for young people of all socioeconomic strata especially including people with lower incomes and social status. Children receive vocal and orchestral training for free, and present concerts in their communities that boost social inclusion, connection, and of course, music skills. The program has demonstrated benefits for children's overall development such as self-confidence and motivation to succeed, language development, educational goals, and pro-social behaviors.

To engage hard-to-reach groups, Arts on Prescription in England is over 20 years old and has shown positive impacts in connecting patients with community social activities in the arts. "Social prescribing" is part of personalized care programs in the National Health Service (NHS) and additional funding was allocated recently for the LGBTQ community. In addition, Arts on Prescription has also been successfully deployed in the prison system especially among juvenile offenders with complicated mental health challenges.

Open Window Ireland focuses on the right side of Figure 2 for management and treatment — in this case, an arts-based intervention with a "virtual window" for patients planning bone marrow transplantation for leukemia. This project brought patients into the design process, with patient-centered artwork to address patients' feelings of isolation from the outside world, helping them to deal with the stresses involved with hospital infection protocols.

There are more than a dozen more case studies described in detail to delight and inspire you to consider, or re-consider, the roles and beneficial impacts of arts across the health/care continuum.



**Health Populi's Hot Points:**

About his art-workings, Rodin wrote, “The main thing is to be moved, to love, to hope, to tremble, to live.” Rodin’s sentiment makes manifest the findings of the 3,000+ studies that the WHO Europe team considered. By engaging with any of the arts, we people — patients, caregivers, consumers, health citizens — feed our health and well-being feeling moved, loving or loved, and life-affirming.

Originally, Rodin called this image, “The Poet,” not “The Thinker.” So how appropriate that Rodin’s Poet-Thinker is deep in thought here...reminding us to think, indeed, about the role of arts in our own health and the health of communities.

This side of the Pond, the U.S. **National Endowment for the Arts has studied** the role of arts in healing, **Americans for the Arts** advocate for their research application in health care, and the University of Florida **Center for the Arts in Medicine** offers a full curriculum on the topic, explained in this video.

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