



AHRC Creative Communities

Policy Lab: Health & Wellbeing | Scotland

Policy Contexts

Many societal, economic and place-based factors are involved in our experiences of health and wellbeing and how we access and engage with culture as part of our attempts to 'live well'. Devolved policy plays a key role in unlocking the potential of arts, culture and the creative industries to address opportunities and challenges arising from health and wellbeing contexts in contemporary Scotland.

Health and Wellbeing

[Public Health Scotland](#) highlights the biggest public health challenge facing Scotland is a stall in life expectancy. Health inequalities are worsening and socioeconomic position is increasingly impacting how long people live, and how long they live in good health. Legacies of austerity, with pressure on health and social care services, have also contributed. It is estimated that one-third of GP consultations have a [mental health component](#) – approximately 8 million consultations a year – with the proportion higher in areas of high deprivation. There are significant mental health inequalities in Scotland, with [socially disadvantaged](#) people having an increased risk of developing mental health issues. It is estimated that poor mental health and wellbeing [costs the Scottish economy £8.8 billion each year](#).

The [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#), published in 2023, is the shared vision of Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to improve mental health and wellbeing. Its outcomes include a focus on equipping communities to act as a source of support for people's mental health and wellbeing, championing the eradication of stigma and discrimination and providing a range of opportunities to connect with others. It commits to adopting a 'mental health and wellbeing in all policies' approach to facilitate cross-policy actions that more effectively address the wide-ranging social, economic and environmental factors that impact people's mental health and wellbeing, including poverty, stigma, discrimination, and injustice.

Culture

The Culture Strategy for Scotland was published in 2020, with an Action Plan updating and detailing how the strategy's ambitions will be delivered following in 2023. The Action Plan commits to strengthening cross-Scottish Government joint-working on culture and health and wellbeing policy development and delivery, by developing cross-Government policy compacts, embedding culture at the centre of policy-making. This will be achieved through formalising cross-government connections between Culture and Health officials via the recently established Scottish Government Culture and Health working group.

Taking part in art, music, creative and expressive activities, including through social prescribing, can lead to a [wide range of benefits](#), including include increased social interaction, decreased stress, adoption of healthy behaviours, and improved outcomes such as skills and employment. The arts can [help meet major challenges](#) facing health and social care: ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health. Evidence also shows that the arts can help save money in the health service and social care. There were [119 organisations](#) identified as delivering arts and health provision in Scotland in 2021, and various [different models of social prescribing](#) in place across the country. Many of these involve a social practitioner who works with people on a person-centred approach to link into local resources.

Creative Economy

The latest Scottish Government Growth Sector Statistics show that the [Gross Value Added \(GVA\) of Scotland's creative industries](#) was £4.4bn in 2020, representing a 62% increase in GVA since 2010. In 2021, 78,175 people worked in the sector, an increase of 3% on 2018 and a 9% increase since 2010. Creative Scotland highlights the ongoing challenges for those working in the culture and creativity sector of increased operational costs, high inflation, and the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; but that the value and importance of culture and creativity to the people of Scotland remains undiminished.

In the 2023 Autumn Budget, the Scottish government reimposed a £6.6m budget cut on [Creative Scotland](#), the public body that supports the arts, screen and creative industries. The Scottish Government's Draft Budget for Creative Scotland for 2024/25 will be just over £68m, compared to £55m for the current financial year. This would restore their Grant in Aid budget following recently applied in-year reductions, while also accounting for the reserves they deployed in 2023/24 to ensure continuity of support for 119 Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) across Scotland. The Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf committed that "over the next five years we will more than double our investment in Scotland's arts and culture", during [his keynote speech](#) to the SNP Conference in Aberdeen in October 2023.