

The whole person, the whole life

Region Skåne's strategy for Arts
and Health 2022–2030

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Region Skåne's Vision for Arts and Health

In order to achieve the goal of **'Better life and health for more people'** (1) Region Skåne will develop high quality cross-sectoral and sustainable structures for arts and health activities. By encouraging research and methodological development - as well as fostering projects in internal and external collaboration - arts and health initiatives will be considered an integrated part of the work for equal health.

Introduction

Arts and health is a cross-sector field focusing on how the arts, in various ways, can contribute to prevention, to health promotion, for treatment and for recovery. Therefore, the field impacts on the art and culture sector, healthcare and social care, the public health sector, the education sector and others. Arts and health is a growing interdisciplinary research area and interest in the field is growing, both nationally and internationally, with an increased knowledge-base in terms of experience and research.

Region Skåne is progressive in the arts and health field. Strategic initiatives such as knowledge dissemination, network building, activities and projects have been delivered since 2003. An important step in developing the field in Region Skåne came in 2014, when both the Culture Committee and the Healthcare Committee adopted an initial common strategy for arts and healthcare in Region Skåne (2). However, there are still a number of challenges. Region Skåne is a large organisation, and it takes time to establish long-term collaborations. It is, therefore, time for a revised strategy, which like the previous one, is developed as a partnership between the Culture Committee and the Healthcare Committee.

The previous strategy focused primarily on initiatives within the Culture Committee's and the Healthcare Committee's common area of interest, namely arts in healthcare contexts. The revised strategy document aims to clearly highlight the role of the arts in preventative and health promotion work, beyond the boundaries of healthcare. Therefore, the emphasis is on the importance of collaboration between more policy areas/sectors and internal administrative bodies and with external partner such as municipalities, stakeholders for the arts, civil society and academia externally.

Background and current situation

Since the previous strategy period, Region Skåne has continued developing the field. Regular policy discussions between the Culture Committee and the Healthcare Committee have been held. A strategic group for culture and health was created, consisting of representatives from the arts administration, regional development, hospitals, libraries and healthcare. Joint and committee-specific initiatives within the field of art and health have been implemented by supporting activities and projects as well as delivering training courses and conferences. Increasing numbers of cross-policy collaborations and cooperation between different administrative bodies in Region Skåne have taken place within, for example, the library area, “designed living environment”, “arts on prescription”, as well as in the promotion of reading and language development initiatives for young children in paediatric care and around accessibility to the art in Region Skåne’s art collection.

Moreover, Region Skåne has increased its collaboration with municipalities, civil society, the arts and culture sector and universities and colleges with focus on arts and health. Interests and initiatives from the external stakeholders have also grown.

Despite the positive examples, the evaluation of the previous strategy period highlighted that there was still much to do in the field. A need for a stronger foundation and more knowledge, mandates, and resources was identified. Initiatives in the arts and health field are often experienced as carried out by individuals, and initiatives are often short-term projects. Projects were seen as difficult to transform into long-term initiatives. During the evaluation it was also highlighted that there was a need to place further emphasis on prevention and health promotion work and in doing so to collaborate across different committees and administrative bodies in Region Skåne, as well as with external partners such as municipalities, the third sector, patient organisations, and stakeholders within the art and culture area.

The development in the field has moved from initially promoting arts in healthcare to the now much broader application of arts and health initiatives and research, which embraces arts in various innovative ways as inherent interventions and activities both in care contexts and as health promotion, treatment, and as preventative measures.

Why a strategy?

In order to:

- Have a systematic, common method of working in the field, a shared platform, long-term structures as well as a shared knowledge base and an understanding of the methods and interconnections in the field.
- Clarify intentions and common goals.
- Make better use of resources, initiatives and activities already existing in Region Skåne, as well as among external stakeholders.
- Strengthen the field of arts and health and be better equipped to face prevailing challenges within society.
- Make better, well-informed decisions in the field.

Region Skåne's strategy for Arts and Health 2022–2030 aims to achieve the following:

- Increased cross-sector collaboration, coordination, long-term structures, and development of activities in the field of arts and health as well as within the organisation itself, in collaboration with external bodies, such as municipalities, arts and culture organisation, civil society and academia.
- Optimised impact of the arts on people's health and well-being. Creating platforms for prevention, health promotion and healthcare collaborations with increased access to the arts.
- For arts to be a natural complement to other initiatives within healthcare, a resource for person-centred care and a well-defined part of the work on creating positive healthcare related experiences.
- For the population of Skåne to be empowered and find tools that can influence their own health experience through the arts and culture. To stimulate the development of methodologies for increased accessibility to arts participation in arts and culture life, which in turn can contribute to social sustainability and equal health.

Strategic initiative areas

The important strategic areas to achieve Region Skåne's vision for arts and health are:

- Knowledge-driven arts and health activities.
- Arts and health established, embedded, and financed in Region Skåne.
- Arts and health activities in broad cross-sector collaboration, methodology development and new practice through a variety of stakeholders.

Knowledge-driven arts and health activities

- Deliver competence raising initiatives for and with relevant stakeholders within the healthcare, social care, public health and arts and culture sectors as well as civil society etc.
- In a structured manner, evaluate and analyse the impact of more arts and health activities and projects, and thereby stimulate methodology and knowledge development within the field.
- Develop and encourage platforms and networks for knowledge exchange and collaboration between stakeholders in arts, research, healthcare, public health and social care.
- Work towards generating more research within the field and establish cross-disciplinary and cross-sector research groups.

Art and Health established, strengthened, and financed in Region Skåne

- Identify the link between arts and health and the importance of cross-policy collaboration in relevant regional steering documents.
- Disseminate know-how about the strategy for arts and health and work to ensure this is implemented in the activities within Region Skåne.
- Build structures for collaboration and knowledge sharing between relevant decision-makers and administrations in Region Skåne.
- Stimulate boards and committees to implement arts and health initiatives.

- Develop action plans at administrative level for arts and health in work strategies, for example by describing initiatives in the annual activity plans and budgets. Follow-up these annually in reports in order to keep the contents of the strategy alive during the duration of the plan.

Follow up the 2022–2030 Region Skåne strategy annually in the Healthcare Committee and the Culture Committee.

Arts and Health activities in broad cross-sectoral collaborations

- Build long-term structures for increased collaborations within Region Skåne in order both to stimulate the development of the field and to make better use of financial and other resources.
- Increased cross-sectoral collaboration with and between external stakeholders such as municipalities, civil society, the arts and culture sector, academia etc.
- Include citizens, patients, and relatives in the work of developing the field of arts and health.
- Bring together existing activities and operations in municipalities, third sector organisations, the arts and culture sector and so forth with relevant initiatives within care, welfare, and health promotion.
- Continue to develop collaboration with universities and colleges, for example, by means of education about art and health.

Methodology development and new practice within Arts and Health through a variety of stakeholders

- Increase opportunities to implement and finance initiatives which develop the field.
- Stimulate and support arts and culture stakeholders to be active within the field of art and health and in turn increase the number of stakeholders in the field.
- Develop existing methods and working models as well as stimulate the development of new ones.

- Map existing arts and culture initiatives in healthcare and social care as well as in health promotion and preventive work and ensure dissemination of such information.

Research and evidence

A number of research studies as well as practical experience have shown that participation in artistic and cultural activities can improve health, well-being and quality of life. The effects can be seen in many areas: participation in arts activities can both contribute to longer life and impact on health and can be positively compared with health promotion initiatives (3).

The international evidence base increasingly shows that participation in art and culture activities has a preventative effect and can contribute to treatment, rehabilitation, and support in the final stages of life (3,4). Findings from research which demonstrates the benefits of participation in art and culture activities, includes improved social cohesion, reduced loneliness and isolation and increased prosocial behaviour for individuals of different ages (5,6,7). Participation in art and culture activities can especially be supportive for individuals who experience mental health problems (8, 9).

In terms of the prevention of mental and physical illness, research points positive benefits of participation in art and culture activities, such as supporting wellbeing, increased motivation, and quality of life (10).

There is evidence that participation in art and culture activities can impact on cognitive ability in older people, for example the memory and the ability to think, plan and do things (11). Further, there is evidence that participation in art and culture can reduce physical deterioration in older adults, including better walking, strength, and balance (12).

Research in the field of arts and health is relatively new (approximately 25 years). However, there is evidence to support the claim that participation in art and cultural activities can promote health and wellbeing, although more research is needed in different areas of the field. Some positive developments are the establishment of various networks for researchers in the field, for example the Nordic Arts & Health Research Network (13) as well as the Nordic Journal of Arts, Culture and Health (14) in the Nordic context.

Importance of the field

Our society is facing a number of major challenges. In Skåne, as in many other places in Sweden and abroad, the proportion of older and younger people in relation to people of working age is increasing. Although older people above the age of 80 are fitter than previously, there is an expectation of an increasing demand for resources and the need for a stronger focus on the living conditions of older people (15).

Polarisation in society is another aspect which is leading to increased exclusion, different socio-economic situations, and an increased inequality in health. A further development linked to health is that mental illness is increasing, not least among children and young people. Mental health diagnosis is the most common cause of sick leave in Sweden and has been since 2014. Illness means distress for the individual, but absence from work due to sickness also generates high costs for society and an increased pressure on the welfare system.

In order to deal with the future challenges, strategic prevention and health promotion initiatives are important, as well as cross-sector coordination and collaboration. There is a demand for long-term solutions, new methods, and innovative collaboration (16). The arts and health field is one example of a cross-sectoral field which can contribute to this work. Arts and culture activities are obvious resources that should be explored in order to achieve the goal of **‘Better life and health for more people’**.

The years of the pandemic (2020 and 2021) brought the role of the arts for our well-being into focus. For a long time, we were unable to attend arts and culture events. Many people experienced levels of unhappiness, were socially isolated and became unemployed. Studies show an increase in depression, anxiety, and insomnia, especially among those who already had a history of poor mental health (17, 18). However, it is too early to draw any conclusions. The pandemic period can be considered a historic crisis and the long-term consequences unknown at the time of writing this strategy document.

Art and health initiatives are seen as an investment in a society where people are healthier, more secure and have greater well-being. Cross-sector collaboration contributes to a future with a more sustainable society and generates profits for the benefit of individual citizens and society as a whole. Moreover, it can stimulate the arts and culture sector, particularly in

terms of working to achieve the policy goals of increased accessibility and participation.

Definitions

Arts and Health

The arts and health field is multifaceted, and consists of a broad spectrum of professionals from many different disciplines, such as researchers, arts and culture professionals, social care, and healthcare professionals etc. The cross-sectoral nature of the field means that it is characterised by a variety of approaches and methods and there are different definitions of how the field is constructed.

The concept of arts and health is often used as an umbrella term, but the field has many components and covers medicine, social science and humanistic methods and practices. In this strategy document, arts and health is defined as an:

Active engagement in an art and culture activity which is carried out with the aim of creating health promotion effect and/or of increasing quality of life, be it physical, mental, social, aesthetic, or existential.

Arts and health activities often involve collaborations between the arts and culture sector and the healthcare sector, social care, public health, or other stakeholders who are active in prevention and health promotion work.

Health

The arts and health field adopts a broad definition of the concept of health, which includes physical, mental, cultural, existential, emotional, spiritual, work-related, social and community health.

Arts and culture

Arts and culture should, in this context, be understood as arts activities such as music, theatre, dance, visual arts, and literature as well as the work produced by cultural organisations such as museums, libraries and institutions for adult education.

Link to regional strategies and steering documents

The strategy is linked to a number of regional steering documents. Region Skåne's overall vision is *Belief in the future and quality of life* (19). Of the five associated goals, the goal *Better life and health for more people* is emphasised. This goal has also provided inspiration for previous strategies.

The regional development strategy, *Open Skåne 2030* (20) functions as a platform for collaboration in Skåne and will formulate and create a broad consensus for a common set of goals for Skåne 2030. In this document, the importance of art and cultural life for quality of life and public health, as well as its importance as a binding force in social development, is highlighted.

The arts and culture sector works continuously with the arts and culture policy objectives to increase accessibility and participation in arts and culture life. Everyone, regardless of personal and geographical circumstances, should have access to a broad range of varied activities and the opportunity to participate in a creative process themselves. In the regional arts and culture plan 2021-2024 (21) a number of target groups are highlighted, particularly children and young people, but in the arts and health context there is also focus on older people and people with disabilities. In addition, the arts and culture plan stresses the importance of initiatives to increase knowledge and the interplay between arts and health, that collaboration across policy areas should be stimulated and that systematic working methods, structures and networks should be developed within the field.

The steering document *The health system of the future* (22) stipulates that Region Skåne's healthcare environment should be stimulating and inspiring for patients in order to contribute to a positive experience and to recovery. In addition, the importance of prevention and health promotion initiatives to improve the health of the population and in the longer term for more effective use of healthcare resources, are highlighted. As the determinate factors of health is often found outside the healthcare sector, it is suggested that initiatives are implemented in collaboration with citizens, municipalities, civil society, the third sector and other relevant stakeholders in society.

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