

**National Endowment for the Arts:
Involvement in Arts & Health Promotion**

The Creativity and Aging in America study evaluated the effects of active involvement in the arts on the physical health, mental health, and social functioning of adults ages 65-103, as compared to a Control Group. Results showed striking positive results relevant to health promotion and cost savings.

Lead Agency:

National Endowment for the Arts

Agency Mission:

The National Endowment for the Arts is a federal agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education.

Principal Investigators:

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Partner Agencies:

National Endowment for the Arts (Lead Sponsor)
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Center for Mental Health Services
National Institute of Health (NIH)
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
AARP
National Retired Teachers Association
Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation
International Foundation for Music Research

General Description:

In 2001, the National Endowment for the Arts engaged George Washington University to conduct a multi-site, national study with the aim of measuring the impact of professionally conducted community-based cultural programs on the general health, mental health, and social activities of older persons, age 65 and older. The study measured participants engaged in on-going, weekly programs in creative writing, visual arts, music, and theater. Referred to as the *Creativity and Aging Study*, the project's formal title is "The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults." *No previous study of this nature using an experimental or related scientific*

The Creativity and Aging study is the first theory-driven, multi-site, national study with an experimental or related scientific design and a control group that sought to assess the impact of active involvement in community-based art programs on the physical health, mental health, and social functioning of older adults. Moreover, for a study cohort with an average age of 80, most scientists would expect that any positive effects would take the form of merely a slower decline in health. Instead, what makes this Study truly noteworthy are evidence-based, statistically significant findings that show actual improvement in overall health among those participating in the art programs, versus declines in the Control Group.

The partnership that supported the study is unique in itself. The study was conducted and supported by a diverse group of government agencies and private sector organizations in the scientific and arts fields with individual and common goals for older Americans—brought together by the National Endowment for the Arts through a series of interagency agreements and contracts.

For example, one of goals of the National Endowment for the Arts is to make the best art available to all Americans. Over the years, the Endowment and many of its grantees have observed how involvement in quality arts programming, including dance, creative writing, theater, painting, and music, appear to make a remarkable difference in participants' lives. However, there was no substantive data to validate the observation. The National Institutes of Health have long been concerned with improving the mental and physical health of older adults. And the AARP is dedicated to positive social change and enhancing the quality of life for people as they age. The International Foundation on Music Research works to advance active participation in music making across the lifespan. This effort addresses all of these important missions.

Significance: How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

This research is highly relevant because it has shown, among older adults, clear health promotion and prevention effects. The Study results reflect a reduction in risk factors that drive the need for long-term care. It has also demonstrated important cost-saving outcomes highly relevant to an aging society. The arts programs in the Study can be replicated in urban, suburban, and rural settings across the country.

Effectiveness: What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

The positive impact of this research on the physical health, mental health, independent social functioning, and health care cost-savings for older persons is of high relevance to older adults, their families, their communities, and society. In the two years following start-up Federal funding for the Levine School's Senior Chorale, the program doubled in size because of public demand and recognition of its **effectiveness**.

Innovativeness: Why is this research exciting and newsworthy?

The Creativity and Aging research is exciting and newsworthy because it illustrates surprising health improvements in a population group with an average age greater than normal life expectancy, when one would typically anticipate noticeable declines in health. It also reveals dramatic cost-saving ramifications without causing an added burden to Medicare or Medicaid programs. This study and participation by the Levine School's Senior Chorale were featured with in-depth coverage on the *CBS Evening News with Dan Rather*.

One year after the study began, Medicare D went into effect. The study had been measuring medication usage. In the Medicare D-eligible population, a savings of a mere 8 cents a day—extrapolated to the 36.5 million persons in this age group—comes to \$1 billion per year in savings.* On the other hand, a dollar a day in savings nets \$13 billion a year in total savings. In fact, the results from the just-completed cost analysis of the Senior Chorale reflect a savings close to a dollar a day. At the same time, doctor visits, though essentially the same in number among those in the Senior Chorale and the control group at the start of the study, had grown to an average of 3.56 visits per year for the control group two years later. Extrapolating this finding to all Medicare-eligible Americans would mean a yearly savings of \$6.3 billion a year by being in a chorale similar to the one in the Intervention Group. The Study reveals the profound role on healthcare cost savings that is played by creative engagement through involvement in community-based arts.

* Medicare data found under "Statistics" at: [1 www.cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov)