



## **All Parliamentary Group Report on Arts, Health and Wellbeing response**

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*This piece has been written by musician and Director of [Pulse Arts](#), David McKenny,  
September 2017*



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### Introduction

In July 2017, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW) published a report outlining the case for the role of arts in health and wellbeing entitled [Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing](#). Commissioned to improve awareness of the benefits that the arts can bring, this two-year inquiry captures evidence, conversation and practice with patients, arts and cultural organisations, academics, health care professionals and policy makers. It makes possibly the strongest case yet that arts have a significant and positive impact on health and wellbeing. What is particularly interesting to see is evidence captured around the impact that early arts intervention can have on wellbeing of children in **early childhood** and the whole family; and the vital role that **individual practitioners** play in contributing to health and wellbeing of communities at a grassroots level. To draw out these themes in more detail, Sound Connections commissioned David McKenny from [Pulse Arts](#) to reflect and respond to the report.

### All Parliamentary Group Report on Arts, Health and Wellbeing response

In July the All Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing published their inquiry report entitled [Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing](#). It is the result of a two-year consultation with a range of stakeholders - including patients, artists, arts and healthcare bodies and the government - to develop policy recommendations and inform vision for political leadership in this area.

The first three chapters cite numerous commissions, policy reports and evidence sources that demonstrates how research of both the arts and of healthcare in England have converged over recent decades. The report reiterates significant research findings that point to the health benefits of playing and listening to music for young people experiencing ill health and social isolation. It serves as a useful reference of key reports that are relevant to the aims and strategies of arts in health and healthcare as a whole. One example that stood out were the [Marmot Principles](#). Published in 2010, [The Marmot Review](#) proposes evidence-based strategies for reducing health inequalities and addresses the social determinates of health. The Marmot Principles illustrate the common ground between the arts and medical communities by demonstrating that both groups could talk passionately about how they are striving to realise these principles.

As a strategic document, the report profiles some flagship and scalable projects that demonstrate the richness of work taking place across many arts forms. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of small scale initiatives and individuals working alone that make up the arts in healthcare workforce. The profiling of a single artist or musician and highlighting their unique position within a healthcare environment would have further illustrated the breadth of successful activities and working practices currently taking place.

Local musicians covering all types of music for wellbeing approaches will be integral to developing local 'arts on prescription' services, where patients might receive referrals to arts activities from their health professionals. As musicians working alongside clinicians in hospitals, we recognise the need to cultivate trust with doctors and nurses

and for them to have confidence that our skills will help patients. For arts on prescription to be adopted by local health services, GP's and mental health professionals in the community will need to have faith in our skills and professionalism.

We must build upon on the report's recommendation to develop social prescribing by also including musicians, artists and frontline medical staff in early conversations with local clinical commissioning groups, NHS Trusts and local authorities. By doing so we can collectively cultivate a local framework that will best meet the needs of people both accessing and delivering the services.

The report's recommendations set out some exciting and ambitious possibilities, such as a centre to support the advance of good practice and greater strategic work at NHS board level, clinical commissioning groups, government and [Arts Council England](#). This could make new music in health initiatives easier to bring about and more widespread. The integration of music in health modules at undergraduate and postgraduate level could even see these practices become a conventional part of a music graduate's career in a relatively short period of time. We should also be fostering the talents of musicians for whom university is not an option but still have much to offer the sector. Pulse Arts CIC would not exist if it wasn't for the high quality, accessible and generous CPD and shadowing offers made available to us from other music in health charities, community interest companies and individuals.

For me, the most fascinating paragraph came in the summary of chapter three where Ray Pawson, Professor of Social Research Methodology at University of Leeds, is quoted as saying "there is no such thing as evidence based policy", and where Lord Ramsbotham is quoted as saying what is required is a "social process rather than a scientific process". Many local and national funders are already supporting this process by supporting short and long-term projects. So in addition to delivering and evaluating our work, how can musicians and small organisations like Pulse Arts act on the recommendations to help them make their way into policy? Corporate businesses have lobbyists that are skilled in engaging at government level on their areas of interest. This feels like lightyears away from the world we inhabit and yet it holds so much significance for our work and the people we work with.

This seems like a great opportunity for networks like the [Challenging Circumstances Music Network](#) (CCMN) and the [National Alliance for Musicians in Healthcare](#) to engage with the report's recommendations and help shape their debate and implementation.