

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS REPORT ON ARTS, AGING, AND HEALTH

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National Endowment for the Arts Report on Arts, Aging, and Health

By National Endowment for the Arts

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Washington, DC—Older adults who create art and attend arts events have better health outcomes than adults who do neither is one of the conclusions in a new report published by the National Endowment for the Arts. [Staying Engaged: Health Patterns of Older Americans Who Engage in the Arts](#) presents the first detailed look at arts participation habits, attitudes toward the arts, and related health characteristics of adults aged 55 and older. *Staying Engaged* is based on results from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), conducted by the University of Michigan with primary support from the National Institute on Aging within the National Institutes of Health.

"Previous studies have found a better health profile for older adults who participate in the arts, compared with those who do not, but much of that research is limited to the study of creating art, or taking part in arts classes or lessons," said NEA Research & Analysis Director Sunil lyengar. "This report, by contrast, looks at older adults who either create art or attend arts events, do both, or do neither, and health differences across these groups. The findings, while purely descriptive, will help future researchers to probe the arts-health relationship further."

The HRS is a nationally representative, 20+ years longitudinal study that has tracked the health profiles of older adults through surveys and other measurement tools. In 2014, HRS investigators added survey questions about older adults' involvement in arts and cultural activities over the past year. The new questions allow study of the relationship between engaging in the arts—as creators or observers—and selected health outcomes.

Key sections and selected findings of *Staying Engaged*

Arts participation: The report examined creating art, attending arts events, doing both, and doing neither, among adults over 55 years of age.

84 percent of these adults reported either creating art or attending arts events.

Among this group, 64 percent created art of their own, 68.7 percent attended arts events, and 48.6 percent both created and attended.

Attitudes about the arts were measured through eight questions including:

The arts are important (63.8 percent)

The arts help me to be active and engaged (54.9 percent)

Health outcomes

Older adults who both created art and attended arts events reported higher cognitive functioning and lower rates of both hypertension and limitations to their physical functioning than did adults who neither created nor attended art.

Among those who both created and attended, cognitive functioning scores were seven-fold higher than for adults who did neither type of arts activity.

More information is in the [Staying Engaged fact sheet](#). Also, see this [Arts Data Profile](#) with an interactive graphics.

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About the National Endowment for the Arts

Established by Congress in 1965, the NEA is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. Visit arts.gov for more information.

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