



CULTURE AND HEALTH

Executive Summary



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The importance of linking culture and health has been explored and acknowledged for a long time, and progress is being made in the promotion of specific initiatives along these lines. The arrival of the pandemic and the corresponding global shock focussed attention on health systems around the world and on the protection of both physical and psychological health. In such a fragile context, the arts and culture emerged as escape routes, showing their potential and direct effect on the state of people's health and well-being.

The majority of reports and projects exploring the relationship between culture and health do so by analysing the positive effects of culture on people's state of health, whether through preventive or treatment actions. This report also backs the exploration of the existing relationship between health and culture, analysing the effect on people's state of health when limiting or conditioning cultural practice and consumption. Thus, the report's aim is to explore the relationship between culture and health as a whole.

Firstly, in order to move forward in the debate, it is important to define the central concepts of this analysis.

The WHO defines **health** as a complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

It is more difficult to define **culture**, but this report links it closely to performance arts, visual arts, design, craftsmanship, literature, digital arts and cultural consumption related to attendance at museums, galleries, exhibitions, concerts, theatre, community events, festivals and fairs.

With regard to the effects of culture on health, two aspects must be differentiated.

1. Firstly, culture affects health in both the prevention and treatment of diseases. Cultural activity and practices can have positive effects on health from a dual perspective: in the **prevention** of the risk of suffering certain diseases or health problems and as a **complementary treatment** to improve certain conditions.
2. Secondly, the effects on health differ depending on whether the cultural activity is **actively practised** or **consumed more passively**.

In this regard, it is important to underline that not all artistic activities are indicated as health strategies, but rather, in order to achieve these benefits, they must be planned and designed with an explicit objective regarding health.

World organisations such as the WHO have recently investigated the beneficial effects of culture on health, reaching the conclusion that art can help in both psychological and emotional management and recovery from an injury or a disease. In addition, the promotion of projects linking culture and health are a clear way of responding to sustainable development goals.

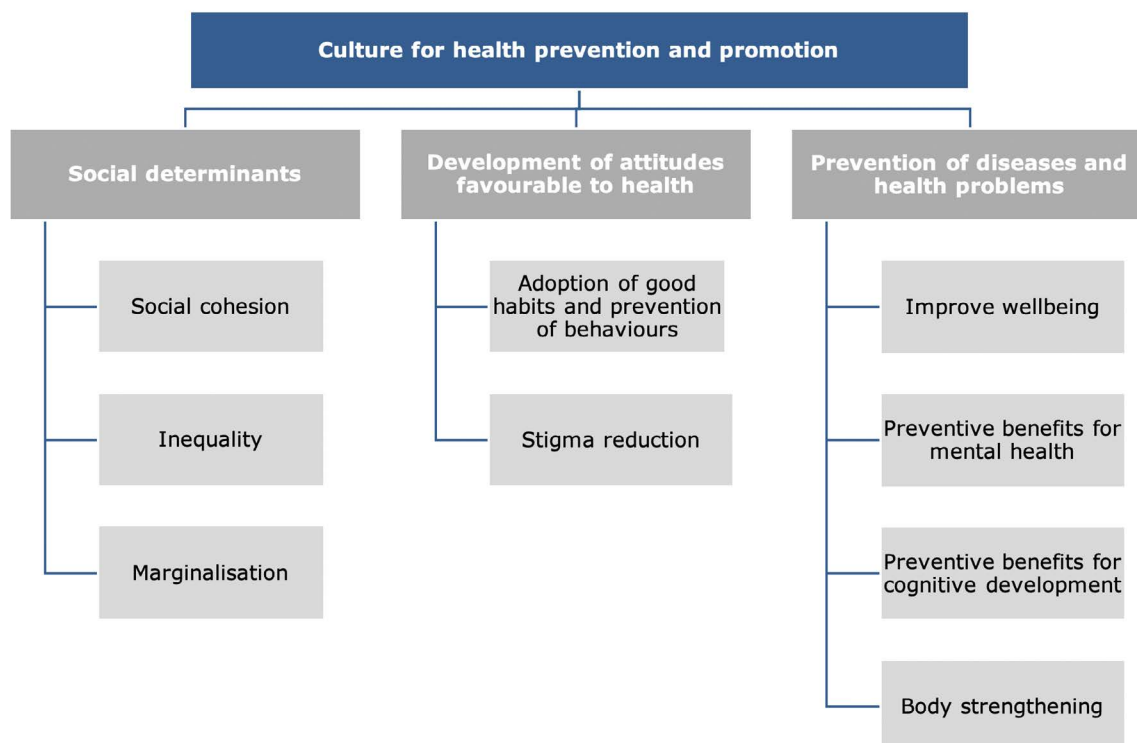
Child protection, ageing of the population and the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities are also strategic areas at European level requiring specific actions designed to improve their quality of life. In this regard, it would be very beneficial to have an integral strategy including culture in health awareness-raising, promotion and protection.

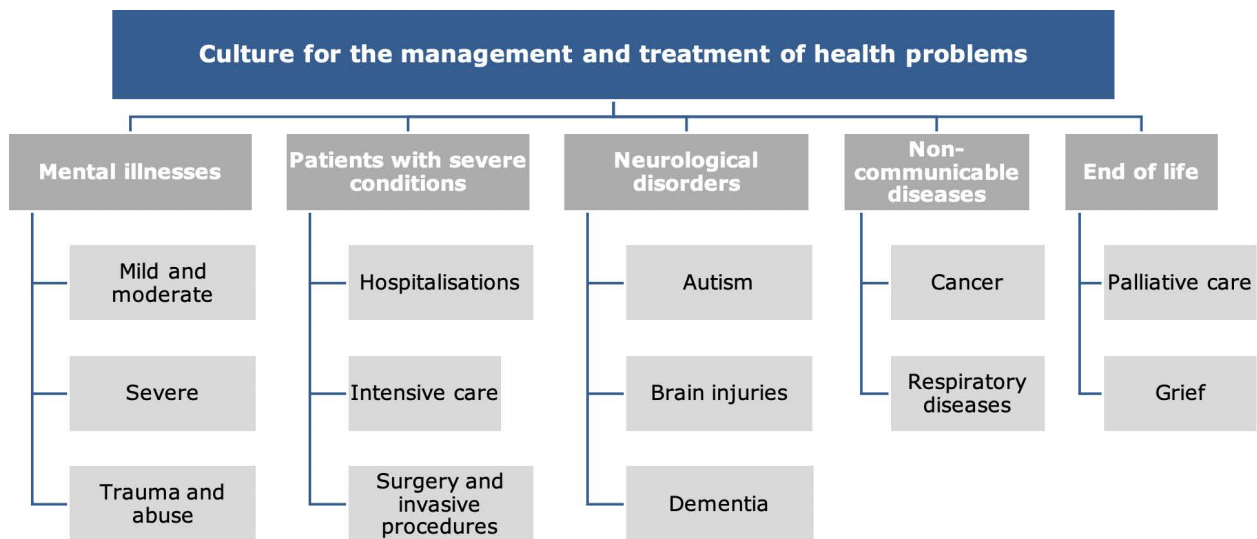
Work is being done from different areas to openly and globally cover the health challenges posed at present. In the Basque Country, for example, the new Public Health legislation opens the opportunity for inter-departmental actions from multiple sectors in health improvement, committing to an integral and innovative vision which provides room for the promotion of health strategies involving links with the area of culture.

With the goal of shedding light on the debate and arguing the importance of linking culture and health, we will provide graphic specifications of, firstly, the benefits of culture on health and, secondly, the effects of health on culture.

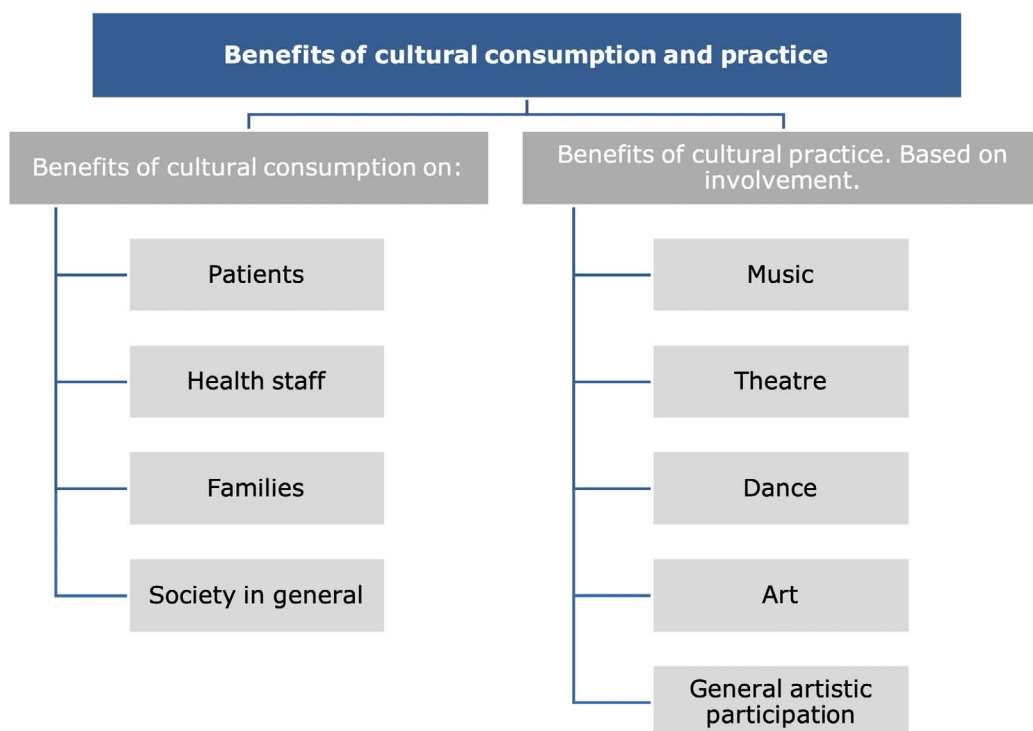
With regard to **the effects of culture on health**, two trends are differentiated.

1. The **positive effects of culture on both the prevention and treatment** of certain diseases, disorders or health problems.





2. Differences between the **effects produced by consuming culture passively and actively practising a cultural activity.**



Whether culture is consumed more passively or whether there is active participation in cultural activities, most of the benefits are linked to an improvement in mood and well-being, improved cognitive development preventing dementia and mental illnesses, an improvement in social isolation, stress, depression and anxiety, the adoption of healthy lifestyle habits and the development of an active life.

With regard to **the effects of health on culture**, it is worth highlighting that people's overall health situation largely conditions their chances to gain access to culture. Access to culture should be universal and, therefore, certain health determinants should not be a barrier. There are three lines of action which can be followed to reduce the negative effects of health on cultural participation and consumption:

Accessibility	Refers to the physical adaptation of cultural spaces and events to ensure the possibility of participation in equal conditions.
Adaptation	Refers to the correct planning of events, activities, exhibitions, etc., both in content and in format, to facilitate both cultural participation and consumption by all people in equal conditions.
Proximity	In cases where neither accessibility or adaptation are sufficient, there is the possibility of bringing culture closer to specific collectives who are denied it because of certain conditions.

The cultural field must also take into account the barriers obstructing both cultural participation and consumption for people with certain health problems, such as architectural barriers, sensory barriers and cognitive barriers.

The relationship between culture and health is becoming more and more evident. Therefore, activities are promoted which allow culture to be brought closer to people with health problems, improving both prevention and treatment of certain illnesses. The existing evidence makes it more and more widespread to study the possibility of linking cultures to public health plans and programmes and, as a result, it can be seen that public organisations, especially international ones, are promoting the inclusion of culture as a useful tool to promote the health of the population.

Culture and health create mutual feedback dynamics and, as a result, action must be taken from the cultural field to prevent and improve individual and collective health problems as well as to ensure that health conditions do not involve a denial of the universal right to culture.

In this regard, a group of good practices stand out in both the international and state fields. These are explored extensively in the long version of this report. If the initiatives highlighted in the report are analysed together, it can be seen that most of the projects and programmes are devoted to improving or preventing people's emotional health or improving accessibility conditions to guarantee the integration of people with certain health problems.

In conclusion, the trend of the current international context has led to health becoming a priority field in public debate and, as a result, it is analysed and explored in interaction strategy areas which can contribute to an improvement in people's health and quality of life.

Among these areas of interaction, the cultural field has long shown the positive benefits it contributes to people's health states, but despite this development, actions taken in cultural and health matters are seen to be individual and dispersed, and there is not yet a shared commitment to implementing cultural and health programmes at national or European level.

The report summarises evidence showing the benefits of culture on health, but health is not the only area to benefit from inter-departmental programmes and policies involving the cultural field. Culture is beneficial for individual and social development in many aspects, and the challenge to be explored is that of setting open, inter-departmental and integrational policies in cultural matters from which to develop specific strategies for specific areas such as health.

