



AHRL
ARTS IN HEALTH
RESEARCH LAB

Overview:

Arts in Health Research Lab

njpac

R | **RUTGERS**
THE STATE UNIVERSITY
OF NEW JERSEY

New Jersey Performing Arts Center • Rutgers School of Public Health • Mason Gross School of the Arts

Nearly
50%

of U.S. healthcare institutions offer arts programming for patients, families, and staff;

78%

offer these programs to leverage the healing benefits of the arts, including shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and reduced reliance on medication.

75%

of Americans say if their doctor wrote them a prescription to participate in the arts as a way to improve their health, they would likely follow that recommendation.

Creative Inquiry,

60%

of Americans say the arts have “helped them cope during times of mental or emotional distress.”

72%

of Americans believe “The arts provide shared experiences with people of different races, ethnicities, ages, beliefs, and identities.”

In 2022, the U.S. Arts & Culture sector contributed \$1.1 trillion to the economy—4.3% of GDP—and supported 5.2 million jobs, surpassing industries like Transportation, Construction, Education, and Agriculture.

Cohen, Randy. "10 Reasons to Support the Arts in 2024." Americans for the Arts, 2024, www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/advancing-arts-locally/top-10-reasons-to-support-the-arts. Accessed 12 June 2025.

45 minutes
of art making can
lower the stress
hormone cortisol
by 25%

Students engaged in arts learning have higher GPAs, standardized test scores, and college-going rates as well as lower drop-out rates. These academic benefits are reaped by students across all socio-economic strata.

72%
of business leaders report that creativity is of "high importance" when hiring, as noted in the Conference Board's *Ready to Innovate* report.

Collective Well-being

The arts can heal the mental, physical, and moral injuries of war for military service members and Veterans—who rank the creative arts therapies in the top four (out of 40) interventions and treatments.

69%
of Americans believe the arts "lift me up beyond everyday experiences."

The Arts in Health Research Lab harnesses the transformative power of arts and culture to improve health outcomes through three foundational pillars: research, education, and community engagement.

Together, these three pillars shape our interdisciplinary approach to advancing health through the arts. The Lab is a triadic collaboration between Rutgers University Mason Gross School of the Arts (MGSA), the School of Public Health (SPH), and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC); this unique partnership between a major public research university and a celebrated performing arts center is the first of its kind in the nation. By bridging the realms of art, culture, public health, and academic research, we employ rigorous, evidence-based inquiry and evaluation to explore how the arts contribute to measurable improvements in physical, social, and mental well-being.

Collaborating closely with various communities, the Lab promotes engagement, highlights strengths, and fosters belonging. We share innovative methodologies and insights that empower researchers, practitioners, and communities to employ arts-based strategies that create healthier futures for individuals and communities.

The Lab strives to advance meaningful change and to catalyze policy advocacy in health and the arts.



Research

At the core of the Lab's mission is a commitment to rigorous, interdisciplinary research that examines the role of the arts in advancing health. Through collaborative inquiry between artists, public health scholars, and community partners, the Lab develops and evaluates arts-based interventions using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.



Education

The Lab aims to equip students, faculty, and practitioners with the knowledge and skills to utilize the arts to support health and well-being. Through courses, workshops, and public programming, we explore the historical, cultural, and ethical dimensions of the field, while encouraging students to interrogate and expand their own definitions of health and creativity. Our educational initiatives cultivate a new generation of leaders who understand the value of interdisciplinary thinking and the potential of creative work to shape more equitable and holistic health systems.



Community Engagement

Rooted in a deep respect for community knowledge and cultural expression, the Lab approaches engagement with an assets-based mindset—centering local voices and lived experiences. We co-create programs with community partners that reflect shared goals, amplify strengths, and address health needs. By supporting long-term relationships and participatory practices, the Lab ensures that its work remains responsive, inclusive, and impactful.

Meet the team driving creative inquiry and collective well-being at the Arts in Health Research Lab.



Dr. Stephanie Cronenberg (she/her)
Mason Gross School of the Arts

is an Associate Professor of Music at MGSA. She is the MGSA Director of Research, the Area Head of Music Education, and the faculty contact for the Arts Management and Leadership Minor. Dr. Cronenberg specializes in narrative, survey, and mixed methods approaches to social inquiry with a particular focus on the importance of arts learning for grades 5-8.



Dr. Ian Koebner (he/him)
Mason Gross School of the Arts

is an Associate Professor and the Endowed Chair of Arts in Health at MGSA. He has over 20 years of experience developing and evaluating innovative strategic partnerships between the cultural and health sectors to improve individual, organizational, and community well-being.



Dr. Kristen Krause (she/her)
School of Public Health

is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Urban-Global Public Health at the SPH and the Deputy Director of the Center for Health, Identity, Behavior and Prevention Studies (CHIBPS), a leading training ground for LGBTQ+ scholars.



Aly Maier Lokuta (she/her)
New Jersey Performing Arts Center

is the Assistant Vice President of Arts & Well-Being at NJPAC, where she leads innovative programming, research, evaluation, and education at the intersection of arts and health, serving communities in Newark and New Jersey. A multidisciplinary artist, Aly stays well through creating visual art and writing.



Dr. Taylor Masamitsu (they/he)
New Jersey Performing Arts Center

is the Senior Director of Research and Evaluation at NJPAC and a Visiting Scholar at Rutgers University, Newark's Department of Urban Education. Dr. Masamitsu uses their interdisciplinary research agenda to study critical social theory, sociopolitical marginalization, and educational equity.



Jacqueline Thaw (she/her)
Mason Gross School of the Arts

is a graphic designer and Associate Professor in the Department of Art & Design at MGSA. Her work addresses social change and community participation. She is a member of the design group Class Action Collective and the Rutgers Arts Integration Research (AIR) Collaborative. Thaw's collaborative arts-engaged research has been supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Union of Concerned Scientists.



Dr. Peichi Waite (she/her)
Mason Gross School of the Arts

Manages the AHRL and leads Scarlet Arts Rx, an arts and well-being student program at Rutgers University - New Brunswick. Dr. Waite has worked on research projects for entities including Harvard, UCLA, American Institutes for Research, and the U.S. Department of Education, and served as an IRB member and administrator at Concordia University Irvine.



Katherine Zapert (she/her)
School of Public Health

is the Assistant Dean for Research at the SPH, where she leads research strategy and administration. She is a lover of the arts and committed to advancing public health, research, and training through strategic leadership and institutional collaboration.

NJPAC Arts & Well-Being Process Evaluation

Collaborators: AHRL; NJPAC; Christina Eskridge, Elevate Theatre Company

Status: Completed, publications forthcoming

Deliverables: Report and manuscript

This process evaluation examined NJPAC's Arts & Well-Being initiatives, including Arts in Healthcare programs (Artists in Residence, Music in the Lobby, Culture Connects), Health Promotion programs (Lullaby Project, Ritual4Return, Photovoice, Rutgers-Newark Student Mental Health), and ArtsRx. Conducted between September and December 2024, the evaluation focused on five programs implemented from Fall 2023 through Fall 2024.

Drawing on direct feedback from a range of stakeholders and a review of relevant program materials, the assessment highlights key successes and identifies opportunities for future growth and enhancement.





Addressing HIV-Related Stigma with Photovoice

Collaborators: Ashley Grosso, SUNY Downstate; Jacqueline Thaw, Rutgers MGSA; North Jersey Community Research Initiative; NJPAC

Status: Ongoing

Deliverables: Exhibition

This is a participatory photography project that invites LGBTQ+ individuals to explore and express their lived experiences through image-making. In each workshop series, participants engage in conversations around a shared theme or guiding question, collaboratively chosen to reflect their collective realities. Alongside learning technical and ethical aspects of photography, participants create original work that visually responds to these discussions.

The project culminates in the opportunity for participants to share their perspectives through an online or in-person exhibition, amplifying voices and fostering deeper understanding across communities.



Notice Nature

Collaborators: AHRL, Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, Rutgers Libraries, others

Status: Ongoing

Deliverables: Report

Rutgers students learned about and engaged in nature journaling to build curiosity, discovery, wonder, and mindfulness.

A pilot study ran in the Fall 2024 semester and the full study ran in the Spring 2025 semester. In the spring study, participants nature-journaled for 20 minutes per week, 3 weeks in a row. Funded by a Rutgers Chancellor's Challenge Grant of \$49K.

New Jersey Arts and Well-being Indicators Study

Collaborators: AHRL

Status: Completed

Deliverables: Summary Report

This study utilized an adapted version of the Arts and Well-being Indicators model survey to explore the perspectives and experiences of New Jersey residents related to arts and well-being.

The model is structured around three core domains: wellness, arts, and community. The wellness domain includes measures of health and quality of life; the arts domain addresses participation, access, value, infrastructure, and investment. The community domain covers civic engagement, satisfaction with leadership, openness, safety, social capital, and overall community satisfaction.





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