

The NHS Long Term Plan

Icon Statement

6 March 2019

Icon, The Institute of Conservation, welcomes the commitment to social prescribing set out in the [NHS Long Term Plan](#). Icon hopes the cultural heritage sector's potential to support health and social care services will be fully exploited for the benefit and wellbeing of our communities.

Icon is a registered charity and the professional body for the conservation of our cultural heritage. Icon raises awareness of the cultural, social and economic value of caring for heritage and champions high standards of conservation. We represent nearly 3,000 individuals and organisations comprising professional conservators, heritage scientists and many others who share a commitment to improving understanding of and access to our cultural heritage.

Icon defines 'cultural heritage' as objects or collections, as well as internal and external features of a building, but not the building itself. This can vary from family photographs to rare books to fine tapestries and the interiors of historic houses. However, within the context of this statement, we refer to cultural heritage as including all landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences.

The NHS Long Term Plan is a new plan developed by NHS bodies to improve the quality of patient care and health outcomes. It describes how the £20.5 billion budget settlement for the NHS, announced by the Prime Minister in June 2018, will be spent over the next five years.

The plan includes an outline of major, practical changes to the NHS service model to ensure people "will get more control over their own health and more personalised care when they need it." A part of this work includes a commendable commitment to social prescribing – the practice of helping patients to improve their health, wellbeing and social welfare by connecting them to local non-clinical services typically run by voluntary and community sector organisations.ⁱ

The plan states that "within five years over 2.5 million more people will benefit from 'social prescribing,' a personal health budget, and new support for managing their own health in partnership with patients' groups and the voluntary sector." Link workers within primary care networks will work with people to develop tailored plans and connect them to local groups and support services. The plan forecasts over 1,000 trained social prescribing link workers to be in place by the end of 2020/21.

Icon agrees with the holistic approach to health and firmly believes in the potential of arts and cultural heritage to be integrated within a social prescription scheme. The UK conservation sector comprises several public and civil society organisations that could be mobilised to deliver the many benefits of arts and cultural heritage to health and wellbeing, through

- Nurturing a sense of belonging and identity

Engagement with arts and cultural heritage can cultivate a strong sense of place and identity by promoting a positive connection to our shared past. Heritage brings people and communities together across generational, ethnic and socio-economic divides, creating a sense of shared belonging and

community pride. Conservation ensures that this heritage is protected, cared for and made accessible, enabling sites and collections to serve as focal points for the interaction of communities and help people to navigate their place in the world.

- Supporting social connections

The wide range of volunteering opportunities available within the arts and cultural heritage sector facilitate the development of meaningful relationships. The heritage sector has a sizeable volunteering workforce, with 616,000 heritage volunteers in England alone.ⁱⁱ In 2017-18, 475 people volunteered their time with Icon, spending approximately 6,000 hours supporting our activities.ⁱⁱⁱ Volunteering allows individuals to build their social networks by encouraging people to work together towards shared aims in a positive atmosphere where they can enjoy themselves and get to know each other.

- Building confidence and self-esteem

Conservation is a highly skilled practice, with professional conservators combining scientific skills with knowledge of art history, architecture, changing fashions and lifestyles to understand the context of the objects they work with, and to conserve them sensitively. Participation in conservation projects often requires professionally-led training and learning to ensure that heritage assets are conserved and cared for appropriately.

Engagement with such projects can significantly empower people by encouraging individuals to cultivate new competencies. For example, the Birmingham Conservation Trust's 'Resurrecting the Coffin Works' – recipient of the 2015 Icon Conservation in the Community Award – provided volunteers with an opportunity to gain new skills, greater confidence and to learn about conservation through the rescue of a Victorian factory building.^{iv}

Studies have shown that being permitted to touch historical objects, for example through museum handling sessions, fosters a sense of privilege and responsibility. This has been linked to engendering positive feelings of value and self-worth. For example, the UCL-led Heritage in Hospitals research project delivered over 200 museum object handling sessions with hospital patients.^v Comparison of pre- and post-session quantitative measures showed significant increases in wellbeing and happiness.

Participating in arts and cultural heritage activities can help individuals mitigate and prevent health and wellbeing challenges in the above ways, but it also has a wider economic and social impact. The arts and cultural sectors support local and national tourism, create employment opportunities and help to enhance the UK's global reputation. Engagement with arts and cultural heritage thus enables people to improve their own health but also to contribute to an environment supportive of healthy communities.

The arts and cultural sectors have been proactively delivering health and wellbeing projects in recognition of these benefits. A UCL-led research project 'Museums on Prescription' successfully used a social prescribing model to connect older people at risk of isolation with partner museums in London. Historic Royal Palaces partnered with the Alzheimer's Society to create a dementia-friendly heritage guide to encourage heritage sites to support people with dementia to enjoy a connection with the places they love and help to improve their wellbeing. More examples can be found in *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*, an inquiry report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing.^{vi}

Icon is pleased that sector funders continue to support and drive progress in this area. The National Lottery Heritage Fund's *Strategic Framework 2019-2024* sets out plans to encourage collaboration between heritage and health organisations and to fund high quality projects.^{vii} Historic England has developed strategic objectives for wellbeing and the historic environment and remains committed to further research within the context of its Research Agenda.^{viii}

We hope recognition of the value of the arts and cultural sector as a partner for social prescribing will continue to grow and be supported through frameworks such as the NHS Long Term Plan. However, social prescription should not be a replacement to primary care for those who require it. The safe delivery of programmes will depend on the social welfare input of any prescription scheme being provided by health personnel with qualified professional backgrounds.

In light of the potential of arts and cultural heritage to support health and wellbeing, Icon appeals to

- The NHS and Clinical Commissioning Groups to include cultural heritage participation within social prescription programmes.
- Government and funders to support third sector cultural heritage organisations to deliver non-clinical health and social services.
- Health institutions to embrace the support offered by cultural heritage, for example by designating an individual to take responsibility for integrating arts and cultural heritage within organisational policies.
- Leaders within the health and cultural heritage sectors to collaborate on the advancement of good practice and to coordinate and disseminate research to inform policy.
- Education providers and professional bodies within the health and cultural heritage sectors to provide education and training to relevant medical practitioners, heritage professionals and students on the practical applicability of cultural heritage to health objectives.
- Government, funders and cultural heritage bodies to promote opportunities and champion the benefits of heritage engagement to the public and health service providers.
- The cultural heritage sector to capture and evidence the impact of wellbeing programmes, for example by working with health bodies to develop sophisticated ways of assessment and evaluation.

Links to further information:

Icon website www.icon.org.uk

ⁱ https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing?gclid=EAlalQobChMlubiM_LaG4AIVLrftCh2HzA4xEAAAYASAAEgl98_D_BwE

ⁱⁱ <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2018/heritage-and-the-economy-2018/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon_trustees_annual_report_2017-18_v7.3_signed_as_approved_by_the_board_19.09.2018.pdf

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/he-research-agenda/research-agenda/>

^{iv} <https://icon.org.uk/news/six-winners-announced-2015-icon-conservation-awards>

^v <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/heritage-hospitals>

^{vi} <https://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>

^{vii} <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/attachments/Heritage%20Fund%20-%20Strategic%20Funding%20Framework%202019-2024.pdf>

^{viii} <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/he-research-agenda/research-agenda/>