



HSC Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust
caring supporting improving together



CREATIVE CARE

Arts in Health Strategy 2026–2030





Courtyard Improvement Project: Belfast City Hospital, in partnership with Estates under the Arts Care Artist in Residence Programme, Summer 2025

Foreword

CREATIVE CARE: Arts in Health Strategy 2026–2030 is Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's third Arts in Health Strategy. It is clearly evidenced that much has been achieved since the launch of our first-ever Arts in Health Strategy *Unfolding Arts in Health: Belfast Trust Arts in Health Strategy 2013–15*. This ground-breaking document laid the foundation for a vibrant and growing Arts in Health programme within Belfast Trust and beyond, influencing practice across Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

Over the years, engagement in creative activities has flourished. Patients, service users, staff, and volunteers now regularly participate in and experience a wide range of art forms, including visual arts, music, dance, movement and photography. *Arts in Health: the Next Chapter 2019/24* was delivered during challenging times. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the benefits of creative activity for all. The Arts in Health programme adapted to the challenges quickly by supporting staff wellbeing, transforming environments and supporting services to engage remotely with service users in creative activity. Locally, nationally, and internationally, the field of Arts in Health continues to evolve, gaining recognition for its impact on wellbeing and healthcare delivery.

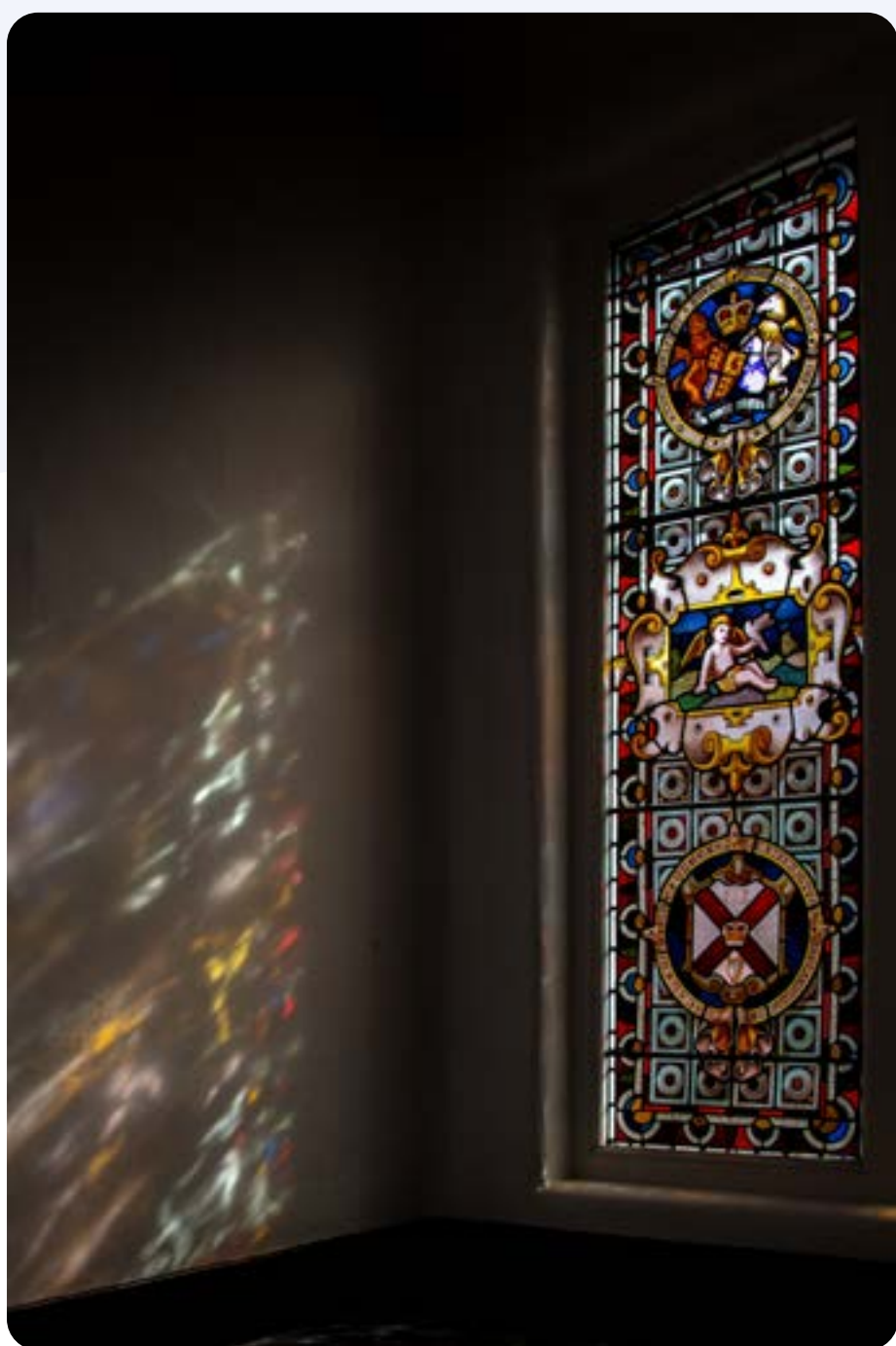
This updated strategy builds on the original vision and provides a framework for the next five years. It has been shaped through consultation with staff and service users and the arts sector. Dedicated workshops with staff and stakeholders helped refine our vision and objectives ensuring the strategy reflects the needs and aspirations of our community.

CREATIVE CARE: Arts in Health Strategy 2026–2030 continues with a focus on participatory creative activity for wellbeing. Importantly the document includes strategic aspirations for work in relation to the Trust's collection of art and heritage assets, recognising the work in this area since 2021 and Belfast Trust's role in the preservation of the city's heritage. We plan to build on the positive impact of this work for our staff, patients and wider community.

The Arts Steering Group and its subgroup the Heritage, Archives and Environment Team, lead this work and include representatives from across the Trust. With the launch of **CREATIVE CARE: Arts in Health Strategy 2026–2030**, we reaffirm our commitment to measuring the impact of our work and delivering meaningful outcomes.

Jennifer Welsh
Chief Executive, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
January 2026





Good Samaritan Window (1886):
Victorian Corridor, Royal Victoria
Hospital. Photograph taken by
staff member at a Creative Staff
Wellbeing Workshop, April 2025

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Floral Harmonies: An artistic journey for older people in acute settings at the Royal Victoria Hospital by the Acute Dementia Service under the Arts Care Artist in Residence Programme, February 2025

- Floral Harmonies Patient Workshop
- Floral Harmonies Mobile Privacy Screens

Introduction: **Why Arts in Health?**

At Belfast Trust, our Arts in Health programme aims to enhance the experiences of patients, service users, families and communities. We also support staff and volunteers in delivering compassionate creative care. We believe in the power of the arts to lift spirits, bring joy, and empower individuals in their recovery, rehabilitation, and wellbeing.

Alongside clinical excellence, arts engagement can accelerate recovery, promote disease prevention and improve overall wellbeing. It enriches healthcare environments, supports staff retention and development, and fosters meaningful engagement with service users. Arts in Health broadens our understanding of wellness and explores how the Trust can support holistic health.

The National Centre for Creative Health's *Creative Health Review (2023)* was delivered in partnership with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing. It highlights the potential for creative health to help tackle pressing issues in health and social care and more widely, with three key messages:

- Creative health is fundamental to a healthy and prosperous society, and its benefits should be available and accessible to all.
- Creative health should form an integral part of a 21st century Health and Social Care system – one that is holistic, person-centred, and which focuses on reducing inequalities and supporting people to live well for longer.
- Creating the conditions for creative health to flourish requires a joined-up, whole system approach incorporating health systems, local authorities, schools, and the cultural and the voluntary and community sectors.

This builds on the 2017 report Creative Health: *The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*, published by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing which offered compelling evidence of the benefits of arts engagement. These include supporting self-management and recovery; addressing obesogenic environments; improving mental health; promoting healthier ageing; and reducing health inequalities. *CREATIVE CARE: Arts in Health Strategy 2026–2030* sets out to embed a creative health approach across Belfast Trust.



Strategic Framework

Vision

- Better health and wellbeing through access to the arts and heritage for all who come into contact with Belfast Trust

Aims

- To raise awareness of the role that the arts can play in prevention, healing, health and wellbeing
- To integrate the arts into health and social care
- To make greater use of the arts to promote health and wellbeing and engage with communities

Values

- We will ensure best practice and ongoing improvement through continual learning and development of our service

Strategic objectives

- Access to the arts for all
- Partnership workshop for Arts in Health
- Protecting our art and heritage
- Demonstrating the value



Creative Staff Wellbeing Programme: RVH Endocrinology and MDT Foot Team Day Photo supported by Belfast Trust Charitable Funds, June 2025

Strategic Objective No. 1

Access to the arts for all

We will:

- Use evidence based and innovative creative practice to engage with a range of groups and individuals
- Showcase arts in health through events, launches, exhibitions, publications and performances
- Use a variety of art forms to increase participation in arts in health and support wellbeing including visual arts, dance, music and digital arts
- Prioritise staff health and wellbeing through a programme of arts in health activity
- Enable, educate and empower Trust staff to access arts in health through training and capacity building initiatives
- Be informed by lived experience
- Work to include plans for integrated art and new commissions within new build projects and refurbishments



Strategic Objective No. 2

Partnership working for Arts in Health

We will:

- Lead the development of internal networks, which will empower staff to share learning and good practice in arts in health
- Develop external networks and connections with a range of creative stakeholders
- Strengthen partnerships to increase access to funding for arts in health activity
- Continue to advocate the development of a regional strategic approach to arts in health



Arts Care Summer Concert: Members of the ETC Club Dance Group perform for service users from Older People's Services, Learning Disability and Mental Health, as part of the Arts Care Summer Concert of music and dance at Knockbracken Hall, June 2025

Strategic Objective No. 3

Protecting our art and heritage

We will:

- Recognise healthcare as a vital part of Belfast's heritage by working with partners to preserve and provide access to Belfast Trust's collections
- Develop policies and procedures for collections management, to include our art collection, physical and cultural heritage, built heritage and archives
- Value, share and celebrate our heritage through engagement with staff, service users and communities
- Showcase and use our collections to support the wellbeing of our staff and those in our care



Strategic Objective No. 4

Demonstrating the value

We will:

- Gather qualitative and quantitative data on arts in health activity
- Utilise evidence on the benefits of arts in health to promote best practice
- Share our evidence to lead the development of arts in health activity within the Trust
- Recognise leaders and champions of arts in health and empower them to share their experience and inspire others



Live Music Now: Residents of Orchardville House enjoying a workshop with Live Music Now NI musicians, July 2025

Supporting the delivery of our strategy – our enablers

To enable the Trust to deliver against the key strategic objectives, we will put in place key enablers.

We will:

- Work to increase access to resources for use in arts in health activities, including people, programmes, materials, equipment and information
- Develop and implement a communications plan
- Increase access to Belfast Trust spaces to support the delivery of arts in health activities
- Use Information Technology, digital arts and new technologies to improve the management, delivery and accessibility of the Arts in Health programme
- Review our strategy annually, to offer the flexibility to adapt to unforeseen challenges and identify opportunities for improvement



Glossary

- **Arts:** In healthcare, this typically includes visual arts, music, dance, writing, poetry, photography, film, animation, drama, and clowning - but may extend to many other forms.
- **Artists:** Creators working in any of the art forms listed above.
- **Artist in Residence:** Within Belfast Trust, this refers to the Arts Care Artist in Residence Programme. These artists facilitate creative participation and produce new work with individuals and groups.
- **Collections:** A curated and managed group of artworks, heritage items or documents, preserved for an agreed purpose i.e. improving the healthcare environment and providing access to Belfast Trust's heritage.
- **Integrated Art:** Refers to artistic elements that are incorporated into a building's design from its planning stages, where the art is not a separate addition at a later stage.



Snowdrop Group
Exhibition: Baby Loss
Awareness Week at
Belfast Exposed Gallery,
in partnership with Royal
Jubilee Maternity Services
and Arts Care NI,
October 2023

Governance, Acknowledgements and Contact Information

Arts Steering Group Membership

Director, Planning, Performance and Informatics (Chair)
Involvement and Community Development
Public Health
Estates
Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital
Occupational Therapy
Learning Disability Day Opportunities
Arts Care NI
Capital Development
Child and Family Care

Heritage, Environment and Archives Team Membership

Director, Planning, Performance and Informatics (Chair)
Involvement and Community Development
Public Health
Estates
Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital
Occupational Therapy
Independent Members

Thanks to all those who participated in the consultation activity to support the development of this strategy. Thanks also to the artists, musicians, dancers, creative facilitators, participants, staff and partners who support the Arts in Health Programme to bring colour and creativity to the healthcare environment.

Contacts and further information:



For BHSCT staff



For external readers

Alternatively contact
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Tel 028 9504 5476



