

# ARTS IN HEALTH

## IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF VETERANS AND OLDER AMERICANS THROUGH THE ARTS

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### ACTION NEEDED

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We urge Congress to:

- Support H.R. 4063, the Jason Simcakoski PROMISE Act, sponsored by Rep. Bilirakis (R-FL), to improve access to evidence-based complementary alternative treatments for veterans, including creative arts therapies.
- Enact S. 192, the Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act of 2015, sponsored by Sen. Alexander (R-TN), which passed in the Senate in July 2015 and was referred to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.

*"Arts in Health" includes the professional creative arts therapies disciplines of art therapy, music therapy, dance/movement therapy, drama therapy, and biblio/poetry therapy, all of which are nationally board certified therapies with licensure in selected states, as well as artist-directed applications of visual, literary and performing arts, and design. These creative arts therapists and community artists work together to provide quality, cost-effective services within a wide variety of healthcare and community settings.*

### BACKGROUND

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Key aspects of H.R. 4063 that reference access to complementary alternative treatment were previously a part of H.R. 2256, the Veterans Information Modernization Act, which passed the House in July 2015. Unfortunately, unrelated sections within H.R. 2256 limit successful legislative progress in the Senate and with the Administration. H.R. 4063 offers improved focus on expansion of research, education, and delivery of complementary and integrative health services to veterans.

Today, creative arts therapists and community artists work in diverse settings across a wide spectrum of populations, assisting people through all life stages. Besides private for-profit and nonprofit health facilities, settings for this work include, but are not limited to, hospice programs, long-term care facilities, mental health programs, schools, rehabilitation treatment centers, special needs camps, disaster response teams, psychiatric forensic units, veterans' facilities, prisons, community centers, wellness programs, and military bases.

Despite strong historical beginnings in veterans hospitals during World War II, and inclusion in federal programs and research grant awards over many years through agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services, there remains a need to expand opportunities for creative arts therapies and artist-directed programs so that more Americans can access these services in their communities.

Economic analyses, cost studies, and clinical research show a positive trend in the use of creative arts therapies and their impact on containing healthcare costs and facilitating functional outcomes achievement. Creative arts therapies and artist-directed programs have the potential to positively impact the healthcare spending concerns, quality of care issues, and healthcare needs of veterans and older adults currently facing our nation.

An investment in "Arts in Health" is an investment in America's health.

### TALKING POINTS

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#### **Complementary, Alternative, and Integrative Health Interventions Help Veterans**

- H.R.4063, the Jason Simcakoski PROMISE Act, sponsored by Rep. Bilirakis (R-FL), would expand research and education on and delivery of complementary and integrative health to veterans and develop a pilot program on integration of complementary alternative medicines and related issues for veterans and family members of veterans.

- Creative arts therapies interventions have been shown to be effective for relieving symptoms related to insomnia, anxiety, pain, and issues associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- Artist-directed programs create opportunities for service members and their families to spend quality time with one another while being celebrated and supported by local arts organizations. These programs provide meaningful opportunities for families to access affordable cultural and educational experiences.
- Creative arts therapies and artist-directed programs and services within Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals and on military bases will provide increased access to affordable, outcomes-based healthcare and successful treatment options for veterans and military personnel who do not respond to traditional interventions.

### **Program Examples**

#### **Museum of Glass: Healing with Fire (Tacoma, WA)**

In 2013, Museum of Glass introduced Hot Shop Heroes: Healing with Fire. This partnership with the Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB) at Joint Base Lewis-McChord serves soldiers with physical and mental injuries. From one soldier, "This class awakened a previously hidden joy in creating things by hand. I was able to actually feel something other than numb."

#### **The NEA Military Healing Arts Partnership (Bethesda, MD and Fort Belvoir, VA)**

Since November 2011, programs that include art therapy, music therapy, and therapeutic writing have reached more than 1,000 service members at the National Intrepid Center of Excellence at Walter Reed Bethesda and 128 service members at Fort Belvoir Community Hospital Brain Wellness Center in Virginia through this NEA-supported partnership.

## **Creative Arts Therapies and Artist-Directed Programs Support Healthy Aging**

- S. 192 reauthorizes funding for support services, including creative arts therapies; directs funding for behavioral health programs; and requires the Administration on Aging to focus on health and welfare needs of older individuals, which could increase access to creative arts therapies and artist-directed programs.
- S. 192 would provide opportunities for states and area agencies on aging to increase access to support services and health promotion services for older individuals.
- Research demonstrates the following positive outcomes when creative arts therapies and artist-directed programs are integrated into medical treatment and community prevention and wellness programs:
  - Improved cognitive functioning
  - Reduced reports of pain and anxiety related to illness and invasive treatment
  - Improvements in quality of life
  - Reduced levels of depression and agitation
  - Decreased need for use of sedatives during medical procedures
  - Reduced lengths of hospital stays
  - Decreased use of medical interventions covered by Medicare among the aging
- Accessibility to and active participation in the arts provides lifelong learning opportunities and increases the quality of life across the lifespan.
- Community-based cultural programs for older adults reveal positive impacts on maintaining independence and reducing dependency, which appear to reduce risk factors that drive the need for long-term care.

*Research citations and program examples are available in the Arts in Health Field-at-a-Glance document [online](#).*