

CULTURE AND HEALTH.

Building Resilient Cross-Sectoral Cooperation in Latvia

Rīko

Saldus



Atbalsta

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On October 15, an international conference “Culture and Health: Building Resilient Cross-Sectoral Cooperation in Latvia” took place at the Cēsis Concert Hall and online. The conference brought together policymakers, researchers, practitioners from the cultural, health, and social sectors, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations.

The conference was organized by the municipalities of Cēsis and Saldus, marking the conclusion in Latvia of the Interreg project “Arts on Prescription (AoP) in the Baltic Sea Region 2023–2025.” The Arts on Prescription model was originally developed in the United Kingdom to enable health and social care professionals to refer individuals to cultural and artistic activities that support health and well-being. Within the project, this approach was adapted to the Baltic Sea context, resulting in the creation of the AoP Baltic Model. The conference aimed not only to present the project’s outcomes but also to foster lasting and sustainable collaboration between the culture and health sectors in Latvia.

The conference concluded with a panel discussion exploring key challenges and next steps to strengthen culture–health collaboration in Latvia.

Members of the panel discussion

Lāsma Krastiņa-Sidorenko,

Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia,
Head of the Creative Industries Division

Svens Henkuzens,

Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia, Deputy State Secretary for Health Policy

Anda Laķe,

Latvian Academy of Culture, Head of the Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies

Anda Ķīvīte-Urtāne,

Rīga Stradiņš University, Director of the Institute of Public Health

Moderator: Marta Krivade, World Health Organization in Latvia

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Summary of Challenges and Next Steps following the Panel Discussion “The Potential and Visions for Cooperation between the Culture and Health Sectors in Latvia”

1.

Lack of personal experience hinders understanding of evidence

Research (WHO 2019, EC 2023) confirms the positive impact of culture on health, but Latvia has yet to take this into account in health and cultural policy-making. Patients often expect a “medicine prescription” rather than a “referral to cultural activities,” and decision-makers — members of Parliament — often have not personally experienced the therapeutic power of culture and health collaboration. There is a lack of personal experience and stories that would make the data heard.

What can be done?

- Develop initiatives in which culture and health professionals jointly implement programmes and document results (for example, in the Cēsis and Saldus municipalities).
- Use these projects as tangible evidence for society and policymakers.
- Develop quality criteria that help distinguish cultural activities with healing potential from those intended only for entertainment or socializing, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of culture and health practices.

2.

Lack of policy documents and decision-making

The role of culture in promoting health is not reflected in policy documents, which hinders structured cooperation between sectors.

What can be done?

- Include the culture and health dimension in existing policy documents (for example, in the upcoming *Public Health Guidelines* or the *Mental Health and Addiction Reduction Plan*).
- Regularly inform existing cross-sectoral advisory councils about culture and health projects and their outcomes so that experiences, knowledge, and results can be shared beyond individual sectors.

3.

Insufficient inter-institutional cooperation and coordination

The health and culture sectors, municipalities and state institutions, medical and cultural organizations in Latvia operate largely in isolation from one another. They lack coordination, a holistic approach, and the necessary experience or confidence in the success of cross-sector collaboration.

What can be done?

- Promote capacity building for professionals, for instance through the professional development course “Culture and Health: Managing Cross-Sector Initiatives” created by the Latvian Academy of Culture and Rīga Stradiņš University in collaboration with other Baltic universities.
- Fund coordination and administrative roles between ministries, municipalities, and service providers to develop best practice examples and foster the exchange of experience.