



CANADIAN DEMOGRAPHICS ARE SHIFTING: OLDER ADULTS MAKE UP THE FASTEST GROWING AGE GROUP ¹



In 2011
~5.0 million
Canadians were
65+ years of age



By 2036
~10.4 million
Canadians will be
65+ years of age

OVER THE LAST 40 YEARS, THERE HAVE BEEN TWO BIG SHIFTS IN THE WAY THAT AGING IS VIEWED ²

INEVITABLE DECLINE

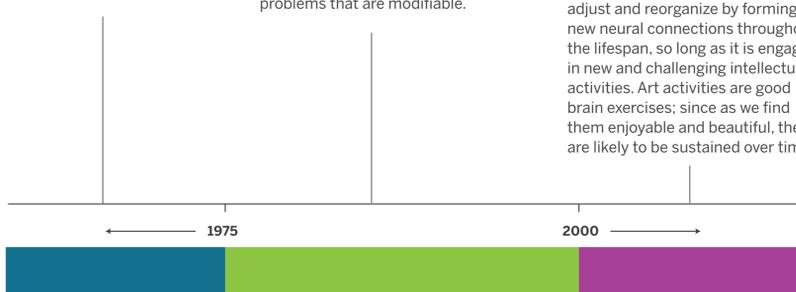
Aging viewed as a series of decremental changes toward senility.

AGE-ASSOCIATED MODIFIABLE DISORDERS

Decrements no longer seen as normal, but as age-associated problems that are modifiable.

THE CREATIVE AGE

There is potential beyond problems in the second half of life! It is now recognized that the brain can adjust and reorganize by forming new neural connections throughout the lifespan, so long as it is engaged in new and challenging intellectual activities. Art activities are good brain exercises; since as we find them enjoyable and beautiful, they are likely to be sustained over time.



WHAT IS CREATIVE AGING?



“Creative Aging is about possibilities, freeing ourselves of limiting beliefs about aging and embracing the reality that individuals continue to grow, learn and contribute to their communities throughout the life journey.”

Pat Spadafora, Sheridan Centre for Elder Research, Sheridan College



“The practice of engaging older adults in participatory, professionally-run arts programs with a focus on social engagement and skills mastery. This movement is about providing opportunity for meaningful creative expression through visual, literary and performing arts workshops; it is not about making macaroni necklaces.”

The Creative Aging Toolkit for Public Libraries, Lifetime Arts, Inc.

THE LANDMARK CREATIVE AGING STUDY

In the Creativity and Aging Study ³ 166 people ages 65-103 (average age 80) were split into two groups, those who would carry on life as usual and those who would attend weekly, professionally facilitated chorale groups.

After two years, compared to the control group, those attending chorale groups had:



Less medication use



Fewer doctors visits



Less loneliness



Increased activity levels



Better self-reported physical health



Better morale

This study illustrates that community-based professionally run arts programs have real health prevention and promotion effects, an impact on maintaining independence and reducing dependency; thereby reducing the risk factors that necessitate long term care. ³

MECHANISMS THOUGHT TO EXPLAIN THESE RESULTS INCLUDE: ⁴

SENSE OF CONTROL

positive health outcomes are associated with experiencing a sense of mastery

INFLUENCE OF THE MIND ON BODY

positive feelings associated with a sense of control can trigger a boosted immune response

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

social connectivity is a widely recognized social determinant of health

BRAIN PLASTICITY

our brains can adapt and form new synapses between cells through creatively challenging ourselves in a sustained manner

CREATIVE AGING RESEARCH

Evidence reviews ^{5,6} suggest that professionally led participatory arts programs (including music, singing, drama, visual arts, dance, storytelling, festivals & mixed art forms) with people over age 60 can have a variety of health outcomes including:



MENTAL & EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Decreased depression and anxiety; improved self confidence, self-esteem, positive identity, etc.



COGNITIVE HEALTH

Improved memory, problem solving, recall and recognition, processing speed, verbal fluency, etc.



PHYSICAL HEALTH

Increased daily activity, cardio-vascular health, joint mobility, breath control, balance, etc.



SOCIAL HEALTH

Social connectivity, sense of giving back to community, addresses internal and external age discrimination, improves communication, etc.

Note: These outcomes represent trends across multiple studies that used different art modalities and measured different effects. Caution should be taken when generalizing the results of one study to another art modality or population.

It's never too late to tap into your creativity. Get artsy, for the health of it, Canada!



ARTS HEALTH NETWORK CANADA

Arts Health Network Canada is the primary national arts and health knowledge sharing, networking and capacity building hub, helping to promote and facilitate the development and growth of arts and health initiatives across Canada. Learn more at artshealthnetwork.ca

1. Government of Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, Canadians in Context-Aging Population.
2. Cohen, G. Research on Creativity and Aging: The Positive Impact of the Arts on Health and Illness. Generations, 2006;30(1), 7-15.
3. Cohen GD, Perlestein S, Chapline J, Kelly J, Firth KM, Simmens S. The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on the Physical Health, Mental Health, and Social Functioning of Older Adults—2-Year Results. Journal of Aging, Humanities and the Arts. 2007;1(1-2):5-22
4. Cohen, G. New theories and research findings on the positive influence of music and art on health with ageing. Arts & Health. 2009; 1(1):48-63.
5. Castora-Binkley M, Noelker L, Prohaska T, et al. Impact of Arts Participation on Health Outcomes for Older Adults. Journal of Aging, Humanities and the Arts. 2010;4(4):352-367.
6. An Evidence Review of the Impact of Participatory Arts on Older People. Mental Health Foundation – Edinburgh, 2011.