

Study update, July 2021

The cultural sector, older people, well-being and social prescribing

Welcome to our July 2021 update. This document informs our project partners, public contributors and other interested parties about our progress on the research.



A short reminder about our research:

Cultural institutions as social prescribing venues to improve older people's wellbeing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: What works, for whom, in what circumstances and why?

This is the question our research seeks to answer. The study is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Where are we in progressing the research?

- We are writing up results from our rapid realist review for publication in a journal. [We have produced a blog on this review, which summarises this work.](#)
- We have been interviewing older people and staff from the cultural sector. Further details below.
- We invited link workers to complete a questionnaire that explored their views and experiences of drawing on the cultural sector as part of social prescribing. We are in the process of analysing this information. Further details below.
- We have completed an interim summary document, which highlights key findings from the research to date. [This has been posted on our website \(.pdf\).](#)

Interviews with older people and cultural sector staff

We have been conducting interviews with older people (aged 60+ years) to understand what may help or hinder them from using cultural organisations, such as curated gardens, libraries and museums, for well-being, especially in the context of COVID-19.

At the same time, we are conducting interviews with cultural sector staff to explore challenges and potential solutions for providing social prescribing opportunities, particularly in curated gardens, libraries and museums, to older people in the context of COVID-19. So far, we have interviewed 27 older people and 25 cultural sector staff.

Online questionnaire completed by link workers

In April 2021, we sent out an online questionnaire for link workers to answer. It asked them a range of questions on their use of the cultural sector (or not) as part of social prescribing, especially for older people. It included questions about how things may have changed in this respect because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recruited respondents through the Social Prescribing Network (www.socialprescribingnetwork.com) and the National Association of Link Workers (www.nalw.org.uk).

During April and May, when the questionnaire was open for completion, 148 link workers from across the UK filled it out. The information they provided will help us to develop our programme theory for the research. A programme theory is a proposition (often in the form of a model or diagram) of how an intervention (in this case the cultural sector through social prescribing pathways) is thought to work, under what conditions and for whom (we are particularly interested in older people, aged 60 years and above).

[We have written a blog on this questionnaire](#)

Meetings with our public contributors

As part of this project, we ran a 'cultural conversation' group composed of six members of the public. They have met with us on three occasions during the study. We have been able to share with them our work and have received useful feedback from them on it.

At our most recent meetings with this group, we discussed some of the issues being raised during interviews with older people and cultural sector staff. We then asked them to comment on five key points to come from this part of the study:

1. The balance between social prescribing offers in the cultural sector being structured compared to having freedom to explore and discover;
2. The idea of attending cultural venues or activities (online or in person) with a buddy and what characteristics this individual would need to exhibit;
3. How older people may be made to feel by barriers like lack of toilets, lack of seating or inability to use technology when trying to access cultural-based social prescribing offers;
4. The importance of cafes as spaces for comfort and conviviality in gardens and libraries, and how they may differ to other cafes on the high street;
5. How to make older people who are unaccustomed to using the cultural sector feel that these venues or offers are 'for them'.

Stay in touch

If you would like any more information about this project, please see our [project page](#) or do not hesitate to contact:

- Dr. Stephanie Tierney stephanie.tierney@phc.ox.ac.uk
- Prof. Kamal R. Mahtani kamal.mahtani@phc.ox.ac.uk

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and not necessarily those of their host institution, organisations mentioned or the study's funder.