



what works wellbeing

what music and singing interventions work to improve wellbeing of adults living with diagnosed conditions or dementia? This briefing looks at all the available evidence to support better policy.



music, singing and wellbeing

in adults with diagnosed conditions or dementia

There is a lot of existing evidence looking at the impact of music and singing where the focus is on clinical outcomes such as pain management, coping with hospitalisation, coping with symptoms and managing symptoms of dementia.

This new evidence focuses on wellbeing for those living with diagnosed conditions or dementia. Specifically, it focuses on self-reported measures of quality of life; life satisfaction; and anxiety or depression.



what evidence did we find?

There are three types of evidence:



strong - we can be confident that there is an impact in the stated group and context.



promising - which we need to investigate further.



initial - there may be an effect, which we need to investigate further.

Strong, promising and initial evidence refer to high quality, medium quality and low quality evidence as per GRADE and CERQual guidance. For further information on these classifications, please see the Centre's [Guide to Evidence Review Methods](#).

What were the general benefits of singing for people living with diagnosed conditions or dementia?

Participants report a wide range of wellbeing benefits from singing including:



relaxation, reduction in anxiety, spiritual uplifting and improvements in mood, emotional wellbeing, confidence, enjoyment and a 'feel good factor'



participation in a music project can raise participants' awareness of the significance of music in their life. This in turn can have a positive effect on awareness of health and quality of life and can encourage behaviour change.



what evidence did we find? (cont.)

in hospice and hospitals



- ③ Brief music therapy is an effective intervention to support wellbeing of palliative care patients in hospital settings.

- ① Music therapy can contribute to improved spiritual wellbeing in hospice patients

in higher education settings



- ③ Targeted, culturally relevant music interventions can decrease depression in nursing students in a college environment.

- ① Music therapy can alleviate anxiety in undergraduate students.

in residential and community settings



- ③ Targeted, culturally relevant music and singing interventions can enhance mental wellbeing and decrease depression in older people with chronic conditions in residential and community settings.

- ① Participation in individual personalised music listening sessions can reduce anxiety and/or depression in nursing home residents with dementia and that listening to music may enhance overall wellbeing for adults with dementia.

- ① Music therapy has a positive effect on mood in post-stroke patients and may be beneficial for mood improvement with stroke.

- ① Participation in extended (12 months) community singing programmes can improve quality of life and social and emotional wellbeing in adults living with chronic conditions.

- ① Participation in group drumming can support participants dealing with symptoms of PTSD.

- ① Singing classes are associated with improvements in wellbeing in patients with COPD.

how did we gather this evidence?

This briefing is based on a systematic review. This uses empirical research to assess the relationship between non-clinical music and singing interventions with subjective wellbeing published between 1996 and 2016.

Types of studies

We included reports that assessed the relationship between music and singing interventions with subjective wellbeing. This included empirical research: either quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods outcomes or process evaluations, published from 1996 to June 2016.

We also included systematic reviews published between 2010 and 2016.

Types of interventions

We focused on participatory music or singing interventions including listening and performing.

fill the evidence gaps



Community organisations and charities running music and singing programmes need standardised evaluations to help to identify and replicate the characteristics of successful projects.

Do you want to be a pioneer? Do you have an evaluation which we should know about?

Email it to evidence@whatworkswellbeing.org

This includes music therapy offered to enhance wellbeing but excludes clinical treatment.

Types of outcome measure

In order to be included, studies needed to measure subjective wellbeing using any recognised method or measure.

Assessment of quality of included studies

We used the quality checklists for quantitative and qualitative studies detailed in the What Works Centre for Wellbeing methods guide, and for economic evaluations (The Drummond Checklist, 1996) to assess the methodological quality of the included studies.



how can we turn this evidence into action?

Music and singing activities can enhance and maintain subjective wellbeing in adults with diagnosed conditions. Wellbeing is important as a goal in itself, for people to feel satisfied with their lives and experience. However, higher levels of wellbeing have also been associated with better health, work performance and social contribution.

Commonly identified priorities for local authorities

Support those with long term conditions
 Making communities a better place for people with dementia and their carers
 Addressing mental health and the wider determinants of health
 Living well and ageing well
 A good quality of life for older people
 Supporting carers

1 Keep doing what you do well

There is promising evidence to support the work of community groups, local authorities, care homes and others who are already using culturally relevant, targeted music and singing interventions to enhance wellbeing and decrease depression - in older people with chronic conditions in residential and community settings.

Stronger evidence supports appropriate music interventions supporting the wellbeing of palliative care patients, and to decrease depression in nursing students in a college environment.

decisions of where best to allocate their money and time.

2 Developing the evidence: innovative funders in particular can help to inform future decisions

Supporting initiatives with initial and promising evidence and providing support to evaluate their impacts will be essential to develop the evidence base. Initial evidence on the benefits of listening to music for those with dementia, or, for example, the benefits of drumming for PTSD, singing classes for patients with COPD – can all be strengthened.

We can better understand what works, in what contexts, for whom, with standardised reporting of impacts as well as characteristics and challenges. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing is developing a set of tools for practitioners and community groups' activities and provide an idea where money may best be spent.

2 But we need to find out more

How large are these benefits compared to other activities? How much does this cost compared to others?

We need to know more, to be able to fully support local authorities, funders and organisations with the

read more from this series



This briefing note is part of a suite of publications looking at the impacts of music and singing interventions on different populations.

- Music and singing for wellbeing in:
 1 healthy adults
 2 adults with diagnosed conditions or dementia
 systematic reviews and case study
- Supporting analysis of datasets
- Grey literature review: music, singing and wellbeing

whatworkswellbeing.org/music-singing



what works
wellbeing

www.whatworkswellbeing.org

@whatworksWB

We are an independent organisation set up to produce robust, relevant and accessible evidence on wellbeing. We work with individuals, communities, businesses and government, to enable them to use this evidence make decisions and take action to improve wellbeing.

The Centre is supported by the ESRC and partners to produce evidence on wellbeing in four areas: work and learning; culture and sport; community; and cross-cutting capabilities in definitions, evaluation, determinants and effects.



Licensed under Creative Commons: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)