

THE IMPACT OF ARTS AND CULTURE

# AGENDA:

**AGING**

greater  
philadelphia cultural  
 ALLIANCE

## SUMMARY

# Culture is key to keeping people engaged and inspired through the entire journey of life.

For adults over 50, arts and culture can dramatically reduce the risk of developing depression, decrease the possibility of dementia through volunteer engagement and improve mental and emotional processing power.

The Agenda series highlights existing research and resources that demonstrate the relevance and impact of arts and culture in Greater Philadelphia, throughout the Commonwealth and across the country.



*Photograph courtesy of  
Brandywine River Museum of Art*

## IMPACT: REDUCING DEPRESSION

A recent major study shows the impact of arts and culture engagement on older adults: in the more than 2,100 participants 50 years and older, monthly engagement in cultural experiences—including theater, opera, art galleries, cinema, exhibitions, museums and concerts—reduces the risk of developing depression by a staggering 48%. Even less regular attendance, every few months, lowers the risk of depression by 32%.<sup>1</sup>



Photograph courtesy of the  
Museum of the American Revolution

Regularly engaging  
with arts and culture  
**reduces risk of  
depression by**

**48%**

in older adults

**The emotional response to cultural activities such as music involves brain regions critical to the processing of positive emotions and reward.<sup>2</sup>**

Cultural activities also require cognitive and perceptual engagement associated with lower levels of depression,<sup>3</sup> and cultural engagement has been found to support coping behaviors in the face of physical health challenges.<sup>4</sup>

1 Fancourt, D., Tymoszuk, U., *Cultural Engagement and Incident Depression in Older Adults: Evidence from the English Longitudinal Study of Aging.*

2 Koelsch, S., *Toward a Neural Basis of Music Perception – a Review and Updated Model.*

3 Camic, P.M., Chatterjee, H.J., *Museums and Art Galleries as Partners for Public Health Interventions.*

4 Hutchinson, S.L., et al., *Leisure as a Coping Resource: Variations in Coping with Traumatic Injury and Illness.*

**Regular volunteer work** – like that done in gardens, museums and other arts and culture organizations – **makes older adults nearly 2.5 times less likely to experience dementia.**



Photograph courtesy of Brandywine River Museum of Art

## IMPACT: ENGAGING MENTALLY & SOCIALLY

**The Brandywine River Museum of Art's workforce of more than 300 volunteers** not only contributes to the work of the organization; it also gives seniors routine, regular social connection and physical activity. The community benefits from the impact of seniors who are economically more active as a result of their volunteer engagement.

Recent studies show that for adults over 65, active volunteer work combines clear structure, collective purpose and increases in cognitive, social and physical activity that improves brain function and reduces the risk of dementia. **Seniors who volunteer continuously (once a month or more) are significantly less likely to need anti-dementia treatment and have fewer cognitive complaints** than seniors who volunteer occasionally or do not volunteer their time at all.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Griep Y., *Can Volunteering in Later Life Reduce the Risk of Dementia? A 5-Year Longitudinal Study Among Volunteering and Non-Volunteering Retired Seniors.*

## IMPACT: TRAINING THE MIND

**The Curtis Institute of Music's Creative Expression Through Music program**, offered with the Penn Memory Center, gives seniors with Alzheimer's disease a weekly opportunity to make and share music and tell stories in a safe space, helping 50+ seniors and family members feel "happier, lighter and more at-ease" since the program's inception. The curriculum is designed to allow participants to process negative emotions and increase and embrace positive emotions through music creation, community-building exercises and informal interactions with professional musicians and fellow patients.

**A 2019 study on the impact of art training on older adults shows a direct connection between consistent music training and the ability to modulate emotions like those experienced by the Penn Memory Center participants.** Music and visual art training leads to dynamic improvements in neuroplasticity among seniors, helping maintain positive emotional and behavioral responses twice as long as traditional cognitive therapy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Alain, C., et al., *Music and Visual Art Training Modulate Brain Activity in Older Adults*.



Photograph by Eric Sucar, courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Communications

## RESEARCH

# ART MAKES THE DIFFERENCE:

As we age, we benefit from engaging in artistic activity across the creative spectrum.



### DANCING

reduces fall risks,  
strengthens muscles  
and improves mobility<sup>1</sup>

### GARDENING & HORTICULTURE

reduce stress and encourage  
healthier eating<sup>4</sup>

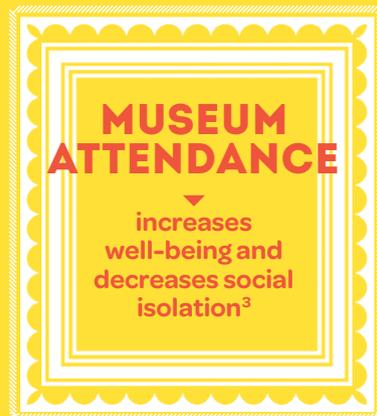
### POTTERY & JEWELRY MAKING

sharpen mental  
acuity and  
maintain manual  
flexibility<sup>2</sup>



### CHORAL SINGING

reduces loneliness,  
anxiety and depression<sup>5</sup>



### MUSEUM ATTENDANCE

increases  
well-being and  
decreases social  
isolation<sup>3</sup>

### POETRY

improves vocabulary  
and word usage among  
adults with dementia<sup>6</sup>

**MORE INFORMATION, CITATIONS + RESOURCES ► [PHILACULTURE.ORG/AGING](https://philaculture.org/aging)**

1 Gratton, L. & Scott, A., *The 100 Year Life*.

2 Fancourt, D., Tymoszuk, U., *Cultural Engagement and Incident Depression in Older Adults: Evidence from the English Longitudinal Study of Aging*.

3 Chatterjee, H., et al., *Museopathy: Exploring the Healing Potential of Handling Museum Objects*.

4 Buck, D., *Gardens and Health: Implications for Policy and Practice*.

5 Daykin, N., et al., *Music, Singing and Wellbeing in Healthy Adults*.

6 Coles, P., *The Manchester Hospital Arts Project*.

# AGENDA BY THE NUMBERS

**10,000 AMERICANS  
TURN 65 EVERY DAY**

**WOMEN 85 YEARS OF AGE  
AND OLDER ARE THE FASTEST  
GROWING AGE GROUP  
IN THE UNITED STATES**

**HALF OF THE PEOPLE  
BORN TODAY CAN EXPECT  
TO LIVE TO 100 YEARS OLD**

**ADULTS OVER 50 MAKE UP  
MORE THAN 61% OF  
RECENT ELECTION TURNOUT**

**PENNSYLVANIA HAS THE  
2ND HIGHEST PERCENTAGE  
OF SENIORS AT 16%**

## PROJECT PARTNERS



**BRANDYWINE  
CONSERVANCY &  
MUSEUM OF ART**



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 **Mayor's Commission on Aging**

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*Photograph courtesy of the Museum of the American Revolution*

*FRONT PANEL: Photograph by Dominic Mercier, courtesy of Fleisher Art Memorial*

