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Arts and culture on prescription

Submission date
29/07/2025

Recruitment status
Recruiting

Registration date
19/09/2025

Overall study status
Ongoing

Last Edited
07/10/2025

Condition category
Other

[X] Prospectively registered
[X] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[ ] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
This study is exploring how cultural activities—like art workshops, music, dance, and theater—can support the health and well-being of older adults. The idea is to see whether taking part in these kinds of activities can help people feel better physically, mentally, and socially. Researchers want to find out if this approach could become a regular part of healthcare for older people.

Who can participate?
The study is open to people aged 65 and over who live in the Lugano area and have long-term health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, chronic lung disease (COPD), or liver disease. People who are still working, have severe dementia or serious mobility issues, or who can't take part in cultural activities won't be able to join.

What does the study involve?
Participants will be split into two groups. Most will join the main group and take part in cultural activities like painting, music, photography, or theatre for six months. A smaller group will receive a free ticket to a cultural event like a museum or concert. Everyone will have health checks and fill out questionnaires at the start, after six months, and again after a year. A link worker will help match each person to the right activities for them.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Taking part could help improve your mood, health, and sense of connection with others. There are no major risks expected, but some people might find it tiring or challenging to take part in regular activities. The team will support participants throughout the study.

Where is the study run from?
The study is based in the municipality of Lugano, Switzerland.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

Who is funding the study?
IBSA Foundation (Switzerland)

Who is the main contact?
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Contact information

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Public, Scientific, Principal investigator

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
2025-01138

Study information

Scientific Title
Arts and culture on prescription. The impact of cultural prescription on the health of the elderly population living in the Lugano municipality – A pilot project.

Study objectives
Primary objective: Explore programme feasibility and acceptability by assessing programme uptake, attendance rates, reasons for non-attendance, and barriers to engagement.
Secondary objectives: Test whether there is any indication of an improvement in health orientation; compare health orientation and health outcomes of those participating in the programme versus the control group.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 15/07/2025, Ethics Committee of the Canton of Ticino (Via Orico 5, Bellinzona, 6501, Switzerland; +41 91 814 30 57; dss-ce@ti.ch), ref: 2025-01138

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Double-arm feasibility study with a control group incorporating baseline and post-intervention assessments

Study type(s)
Quality of life, Efficacy

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Elderly health

Interventions
A link worker from the Città di Lugano will contact participants to provide detailed information about the available cultural offerings and the research procedure. The link worker will work closely with participants to understand their personal preferences and interests, ensuring that the selected cultural activities align with their tastes and needs. By tailoring the experience to each participant, the link worker will help identify the most appropriate events or activities that can enhance their engagement and overall well-being, while also supporting the goals of the study.

Participants will receive up to six sessions with their link worker, which is a pragmatic allocation based on trial feasibility, though in real-world practice, individuals may receive additional support if needed. Each session will last up to one hour and will be conducted in person, over the phone, or via video call, depending on participant preference and accessibility.

The control group will be offered a free ticket for a museum, concert or show.

All cultural activities will be fully funded, ensuring that financial barriers do not limit participation. The available activities are part of a curated set designed specifically for this program, including drawing, painting, music, photography, museotherapy, dance, and theater. Link workers will not have complete autonomy over referrals but will guide participants toward these pre-selected activities that align with the research framework. Every activity includes up to 25 sessions lasting 1-2 hours each per week. The sessions take place at LAC.

The total duration of follow-up for all study arms is 12 months. The randomisation process will be conducted using an online tool.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Uptake and feasibility of recruitment and research procedures measured using attendance records (reported by facilitators and self-report), GP screening logs, and rates of completion of follow-up assessments at baseline, 6 months, and 12 months

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Health orientation measured using the Health Orientation Scale (HOS) at baseline, 6 months, and 12 months
2. Mental health and well-being measured using the following validated questionnaires at baseline, 6 months, and 12 months:
2.1. Generalized Anxiety Disorder Assessment-7 (GAD-7)
2.2. Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)
2.3. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale
2.4. Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS-SF)
2.5. WHO-5 Well-Being Index
2.6. EQ-5D
2.7. Three-item UCLA Loneliness Scale
2.8. Medical Outcomes Study Social Support Survey
2.9. Bernese Sleep Health Questionnaire (BSHQ)
3. Physiological measures measured using clinical examination, wearable device (Garmin vívoactive® 5), and lab tests at baseline, 6 months, and 12 months:
3.1. Clinical: blood pressure, anthropometry, bioimpedance, Mini-Mental State Exam, and Clock Test
3.2. Wearable: heart rate variability (HRV), sleep quality, physical activity, stress (via smartwatch)
3.3. Laboratory: HbA1c, GGT, uric acid, ALAT, creatinine (blood); sodium, potassium, albumin, creatinine (urine)
4. Consultations and hospitalizations/emergency department accesses measured using a structured GP questionnaire (review of medical records) at 12 months

Completion date
31/03/2027

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Aged 65 or older
2. Resident in the Lugano municipality
3. Having access to a GP
4. Diagnosed > six months with one or more of the following pathological conditions: Obesity (BMI ≥30); Obstructive sleep apnea syndrome; Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus; Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) (GOLD 2 or higher); Uncontrolled hypertension; Uncontrolled gouty arthritis; Metabolic dysfunction and alcohol-related liver disease (MetALD)

Participant type(s)

Patient

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Senior

Lower age limit
65 Years

Upper age limit
99 Years

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
1. Individuals who are still in employment (as the study focuses on retirees). Those who undertake occasional freelance work or small consultancies (e.g., fewer than 8 hours per week) may still be eligible, provided their professional activities do not interfere with participation in the study
2. Individuals diagnosed with moderate to severe dementia or cognitive impairment that affects their ability to provide informed consent
3. Individuals with significant mobility restrictions that would prevent engagement in artistic and cultural activities (unless safe accommodations can be arranged)

Date of first enrolment
01/01/2026

Date of final enrolment
31/03/2027

Locations

Countries of recruitment
Switzerland

Study participating centre
Institute of Family Medicine, USI
Via Buffi 13
Lugano
Switzerland
6900

Sponsor information

Organisation
IBSA Foundation

Funder(s)

Funder type
Industry

Funder Name
IBSA Foundation

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be stored in a publicly available repository (https://osf.io/).

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Protocol file	version 1	02/06/2025	04/08/2025	No	No