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## Culture and art AID

### – A new project aiming to improve the mental wellbeing of citizens within the EU

As lead partner Odense Municipality in Denmark is excited to announce a new Interreg Baltic Sea project called: "Arts on Prescription in the Baltic Sea Region". The project aims to improve the health and mental well-being of citizens in the region through engagement in cultural activities. The project will be developed in collaboration with twelve other partners from seven countries within the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) from 2023-2025. The project has a total budget of 3.5 million euros financed 20% by the partners and 80% by the EU.

### Arts on Prescription

Arts on prescription is a concept that has already been tested on small scale programs in countries like the UK, Sweden, and Denmark. The idea is that people with poor mental wellbeing due to conditions such as depression, stress or anxiety, or people at risk of developing such conditions, receive a prescription, not for medicine or therapy but for taking part in regular art activities in group settings. This has been proven to have a positive effect on mental health.

### The challenge the project aims to solve

When planning and implementing such a programme, public authorities are challenged by the underdeveloped cooperation between the culture and health sector, lack of knowledge on how to set up, organise and evaluate a programme and lack of long-term financing.

The partners of the project "Arts on Prescription" will jointly develop a model programme that is based on state-of-the-art evidence and experience, but adaptable to different local conditions and public health systems. The programme will be piloted by local and regional public authorities in cooperation with cultural institutions and evaluated for its health effects, organisational set-up and economic benefits.

The partners who will be preparing and piloting the program, include three local public authorities (Saldus/LV, Cēsis/LV, Odense/DK) and three regional public authorities (West Pomerania/PL, Bremen/DE, and Norrbotten/SE), each of which cooperates with an institution in the field of culture and cultural education (Media Dizajn/PL, Bremer Volkshochschule/DE, Sunderby Folk High School/SE). This way, culture and health departments as well as NGOs take part in the project.

*"We look forward to working together with the partners to establish an online practitioner's guide that enables public authorities' staff to adapt and implement the Arts on Prescription programme, as well as developing information material to raise awareness and garner stakeholder support for Arts on Prescription. We believe that this project has the potential to make a significant impact on*

*the health and well-being of local communities and we are excited to work with our partners to make it a success.” – says Søren Windell, deputy mayor of The Department of Culture, Sport and Urban Development*

Both Cēsis Municipality and Odense Municipality have previous experience with Arts on Prescription. Cēsis Municipality recently initiated a project on "Museums on Prescription".

Odense Municipality is part of Cultural Region Funen, an association of nine municipalities on the island of Funen working with Arts on Prescription in the framework of a cultural agreement with the Danish Ministry of Culture in 2022-2023.

*“Cultural Region Funen has already piloted a number of Arts on Prescription programs within the region, targeting citizens struggling with stress, anxiety, depression, or isolation. Evaluations shows that this approach is beneficial in helping people. They meet each other, they participate actively - and they see culture from a new perspective – and that is what helps them. We are glad to share our experiences in this field and help develop more projects. We hope and look forward within this collaboration to not only share our experiences but also gain new insights and perspectives enabling us to further improve our model. This will in turn help us to continue to develop and improve our programs to better serve the community.” – says Anne Møllegaard, chairman of Cultural Region Funen.*

### **Three universities are evaluating the project**

The piloting partners are supported in the development of the model programme and in the evaluation of its piloting by three universities: The Danish National Institute of Public Health (University of Southern Denmark), Turku University of Applied Sciences, and the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences. Each of these universities brings in complementary expertise in the evaluation of health effects, organisational setup, and the economic cost/benefits.

A particularly important role in the partnership will be played by the Northern Dimension Partnership on Health and Social Well-being Secretariat (NDPHS). As coordinator of PA Health of the EUSBSR and partner of the ongoing project "The Art of Staying Healthy," the NDPHS secretariat is the ideal partner for promoting the results of the project more broadly in the EU. The NDPHS has direct access to senior officials of the national ministries of health and can help to raise awareness and put the topic on the political agenda.

### **For further information**

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