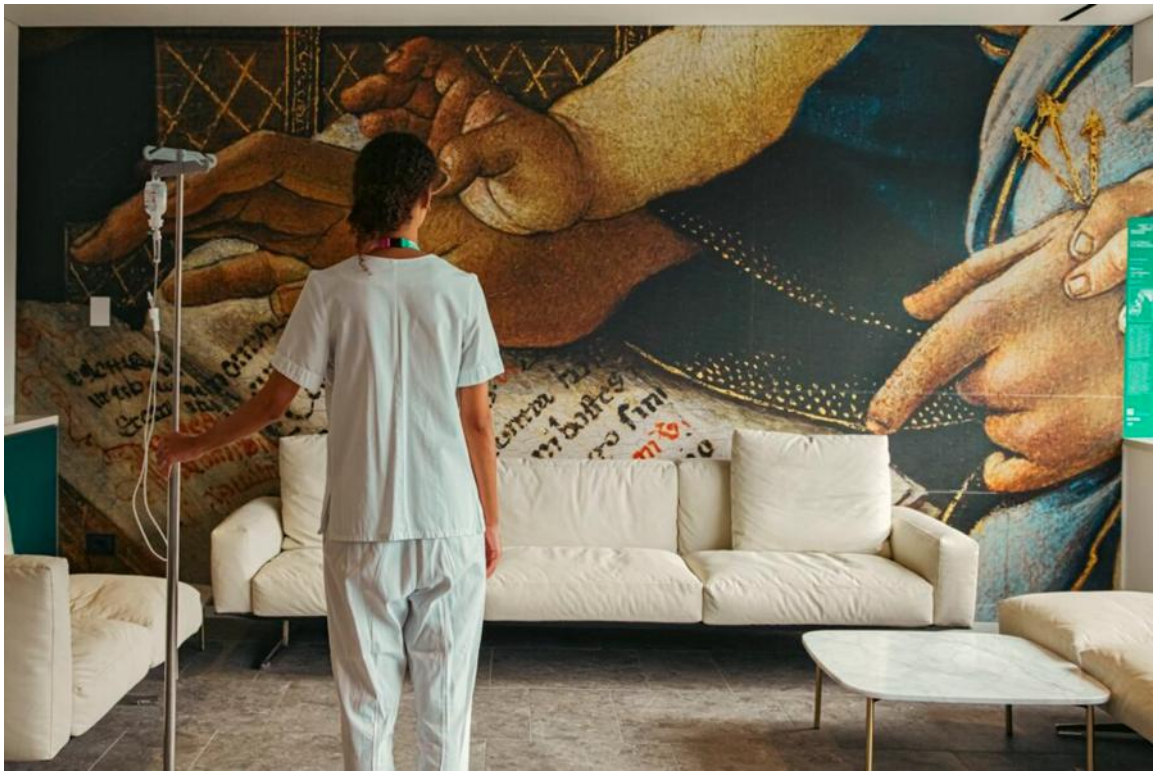
Museum and Health/Musei e Salute



Gruppo di Lavoro

Franca Accerenza, Sílvia Alemany, Lurdes Boix, Mariona Font, Tea Perintic, Mª Paola Profumo e Elvira Mata



This working group was established based on the work carried out by the "Museums and Sustainable Development Goals" working group.

At the AMMM Forum held in San Benedetto del Tronto, one of the working groups formed within our Association was the one focused on Museums and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This working group led to the establishment of the "Museums and Education" group and the "Museums and Health" group, both formed during the AMMM Forum in Sant Feliu de Guíxols/l'Escala (2025).

In recent years, the role of museums in promoting well-being and health has gained increasing international significance. The report *Art, Healing and Museums*, published by the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO)—alongside insights that emerged during the 2026 Museum Wellness Summit—highlights how museum institutions are progressively broadening their mission. Beyond their traditional functions of preserving and showcasing heritage, museums are developing practices focused on psychological and relational well-being, offering cultural experiences that foster social connections, personal reflection, and participation.

This evolution in the role of museums aligns with the new definition of a museum adopted by ICOM (International Council of Museums) on August 24, 2022, in Prague, which recognizes the museum as a permanent institution at the service of society—one committed to promoting participation, inclusion, sustainability, and the well-being of communities.

The United Nations has developed the 2030 Agenda, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at addressing key challenges for a better future.

The 2030 Agenda seeks to provide benefits for all and is committed to "leaving no one behind," reaching out to those in need or those who are marginalized—wherever they may be—in order to address their specific problems and vulnerabilities.

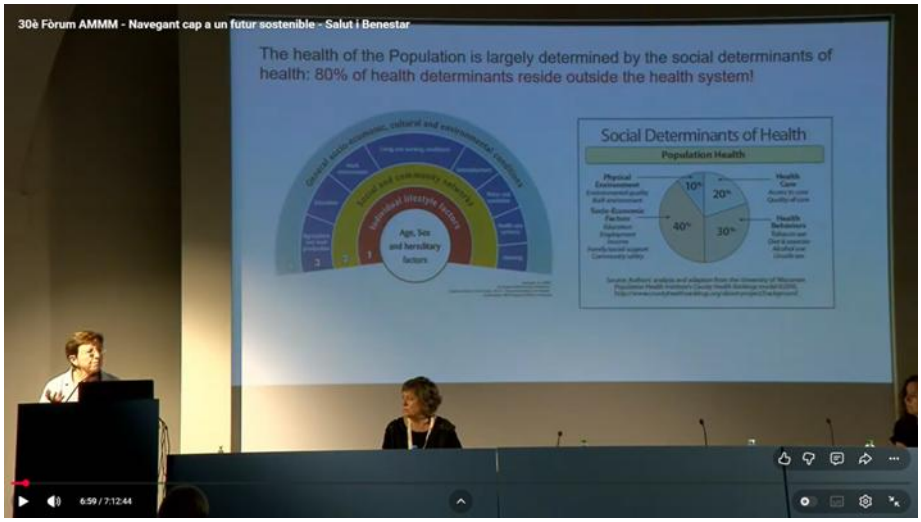


Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Sustainable Development Goal 3 aims to ensure health and well-being for all at all ages by improving reproductive, maternal, and child health, ending epidemics of major communicable diseases, and reducing non-communicable diseases and mental health disorders. Sustainable Development Goal 3 also

calls for the reduction of health risk factors, whether behavioral or environmental.

Goal 3 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals focuses on promoting global health and well-being. The goal aims to reduce child and maternal mortality, combat communicable and non-communicable diseases, ensure access to quality healthcare services and medicines, strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, and achieve universal health coverage. Experience with the Millennium Development Goals has shown that health issues cannot be addressed in isolation, but rather within their broader context. These goals pose a challenge for many countries, especially those with weak or inadequate healthcare systems. Nevertheless, they are vital objectives for improving the health and well-being of the global population.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wg-S9SjT-q0

Listening to the excellent presentation by Dr. Carmen Cabezas—a specialist in family and community medicine, preventive medicine, and public health—at the recent Forum held in the auditorium of the Museum of Sant Feliu de Guíxols, provided a unique opportunity to understand and gain awareness of the significant role that museums can play in the field of health.

In her talk, Dr. Cabezas (formerly the Secretary for Public Health for the Generalitat of Catalonia) noted that a "health asset" is any element outside the formal healthcare sector that contributes to well-being—such as art and museums.

During the same Forum, we learned about various initiatives in this area, which we believe could be valuable for developing future action proposals for our own museums.

Although the working group initially intended to focus primarily on two specific thematic areas—excessive loneliness and the use of sailing as a health resource—the project's scope expanded as it progressed, drawing upon the diverse professional expertise of the group's participants.

“The numbers speak for themselves: as early as 2016—well before the COVID-19 pandemic—one in six European citizens reported experiencing some form of mental health issue, and concerns about the future are now on the rise. This is a social issue that affects various segments of the population, stemming from a range of root causes. No one is exempt—including those who have reached retirement age, who may themselves suffer from mental or cognitive disorders associated with aging.” “Of particular concern are young people under 25, who, since 2018, have seen an alarming surge in cases of severe depression… comparable to the classic midlife crisis.”



In this sense, all issues related to mental health in a broad sense are considered a priority, as are initiatives addressing gender-based violence and any experiences that can serve as inspiration or examples for navigating the intersection between the realms of health and well-being and the world of museums and culture.

Consequently, there is a clear commitment to focusing on experiences, practices, or projects aimed at groups of people affected by issues that are less commonly addressed.

Cooperation and networking among museums, professional associations, and organizations representing the families of those affected by illness have become key strategies for achieving inclusion and the "normalization" of individuals living with health conditions—with museum-based health initiatives becoming an integral part of the regular programming offered by our museums.

On the website of the "Positivr" movement—which is fully aligned with the 2030 Agenda—an article states:

“It is scientifically proven that visiting a museum can improve our physical condition and mental well-being.”

Museum visits by medical prescription: “Go to a museum to heal.” The idea may come as a surprise, but it is gaining traction. According to a recent American study, such cultural therapies can offer a multitude of health benefits, including the alleviation of chronic pain and mental distress.

Millions of people visit museums every year. While many go to learn, these visits can also improve their physical condition and mental well-being—or so suggest researchers from the University of Pennsylvania in a study published in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*.

Katherine Cotter and James Pawelski compiled and reviewed over a hundred scientific publications and reports on the various health benefits of art. They found that engaging with works of art significantly reduces anxiety and stress. Recent research has shown that visiting an art museum has a tangible impact on the secretion of hormones—such as cortisol and serotonin—that influence our well-being.

The therapeutic virtues of art do not stop there. "Museum therapy" has also proven effective in preventing and managing the behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia.

A team of Australian and South African researchers discovered that cultural therapies can combat depression in individuals living with dementia, while simultaneously improving their cognitive functions.

In this spirit, the association *Médecins francophones du Canada* (French-speaking Physicians of Canada) enabled its members to refer patients suffering from depression, diabetes, or chronic illnesses to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts at no cost. This one-year pilot project, which began in November 2018, has since inspired similar initiatives in Switzerland and France.

One thing is certain: visiting a museum has a (positive) effect on our mood and mental well-being. But the benefits of such cultural visits do not stop there. Katherine Cotter and James Pawelski have observed that museums play a role in social cohesion. People who visit them regularly tend to feel less lonely. They are also more inclined to question social issues, "suggesting that the experience of visiting [a museum] encourages different forms of thinking and thought processes," the researchers conclude in their study.

Participating in cultural activities and engaging with culture undoubtedly contribute—as science has shown—to better health and, consequently, a higher quality of life.

Recent studies demonstrate that visiting cultural heritage sites and taking part in activities organized by museums can help combat stress, significantly reduce social isolation and loneliness, boost self-esteem, and even contribute to a longer life. Following the Covid crisis, a new area of focus has emerged in which museums have become hubs for health and well-being.

Many recent gatherings of museum professionals have addressed the intersection of museums, health, and well-being. At these technical meetings, one can hear thought-provoking presentations, learn about concrete experiences, and gain useful advice from those who coordinate such initiatives in museums around the world.

From improving mental health to combating social isolation, and from developing resilience in children to supporting individuals with age-related conditions, these themes are central to the relationship between health, well-being, and museums.

One of the most concerning issues in our society today is unwanted loneliness. This is a serious issue which, while not a disease in the strict sense, represents a major public health concern and a source of suffering for all those affected.

Unfortunately, unwanted loneliness is an increasingly widespread problem. Many medical professionals already refer to it as the "silent epidemic of unwanted loneliness in the 21st century." This phenomenon is a global issue linked to the processes of modernization and individualism that are increasingly impacting modern societies; it affects not only the elderly but also other groups—including young people, women, individuals with disabilities, those with mental health disorders, and other vulnerable segments of the population.

https://www.ne-mo.org/news-events/article/museums-as-a-remedy-for-loneliness

https://www.socialconnectionguidelines.org/en/case-studies/museums-as-hubs-for-well-being-ramm-s-initiative-to-combat-loneliness-among-seniors

his phenomenon, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, affects people of all ages, especially the young. Although often associated with the elderly, studies show that loneliness is more prevalent among adolescents, though it also occurs at other stages of life. Unwanted loneliness does not depend solely on the number of relationships we form, but also on our perception of their quality—a gap that gives rise to feelings of emptiness and exclusion.

The negative consequences that unwanted loneliness has on an individual's health, well-being, and quality of life are well-documented. It is also clear that, alongside the direct support provided to those affected, raising awareness is an essential tool for fostering a new culture of social engagement, empathy, and societal transformation.

Unwanted loneliness is defined as a subjective, unwelcome feeling of a lack or loss of companionship. It arises when there is a discrepancy or imbalance between the social relationships one has and those one desires. Unwanted loneliness is distinct from social isolation, which refers to a substantial lack of social contact and can be measured objectively.

Some individuals may live alone without experiencing unwanted loneliness, as they might prefer solitude and choose it as a way of life. Conversely, others may live in the company of others—such as elderly individuals residing in care homes—yet still suffer from unwanted loneliness. It is, therefore, a subjective, unwelcome experience that exists independently of whether or not one is physically alone.

"Unwanted loneliness is not a disease, yet it causes a significant deterioration in physical and emotional health."

"Many young people between the ages of 18 and 24 also suffer from unwanted loneliness." "And it is well known that social networks—contrary to what many people think—isolate these young people." — Dr. Cabezas

Studies provide us with clear data. For instance, a study conducted in Spain in 2023 reveals that:

- 1 in 4 children aged 10 to 12 experiences loneliness.
- 50% of people over the age of 80 report feeling a sense of loneliness.
- 13% of the general population suffers from it on a regular basis.
- Even in the workplace, 10% of employees state that they feel lonely.

In Catalonia, nearly 3 out of 10 young people aged 18 to 34 admit to experiencing it; the issue affects both children and adults alike.

The report on Museums and Health, prepared by the Department of Culture of the Generalitat de Catalunya, states:

“Health is not merely the absence of disease; rather, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) definition, it refers to a complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being. Just as museums play an essential role in people’s education, they can also play a part in shaping how individuals perceive their own health and well-being.” ...

... “In fact, for decades, research has been conducted internationally on the benefits of collaborative programs between the cultural and healthcare sectors, with scientific evidence now supporting this premise. In this regard, the WHO itself published the report: ‘Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report: What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review.’”

It is important to break down stereotypes surrounding unwanted loneliness. As a society, we must join forces to raise awareness and destigmatize this growing problem, with the goal of minimizing its negative consequences and finding social solutions that provide an effective response.



Practicing solidarity is a process of personal and collective transformation that enables us to understand, feel, and respond to situations of injustice—situations that cause suffering and exclusion for millions of people, while imposing severe social and economic costs on the system as a whole.

Drawing on the experience of the Galata Maritime Museum (Galata Museo del Mare), we propose an analysis of the violent nature of domestic abuse and explore how museums can address this issue.

Domestic violence is a form of discrimination against women and a violation of their human rights. It infringes upon a woman's right to life, safety, physical integrity, equal treatment, and freedom from torture.

In Italy, according to preliminary estimates from an ongoing survey, approximately 6.4 million women (31.9%) between the ages of 16 and 75 have experienced at least one instance of physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives (from the age of 16 onwards). Specifically, 18.8% have experienced physical violence, and 23.4% have experienced sexual violence—a category that includes 5.7% of women who have been subjected to rape or attempted rape.

In Spain, the number of women who were victims of gender-based violence in 2025 fell by 3.8%, totaling 33,373. The rate of gender-based violence among women aged 14 and older stood at 1.5 per 1,000. Conversely, the number of victims of domestic violence increased by 7.4%.

In Croatia, 25% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. Approximately 48% of women have experienced health consequences as a result of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. About 36% of women who have been subjected to physical or sexual violence by any perpetrator in the last 12 months did not speak to anyone about it.

According to official data from the country's public prosecutor's office, criminal proceedings for domestic violence in Greece have increased significantly in

recent years—more than doubling between 2023 and 2024—and have remained at high levels throughout 2025.

Please note some experiences in this question

https://oma-online.org/my-intimate-partner/

https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/arising/

https://www.museumnext.com/article/how-the-national-gallery-of-ireland-is-using-art-to-support-survivors-of-domestic-violence/

https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/12/mansfield-museum-launches-art-therapy-project-for-domestic-violence-survivors/

Social problems require social responses.

Being part of cultural institutions means providing these tools to those who need them, offering a physical space where interactions are built and where participation in activities—in which individuals take a leading role—facilitates the creation, maintenance, and strengthening of personal social networks.

Our museums are repositories of living history, life, experiences, and even emotions. This implies that our institutions can play a significant role in improving people's well-being.

- Conceiving the museum as a public space and service for the community—a communal resource that enhances access to culture and society for individuals living with mental health conditions, illnesses, and more.
- The museum can and should be a driver of community development: it can help weave a supportive and cohesive social fabric, ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens and fostering better integration through active participation and the shifting of attitudes.
- The museum can help restore dignity to the community of people living with severe mental health conditions.
- Cultural spaces and museum institutions promote healthy habits that support the recovery of social and familial skills.

Education centered on cultural heritage and museums aims to provide individuals with the opportunity to learn about and forge a connection with their cultural heritage, fostering identity, social cohesion, and intergenerational understanding within an informal learning environment. One of its primary goals

is to facilitate deep, emotional connections between people and their cultural heritage.

In the article "Loneliness and Social Isolation: How Can Museums Help?", Charlotte Coates writes that museums encourage people to leave their homes, interact with others, and connect with their local community, thereby helping to reduce loneliness. Cooperation and networking among museums, professional associations, and organizations for families of individuals living with a medical condition have become key strategies for achieving inclusion and the "normalization" of those affected by illness; in this context, museum activities related to health should be integrated into the regular programming offered by our museums.

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One thing is certain: visiting a museum has a (positive) effect on our mood and mental well-being. But the benefits of such cultural visits do not stop there. Katherine Cotter and James Pawelski have observed that museums contribute to social cohesion. People who visit them regularly tend to feel less lonely. They are also more inclined to engage with social issues—"suggesting that the experience of visiting [a museum] encourages various forms of thinking and thought processes," the researchers conclude in their study.

And what role can our maritime museums play in this context? What can they offer—in a sense, perhaps even uniquely?

It has been shown that proximity to natural bodies of water, especially the sea, provides health benefits. This effect has been termed "blue health."



"Blue health" is an increasingly popular subject of research. Experts around the world are studying why "blue spaces"—such as the sea—can improve our physical and mental well-being. Many people believe the sea possesses a therapeutic quality, finding it both moving and magical. Now, scientists are confirming this: spending time by the seaside rejuvenates the body and mind, while reducing stress and anxiety.

In recent years, a growing body of research has demonstrated the numerous health and well-being benefits derived from exposure to "blue spaces"—natural environments characterized by the presence of water (Gascon et al., 2017; White et al., 2020). https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9226434/

Sailing is an ideal activity to share with friends and family. Spending time together in such a relaxing yet stimulating environment strengthens bonds and improves communication. Working as a team to handle the boat, preparing a meal on board, or simply taking in the view encourages collaboration and mutual understanding. These shared experiences create unforgettable memories and deepen interpersonal relationships.

https://www.ussailing.org/news/the-science-behind-how-sailing-improves-your-mental-and-physical-health/

https://oceanshealth.icm.csic.es/en/sailing.html

Maritime museums can offer various opportunities in this regard. Here, we propose exploring a potential course of action centered on the use of traditional sailing vessels.

Many of our museums either operate sailing vessels directly or maintain close ties with groups and associations that manage traditional craft. Possibilities exist. Every action, no matter how small, is helpful—never underestimate it.

Sailing offers a unique combination of physical activity and mental focus. It is a holistic engagement that, unlike more conventional forms of exercise, seamlessly integrates mindfulness with movement, providing both physical exertion and mental clarity. Research suggests that activities like sailing—which demand concentration, balance, and situational awareness—promote neuroplasticity, enhance cognitive function, and aid in emotional regulation.

Unlike passive water-based activities, sailing engages both body and mind, offering the dual benefit of physical exercise and cognitive stimulation. "We see the positive impact of sailing, especially on young people. It’s a tangible, physical experience—far removed from screens—that engages them mentally and teaches them valuable life skills," says John Pearce, Youth Racing Director at US Sailing. "Plus, it’s fun, challenging, and adaptable to a wide range of abilities and interests. Every young person should have the chance to go sailing!"

We will take as an example an activity carried out by the Maritime Museum of Barcelona. This initiative, "Catalogna Atraverso," was organized jointly with the Association of Friends of the vessel *Ciutat de Badalona*, and with the close collaboration of two other museums within the Network of Maritime Museums of the Catalan Coast: the Fishing Museum in Palamós and the Museum of the Ebro Lands.



"Catalogna al Través" used sailing as a school for life, welcoming young people of any gender, socioeconomic background, religion, or nationality—regardless of whether they had prior sailing experience. The participants came from vulnerable segments of the population.

The program took place aboard sailboats, fostering a shared living experience among the young men and women, who spent their nights on board and actively participated in the vessel's tasks, operations, and maneuvers under the guidance of the crew. Participants joined as crew members and spent 10 days traveling along the Catalan coast.

This initiative leveraged the experience of sailing and life at sea as a means to cultivate core values and develop a range of personal and social skills—assets that can prove highly valuable throughout a person's life.

The activity promotes essential values, including:

• teamwork and cooperation
• discipline
• respect and coexistence within a confined space
• adaptation to a new environment
• confronting seemingly insurmountable challenges
• taking on responsibility and managing risks in a controlled manner

The positive impact of this program has been demonstrated by various studies: the young participants learn more about themselves, boost their self-esteem,

and discover hidden strengths and talents, all while gaining an appreciation for the value of teamwork.

At the same time, it sparks unforgettable emotions—lifelong friendships, the sight of the open sea or a first dolphin, drifting and sailing beneath a starry sky, and the realization that one is capable of achieving the "impossible." In short, it is a life-changing experience.

It should be noted that most of the young people who took part in this sailing program came from highly complex circumstances, and many clearly exhibited significant emotional distress. Finally, we include a reference to the RADAR project. RADAR is designed to be usable by anyone, thanks to a simple, intuitive, and accessible design.



https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/2024/05/toolkit-radar-misurare-felicita-prodotta-espereienze-culturali/

Working Group 2026