Rx for the Arts

October 26, 2024

Facilitators

Chris Appleton, Founder and CEO, Art Pharmacy

Michael Bobbitt, Executive Director, Mass Cultural Council

Emily Pinto Taylor, Assistant Professor, Emory University School of Medicine

Session Description

Arts on prescription programs allow health care providers and social service agencies to prescribe arts activities and cultural engagement experiences to support positive physical, mental and behavioral health outcomes while improving well-being and quality of life. Learn how the Massachusetts Cultural Council is taking this idea to scale at the state level through innovative policy partnerships and compelling research.

Michael Bobbitt

Michael provided an overview of Mass Cultural Council's work to pilot and implement social prescribing through the arts in Massachusetts. After three-plus years of pilot programming and beta testing, the approach was shifted from being an in-house initiative at Mass Cultural Council to working alongside a partner to scale the work. This approach addressed the need for health care to fund and support the impactful work. The partner they identified was Art Pharmacy.

Mass Cultural Council focuses on making introductions with arts organizations and connecting them with Art Pharmacy. Additionally, they collaborated with Tasha Golden to develop Arts on Prescription, A Field Guide for US Communities.

The Card to Culture program has supported the distribution of over a million free or discounted admissions to arts organizations.

Arts & Culture Benefit for Employees will encourage employers to expand things like gym memberships to include the arts. For example, this might provide employees with a stipend to spend toward arts and culture experiences.

Chris Appleton

Chris explained that artists have been healers since the beginning of time. Art Pharmacy addresses challenges around access, permission and leveraging health care dollars surrounding social prescribing for the arts. State arts agencies play an important role in helping make connections to build social prescribing ecosystems.

Emily Pinto Taylor

Emily shared personal examples of her experiences working with patients who have received arts prescriptions through Art Pharmacy. She described the benefits for the patients in addition to the ease of use as a practitioner.

Audience Questions

- How have you navigated working with communities that have mistrust in the health care system? Art Pharmacy responded:
    - Care navigators are certified support specialists. At true scale, there is a desire for care navigators to be living in the communities they are serving.
    - The patient has agency in choosing the arts they would like to engage with.
    - There is a need for anonymity between a patient and the arts organization. No private health information is being exchanged, so there isn't a HIPPA concern.
    - Individuals show up as a member of the public and the organizations don't know that they have arrived through Art Pharmacy.
- Has there been any legislation to approve arts prescribing?
    - The panelists discussed how the arts sector is not as organized as other sectors in terms of advocacy and lobbying. There is a need for the arts sector to be doing this type of advocacy.

- What are steps that can be done in the next three months?
    - Identify funding sources, find ways to gather representatives from health care and the arts.
- Are there certifications or other supports for people who are leading workshops and instruction that is offered through Art Pharmacy?
    - All arts partners get access to trainings around trauma-informed approaches, mental health training.
    - Goal is for the matching system to give more weight to organizations that have gone through trainings.
    - There is a requirement for a safety plan.
    - There is also a need to be mindful of not adding burden to the arts organization's work.
- What were considerations taken to ensure fairness?
    - There is an understanding that in the arts we don't want someone with a cultural connection to not be able to find something that they can connect to. State arts agencies play a valuable role as connectors with arts organizations.