

# Supporting people with long term health conditions to be physically active

Resource pack for health and care organisations

March 2022



The  
Richmond  
Group  
of Charities



**SPORT  
ENGLAND**

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# Introduction

## Who we are

The Richmond Group of Charities is a coalition of health and care charities working in partnership with Mind, MS Society, Parkinson's UK and Sport England. We are united in our commitment to:

- support the least active people living with long term health conditions to be more physically active;
- encourage health and care professionals with long term health conditions to be active;
- ensure consistent, person-centred conversations about physical activity are a routine part of health and care interactions;
- see supportive, inclusive and accessible physical activity opportunities and facilities prioritised by the sport, leisure and physical activity sector.



## What is this pack?

**This pack is aimed at health and care organisations, such as those working in partnership as Integrated Care Systems, and provides:**

- Four ways your organisation can make a difference and help people with long term health conditions be more active.
- Information about why it's important to support people with long term health conditions to increase their physical activity – including your own workforce.
- Links to resources and case studies with more information and inspiration from good practice.

We've created this pack because leaders and frontline practitioners in the health and care system are having to tackle a threefold challenge of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, developing population health approaches that help prevent disease and improve the nation's resilience, as well as reducing health inequalities.

Supporting people living with long term health conditions to become and stay physically active has a **key role in helping address these challenges** because of the widely acknowledged benefits to health and wellbeing including self-management, risk reduction, improved mobility and reconditioning.

# Four ways you can make a difference

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## What you can do to support more people with long term health conditions to be active

### 1 Prioritise physical activity

Make promotion of physical activity for people living with (multiple) long term health conditions a priority, whilst committing to engage with people living with long term health conditions in the development of pathways, services and support.

### 2 Enable physical activity conversations with patients

Support your workforce to embed physical activity conversations into routine practice to ensure they maximise all opportunities to promote [We Are Undefeatable](#) and other relevant resources in their interactions.

- I. Use the available information and resources that help your workforce provide Very Brief Advice about physical activity, from the free Health Education England [elearning for healthcare Physical Activity and Health module](#), the Moving Healthcare Professionals Physical Activity Clinical Champion [peer training](#), and other practical resources such as [Moving Medicine](#) or the [We Are Undefeatable conversation starters](#) on the [Public Health England Campaign Resource Centre](#).
- II. Look at the [case studies](#) included in this pack to learn how other organisations have implemented this.

### 3 Champion physical activity

Provide leadership across your organisation and within the health and care sector by advocating physical activity, encouraging colleagues to do the same and promoting ongoing learning and development. See our [resources](#) for more information and tools to help you.

### 4 Support your workforce's wellbeing

Encourage your workforce living with long term health conditions to prioritise self-care and promote [We Are Undefeatable](#) as a support tool to encourage them to be physically active. Find examples of how other organisations have supported their workforce to be active in our [case studies](#) section.

# About physical inactivity and long term health conditions

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In England, 43% of the population has at least one long term health condition.<sup>1</sup> Long term health conditions are more common (and more likely to be severe) in older people and in people from lower socio-economic groups, who are also more likely to live with multiple conditions, including a mental health condition.<sup>2</sup>

Estimates for the percentage of people living with **multiple long term health conditions** in England vary from 15% to 30% according to different national and local sources. In the UK this number is **expected to rise to 68% in 2035.**<sup>3</sup>

30% of people with 4+ conditions are under 65 years of age, and this percentage is higher in disadvantaged areas<sup>4</sup>



## What is physical activity?

Physical activity is defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure. **There is no minimum amount of physical activity required to achieve some health benefits** but the UK Chief Medical Officers recommend 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity activity (e.g. brisk walking or cycling) and minimising sedentary time and inactivity. **To be inactive is to do less than 30 minutes per week of physical activity. The greatest gains in health are to be had by the least active people increasing their activity levels, even by small amounts.**<sup>5</sup>

Being active means different things to people, and many assume they need access to equipment, memberships, clothes or facilities to get the benefits. However, it's really about **finding what works for the individual** and while for some that may mean being directed to exercise referral classes or structured activity programmes, for many it will be about **building movement (ideally a mixture of aerobic and strength) into everyday life.**

Examples of everyday physical activity are taking stairs as opposed to lifts or escalators, walking on the spot or wheelchair dancing while watching TV, or carrying shopping home.



**For good physical and mental health, adults should aim to be physically active every day. Any activity is better than none.**

UK Chief Medical Officers.<sup>6</sup>



## The facts about inactivity

- People with multiple long term health conditions are **less likely to be active**, as are people from ethnic minority groups, lower socio-economic groups and older people.<sup>7</sup>
- Carers are also more likely to be inactive, as Carers UK research has found. **Nearly half (46%) of unpaid carers aged over 55 years old are inactive compared to 33% of adults of the same age.** This is despite 73% of carers indicating activity makes them feel good and 87% indicating they'd like to be fitter.<sup>8</sup>
- There are **significant barriers** to people with long term health conditions being physically active. **Often these are condition related**, such as fear of making conditions worse and struggling to build a routine due to the unpredictability of health conditions. They are also compounded with common barriers of lack of motivation, time and social support.<sup>9</sup>
- Inactivity costs the UK economy in ill health, it drives up health costs and reduces the health and productivity of the workforce.<sup>10</sup> It's estimated that sport and physical activity generate savings of £5.6 billion in healthcare and £1.7 billion in social care.<sup>11</sup>

### Percentage of people who are active with long term health conditions<sup>12</sup>

56%

with one form of impairment

48%

with two forms of impairment

37%

with three or more impairments

- Long term health conditions are more prevalent in the most deprived areas, among people with ethnic backgrounds, and older people. Therefore, **inactivity can affect the most vulnerable in our communities**.<sup>13</sup> These groups are likely to experience additional barriers to physical activity such as caring responsibilities, time, cost and location and access to services as well as cultural barriers. Inactive people are also those most likely to require support to make sustainable changes to their behaviour and this will be different for everyone, recognising the barriers and lifestyle unique to each individual.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified physical inactivity further, making the health inequalities starker and exacerbating the existing complex web of barriers and challenges that make it harder for people with long term health conditions to become and stay active. This has led to deconditioning, particularly amongst older people which the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities predict will result in a higher number of falls.<sup>14</sup> The pandemic has also had a huge psychological and emotional effect, which has impacted motivation to be active.<sup>15</sup>**

**57% of people long term health conditions cite condition specific barriers to physical activity<sup>16</sup>**



# Why addressing physical inactivity is important

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**2x**

as likely to be inactive with a long term condition as without.<sup>17</sup>

**40%**

of long term health conditions could be prevented by reducing inactivity.<sup>18</sup>

**1 in 6**

UK deaths are due to physical inactivity.<sup>19</sup>

**57%**

of people with long term health conditions look to the NHS for advice on how to be active.<sup>20</sup>

**£7.4bn**

the estimated annual cost of inactivity to the UK economy.<sup>21</sup>

**£9.5bn**

value in improved physical & mental health generated by physical activity.<sup>22</sup>

**65%**

of people with mental health conditions feel physical activity should be offered alongside medication and talking therapy.<sup>23</sup>

**64%**

of people living with long term health conditions would like to be more active.<sup>24</sup>

**We Are Undefeatable** has been highly successful in reaching out to and connecting with the groups most affected by health inequalities and inactivity, including those from different ethnic backgrounds, lower socio-economic groups and those digitally excluded.<sup>25</sup>

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## Heraldo's story

Heraldo has had multiple surgeries in recent years including heart surgery, after which he took up pilates and discovered a new way to help manage his health and wellbeing. Hear more about his journey on the [We Are Undefeatable YouTube channel](#)



## Supports health and wellbeing benefits

- **Reducing inactivity could prevent up to 40% of long term health conditions.**<sup>26</sup>  
It also can help improve quality of life and sleep and manage stress.<sup>27</sup>
- Evidence also suggests that physical activity can also help reduce social isolation.<sup>28</sup>
- All physical activity counts, and any reduction in sedentary time could have **significant health and wellbeing benefits**, including reducing the risk of hospitalisation and death due to COVID-19.<sup>29</sup>

**Physical activity can help manage more than 20 common physical and mental health conditions**<sup>30</sup>



## Physical activity is safe

Medical consensus published in November 2021 by the Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine (FSEM) is that **physical activity is safe for people with health conditions**. The findings of the review which led to the Medical Consensus Statement on Risk challenges the need for medical clearance for people living with stable long term health conditions before increasing their physical activity levels. The FSEM recommend medical guidance, rather than clearance, for people living with long term conditions who are concerned about their symptoms.<sup>31</sup> This viewpoint is echoed by the World Health Organisation in their 2020 Physical Activity Guidelines.<sup>32</sup>



## Supports self-management and personalised care

- The number of people on NHS waiting lists in England has reached an all-time high at over 5.8 million in November 2021<sup>33</sup> and evidence suggests that as a result of COVID-19, deconditioning is a widespread and significant problem.<sup>34</sup>
- **Encouraging physical activity and directing people to our support resources could help support their physical and mental health;** manage pain while waiting for elective surgery/treatment and ensure people remain fit for surgery/treatment throughout the waiting period; help people to recondition and reduce their risk of falls, enable better self-management of their condition and reduce further deterioration or onset of additional physical or mental health conditions.
- As well as advocating for **senior level physical activity champions** in NHS organisations and local authorities,<sup>35</sup> NICE also recommends **physical activity behaviour change interventions** for a wide range of physical and mental health conditions and yet health professionals say that lack of time, confidence, training, and resources are barriers to promoting physical activity.<sup>36</sup> By providing resources and training opportunities, the number of positive and effective conversations about activity could be improved, which could lead to **reductions in demand.**





- When physical activity isn't consistently embedded into health and social care pathways there are **missed opportunities for professionals to deliver Very Brief Advice** about physical activity, which is recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).<sup>37</sup>
- **Social prescribing is one such opportunity to reach people** with long term conditions who need support to become active and is a key component of Universal Personalised Care, a pillar of the NHS Long Term Plan.<sup>38</sup>
- Routinely discussing physical activity as part of a personalised care approach could have an impact on reducing levels of physical inactivity that have increased as a result of COVID-19.<sup>39</sup> It could also contribute to improved self-management of conditions and symptoms such as pain and fatigue. This could result in fewer appointments over the longer term, and **reduce demand for complex follow up care and treatment.**

- Research indicates that **patients look to health professionals for encouragement and reassurance to be more active** but they aren't consistently benefiting from that guidance (57% of people with long term health conditions look to the NHS for advice on how to be active).<sup>40</sup>
- Research commissioned by Mind indicates that almost two thirds of people with mental health conditions feel **physical activity should be offered alongside medication and talking therapy**, with over two thirds of people (67%) feeling physical activity should be in everyone's 'toolkit' as a way to support mental health recovery.<sup>41</sup> The National Overprescribing Review suggests there could be a greater use of social prescribing for patients, in particular those who are taking many medications.<sup>42</sup>
- Better awareness of appropriate language and of personalised messaging when discussing physical activity (i.e. the avoidance of using 'sport', 'exercise', and reference to 150 minutes a week) could encourage people with health conditions to act upon conversations about activity. There are resources available<sup>43</sup> that could be used to support professionals who don't routinely have conversations about being more active.

**65% of people with mental health conditions feel physical activity should be offered alongside medication and talking therapy<sup>44</sup>**



## Supports an active workforce

- Up to **25% of the health and care workforce were living with long term health conditions pre-COVID-19** and others are dealing with health problems that have developed since the pandemic.<sup>45</sup>
- A significant proportion of the health and care workforce is physically exhausted and dealing with emotional distress or mental health problems, both as a result of the pandemic and existing high levels of burnout pre-COVID-19.<sup>46</sup> In social care in particular, 26% of care home workers were likely to be experiencing depression at the start of 2021 and 27% were likely to be experiencing an anxiety disorder (compared with 20% and 18% at the national average).<sup>47</sup>
- The current absence rate in the NHS is 5.7%,<sup>48</sup> largely owing to stress and mental health problems as well as musculoskeletal conditions.

**In 2020, only 40% of health and care staff reported that their organisation took positive action on health and wellbeing<sup>49</sup>**



- Physical activity levels of the NHS workforce prior to COVID-19 were estimated at 30% not at all active and 45.2% not meeting the Chief Medical Officer guidelines at the time. **The top barriers were lack of time, lack of energy and lack of motivation.** The least active respondents were also more likely to smoke and not meet the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.<sup>50</sup>
- Physical inactivity is adversely affecting many people living with long term health conditions who make up the workforce in the NHS, local statutory bodies and social care. This is despite the **National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) QS84 recommending physical activity programmes for staff.**<sup>51</sup> The [NHS People Plan](#) recommends that every staff member has a health and wellbeing conversation every year which is an ideal opportunity to discuss physical activity.
- Investing in promoting physical activity to the workforce could help to **improve health and wellbeing, reduce absence and even encourage more conversations with the people they support.**<sup>52</sup>

## Physical activity levels of the NHS workforce prior to COVID-19 were estimated at <sup>50</sup>

30%

not at all active

45.2%

not meeting the Chief Medical Officer guidelines

**1****2****3****4****5****6**

## Linda's story

Linda lives with osteoarthritis and is a carer for her husband Tim who lives with multiple long term health conditions. Linda was encouraged to be active by a physiotherapist, does exercises at home and goes for walks as a way to keep active and manage her condition. Find out more about Linda's story at [We Are Undefeatable](#)



# Resources

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For the health and care workforce to engage and encourage people with LTCs to be active. For more resources and information visit our [resource and knowledge hub](#).

## Signposting to inclusive physical activity support and opportunities

[We Are Undefeatable](#) a physical activity website aimed at people with (multiple) health conditions

[We Are Undefeatable YouTube Playlists](#) curated suites of accessible and inclusive videos from trusted partners, tailored for people with (multiple) health conditions

[Make Your Move physical activity videos](#) created for people with (multiple) health conditions and symptoms

[Demos 10 Today](#) a selection of 10-minute physical activity audio sessions available via BBC Sounds

[Disability Rights UK Get Yourself Active](#) inclusive physical activity with support tools

[NHS Better Health Apps Couch to 5K and Active 10](#), to support physical activity behaviour change

[Activity Alliance Get Out Get Active Programme](#) disability inclusive activities

NHS staff physical activity support [Doing Our Bit](#)

## Examples of online physical activity finder tools

London Sport <https://getactive.io>

Wheelchair sports [www.wheelpower.org.uk/sports](http://www.wheelpower.org.uk/sports)

Disability Sport <https://parasport.org.uk/find-an-opportunity>

Long term conditions <https://movingmedicine.ac.uk/consultation-guides/activity-finder>

Staffordshire Active My Way [www.activemyway.org](http://www.activemyway.org)

Hertfordshire Moving More [www.movingmore.co.uk](http://www.movingmore.co.uk)

## Websites including condition specific information and advice

Age UK [Physical Activity Support](#)

Age UK [Walking Football Programme](#)

Alzheimer's Society [Physical Activity Support](#)

Asthma + Lung UK [Physical Activity Support for asthma](#) and [lung conditions](#)

Bat Bounce [Alzheimer's Therapy](#)

Breast Cancer Now [Physical Activity Support](#)

British Heart Foundation [Physical Activity Support](#)

British Red Cross [Wellbeing Support](#)

Diabetes UK [Physical Activity Support](#)

Macmillan Cancer [Support Physical Activity Support](#)

Mind [Physical Activity Support](#)

MS Society [Physical Activity Support](#)

Parkinson's UK [Physical Activity Support](#)

Parkinson's UK [Exercising At Home Toolkit](#)  
 Rethink Mental Illness [Physical Activity Support](#)  
 Rethink Mental Illness [Rethink Activity Toolkit for Support Groups](#)  
 Royal Voluntary Service [Physical Activity Support](#)  
 Royal Voluntary Service [Virtual Village Hall Seated Exercise](#)  
 Stroke Association [Physical Activity Support](#)  
 Swim England [Dementia Friendly Swimming](#)  
 Versus Arthritis [Physical Activity Support](#)  
 Versus Arthritis [Active Londoners Programme](#)  
 Versus Arthritis [Movement Series](#)

### Examples of some local physical activity campaigns

Manchester That Counts [www.thatcounts.co.uk](http://www.thatcounts.co.uk)  
 Liverpool Fit For Me [www.fitforme.info](http://www.fitforme.info)  
 Move More Sheffield [www.movemoresheffield.com](http://www.movemoresheffield.com)

### Physical activity and behaviour change knowledge and tools

National Institute for Health & Care Excellence (NICE) [Physical activity guidance and quality standards](#)  
 UK Chief Medical Officer [Physical Activity Guidelines 2019](#)  
 World Health Organisation [Physical Activity Guidelines 2020](#)  
 Public Health England [Health Matters Guidance on physical activity – prevention and management of long term conditions, 2020](#)  
 World Health Organisation [Global Action Plan for Physical Activity: GAPP](#)  
[International Society for Physical Activity and Health Eight Investments for Physical Activity](#)  
 Health Education England [elearning for healthcare module on physical activity, behaviour change and health](#)  
 Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine [Medical Consensus Statement of Risk on physical activity for people with long term conditions](#)

### [Moving Healthcare Professionals Physical Activity Clinical Champions training](#)

British Association of Sport and Exercise Medicine resources: [Website](#) and [Physical activity guide](#)  
[Moving Medicine](#) a resource to help healthcare professionals integrate physical activity conversations into routine clinical care  
 Activity Alliance [Enabling Healthcare Professionals video](#)  
 Royal College of General Practitioners [Active Practices Toolkit](#) to help GP practices encourage physical activity and become more active  
 Public Health England's [Campaign Resource Centre](#) assets for health campaigns  
 Disability Rights UK [toolkits and guides](#) including guides for social workers having conversations about physical activity  
 Chartered Society of Physiotherapy [Stronger My Way resources](#)

## Related health care services, initiatives and policy

Everybody Active [Every Day Public Health](#)  
[England's national physical activity framework](#)

NHS England [Personalised Care](#) an approach to supporting millions of people to take more control over what matters to them in

[National Association of Social Prescribing](#)

Making Every Contact Count (MECC)  
[National behaviour change programme to encourage positive lifestyle behaviours](#)

[British Society of Lifestyle Medicine](#)

[British Association of Sport and Exercise Medicine](#)

[National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine](#)

[Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine](#)

[Rethinking Medicine](#) supported by NHS England and the Royal College of GPs, improving how medicine supports better health and care in England

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy resources:  
[Public health and physical activity guidance](#)

[Love activity, Hate exercise? Campaign](#)

[Let's talk about strength Campaign](#)

### Insight

Richmond Group of Charities [Physical activity insight](#) including [We Are Undefeatable insight](#)

Public Health England [report 'Wider Impacts of COVID-19 on People Aged 65 or Over' 2021](#)

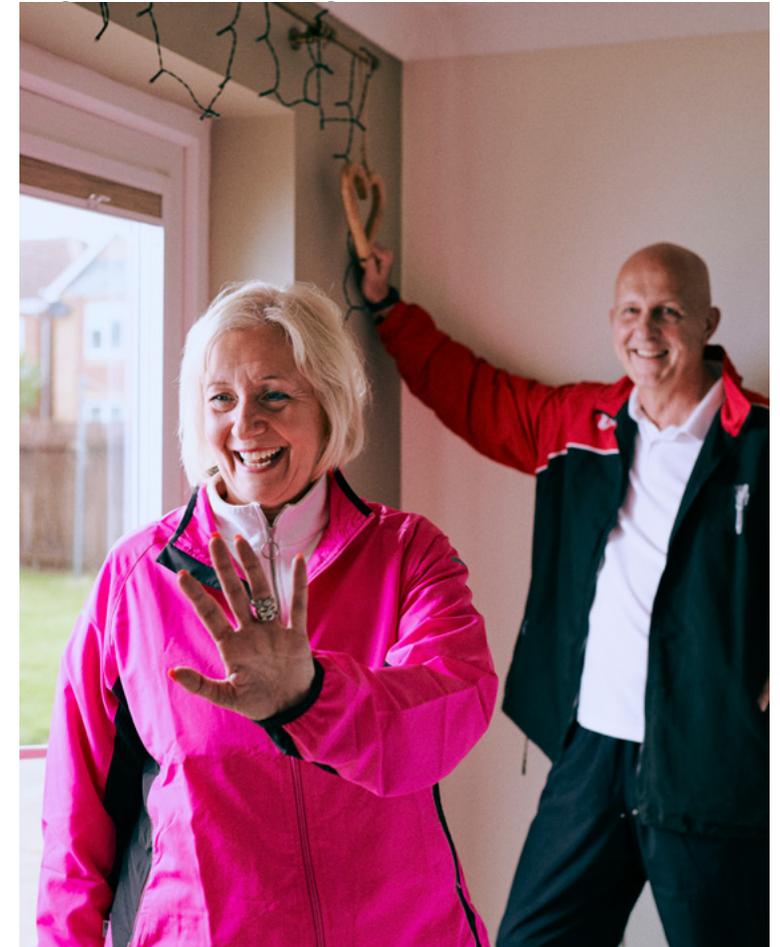
Sport for Development Coalition and Mind  
[Moving for Mental Health Report](#)

### Data and return on investment

[Sport England](#) searchable information on physical activity levels across England

[Sport England Social Return on Investment of Sport](#)

[Public Health England public health profiles](#)



# Case studies

Here are some examples of how healthcare organisations are working to improve promotion of physical activity for the workforce and the people they support. Find out more in our [case study pack](#) about:

- SASP: Moving Miracles in Somerset
- Developing an Active Hospital: Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust
- Active Essex
- Royal College of GPs: Active Practices

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