



# Fairness in Activity: Embedding sport and activity in the national disability strategy

## Introduction

Activity Alliance is the national charity focused on enabling more disabled people to enjoy the benefits of sport and active recreation. Our strategic purpose is clear:

### **Aim: Fairness for disabled people in sport and activity**

We will close the gap between disabled people's level inactivity and that of non-disabled people. We will make that change within a generation by:

- 1. Embedding inclusive practice into organisations**
- 2. Changing attitudes towards disabled people's sport and activity**

## Key points for the commission to consider

Activity Alliance is able to draw from our own and additional research to contribute to the development of a new national disability strategy. In summary, we make the following key points:

- Being active produces many benefits. Its absence creates significant problems not least those experienced by the disproportionately high number of disabled people suffering and dying during the Covid pandemic.
- The first steps into activity bring the most significant health benefits. We have increasingly focused our efforts on supporting the movement from inactive to active. However, disabled people's rate of **inactivity** is approximately double that of non-disabled people.
- The application of the Social Model of disability underpins our work and there is clear evidence that disabled people's enjoyment of physical activity and sport is prevented by a number of barriers
- We were beginning to see positive evidence of progress in disabled people's activity levels, as well as in attitudes towards activity ahead of the pandemic. It is essential that there is a real drive to ensuring the full and equal inclusion of disabled people in sport and activity as we re-introduce organised activity during the recovery period

Activity is a fundamental enabler of good physical and mental health. Disabled people have an equal appetite to be active and will enjoy some of the greatest benefits.

Sport and activity cannot therefore continue to be a marginalised area of interest but merits a strong and **central place within the national disability strategy.**

## Research evidence

Activity Alliance would be able to share a wealth of evidence to support the assertions we make above. However, we set out below some of the key insight to support this review:

- Disabled people are twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people. However, before the emergence of COVID-19 disabled people's inactivity levels were beginning to show tangible reductions (2.5% last year). (Active Lives, Sport England)
- Since 2015, there had been a 2.9% decrease in the proportion of disabled people who are inactive, from 43.3% to 40.4% in 2020 (Active Lives, Sport England, Oct 2020 report)
- Activity Alliance's research over the years has produced evidence of a number of findings and responses to support disabled people's activities including:
  - [barriers to participation](#) (psychological barriers being greater than both physical and logistical).
  - [disabled people are likely to be motivated](#) by the values that they pursue including friendship, family, health, progression in life, mental strength and well-being, having fun and feeling free.
  - those who [support or care for disabled people](#) have identified barriers specific to those which can inhibit disabled people's participation if not addressed.
  - Activity Alliance has placed an emphasis on inclusive activity (where disabled and non-disabled people take part together).
  - [Our Annual Survey 2019](#) showed that four in five disabled people want to be more active but demand is not being met. Only two in five feel they are given the opportunity to be as active as they would like to be.
  - based on research with disabled people [we have developed 10 principles](#) which will help the delivery of provision in a way that includes disabled people effectively (1. My channels, 2. My locality, 2. Me, not my impairment, 4. My values, 5. My life story, 6. Reassure me, 7. Include me, 8. Listen to me, 9. Welcome me, 10. Show me).
  - [The Activity Trap](#) explored disabled people's fear of being active, with almost half of disabled people fear losing their benefits if they are seen to be physically active.

## The disproportionate impact of Covid-19

Disabled people are much more at risk of death from coronavirus than non-disabled people – from March-May this year, disabled women and men were 11 and 6.5 times more likely to die than non-disabled women and men<sup>1</sup>. Disabled people accounted for two-thirds of the deaths from coronavirus as of July.

In early October, 79% of disabled people are worried about the effect coronavirus is having on their lives. This is increasing as cases and restrictions increase.<sup>1</sup> Disabled people are more likely to be affected by the impact of coronavirus on their health, wellbeing, relationships, and mental health.

Disabled people were left without the social and medical care they needed during the first lockdown: 31% were concerned about the level of social care they received in July<sup>2</sup>, and only 33% of people with a long-term health condition were receiving the same level of medical care as they were before the pandemic<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/datasets/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritaindata>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/disabled-people-and-coronavirus/the-disability-report/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/datasets/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritaindata>

59% of disabled people are concerned about feeling forgotten by the Government, and 67% feel the Government's plans for easing lockdown did not take their needs into account<sup>4</sup>.

In October, only 23% of disabled people are meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of at least 30 minutes of physical activity<sup>5</sup> or more times each week.

Only half (53%) feel they have the opportunity to be active, compared to 73% of non-disabled people. Disabled people are less likely to have found new ways to be active, use exercise to manage their physical and mental health, and to have more time for physical activity during the pandemic<sup>5</sup>.

Disabled people's attitudes and motivations to be active have fallen since August and remain significantly lower than non-disabled people<sup>6</sup>.

## The Long view

Ahead of COVID-19 not only were numbers of inactive disabled people coming down but attitudes towards disabled people's activity were improving. Disabled people were more likely to feel that they had an opportunity to be active as compared to the previous year. In addition, the gap between disabled and non-disabled people's perception of activity being for them has narrowed.

Despite the COVID-19 "set back", we will continue to define our long-term goal as closing the Fairness gap.

**We would like to see that aim embedded fully within the National Disability Strategy:**

The 'Fairness Gap' is the difference between the number of inactive disabled people and the number of inactive non-disabled people as measured in the Sport England Active Lives annual survey.

There are many reasons why disabled people are less active. Our research shows that it is caused most often by the barriers which disabled people face, including negative attitudes and a lack of inclusive practice. This must change.

That is why Activity Alliance has developed the Fairness Gap and set a target of closing the gap within a generation. We will only see progress if partners embrace inclusive practice and we all share positive attitudes towards disabled people's sport and activity.



[Image: Shows the fairness gap dial. This is the difference between the number of inactive disabled people and the number of inactive non-disabled people as measured in the Sport England Active Lives annual survey.]

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/disabled-people-and-coronavirus/the-disability-report/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sportengland.org/know-your-audience/demographic-knowledge/coronavirus>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sportengland.org/know-your-audience/demographic-knowledge/coronavirus>

## Our commitment to help

Activity Alliance stands ready to engage with the commission and support the development of the National Disability Strategy to help ensure that activity is seen as a key theme.

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**Dated November 2020**