
Social value of disabled people's physical activity

Using HM Treasury
endorsed methodology

Executive Summary

December 2024

**activity
alliance**
disability
inclusion
sport

Commissioned by Activity Alliance



Foreword by Activity Alliance

Our portfolio of sector-leading research and insight plays an important part in our vision to create a future where all disabled people feel they belong in sports and activities.

With the launch of our new strategy in 2024, we recognised gaps in regard to the return on investment and the economic impact of participation in sport and physical activity for disabled people. Although many partners are looking at this for the whole population, we knew there was merit in delving deeper into the data for disabled people.

Working with State of Life, we now have powerful figures that give us and others who deliver sports and activities more evidence of the value in disabled people being more active, and consequently, the societal cost of inequality.

Being active at the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) guideline level, 150 minutes per week, is feasible for some but more realistic if we live in an inclusive, barrier-free society. But our analysis clearly highlights that there is huge value in disabled people doing small bouts of movement, significantly more than non-disabled people.

The report also shows there is great value in moving a small percentage of disabled people from inactive to active, and all the steps in-between.

More effort must be given to breaking down the barriers so disabled people feel light activity like walking down the road and playing in local parks is achievable. Finding ways to build activity levels, to more minutes, if possible, is just as impactful.

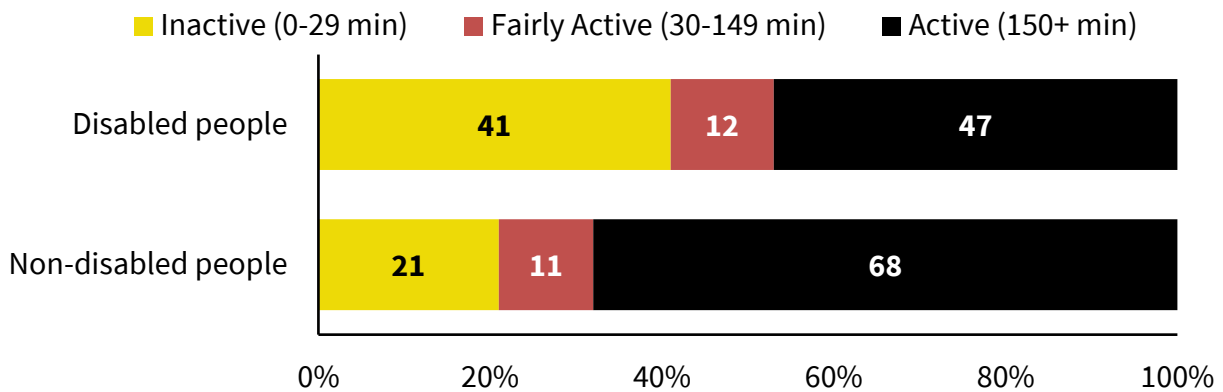
We know that sport does not work in silo. For disabled people to be more active, it takes a wider movement to change systemic barriers that prevent it. Whether in health, transport, or education, policy makers play a vital role in ensuring more disabled people feel that they belong.

This report also enables us at Activity Alliance to make a greater case to HM Treasury for investment in sport for disabled people using the Treasury's own words and guidance. It is clear that there is significant 'lost value' in disabled people not doing any activity.

Adam Blaze
Chief Executive Officer

The ‘activity gap’

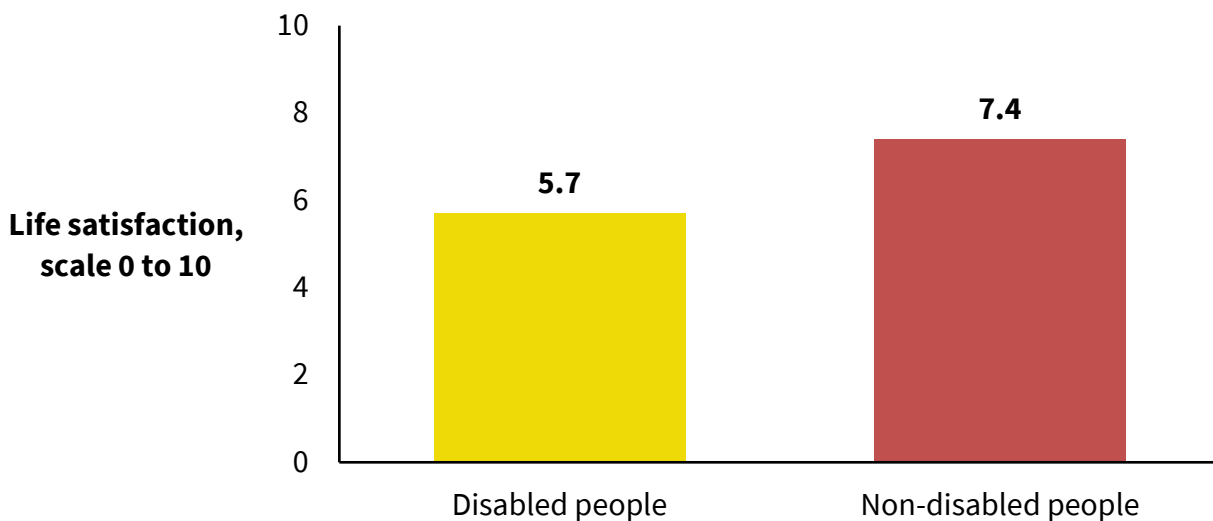
Disabled people, or those with long-term health conditions, are twice as likely to be physically ‘inactive’ as non-disabled people (41% compared to 21% for non-disabled people).



[Chart data source: Sport England Active Lives Survey, 2021-22¹]

The ‘wellbeing gap’

Disabled people also report lower life satisfaction (5.7, compared to 7.4 for non-disabled people). In wellbeing terms, this is a big gap – almost three times that of being unemployed compared to employed².



[Chart data source: Sport England Active Lives Survey, 2018-22³]

¹ [Sport England data tables](#)

² 0.46, Annex 2, [HM Treasury \(2021\)](#)

³ Table 4, full report, 2018-22

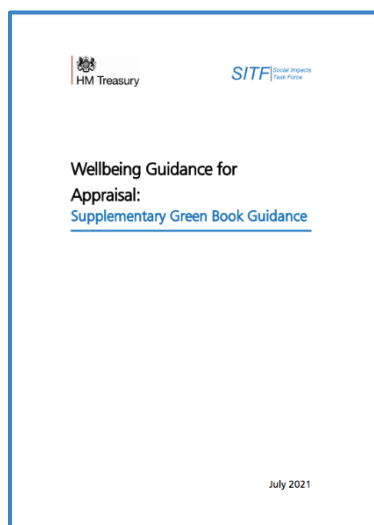
Can increased activity for disabled people start to bridge this wellbeing gap?

In short, yes. This study aims to evidence the wellbeing benefits, and social value, of disabled people doing more physical activity. We find the wellbeing benefits of physical activity are greater for disabled people than non-disabled people (benefit of being 'active' is three or four times greater). Moreover, for disabled people, there are substantial wellbeing benefits in physical activity before the 150 minutes a week guideline is met (approximately two-thirds the benefit from meeting the guideline).

Putting a monetary value on wellbeing – using the new WELLBY

Social value is the quantification of the relative importance of changes people experience in their lives. We follow the UK government's guidance on measuring and valuing social benefits for policy appraisal:^{4,5}

- Measurement should be based on the subjective wellbeing measure of life satisfaction (on a scale from 0 to 10).
- Valuation should utilise the WELLBY (wellbeing-adjusted life year); a change of one point on the life satisfaction scale, caused by the intervention of interest, affecting one person over a period of one year. It should be valued at £15,300 (in 2023 prices).



Analysis and attribution

To enable a large sample size, we append four years of data from Active Lives (2018-22). Attribution is key in this type of research; to what extent is a change in wellbeing due to a change in physical activity?

We use a statistical method – multiple linear regression – which **accounts for the influence of other factors**, such as age, employment status or socio-economic status.

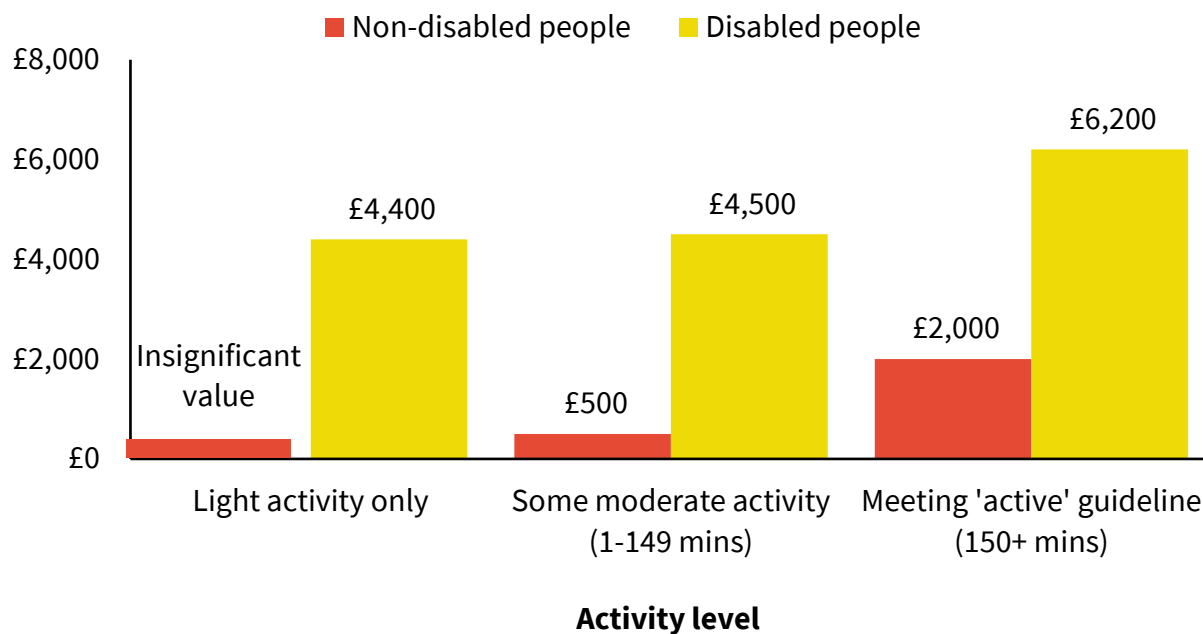
⁴ [HM Treasury \(2022\)](#)

⁵ [HM Treasury \(2021\)](#)

The findings⁶ are important and eye opening in a number of ways

- The wellbeing benefit for disabled people meeting the Chief Medical Officer’s (CMO) weekly ‘active’ guideline (150+ minutes) is high; +0.406 in life satisfaction, a social value of £6,200 per person per year (PPPY).
- For disabled people there are substantial wellbeing benefits (and therefore social value) in activity before the 150 minutes a week guideline is met:
 - The social value of ‘doing some moderate activity’ (1 to 149 minutes) is £4,500 (72% of the value of being ‘active’).
 - The social value of ‘doing only light activity’ is £4,400 (71% of the value of being ‘active’).

Social value of physical activity, per person per year (2023 prices, rounded to £100)



[Chart data source: Table 6 and table 8 in full report by State of Life, using four years of Active Lives data, 2018-22]

⁶ Only statistically significant findings which control for other factors (multiple linear regression) are reported here. Wellbeing benefits (increased life satisfaction) are in comparison to ‘no activity’. Significant findings are then converted to a monetary value using the WELLBY. Values are in 2023 prices and are rounded to the nearest £100.

‘Light’ activity

- Where you neither raise your heart rate nor are out of breath or sweating (for example gentle walking).
- Does not count towards one’s weekly ‘active minutes’ in CMO guidelines.
- A person doing only light activity is categorised as physically inactive.

[These key findings are illustrated clearly in Table 8 in the full report by State of Life. To provide a comparison, being employed rather than unemployed has a wellbeing benefit of 0.46 and a WELLBY value of £7,000 (2023 prices).]⁷

Huge value to society if disabled people were as active as non-disabled people

Applying these individual values to estimates of the disabled population in England (9.1 million) reveals the following:

- The current physical activity levels of disabled people is worth £35.9 billion in social value.
- £3.5 billion of this is generated by the 9% of disabled people who only do ‘light’ activity. Considering them as ‘inactive’ (in adherence with the guidelines) would therefore underestimate the value.

We estimate the ‘activity gap’ at a cost to society of £10.9 billion, i.e. this would be the additional value if activity levels of disabled people were the same as non-disabled people.

In summary, light activity for disabled people (and interventions which encourage this) are likely to be an effective way of achieving wellbeing gains.

Find the full report on activityalliance.org.uk

⁷ £6,000 in 2019 prices, Annex 2, [HM Treasury \(2021\)](#)

