

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Cefnogi pobl sydd â chyflyrau cronig](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [supporting people with chronic conditions](#).

CC26: Ymateb gan: | Response from: UK Active





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ukactive's submission to the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry into supporting people with chronic conditions, 24.05.2023

Introduction

Physical activity is the golden thread in the fight against many of our national challenges, especially in the post-Covid world. It has the potential to address myriad public health issues, including improving the health and wellbeing of our children, ensuring the health of the nation's workforce, tackling loneliness and supporting an ageing society, and providing deeper connections within communities. It is also particularly powerful in helping people manage chronic conditions, and helping the Government provide support networks for those dealing with these conditions.

Despite the clear benefits of physical activity, Sport Wales' recent Sport and Active Lifestyle survey shows that 50% of adults had participated in sport or physical activity less than once per week, or not at all, during the four weeks prior to the survey. To truly support those with chronic conditions, the physical activity sector must be utilised to help prevent chronic conditions before they occur, as well as after diagnosis through rehabilitations, physical therapy and healthier lifestyles.

This evidence is submitted on behalf of ukactive, the leading not-for-profit membership body for the physical activity sector. We work with over four thousand members and partners who share a common ambition to improve the health and wellbeing of the nation by getting people moving, representing over 7200 facilities across all four nations, providing services to over 17 million people, employing over 300,000 across all its many services. This includes 156 members in Wales and leading physical activity and fitness facility operators, equipment suppliers, children's activity providers, charities and the third sector.

The benefits of physical activity in Wales

There are many benefits to physical activity in Wales, with substantial research showing the potential for health, society and economic returns, including regarding supporting those with chronic conditions.

For instance, research from Sport Wales (<https://www.sport.wales/content-vault/social-return-on-investment-in-sport/>) in 2018 showed that for every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity in Wales there is a return of £2.88, and that the social value of improved health as a result of community sport and physical activity is £295.17m. Additionally, the November 2020 lockdown alone cost the UK a loss of £29.4 million in health savings from the closure of leisure venues, demonstrating the vital importance of fitness and leisure facilities for health, as shown by the Local Government Association (<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/spending-review-2021-departmental-supplement-department-digital-culture-media-and>). According to research by Sport England



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(https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/research/inactive-people?section=at_a_glance), NHS providers in England spent more than £900 million in 2009/10 treating people with diseases that could be prevented if more people were physically active, showing that continuing to invest in this sector will increase people's health, allowing them to participate more in sport and enhancing levelling up opportunities.

A physically active population offers the Government substantial ROI in the prevention and treatment of many health conditions, including coronary heart disease and stroke, cancers, type 2 diabetes, dementia, musculoskeletal disorders, depression and mental wellbeing.

ukactive's members are essential in helping people get more physically active, which itself plays a significant role in improving health and wellbeing, including in supporting those with chronic health conditions.

Use of physical activity and leisure facilities in supporting those with chronic conditions

There are currently numerous projects that use fitness and physical activity to support those with chronic health conditions. These can be funded and expanded to provide these services to people across Wales.

For example, leisure facilities have shown great potential to be used as musculoskeletal (MSK) hubs. This can help more than 20 million people (<https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/data-and-statistics/the-state-of-musculoskeletal-health/>) in the UK suffering from health problems such as arthritis, chronic pain or a knee replacement. Successful use of leisure centres and swimming pools as MSK hubs (<https://www.ukactive.com/news/uk-health-pilot-to-explore-how-untapped-potential-of-leisure-facilities-could-save-millions-from-painful-msk-conditions-and-billions-for-nhs/>) could help reduce health inequalities and the burden on the NHS by providing local, supported, self-management options for people to better maintain mobility, physical function and reduce pain through exercise. MSK conditions can affect the muscles, joints, ligaments and nerves, and range from a knee injury to back pain and arthritis, making them the primary cause of disability globally and accounting for the third-largest area of NHS spend at around £5 billion annually.

66% (<https://www.ukactive.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-Decade-of-Change-for-PSL.pdf>) of all prehab and rehab for cancer patients currently takes place within leisure centres. Cancer (p)rehabilitation and recovery programmes for cancer patients, such as GM Cancer in Manchester, can be taken to an even greater scale. The outcome would be quality of life and physical activity improvements following post-operative rehabilitation resulting in reduced demands on healthcare services throughout the cancer pathway and cost savings associated with the early release of beds per prehab patient.



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Additionally, general (p)rehabilitation can reduce same-day surgery cancellations and NHS waiting lists. This should be invested in to establish an operational programme involving fitness, leisure, and wider physical activity sector that will help minimise the level of cancellations due to poor physical health. This would help increase efficiencies, reduce admission to post rehabilitation and reduce NHS waiting list demand, improving quality of care for all.

There are also programmes (<https://www.ukactive.com/journal/places-leisures-covid-19-and-long-covid-rehab-programme-launched-across-england/>) in England aiming to help the more than two million people who are struggling with the long-term effects of COVID-19 in the UK, using physical activity in leisure centres.

Furthermore, the sector can help people get more active through schemes in workplaces. ukactive produced a report on this and how workplaces can both support and be supported in helping their employees be more active and healthier. This report is available here: <https://www.ukactive.com/reports/the-active-workforce/>. A better focus on these types of initiatives and more collaboration with the physical activity sector for this can help other programmes, such as the Workplace Wellbeing programme run by Business Health Matters, which currently works with fitness and leisure partners across the country. Strengthened pathways between health services and physical activity facilities and providers are highly beneficial to long-term health and wellbeing and would allow chronic conditions to be either prevented or better treated.

This shows the great potential of physical activity for improving health, easing long-term conditions, and reducing NHS waiting lists. This also shows how using fitness and leisure facilities to provide these services is practical and efficient for patients. There is a large amount of potential for growth in these programmes, which would help those with chronic conditions manage their health.

Next steps

First, despite the clear benefits of the fitness and physical activity sector, there remains insufficient support for many gyms, pools, and leisure centres which continue to struggle to survive from the combined impact of COVID-19 and rising energy costs. We are now seeing more and more facilities restricting services or closing. The sector needs immediate investment to improve energy efficiency. Given the importance of the sector in helping people manage and take control of their health, it is vital that it receives the right support to stay afloat, and that the Government provides the right conditions in which the sector can thrive.

Secondly, the Welsh government must assess the role it can play in increasing rates of physical activity to gain the benefits to health, education, workforce productivity and social



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cohesion, among others. This should include further integration with NHS Wales, to strengthen the links between the prevention and management of ill-health, and physical activity and the role fitness and leisure facilities can play in supporting those with chronic conditions.

Additionally, to give further information on potential next steps, ukactive and a wider coalition of sector bodies, produced a report in July 2022 containing steps and priorities for governments can utilise sport, recreation and physical activity to improve health and wellbeing. This group also comprises of Active Partnerships, the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA), Local Government Association, Sport and Recreation Alliance, Sport for Development Coalition, and Youth Sport Trust. The report, titles 'Unlocking the Potential' is available here: https://www.ukactive.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Unlocking_The_Potential_report_ukactive_and_partners.pdf.