

Local government public health briefings

Physical activity

<http://guidance.nice.org.uk/phb3/>

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Introduction

This briefing summarises NICE's recommendations for local authorities and partner organisations on how to encourage people to be physically active. It is particularly relevant to health and wellbeing boards.

Physical activity is not only fun and enjoyable, it is essential for good health, helping to prevent or manage over 20 conditions and diseases. This includes heart disease, diabetes, some cancers and obesity. It can also help improve people's mental health and wellbeing ([At least five a week: Evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health](#)).

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is an independent organisation providing guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.

For further information on how to use this briefing and how it was developed, see '[About this briefing](#)'.

What can local authorities achieve by encouraging people to be more physically active?

Boost the local economy

Reduce sickness absence

In England, the costs of lost productivity have been estimated at £6.5 billion per year from sickness absence and premature death.

Physical activity programmes at work have been found to reduce absenteeism by up to 20%: physically active workers take 27% fewer sick days. Getting employees involved in a physical activity programme can also lead to net savings while boosting productivity.

Meet new responsibilities

Public health

Supporting people of all ages to be more physically active can help local authorities meet their new public health responsibilities. Specifically, it will impact on a range of indicators identified in the [public health](#) and the [adult social care](#) outcomes frameworks including:

- use of green space for exercise/health reasons
- child development
- excess weight in children and adults
- proportion of physically active and inactive adults
- self-reported wellbeing and health-related quality of life
- falls and injuries in the over-65s
- mortality from cardiovascular diseases (including heart disease and stroke), cancer and respiratory diseases.

Improve traffic flow and air quality

Encourage more physically active travel

There is potential for increasing the number of journeys taken by bicycle. Currently, these trips make up just 2% of all journeys in Britain. Twenty percent of all trips made cover less than 1 mile – and just over half of all car journeys cover less than 5 miles ([Transport trends 2009](#)).

Although most children can cycle, only 2% of trips to school are made by bike ([Taking part: The national survey of culture, leisure and sport. Adult and child report 2009/2010](#)).

Increase use of existing facilities

Opening school facilities to the local community at weekends and during school holidays can increase use of existing facilities, while making it easier for people to get involved in a range of physical activities.

Reduce demand on services

Health and social care

Being physically active can help older people to maintain full and independent lives, help prevent osteoporosis and falls and reduce demand on health and social care services.

Reduce health inequalities

Tackle social and health inequalities and improve social cohesion

Children from lower socioeconomic groups and some black and minority ethnic groups do less sport and exercise than those from higher socioeconomic groups ([Promoting physical activity for children: review 1 – epidemiology](#)).

Getting people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in leisure and sports activities can improve social cohesion and help reduce antisocial behaviour.

What NICE says

NICE recommendations

NICE guidance offers:

- recommendations based on the best available evidence to help you plan, deliver and evaluate successful programmes
- an objective and authoritative summary of the research and evidence, reviewed by independent experts from a range of backgrounds and disciplines
- an assessment of the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of public health interventions.

Following all of NICE's recommendations on physical activity will help you make the best and most efficient use of resources to improve the health of people in your area. Details of new guidance that NICE is developing on physical activity are on our [website](#).

Basic principles

A wide-ranging programme of initiatives, involving all local authority departments, will help encourage and empower local communities to be more physically active. This should include changes to environmental and other policies and strategies, as well as interventions aimed at individuals or groups.

Different activities will confer different benefits and appeal to different people. Whether or not they will get involved depends on a range of factors, including:

- their personal beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, preferences and perceptions about safety
- environmental factors (such as ease of access to facilities and open spaces, or whether roads encourage or discourage walking and cycling)
- social/cultural factors such as societal norms, peer influences and family priorities.

Encouraging change

Service planning and commissioning

Ensure local commissioning strategies and policies support physical activity, including those related to leisure, transport, housing, urban and rural development and local business strategies.

For details see [strategy, policy and commissioning](#) on NICE's 'Physical activity' pathway.

Transport

- Incorporate walking, cycling and other modes of active travel into the development or maintenance of roads.
- Introduce traffic-calming schemes.
- Create cycle paths, particularly in urban areas.
- Promote active travel to schools, colleges and other workplaces.

For details see [transport](#) on NICE's 'Physical activity' pathway.

Leisure and sport facilities

- Ensure they are easy to reach and use.
- Ensure they are safe.
- Ensure they suit a range of ages, abilities and cultural norms.

For details see [local services](#) on NICE's 'Physical activity' pathway.

Natural environment

Provide green spaces and play areas that stimulate children and safely challenge them.

For details see [public open spaces](#) on NICE's 'Physical activity' pathway.

Built environment

- Design new developments to encourage physical activity.
- Make local facilities and services easily accessible by foot or bike.
- Encourage stair use by providing clear signage and stairwells that are well lit and decorated.

For details see [buildings](#) on NICE's 'Physical activity' pathway

Schools and colleges

- Consider playground design.
- Introduce multi-component physical activity programmes involving the school, family and community.
- Implement school or college travel plans.
- Implement walk- or cycle-to-school days.
- Implement walking buses.

For details see [schools](#) on NICE's 'Physical activity' pathway.

Workplaces

- Introduce cycle purchase loan schemes.
- Promote physically active travel.
- Promote stair use by providing clear signage and stairwells that are well lit and decorated.
- Introduce work-based physical activity programmes.

For details see [workplace](#) on NICE's 'Physical activity' pathway.

Examples of practice

Examples of how NICE's advice on physical activity has been put into practice can be found on our [shared learning database](#). They include:

- [Promoting physical activity in the built or natural environments through applying NICE guidance](#).
- [Using a social marketing approach to influence students aged between 16 to 24 years old to increase their levels of physical activity and adopt healthy eating behaviours](#).

Note that the examples of practice included in this database aim to share learning among NHS and partner organisations, and do not replace the guidance.

Developing an action plan

Table 1 poses a range of questions which could be asked when developing a comprehensive plan to help your local population become more physically active.

Table 1

Assessing opportunities to develop a comprehensive plan to promote physical activity	Links to NICE recommendations
<p>1. How physically active is your local population?</p> <p>Collate data for inactive groups and the needs of specific groups. Check the local joint strategic needs assessment.</p>	<p>Evaluation</p>
<p>2. Do local commissioning strategies and local policies support physical activity?</p> <p>In addition to specific physical activity strategies, ensure other strategies and policies that can impact on physical activity provide positive support.</p> <p>What steps are being taken to ensure physical activity is incorporated into all appropriate policies, settings and plans?</p>	<p>Local strategy, policy and commissioning</p>

3. What steps are being taken to ensure the local environment supports physical activity?	<u>Environment</u>
4. What type of training is available for (and used by) those involved in providing physical activity services?	<u>Training</u>
5. To what extent do local workplaces encourage employees to be physically active?	<u>Workplace</u>
6. How do local authority services help people to be physically active? Are the needs of all groups addressed?	<u>Addressing health inequalities</u> <u>Environment</u> <u>Local services</u> <u>Transport</u>
7. Do local services encourage and empower groups of people and people with specific conditions to be physically active? Specific groups include: women before, during and after pregnancy, older adults, people who are overweight or obese and people at risk of cardiovascular disease or type 2 diabetes	<u>Cardiovascular disease</u> <u>Community engagement</u> <u>Diabetes prevention</u> <u>Older people - mental wellbeing</u> <u>Weight management</u>
8. To what extent do local health services encourage people to be physically active?	<u>Public health services</u>
9. How are local commissioning strategies and policies that support physical activity evaluated?	<u>Evaluation</u>
10. Who is the local councillor with responsibility for promoting physical activity?	<u>Local strategy and policy</u>

Costs and savings

- Inactivity costs the NHS an estimated £1.06 billion a year in direct costs.
- In England, the costs of lost productivity from sickness absence and premature death have been estimated at £6.5 billion per year ([Start active, stay active](#)). Physical activity programmes at work have been found to reduce absenteeism by up to 20%: physically active workers take 27% fewer sick days.
- Walking or cycling, instead of using motorised transport, can help reduce the associated costs of poor air quality, congestion and collisions in urban areas of England. Each of these issues costs society around £10 billion a year ([The wider costs of transport in English urban areas in 2009](#)).
- Many approaches to encouraging physical activity are cost effective, including:
 - Walking buses for younger school children. At £1330 (or £122 per child) they are cost effective, if 50% of those who previously travelled by car start walking to school (see [Promoting physical activity for children: cost effectiveness analysis](#)).
 - Improvements to the walking and cycling infrastructure, as they can help people avoid long-term chronic diseases (see [Physical activity and the environment: economic modelling report](#)).
 - Work-based physical activity programmes. A programme costing £18,900 for a company with 100 employees could lead to an overall net saving of £10,941 (see [Promoting physical activity in the workplace: business case](#)).

Facts and figures

- Around 60% of adult men, 72% of adult women and 68% and 76% of boys and girls (respectively) aged 2–15 do not meet the UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity recommendations. These include:
 - a lifetime approach
 - an emphasis on daily activity
 - recognition of the importance of vigorous-intensity activity
 - advocating a combination of moderate and vigorous-intensity activity
 - new guidelines on combatting sedentary behaviour.
- In 2010, 47% of children's trips to and from primary school were made on foot, compared to 53% in 1995/97. The proportion of trips by car increased by about the same proportion. Similar patterns are seen among secondary schoolchildren, but they make fewer school trips on foot (36% in 2010) ([National travel survey: 2010](#)).
- White adults are more likely than those from black and minority ethnic groups to say that they can cycle. Cycling proficiency is also linked to where people live, with those in more deprived neighbourhoods less likely to report being able to cycle ([Taking part 2011/12 quarter 3: statistical release](#)).
- People living in the most deprived areas are less likely to take part in active sport than people in the least deprived areas (43.5% versus 57.2%) ([Sport overview figures](#)).
- The proportion of people aged 65–74 involved in active sport has increased (from 35.3% in 2005/06 to 36.9% in 2010/11), but there has been a decrease among those aged 16–24 (from 75.8%–71.9%) ([Taking part 2011/12 quarter 3: statistical release](#)).
- Women are less likely than men to have been involved in active sport in the last 4 weeks. Sports participation rates among women have declined (from 47.7% in 2005/06 to 45.9% in 2010/11), while rates for men have remained steady at around 60% ([Sport overview figures](#)).

Support for planning, review and scrutiny

A range of support tools are available via [Into practice](#) on our website. They can help you identify local needs and assist with planning and scrutiny activities.

Other useful resources and advice

The following resources produced by other organisations may also be useful.

- Advice, guidance and information (national, regional and local) on issues relating to active and sustainable travel are provided by the Department for Transport, including the [National Standard for Cycle Training](#).
- Advice, guidance and information (national, regional and local) on issues relating to active and sustainable travel are provided by [Play England](#).
- The 'National planning policy framework' is available from [Communities and local government](#).
- National, regional and local physical activity data is available from a variety of sources including:
 - [Active people survey](#)
 - [Health survey for England](#)
 - [National travel survey](#)
 - [Statistics on obesity, physical activity and diet: England](#)
 - [Taking part survey](#)
 - [Physical activity data sources](#).

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- A range of physical activity planning tools are available including:
 - [Accessibility planning guidance](#)
 - [Active planning toolkit](#)
 - [Community sport: In it for the long run](#)
 - [Creating healthier communities: a resource pack for local partnerships](#)
 - [Let's get moving: revised commissioning guidance](#)
 - [Lightening the load: obesity toolkit](#)
 - [Local sport profile tool](#)
 - [Sport and activity planning tool](#)
 - [A healthy city is an active city.](#)
 - Tools for measuring physical activity and evaluating initiatives include:
 - [International physical activity questionnaire](#)
 - [Standard evaluation framework for physical activity.](#)

About this briefing

This briefing is based on 10 pieces of NICE guidance published up to July 2012 about physical activity. It was written with advice from NICE's Local Government Reference Group, and using feedback from council officers and elected members.

It is for local authorities and their partner organisations in the health and voluntary sectors, in particular, those involved with health and wellbeing boards. This includes local authority officers and councillors, directors of public health, and commissioners and directors of adult social care and children's services. It will also be relevant to members of local authority scrutiny committees.

This briefing may be used alongside the local joint strategic needs assessment to support the development of the joint health and wellbeing strategy.

This briefing is intended to be used online and it includes hyperlinks to sources of data and further information.

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