

Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24

Disabled people's perceptions and
experiences of sport and activity

Full report
June 2024

Activity Alliance,
IFF Research,
and True Insights

activityalliance.org.uk

activity
alliance

disability
inclusion
sport



Contents



1	Foreword	3	5	Appendix	47
2	Introduction	5		Accessibility	48
	Background	6		Defining disability and activity	48
	Methods	6		Sample sources	49
3	Research findings	8		Profile of respondents	49
	3.1 Participation and experience	9		Online workshops	51
	3.2 The legacy of COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis	18		Research limitations	51
	3.3 Outdoor spaces and active travel	24		Survey	51
	3.4 Mental wellbeing and loneliness	30		Workshops	51
	3.5 Representation and belonging	35		Barriers to being active	52
4	Summary and Recommendations	40		Motivations to be active	53
				Sources of advice	54
				Type of support and government policy changes or support	55
				Support for different areas of government for policy	56

1. Foreword

1. Foreword

Our Annual Survey plays such an important role in our work and as we increasingly hear, in partners' work too. To truly inspire change, we need to understand disabled people's experiences of, and views on, the opportunities that exist or should exist to improve activity levels. That's what this trailblazing survey does.

It's positive to see that the number of disabled people being active is stable, especially after the effects of such a hard-hitting pandemic. However, there is a lot of work to be done to ensure we significantly increase this number. The reality is that there remains a long way to go before we can call our society fair and equal.

This report highlights the stark differences in some areas between disabled and non-disabled people. Disabled people remain the least active in every community. This shows the deep-rooted barriers that exist and for this to change, we cannot do it alone. The fight for fairness involves many more people, including the people who work in sport, physical activity, education, health and government. We need to unite to raise awareness and champion disabled people in everything we do.

There are some fantastic examples across the country, whether within the local community or national programmes. In the last few years, we are delighted that programmes we run and that of our partners, have indeed improved thanks to this insight. We know we are better for this survey and the knowledge we gain from it.

We are proud to work with and support many organisations who work tirelessly to develop ideas and increase opportunities. The demand is clear within this survey, with three-quarters (76%) of disabled people saying they want to be more active. We cannot ignore this call for action.

It is a challenging climate for both disabled people and activity providers, where we face instability and the rising cost of living. Just a few months ago, we released our manifesto ahead of the general election. The three asks within the manifesto cover benefits, health and care workers, and outdoor spaces – three areas explored in this report.

We are here to help, and our expert team can support in many ways.

I call upon leaders and providers to read this report with the changes, small and great, they can make in mind. It is time we doubled our efforts and prioritised disabled people. From the playground to podium, nobody should feel left out or forgotten. Inclusion and accessibility benefit everyone.

Adam Blaze

Chief Executive, Activity Alliance



2. Introduction

2. Introduction

Background

Now in its fifth year, our Annual Disability and Activity Survey continues to track disabled people's perceptions and experiences of sport and activity.

We reviewed the questions in August 2023 with disabled people, stakeholders and with Activity Alliance colleagues, understanding which topics are most important for the survey to provide data on. Along with core questions on experiences, perceptions, and attitudes, this year's survey includes insights on how being active is affected by:

- The legacy of COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis
- Outdoor spaces and active travel
- Mental wellbeing and loneliness
- Representation and belonging

Methods

Online survey

2,320 people took part in an online survey between October and November 2023.

- Disabled people: 971
- Non-disabled people: 1,349

The sample is representative of the UK profile of disabled people¹ across demographics and is consistent with previous years. People with a range of impairment types took part, including 338 (35%) who reported living with a long-term health condition. [More information on the sample and profile of respondents can be found in the appendix.](#)

Workshops

Following the survey, the findings were explored in co-facilitated online workshops with three groups of disabled people and disabled co-researchers. 18 people with different impairments and demographics took part – together we explored the survey findings in connection with participants' experiences and developed ideas for actions to tackle the inequalities seen in the survey. We thank our participants and co-facilitators for their time and expertise.

¹ Percentage targets based on the [Family Resources Survey](#) and [ONS Census](#).

Understanding the report and definitions used

This report summarises findings based on significant differences between disabled and non-disabled people, and between this year and the previous years of the survey.



Arrows represent statistically significant changes across years of the survey within a group.



Asterisks represent a significant difference between disabled people and non-disabled people.



Lightbulbs represent suggestions from disabled people who took part in our online workshops.

Information on [how we defined disability and activity levels, and on the accessibility of the research can be viewed in the appendix.](#)

We have referenced other research and evidence in the report to add context to our findings. We will also release a separate executive summary for differences for people with different impairment types in the next few months. Please [email Activity Alliance's research team](#) or call 08081 756991 to discuss how to interpret and use the survey data.





3. Research findings

3. Research findings



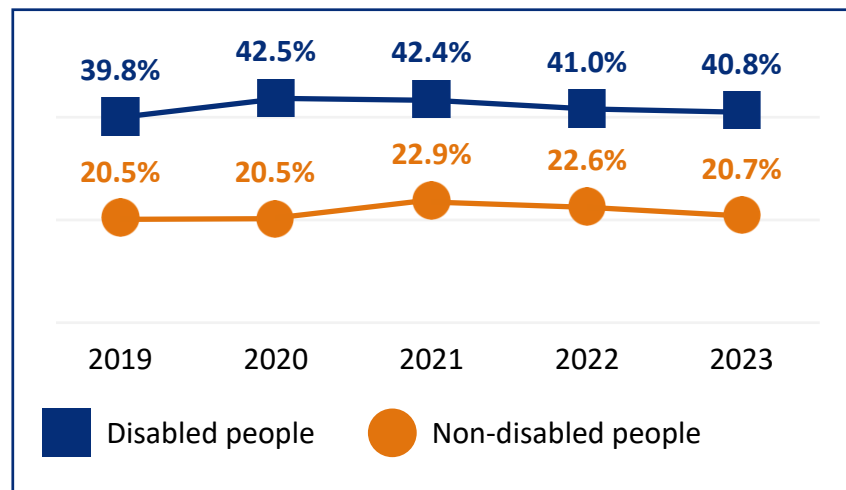
3.1 Participation and experience

This section examines the differences between activity levels, perceptions and attitudes towards participation, and people’s experiences of being active. Survey data remains similar since the survey began in 2019 and we continue to find few positive trends for disabled people’s participation and experiences. Together, we can collaborate and support each other to change attitudes and embed inclusive practices to meet the needs of disabled people and provide better, more meaningful experiences.

Consistent since the survey began, disabled people are twice as likely to be inactive than non-disabled people.

This report complements Sport England’s Active Lives Adult Survey, offering more detailed insights into issues important to disabled people. The most recent Active Lives data from April 2024² shows 40.8% (estimated 6.5 million) disabled people were inactive, compared to 20.7% of non-disabled people. This is consistent with last year and highlights that disabled people continue to be one of the least active groups (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Active Lives data showing levels of inactivity for disabled and non-disabled people between 2019 and 2023.



² Sport England, [Active Lives Adult Survey 2022-23](#) (2024).

Our findings from our survey show participation is also influenced by number of impairments and perception of disability.

- Disabled people with five or more impairments are more likely to be inactive (50% vs 24% of those with one impairment).
- Disabled people who see themselves as disabled are more likely to be inactive (48%), compared to those meeting the Equality Act definition but not identifying as disabled (25%).

Disabled people's activity levels have not considerably improved over the years. In 2023, the government released its latest sport strategy, 'Get Active: A strategy for the future of sport and physical activity'³. This set an ambitious target of 700,000 more disabled people active by 2030, from 7.6 million to 8.3 million⁴. Latest Active Lives data² shows no improvement in activity levels for disabled adults and only small increases for disabled children compared to last year. To achieve the government's target, disabled people need to be a priority focus.

Disabled people still want to be more active.

Three-quarters (76%) of disabled people say they want to be more active, compared to just over half (57%) of non-disabled people. This 'activity gap' has remained consistent since the start of the survey, showing an ongoing unmet demand. Only two in 10 (22%) inactive disabled people are happy with the amount of activity they do.

All the workshop participants were aware of the benefits of being active on their physical and mental health resulting from the activity itself and the additional benefits of being outside their home and socialising whilst being active. They all expressed an interest in learning about opportunities to be more active in their local area.



³ Department for Culture, Media & Sport, [Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity](#) (2024).

⁴ Department for Work and Pensions, [Family Resources Survey 2022-23](#) (2024).

The top motivation to be active is consistently about being healthy.

The reasons why disabled people (would) take part in a sport or physical activity have not changed significantly since the survey began in 2019. The top motivations this year are:

- To improve or maintain physical health (66%).
- To improve or maintain mental health (50%).
- To lose or maintain weight (42%).
- To get fit (41%).

Across the workshops, there was a sense that since the COVID-19 pandemic, the public is more aware of the importance and benefits of being active on their physical and mental health.

“ Obviously, being active has a positive effect on people's mental health and doing something where you're around other people will make you feel better.

Disabled person

”

Despite an increased awareness of the benefits of being active, there have been no positive attitude changes this year about disabled people and activities.

Compared to previous years, there have been no significant positive changes in people agreeing sport and physical activity is 'for disabled people'. Similar to last year, 60% of disabled people and 65% of non-disabled people agree physical activity and exercise are for disabled people.

There was much discussion in the workshops of the importance of feeling understood and valued by wider society. There was a feeling that many non-disabled people do not understand the challenges disabled people face. This feeling of being overlooked, under-valued and/or misunderstood is prominent generally and within the sport and physical activity sector specifically. This can feel apparent when sport and physical activity providers do not actively create a sense of belonging for disabled people.

“ It's important for disabled people to feel they are valued members of society... just because we are disabled doesn't mean we are fit for nothing.

Disabled person

”

People in the workshops felt there can be a lot of misconceptions and lack of empathy by some members of the non-disabled public towards disabled people, particularly those with non-visible impairments. Some with non-visible impairments report having negative experiences taking part in disability-specific activities, and support services within retail, leisure, sport, and physical activity spaces.

“ I am not perceived as disabled enough in some of the disabled-specific activities I've done.

Disabled person

”

“ I'm always getting looked at in a weird way... saying you're not disabled, or you don't look disabled so you can't park here... it's actually got to the stage where I stopped applying for the blue badge.

Disabled person

”

The Paralympics was praised as an example of much-needed positive representation of disabled people in the media. Some felt this had helped improve attitudes. However, the extraordinary achievements of the country's top athletes can feel far removed from disabled people's own lives and experiences.

“ I think representation has got a lot better. You see a lot more disabled people on TV, you see a lot more of the Paralympics... but the discrimination and talking over you or forgetting you as a person still exists.

Disabled person

”

Despite a recent increase in positive representation in the media, there is still a lot of ignorance and discrimination. Challenging perceptions among disabled and non-disabled people is key.

“ There's still discrimination. There (are) still negative attitudes.

Disabled person

”

Disabled people see the benefits of being active but can face obstacles that limit their participation.

Two-thirds (65%) of disabled people enjoyed the last time they took part in physical activity compared to 78% of non-disabled people. There was consensus across the workshops that participation has a positive impact on their physical and mental health.

Most people in the workshops were not aware of any subsidised membership, activities, services, and support for them in their local area (if it exists). This situation is thought to have worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic and during a cost of living crisis where participants report seeing disability centred services and support stopped or reduced.

“ I think a lot of the voluntary organisations are no longer providing the activities, and it switched over to the private sector. To participate (now) is quite expensive.

Disabled person

”

Practical obstacles relating to access and inclusion in sport and physical activity were frequently mentioned in the workshops and are listed below. All are discussed in more detail at relevant points within this report.

- The cost of living crisis – paid physical activities can be easier to cut than energy and food bills, council cuts, charities struggling to obtain funding, and fewer volunteers.
- The rising costs of public transport.
- Fewer bus services to outdoor spaces.
- The uncertainty as to whether those who need an accessible parking space can access one.
- The rising cost of membership and paid activities, and cancellation fees.

- A lack of opportunity (and knowing about opportunities) relating to sport and activities including coaching.
- A lack of appropriate facilities e.g. quiet spaces within gyms, and too few benches and accessible toilets outdoors.
- A lack of volunteers or staff to give assistance indoors and on walking trails outdoors.
- A lack of representation of disabled people participating and working in the space and on promotional materials can enhance the feeling of the space not being for them.

The top reason for not being as active is ‘my health condition or impairment’.

The barriers that disabled people experience have not changed significantly in the last five years.

- Eight in 10 disabled people (79%) said that their impairment stops them from doing as much physical activity as they would like.
- Getting older (31%) and a general lack of motivation (24%) are the next most common barriers for disabled people.

Health condition or impairment being the top barrier can be interpreted differently by survey respondents and was explored in the workshops. It can be interpreted as the physical or psychological impacts of a person's condition or impairment, or as physical activity not being adapted to their condition or impairment. There was agreement in the workshops with the former interpretation with many individuals blaming themselves due to societal barriers and inaccessible structures. This feeling can be heightened among older disabled people where their impairment or condition has worsened with age.

“ I'm getting older and... I am in more pain. I am struggling to do things... and my issues are escalating and becoming more difficult for me to manage.
Disabled person ”

People in the workshops felt they had to do more preparation and planning for activities and trips outdoors compared to non-disabled people. This can be time-consuming and reduce spontaneous activity.

“ I have to research so much... where I could go for a walk? Is there parking nearby? Is it flat? Is it bumpy?
Disabled person ”

There might be times when they want to plan an activity but cannot find the information they need, such as whether there are available accessible parking spaces, or accessible public toilets, which can be off-putting. They might also have to schedule in the support of others which can reduce spontaneous (and planned) activities.

“ Since my amputation, I just keep losing my confidence with trying to swim and then I know that I just won't do it by myself.
Disabled person ”

Some participants in the workshops felt they needed more information about the types of activity that could benefit them. This can further increase their confidence and their likelihood to participate in sport and physical activity.

“ (It is important to) know if I could be doing more damage or whether it's safe for me to do certain activities, I can't get to see anybody (for advice).
Disabled person ”

Healthcare professionals can play a role in reassuring disabled people about being active with an impairment or health condition. Disabled people are most likely to prefer advice on being active from healthcare professionals, and in particular from:

- Physios, occupational therapists, and other medical professionals (50% vs 31% of non-disabled people).
- Specialist doctors, consultants, or medical practitioners (49% vs 28% of non-disabled people).
- GPs or nurses (48% vs 32% of non-disabled people).

“ (We need) access to support... and direction towards specific physical activities that would help.

Disabled person

”

Workshop participants suggested that government and local health providers should work together with sport and physical activity providers to advise and consult on and create opportunities for disabled people in the local area. [Our manifesto](#) asks the next government to ensure that better processes are in place for health and care workers to support disabled people to use physical activity in ways which work best for them. It is important to equip health and care workers so they can give disabled people the best information and accurately signpost to a wider choice of activities.

Disabled people do not have the opportunity to be as active as they want to be.

43% of disabled people feel they have the chance to be as active as they desire, compared to 69% of non-disabled people. This figure has not changed since 2019. This was reinforced in the workshops with participants perceiving there to be fewer sport and physical activity opportunities (with support) for disabled people which negatively impacts on their likelihood to be physically active.

Among disabled people reporting their health condition as a barrier to being active, most said the effects make it harder for them to be active (84%).

Disabled women are more likely feel the disparity in perceived opportunity compared to disabled men (39% vs 48%), as are disabled people with five or more impairments compared to those with one impairment (30% vs 56%).

Many people (regardless of age or gender or other characteristics) in the workshops are concerned about the rising costs of gym membership, and paid activities which restricts their participation, particularly for low-income earners.

Some also expressed concern for the challenging financial situation for some local councils and charities. This resulted in reduced subsidised leisure opportunities for disabled people in their local area.

“ A lot of services have been stripped back to the bare bone and they haven't reinstated a lot of stuff.

Disabled person

”

“ There's lots of charities (that) have disappeared... they haven't been able to get the funding and they've just shut down completely.

Disabled person

”

Workshop participants described a type of 'postcode lottery' for tailored and subsidised opportunities across England, with few (except people in the workshops who lived in parts of London and Brighton) living in a postcode that meant they could benefit from this 'lottery system'.

“ Wherever you live in the country, depending how far away you are from the big city, you get less money unfortunately.

Disabled person

”

A small number of people in the workshops (who lived in London and Brighton) felt fortunate to have access to subsidised sport and physical activities for disabled people organised and funded by either the council, private leisure centres and/or local charities.

“ I'm fortunate, I live in Southeast London... I have access to just about everything I need. If I want to do chair yoga I can, if I want to get help to go to the gym, I get that through the council.

Disabled person

”

Sport and activity providers would attract more customers and more profit if they were more inclusive⁵. However, there were concerns in one workshop that providers might be afraid to offer tailored opportunities to disabled people in case they get it wrong.

“ It's difficult for them... to try and cater for a disabled person... in case they injure themselves and they don't want to be held responsible.

Disabled person

”

⁵ Scope. [Attracting more disabled customers and the Purple Pound](#) (2023).

Most people in the workshops hear about opportunities by word of mouth rather than direct marketing. Our survey findings show websites (33%), friends and family (30%), and healthcare professionals or practices (24%) are typically how disabled people find out about opportunities.

As many disabled people rely on word of mouth to find out about opportunities, it is possible they do not always hear about relevant services and support available in their local area. Workshop participants would like to see more tailored and targeted information and marketing about opportunities made more accessible to them.

Many in the workshops believe national and local government have a role in educating and incentivising providers to be more inclusive. Findings from the workshops suggest increased representation of disabled people within these spaces and in tailored and targeted marketing and communications would enhance a feeling of belonging and encourage them to participate.

Workshop participant suggestions for encouraging greater participation in sports and physical activity include:



- Consultation and collaboration with disabled people and their supporters (including health providers) to create subsidised opportunities for disabled people of all ages and genders.
- Providers to be aware of practical barriers and the perceived expense of sports and physical activities for many disabled people.
- Providers to be aware of emotional barriers to participation and how to create a sense of belonging for disabled people.
- Providers to have more inclusive representation in marketing and communications.
- Provide tailored and targeted information regarding ease of access, subsidised activities, travel, and support provided in their local area.



3.2 The legacy of COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis

This section explores the impact the cost of living crisis and benefits can have on being active. Disabled people are more likely to be hit harder by the cost of living crisis⁶ and it can seem easier to cut expensive membership, paid activities and socialise less than reduce essential services and products such as energy and food bills.

The rising cost of living is now affecting everyone's activity levels and how much people socialise, creating broad societal impact.

Consistent with last year, around two-fifths (39%) of disabled people agree that the increased cost of living has reduced how active they are. However, this year, a similar proportion of disabled people disagree with the statement resulting in mixed views.

Last year, disabled people were more likely to agree than non-disabled people and were therefore impacted more. But this year, non-disabled people are equally likely to agree, implying that cost of living is affecting everyone's activity levels. The same is reported for impacting how much people socialise, with a similar proportion of disabled and non-disabled people agreeing (59% and 57%).

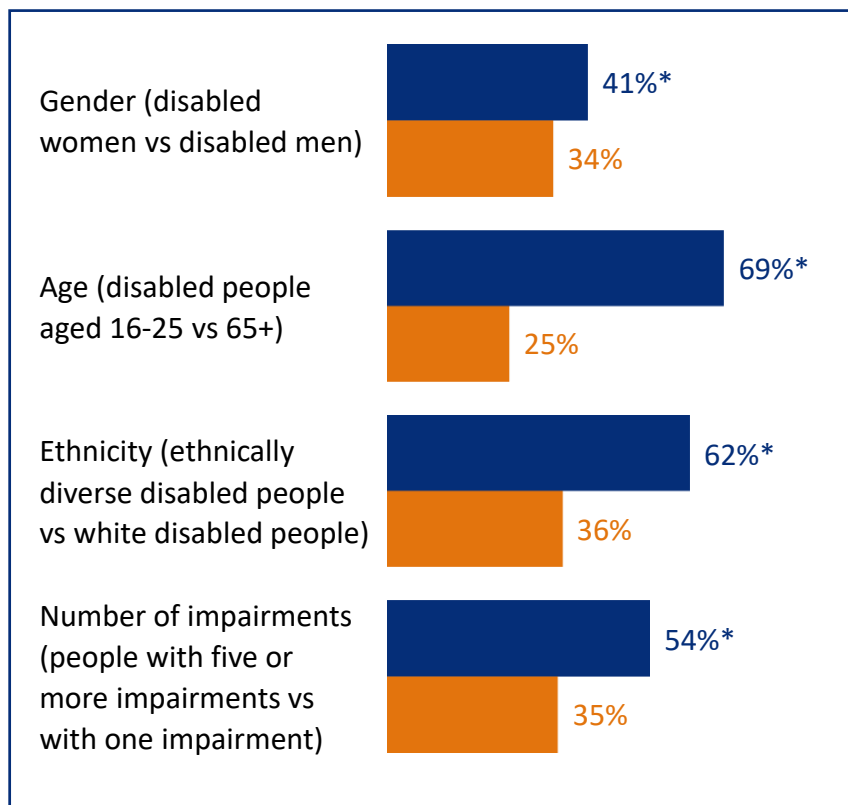
Our findings show cost of living is disproportionately impacting disabled women, younger disabled people, ethnically diverse disabled people, and disabled people with five or more impairments (Figure 2). They are significantly more likely to reduce their activity levels and how much they socialise due to the increased cost of living.



⁶ Scope, [Disability Price Tag 2023: the extra cost of disability](#) (2024).

Figure 2

Proportion agreeing with the statement: ‘the increased cost of living has reduced how active I am’.



In our workshops, the cost of living was the most extensively discussed subject. Most people reported experiencing a negative impact on their standard of living during the cost of living crisis and some have had to make cuts to products and services such as paid activities to get by. Paid physical activities tend to be among the first things to go in people’s lives despite the important benefits of physical activity to the person’s physical and mental wellbeing.

“ Everybody's being affected by it, whether you're an individual person or whether you're a multinational company, you know, everybody's feeling that crunch.”

Disabled person

“ People are struggling and it's a knock-on effect really everywhere.”

Disabled person

Low-income earners in the workshops were particularly concerned by the rising costs of basic bills such as energy and food, making it difficult to justify expenditure on paid membership, sport, and physical activity. Research shows 55% of disabled adults are finding it difficult to afford their energy bills and the cost of living crisis is only amplifying a disparity in society⁷.

*Significant difference between disabled people.

⁷ Sport England. [The rising cost of living and its impact on sport and physical activity](#) (2024).

“ The prices are sky high and with the cost of living at the moment, you have to make a choice. ”

Disabled person

“ I can't do anything anywhere because I get the bare minimum... I daren't even put the heating on. ”

Disabled person

“ My Pilates classes have gone up in price and I get acupuncture as well, that's going up... it's getting harder, and you've got to make decisions as to what you spend your money on. ”

Disabled person

“ I think cost is a massive thing... everything is so expensive now... I need personal training. I can't do it on my own. I have to pay £50 a week for two hours a week. I can't afford that. ”

Disabled person

It was frequently acknowledged across the workshops that disabled people can have unpredictable good and bad days which can make it difficult to commit to bookings. Not being able to cancel a pre-booked activity at short notice without facing a cancellation charge, is thought to be a type of 'disability tax' and can make paid activities feel expensive for low-income earners.



There is a perceived decline in opportunities for disabled people post-COVID and during a cost of living crisis.

Many people in the workshops have seen a decline in tailored activities, services, and support for disabled people in their area. This decline is thought to be particularly serious since the COVID-19 pandemic and during the cost of living crisis. Workshop participants report a perception that local councils and charities that used to support disabled people in their local area are facing a funding crisis and have reduced services and support in response to this.

“ There's nothing coming at the moment from councils... It hasn't gone back to any sort of level since before the pandemic. There's no funding whatsoever. ”

Disabled person

“ They're not bringing back the kind of programmes they used to have. Like when I saw the GP and he suggested resistance training, about five or six years ago, I would have been put in a programme to do (this) with the local leisure centre... and that seems to have disappeared.

Disabled person

”

“ They used to do special swimming sessions that were less busy for, people with Autism, they seemed to have stopped those (post-pandemic).

Disabled person

”

The presence of volunteers not only signals permission to ask for help but can also encourage disabled people to feel safer and fosters a stronger sense of belonging. However, some participants in one workshop report seeing a marked decline in sport and physical activity volunteers in their area. They are concerned that people who once volunteered might now juggle more than one job or take extra shifts to cope with spiralling costs and no longer have the time to volunteer.

“ Regarding the volunteers around here... I am assuming because of the cost of living they've all had to go out and get extra jobs. I can't quite understand why there's no help around my area.

Disabled person

”

One workshop participant explained how before the COVID-19 pandemic there was a staff member or volunteer on hand to help him find a parking space and get to and from their car safely at their local leisure centre. Unfortunately, post-pandemic (and during a cost of living crisis) their experience is that the centre is now under-staffed and can no longer guarantee this type of support to disabled members and visitors.

“ I wish things would go back to how they were before the pandemic because people seemed a lot more helpful, certainly at (my) leisure centre.

Disabled person

”

Disabled people are more likely to consider sport and activity to be a luxury rather than a necessity.

While the findings suggest there is widespread awareness and understanding among disabled people of the importance of sport and activity on their physical and mental health, disabled people are more likely to consider sport and activity to be a luxury rather than a necessity compared to non-disabled people (41% vs 36%).

Findings from the workshops suggest disabled people pay more for goods and services just to be able to live the same quality of life as a non-disabled person. For instance, spending more time at home can result in higher heating bills and not having the option to work extra shifts to cover rising bills can lead to disabled people being potentially hit harder during the cost of living crisis.

“ I think that it's impacting us more but then it's disproportionately going to affect us more because we need that extra bit of help.

Disabled person

”

Some workshop participants are not eligible for benefits to pay for essential medication. One person described how relieved some low-income earning disabled people can feel when diagnosed with diabetes, as this made them eligible for free medication for all their health conditions.

All these additional expenses that disabled people can face were described as a type of 'disability tax.' Paying this tax, particularly on a low income, can have a negative impact on their ability to pay for non-essential items, and sport and physical activity can feel like a luxury.

Workshop participants also reported a worry about the expense related to having the correct clothes or kit. Adding to the sense that membership and paid activities are an expensive luxury.

“ Yeah, I need to be walking in with what I'm wearing and (know whether) it is acceptable or not... Do I have to buy a whole set of kit?

Disabled person

”

Despite increased awareness of the benefits of physical activity, disabled people cut back on paid activities when money is tight.

New to the survey this year, just over two-fifths of disabled people (44%) agreed that when money is tight, the cost of being active is one of the first things they look to reduce.

Just over half (53%) of disabled people agree that the cost of activities influences how they choose to be active.

It was frequently acknowledged across the workshops that it can be easier to drop an expensive membership or paid activity compared to cutting back on items such as energy and food bills.

“ It is an expensive thing for me to do to go to the gym, so I only go there once a week now.
Disabled person ”

“ I have tried several different swimming outlets in my area, and the only one that would accommodate me is a private one, and they're charging about £300... I'm on basic Universal Credit... there's no way I can do it.
Disabled person ”

Disabled people are still afraid they might lose financial assistance if they're active.

Half of disabled people in our survey received benefits or financial assistance due to their health condition or impairment. Consistent with last year, six in 10 (59%) say they rely on their benefits or financial assistance to be active.

Around two-fifths (38%) of disabled people say that a fear of their benefits or financial assistance being taken away prevents them from trying to be more active. Our findings highlight a consistent fear across years, with a small reduction last year from 46% to 37% but a continuous problem. [Our manifesto to the next government](#) calls to protect benefits and provide clearer understanding to reassure disabled people that being active will not threaten their benefits or financial assistance. Our ['Activity Trap' report](#) (2018) explores the ongoing concern.

Disabled men and younger disabled people are more likely to express fear, implying they rely on financial assistance more heavily than women or those who are older. Activity providers must be aware of the financial challenges disabled people face to be active.

Suggestions from disabled people in our workshops include:



- Implement subsidised membership and activities for disabled people.
- Eliminate cancellation fees for disabled people.
- Consult with disabled people regarding how to create more subsidised, targeted and tailored opportunities with flexible schedules.



3.3 Outdoor spaces and active travel

New questions added to the survey explore the accessibility of outdoor spaces and active travel. This section examines where people take part in sport and physical activity, where they would prefer to take part, and how they travel to activities. It showcases that accessing outdoor spaces and actively travelling remains a challenge for a significant proportion of disabled people.

Disabled people want to take part in physical activity in outdoor spaces like parks, countryside, or woodland.

Consistent with last year, disabled people are less likely to be active almost everywhere compared to non-disabled people, apart from at home. They are most likely to say they prefer being active in outdoor spaces like parks, countryside, or woodland (Table 1). There is a significant gap in the participation rates between disabled and non-disabled people in these outdoor spaces (40% vs 50%). Findings highlight the challenges disabled people often face to access outdoor spaces such as parks, countryside, or woodland.



The importance of taking part in physical activity in outdoor spaces like parks, countryside, or woodland was mirrored across the workshops. This is viewed as particularly important during a cost of living crisis when so many people are struggling financially, and membership and paid activities are often the first things to be dropped by participants.

“ My top theme would be ‘outdoors’ – having (somewhere to go) where I feel confident and comfortable... and I can get out and do something outdoors.

Disabled person

”

Table 1

Proportion of people who select each of the following as places where they would prefer to be active.

	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
Outdoor spaces like parks, countryside, or woodland	40%*	50%
Outdoor spaces near lakes, rivers, or the seaside	29%*	36%
Indoor: at a leisure or sports centre, swimming pool, gym, or studio	30%	31%
At home: not using online or digital tools	27%	25%
At home: using online or digital tools such as a phone, laptop, or TV	26%	26%
Indoor: at a community centre or other local building e.g. school or village hall	15%	13%
Outdoor spaces like roads or streets	13%*	21%
Outdoor: at a leisure or sports centre, swimming pool, gym, or studio	10%*	16%
At a sport-specific facility or club e.g. football, tennis, cricket club or climbing centres	8%*	14%

*Significant difference between disabled people and non-disabled people.

Less than half (44%) of disabled people say it's easy for them to physically access outdoor spaces (vs 78% of non-disabled people).

Around a third of disabled people report having difficulty physically accessing outdoor spaces like parks, countryside, or woodland (32%). This finding is highlighted in [our manifesto](#) where we call on the next government to increase accessible outdoor spaces.

Unsurprisingly, disabled people who live in rural areas are more likely to find accessing outdoor spaces easier than those who live in urban areas (50% vs 45%). These findings were reinforced in the workshops with participants who live in urban areas more likely to face challenges accessing and being active outdoors. Whereas those who live in rural areas felt lucky to have easier access to outdoor spaces. This is another type of postcode lottery, where those who live near outdoor areas of outstanding beauty can enjoy them more easily than those who do not.

“ Because we are in the countryside, there is loads of outdoor spaces and different things to go and to walk round and be active in there. We are very lucky that way.

Disabled person

”

Disabled people are significantly more likely to face barriers to being active in outdoor spaces.

Only 14% of disabled people say ‘nothing stops me from being active in outdoor spaces’ compared to 29% of non-disabled people.

The most common things reported to generally stop people are:

- Lack of **motivation** to access outdoor spaces (21%).
- Lack of **confidence** to access outdoor spaces (21%).
- Lack of **accessibility** in winter months (19%).

While a similar proportion of non-disabled people report a lack of motivation and accessibility, they are significantly less likely to report a lack of confidence (12%).

Workshop participants frequently expressed the opinion that travelling to, and using outdoor spaces, can require more planning, take longer, and feel more of a challenge, particularly when people are reliant on mobility aids or experience fatigue. They might also have to schedule in support from others, particularly for those who face longer journeys to outdoor spaces. All these factors can impact motivation and confidence levels and limit participation.

“ There (are) some places that I've wanted to go, and I know it's going to be a mission to get there... if I use public transport, that's going to be difficult. If I take my car, there's not going to be parking close enough. That's a barrier as well.

Disabled person

”

Planning activities outdoors can add a degree of anxiety for those who feel particularly vulnerable about accessing and using these spaces. Women in the workshops were more likely to say they value having someone to support them to access and take part in activity outdoors. Workshop participants frequently raised concerns about a lack of accessible parking spaces, and the availability and cost of public transport to outdoor spaces.

“ It's always that dread – are there any spaces available, you never know. You can't fully commit to doing whatever it is you're doing, because you don't know if you can park.

Disabled person

”

“ I've got to look on Google Maps to find where the single yellow lines are. I need to look up the blue badge rules in that borough/county and then strategically figure out where else can I park.

Disabled person

”

“ It would be helpful if you could reserve a car parking space because you can reserve car charging spaces, so why can't we use that same concept when it's about access.

Disabled person

”

More information about support in outdoor spaces such as the availability and location of benches for resting and accessible public toilets would help disabled people to better prepare and feel more confident outdoors.



“ There seems to be a scarcity of benches in this country. I can't go to parks because I need to sit down every 100 yards and you don't know if there are benches or not, so you rule out going there.

Disabled person

”

Just under half (46%) of disabled people have a preference to actively travel.

Disabled people are most likely to use a car, van, or motorbike that they drive themselves (47%) to reach the place where they usually take part in sport, exercise, or physical activity. The second most common mode was on foot or walking alone (34%), however this is significantly lower than for non-disabled people (53%). Disabled people with only one impairment, who are younger, and who are in a lower social grade are more likely to travel on foot or walk alone.

A large proportion of disabled people (46%) would like to actively travel to the places where they take part in physical activity. While others would prefer to take public transport (26%). How disabled people currently travel aligns with how they want to travel.

Around one in 10 disabled people (12%) travel with someone who supports them, and a similar proportion alternate between travelling alone and with support (13%). Individuals with learning and/or memory disabilities (20%), those with five or more impairments (17%), disabled women (15%), and disabled people in higher social grades (17%) are more likely to travel with support.

When engaging disabled people in activities it is important to think about influencers. Our [‘Supporting me to be active: the role of supporters in influencing disabled people to be active’](#) and [‘Engagement factsheet: supporters’ roles in engaging disabled people’](#) showcase the key role supporters play in encouraging disabled people to be active.



Workshop participants considered travelling to be a form of activity and exercise on its own. However, travel via public transport can be daunting for disabled people compared to non-disabled people, particularly users of mobility aids. Reduced bus services, queues, and changes needed to get to destinations can cause anxiety.

“ The bus service is just terrible now.
Disabled person ”

Not being able to access information about a journey can be off-putting and increase the likelihood of not travelling. Disabled people would welcome more information about public transport options to sports and physical activity spaces to help them better prepare for journeys and feel reassured.

“ There are apps where you can have a look at walking routes and it will tell you how long it would take you and if it's disabled-friendly, but it doesn't specifically tell you the specifics of where's the best place to park.

Disabled person



The cost of travel can be off-putting, particularly to low-income earners. In one workshop, a participant was pleased to report learning about a £2 per journey initiative for bus journeys in their local area which has encouraged him to travel more. The workshop participants responded favourably upon hearing about this and would like to see more initiatives like this across the country.

“ The buses have got better since they introduced this £2 fee thing for people, there seems to be more people getting on the bus and getting out and about. It has helped us.

Disabled person



It was suggested in the workshops that local councils could run minibuses for disabled people to sport and physical activity spaces.

“ I wish they would run a sort of minibus or something similar for disabled people.

Disabled person



Workshop participant suggestions for encouraging greater use of outdoor spaces and active travel include:



- Consult with disabled people to identify the support they need when travelling to and visiting outdoor spaces.
- Provide tailored and targeted information regarding ease of access, travel and support provided in local areas.
- Provide subsidised travel.
- Ensure there are available accessible parking spaces, more benches and accessible public toilets on walking trails and other outdoors spaces.



3.4 Mental wellbeing and loneliness

This section explores the power of sport and activity on mental health and wellbeing including the impact on levels of loneliness. Our findings show that disabled people with protected characteristics (including ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, low economic status, multiple impairments, and younger age group) are significantly more likely to experience loneliness. Engaging in physical activity not only offers mental health and social benefits but also contributes to enhancing disabled people's wellbeing⁸.

Disabled people are experiencing significantly poorer mental wellbeing and higher levels of loneliness.

Consistent with last year's findings, disabled people are significantly less likely to report a very high score (9-10/10) on satisfaction with their life (5% vs 15%), happiness (11% vs 19%), and feelings of worthwhileness (17% vs 21%) compared to non-disabled people. This year, they report similar levels of anxiety. Our findings also show younger disabled people are more likely to report higher levels of anxiety.



⁸ Public Health England, [Health Matters](#) (2022).

Findings from the workshops suggest that one of the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is an increased awareness of the positive impact of physical activity and socialisation on our physical and mental health. All the workshop participants agreed that sport and physical activity and the social benefits that come with it can make a significant difference to their mental health and wellbeing.

“ I think that the mental health and wellbeing is the most important category for me. Because if you have got a disability... you're more likely to (have) depression... and so obviously you do want to just get out and do what you can.

Disabled person

”

Furthermore, there was strong consensus across the workshops that mental wellbeing can be negatively affected when people cannot be active or participate in leisure activities alone and with others.

“ Obviously being active has a positive effect on people's mental health and I think doing something where you're around other people will make you feel better.

Disabled person

”

There was much discussion in the workshops relating to another legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic – more employees working from home. While this is seen as a progressive change, the downside of working from home can be increased isolation.

“ A lot of disabled people like me like to work from home but that brings loneliness.

Disabled person

”

Since the start of the pandemic, disabled people are significantly more likely than non-disabled people to have experienced feeling more socially isolated (48% vs 33%). In particular, younger disabled people and the more impairments a disabled person has, the more likely they are to report feeling lonely.

People in the workshops welcome more opportunities to take part in sport and physical activities with people of similar ages, in similar situations and with the same or similar impairments to feel less isolated and to help combat feelings of loneliness.



“ (Activity) is important and it has helped with my mental health, knowing that I'm going somewhere every week and meeting up with loads of disabled people... feeling understood and included (makes a difference).

Disabled person

”

Being active has key benefits for mental health.

Loneliness levels have been consistent in recent years with disabled people being significantly more likely than non-disabled people to say that they 'often' or 'always' feel lonely (20% vs 11%). The proportion who say they feel lonely 'occasionally' or 'some of the time' has increased this year, rising to 46% from 41% in 2019.

Positively, being active could help disabled people feel less lonely. Among those who said they feel lonely sometimes, often, or always, two-thirds agreed that being active could help them feel less lonely (66%). Only 7% of disabled people disagreed, while the rest neither agreed nor disagreed.

However, findings from the workshops suggest there are not enough inclusive, tailored, and subsidised activities (with support) for disabled people, and this can enhance disabled people's sense of not belonging in sport and physical activity spaces.

“ There's nothing for people that you know are slower, can't do as much, are weaker or bigger. I wish there was more availability for classes, not just for me, but for people in similar situations, so you can all go at the same pace and the class is tailored to you... rather than tailored to fitter people (so you don't feel like you're failing all the time.

Disabled person

”

“ Certainly, in Nottingham, there are gyms everywhere, but you'd never see anything about accessibility, affordable classes or affordable memberships.

Disabled person

”

Greater flexibility relating to availability of classes and activities and last-minute cancellations can also help make a significant difference to all levels of participation and help to foster a greater sense of belonging in the space.

Disabled people with various protected characteristics, including ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, low economic status, multiple impairments, and younger age groups are more likely to experience loneliness.

- Ethnically diverse disabled people are more likely to say they often or always felt lonely (35% vs 19%).
- Disabled women are less likely to say they never or hardly ever feel lonely than disabled men (30% vs 39%).
- LGBT+ disabled people are more likely than heterosexual disabled people to often or always feel lonely (31% vs 19%).
- Disabled people in a lower social grade are more likely to often or always feel lonely (23%) than disabled people in a higher social grade.
- Over a third of disabled people with five or more impairments often or always feel lonely (36%), compared to just under two in 10 (17%) of disabled people with one impairment.
- Younger disabled people are more likely to say they often or always felt lonely; just over a third (34%) of those aged 16-34 years old said this compared to one in ten (13%) of those aged 65+.

Older disabled people in the workshops tend to feel more vulnerable compared to younger disabled people and have increased anxiety relating to planning a sport or physical activity or a trip outdoors.

People with lower incomes in the workshops were more likely to cut back on paid activities when struggling to make ends meet. When they can afford to participate in sports and paid activities, they might be concerned about not fitting in and/or not being able to afford the right kit. This degree of self-consciousness can be a significant emotional barrier to taking part in organised activity.

“ I've not been losing weight and I just wear a massive t-shirt to hide my body shape, disguising what I look like to everybody.

Disabled person

”

There was also a sense (within one workshop) that activities for disabled people tend to target older disabled people exclusively and activities for younger disabled people are hard to find.

“ All the amputees in the swimming pool were much older than me.

Disabled person

”

Workshop participant suggestions for the promotion of better mental health and wellbeing include:



- Consult with disabled people of all ages as to the type of opportunities they would like to see created.
- Create opportunities for disabled people of all ages and genders and ensure the environment is accessible, supportive, and inclusive.
- Ensure sport and physical activities are affordable and there is flexibility with regard to when they are provided.





3.5 Representation and belonging

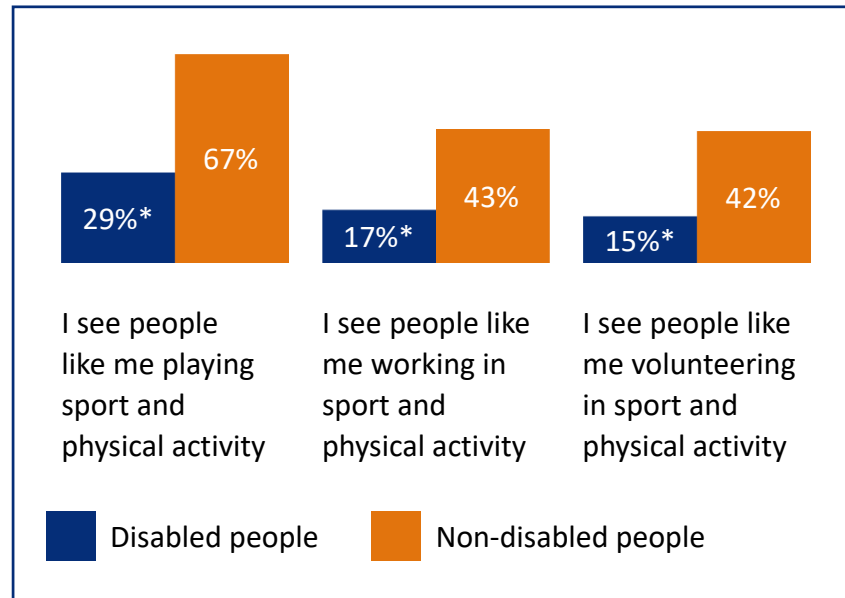
Our findings suggest that greater representation (participating, working, and volunteering) of disabled people in sport and physical activity could have a powerful impact on participation. However, our insight also highlights the current significant inequality that exists in how disabled people see themselves being represented in the sector. This section explores the workforce in sport and physical activity and how to support disabled people to work or volunteer in the sector.

Disabled people are more than half as likely to ‘see people like me’ participating, working, and volunteering in sport and physical activity.

Consistent with findings from previous years, there is a distinct inequality between disabled people and non-disabled people’s perceived representation in sport and physical activity (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Proportion agreeing with each statement.



Q: How much do you agree or disagree with the following comments? Base: All disabled and non-disabled people.

The findings show the likelihood of representation across the sport and activity sector decreases with the number of impairments and with age. Disabled people with five or more impairments, disabled people in a lower social grade, and older disabled people over the age of 65 are least likely to agree that people like themselves are within the sport and physical activity workforce (10%, 13%, and 8%).

*Significant difference between disabled people and non-disabled people.

Workshop discussions highlighted how disabled people often feel over-looked and under-represented in many areas including the sport and physical activity sector.

“ Disability still seems to not be at the forefront of a lot of people's minds. It seems to be one of the forgotten things which I find really challenging.”
Disabled person

“ Disabled people are just as valuable as non-disabled people and I think there's been a misconception that we're not.”
Disabled person

At the time of the research, following a reshuffle, there was no appointed Minister for Disabled People in national government for a period. People in one workshop discussed the absence of an appointed Minister for Disabled People contributed to disabled people being overlooked by national and local government. This was felt to be another example of how under-valued disabled people are in wider society.

“ I think that's where the lack of a Minister for the disabled comes into play because if you haven't got somebody who's actively in government actually campaigning for us – nobody – (so) we get swept under the carpet.”
Disabled person

“ Yeah, they've took away the disability minister, haven't they, that just proves what they think.”
Disabled person

Some workshop participants noticed more positive representation in the media (television) but continue to experience and witness prejudice and ignorance among non-disabled people towards them and other disabled people.

“ I think there's a lot of positive media around disabilities, a lot more than there has been, there's still prejudice.”
Disabled person

The Paralympics was considered a good example of positive representation for disabled people in sport and leisure. Workshop participants highlighted how positive representation makes them feel valued, accepted, and included in society. However, most could not relate to Paralympic athletes and felt this did little to improve understanding for them on an individual and personal level.

“ What people forget is that they (Paralympic athletes) are elite athletes.
Disabled person ”

Many across the workshops expressed the importance of schools and government bodies taking the lead to better educate the public about disability. This education would help dispel myths and promote greater awareness and understanding of disability, diversity, and inclusion.

“ We need to be more understanding of what a disability is. We need that same level of acceptance and understanding of people who have disabilities. Yes, we are a minority, but we equally have a voice, and we should be treated with (a) level of respect.
Disabled person ”

Survey findings show a small positive change since 2019 in disabled people being visible and included in advertising (42% to 48%) and advertising not only focusing on impairment (56% to 61%). Although advertising is positively changing, people within the workshops felt that promotional material about sport and physical activity opportunities currently focuses on non-disabled people and athletes with an elevated level of fitness and ability, which can be intimidating and off-putting.

Communications should be inclusive, emphasising that all disabled participants are welcome not only to engage in sports and physical activities but also to volunteer and work within the sector. Our [Ten Principles](#) show how this can be done in practice.



“ I appreciate seeing more disabled people. I do see a couple of people coming into the gym that I go to with wheelchairs... it is all part of being included.
Disabled person ”

There are fewer opportunities for disabled people to become a coach or take on a role delivering sport and activities.

There was low awareness in the workshops on how to become a coach or take on another role. One participant had been a coach in the past but agreed it was not easy to find these opportunities.

“ I did my football coaching badges through the FA so I ended up with a Level 2 coaching qualification back a few years, which is sort of quite senior. The FA are very supportive of disabled people. So once you engage them and you get talking to them, they will support you. But it's not sort of out there.

Disabled person

”

Our survey findings show disabled people are significantly less likely than non-disabled people to agree with the statement: “I have the opportunity to become a coach or take on a role in delivering sport or physical activity” (9% vs 24%). Findings also show certain characteristics are more likely to disagree:

- Older disabled people.
- White disabled people.
- Disabled people in lower social grades.
- Disabled people with more than one impairment.

Disabled men, younger disabled people, and disabled people in lower social grades are more likely to want the opportunity to become a coach or take on a role in delivering physical activity (14%, 26%, and 18%). Unsurprisingly, disabled people who are active or fairly active are also more likely to want the opportunity compared to inactive disabled people (14% vs 6%).

Younger disabled people (16-34 years old) and ethnically diverse disabled people are most likely to want to be involved in influencing the types of activities they could take part in (52% and 57%).

The top three types of support to help disabled people work or volunteer in sport and physical activity are:

- Having positive physical activity experiences themselves as sport and physical activity participants (17%).
- Greater awareness of opportunities that are suitable for disabled people (23%).
- Financial support and incentives (20%).

Creating a sense of belonging goes beyond implementing inclusive practices; it involves making individuals feel not only included and represented but also welcomed and valued.

There was a strong feeling in the workshops that creating a sense of belonging for disabled people within sport and physical activity spaces is just as important as having accessible opportunities.

Raising awareness about the extra hurdles disabled people encounter in accessing, participating in, and deriving enjoyment from sports and physical activities, along with efforts to tackle these barriers, will support increased participation across all levels. This includes involvement in sports and physical activities, and potentially transitioning into volunteer roles and/or the workforce.

Access to training for deliverers, including instructors, coaches, and volunteers, would increase confidence and the likelihood of disabled people having positive experiences when engaging in sport and physical activities. This training should be easily accessed and promoted and cover disability awareness and inclusive practices.

There has been a small increase from last year in disabled people saying activity leaders “included me in the session” and “met my needs” (83% and 75% respectively, up from 79% and 72% last year). However, overall trends of experiences of activity leaders have remained unchanged since the survey began.

“ My impression of instructors is they have no knowledge on inclusive ability and health issues.

Disabled person



Workshop participant suggestions for improving representation and a sense of belonging for disabled people:



- Recruit and train disabled and non-disabled volunteers and staff to provide support for disabled individuals to access and feel secure while engaging in sport and physical activities.
- Consult with disabled people on how best to reach and inform them about workforce-related opportunities.
- Provide tailored information about support and opportunities available for disabled people working in the sector.
- Provide financial incentives and additional support for disabled people to transition to the workforce.
- Increase the representation of disabled people participating in and delivering sport and physical activities on websites and marketing materials.



4. Summary and Recommendations

4. Summary and Recommendations

The findings highlight the continual need to collaborate with disabled people and sports and physical activity providers to achieve fairness in sports and activity. Since the survey began in 2019, there have been few positive trends in disabled people's participation and experiences. We have identified and summarised key areas for improvement based on the survey and workshop findings, acknowledging that workshop data builds upon survey findings despite lower response rates. These recommendations were developed using the research findings, in collaboration with disabled people and organisations involved in delivering and promoting sport and physical activity.



1. 'Consult and collaborate with me and others from different backgrounds to create and shape accessible and inclusive opportunities.'

Key findings

Three-quarters of disabled people want to be more active. Disabled people feel there is still a lot of ignorance and discrimination within the sector. Characteristics like age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status, and multiple impairments can increase disparity.

What Activity Alliance will do:

- Continue to champion disabled people's voices and person-centred approaches.
- Commit to continuing to build a framework that supports us to involve disabled people in shaping our work.
- Share our learning of working with disabled people with partners to empower them to do their own consultation and collaboration.

We call on sport and physical activity organisations to:

- Prioritise and value collaboration with disabled people and their supporters to create and shape opportunities for disabled people.
- Work together with local government and health providers to provide information and advice, and consult on opportunities that can be created for disabled people in the local area.
- Review your offer to make sure you are meeting disabled people's needs for all ages and genders.

“ Yes, we are a minority, but we equally have a voice, and we should be treated with (a) level of respect.

Disabled person

”

“ I need advice as to what might suit and to which sports and activities have been adapted to suit my needs and everybody should be entitled to that personal assessment.

Disabled person

”

Further reading and useful resources:

- Use Activity Alliance's [Talk to Me ten principles](#) to understand the needs, wants and desires of disabled people in sport and physical activity.
- [Co-production guidance](#) from Disability Rights UK.
- [Check out our Get Out Get Active programme learning resources](#) on engaging different community groups and creating activities that put people's needs first.

2. 'Support me with affordable ways to be active.'

Key findings

Disabled people continue to face financial challenges due to the increased cost of living and extra expenses. They recognise the benefits being active has on mental health and wellbeing. However, they are more likely to see sport and activity as a luxury rather than a necessity and cut back on paid activities compared with essential items such as energy bills and food.

What Activity Alliance will do:

- We will commit to improving our insight to inform the sector of better practices and support more disabled people to be active.
- We will continue to advocate about The Activity Trap research and for funding to focus on tackling inequalities.

We call on sport and physical activity organisations to:

- Understand the financial challenges disabled people are facing and consider the affordability of your offer and be flexible.
- Recognise the financial benefits of engaging with disabled people in your local area.
- Be creative in the ways you plan and deliver activities, such as offering flexible bookings, and taking on a person-centred approach.

“ The cost of everything, it's getting harder, and you've got to make decisions as to what you spend your money on.

Disabled person

”

“ A lot of services have been stripped back to the bare bone and they haven't re-instated a lot of stuff.

Disabled person

”

Further reading and useful resources:

- [Sport England's cost of living guidance and insight](#) on how to reduce energy costs and manage the impact of higher costs.
- Considerations for [supporting disabled people from low-income households to be active](#).
- Consider the [spending power of disabled people](#).
- Share inclusive opportunities through [Every Body Moves website](#).
- Read our top asks for the [next government in our Manifesto](#).

3. ‘Support me to confidently access outdoor spaces.’

Key findings

The majority of disabled people prefer to be active outdoors, particularly during a cost of living crisis when paid activities can seem expensive. They acknowledge that being active outside has a positive effect on their health, but less than half (44%) find it easy to physically access outdoor spaces. Disabled people are more likely to face barriers to being active in these spaces.

What Activity Alliance will do:

- Continue to raise awareness about the inequalities disabled people face to access outdoor spaces and share our insight with national and local partners.

We call on sport and physical activity organisations to:

- Provide information about access and support available to help disabled people feel more confident accessing outdoor spaces.
- Promote walking, wheeling, and cycling to places where people are active.
- Embed accessibility in your communication plans and across channels.

“ If you have more information around what is available for disabled people to help them on a journey... like when you get to the beginning of a walk... (and) you have a big board that has different treks and trails... colour coded.

Disabled person

”

Further reading and useful resources:

- [Sport England’s Active Design guidance](#) helps you to create and maintain active environments.
- Find out more from [Sustrans](#).
- Access our [inclusive communications resources](#).
- Learn about the challenges with access to outdoor spaces in [Groundwork UK Out of Bounds report](#).
- Read our top asks for the [next government in our Manifesto](#).

4. 'Your workforce can help to foster a greater sense of belonging for me and other disabled people and help drive positive change.'

Key findings

The findings highlight that disabled people feel marginalised and overlooked when seeking opportunities to participate, work, and volunteer in the sport and physical activity sector. Making disabled people feel welcome in all areas, and challenging negative attitudes will motivate more disabled people to take part in sport and physical activities and transition into volunteer roles and/or the workforce.

What Activity Alliance will do:

- Maximise opportunities to work with our members and address inequalities through collaboration.
- Support organisations to embed inclusive practices into their work and across their workforces.

We call on sport and physical activity organisations to:

- Focus their attention on reviewing their workforce training programmes to increase confidence and competence in including and supporting disabled people in activities.
- Raise awareness about inclusive approaches and improve representation of disabled people across the workforce.
- Increase allyship and advocate for disabled people, challenge discrimination, and lead by example.
- Increase inclusive opportunities and create a more diverse community.

“ You go in there and feel like the odd one out. You feel everyone's looking at you. You know it's very intimidating.

Disabled person

”

Further reading and useful resources:

- Use Activity Alliance's [Inclusive Activity Programme \(IAP\)](#) eLearning and [inclusive workforce practices](#) to equip workforces with the skills to provide more inclusive experiences.
- Improve your organisation for disabled people by taking part in our [Leading Inclusion Training](#).
- Use Mind's resources to prioritise mental health alongside physical health, including [Mental health and physical activity toolkit](#) and [Mental Health Awareness in Sport eLearning](#).
- [Moving Medicine's risk assessment](#) helps address concerns around risk.
- Learn about [We are Undefeatable's](#) movement supporting people with a range of long-term health conditions.



5. Appendix

4. Appendix

Accessibility

The survey was designed with accessibility in mind. Wording and layout in the standard version were intended to be as simple and engaging as possible.

We provided an Easy Read version of the survey. Easy Read refers to the presentation of text in an accessible, easy to understand format. It is often used by people with learning impairments, people with conditions that affect how they process information, and people whose first language isn't English. The Easy Read survey used simplified language, shorter sentences and supporting images. Respondents were given a choice on the first page of the survey as to whether they wanted to use the Easy Read version. 181 respondents did so, and of these, 19 respondents reported that they had a learning impairment. There was also the option for someone to complete the survey on behalf of the person they support – 47 respondents did so.

Alternative methods such as telephone interviews were also offered, but this was not requested.

Defining disability and activity

Our survey identified respondents as disabled if they answered 'yes' to both of the following questions:

- Do you have any long-term health conditions, impairments, or illnesses? This could include, for example, physical, sensory, learning, social, behavioural, or mental health conditions or impairments. Long-term means that they have lasted, or are expected to last, 12 months or more.
- Do these health conditions, impairments or illnesses have a substantial effect on your ability to do normal daily activities?

We defined activity as: the number of days in a normal week people did 30 minutes or more of physical activity that was enough to raise their breathing rate. Physical activity includes sport, exercise and brisk walking or cycling for fun, or to get to and from places. It does not include housework or physical activity that is part of work.

This survey used the following groupings:

- **Inactive:** person does less than a total of 30 minutes physical activity in a normal week.
- **Active:** person does 30 minutes or more physical activity on at least five days in a normal week.

To ensure accessibility, the question we used to capture activity levels is a simpler version of the Sport England Active Lives Adult Survey question. Active Lives Survey records all activity done in the last four weeks and includes a vigorous activity category. The question we used asks on how many days a person does 30 minutes or more activity in a normal week, rather than the exact number of minutes. This means fewer people are classed as 'active' in our survey.

Sample sources

Two sample sources were used. People who had completed Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey within the last two years and agreed to take part in further research, and people from an independent research panel.

Profile of respondents

Table 2: Age of respondents

	Disabled respondents	Non-disabled respondents
16 – 24 years old	3%	13%
25 – 34 years old	8%	19%
35 – 44 years old	10%	18%
45 – 54 years old	14%	15%
55 – 64 years old	24%	15%
65+ years old	40%	19%

Table 3: Ethnicity of respondents

	Disabled respondents	Non-disabled respondents
White	90%	75%
Ethnically diverse	9%	24%

Table 4: Gender of respondents

	Disabled respondents	Non-disabled respondents
Male	41%	52%
Female	58%	48%

Table 5: Socioeconomic status of respondents

	Disabled respondents	Non-disabled respondents
AB	23%	39%
C1	17%	26%
C2	11%	13%
DE	44%	20%

Table 6: Number of impairments

	Disabled respondents
1	20%
2	22%
3	25%
4	14%
5+	19%

Table 7: Type of impairments

80% of the sample had more than one impairment.

The mode (most common) number of impairments was three.

	Disabled respondents
Mobility	63%
Long-term pain	57%
Breathing or stamina	42%
Long-term health condition	35%
Mental health	30%
Dexterity	25%
Hearing	14%
Memory	14%
Learning or understanding	10%
Social or behavioural	10%
Vision	7%
Speech	5%

Online workshops

We held three online workshops with survey participants and people on our lived experience network. People with a range of impairment types took part, with most having more than one impairment type. The sample had a range of ages, education levels, and ethnicities. There was a good regional spread, and a mix of activity levels.

Research limitations

We recognise that there are limitations to this research project. We seek to improve this for the next survey. Please contact us if you have feedback, or ideas for improvement.

Email: research@activityalliance.org.uk

Phone: 08081 756991

Survey

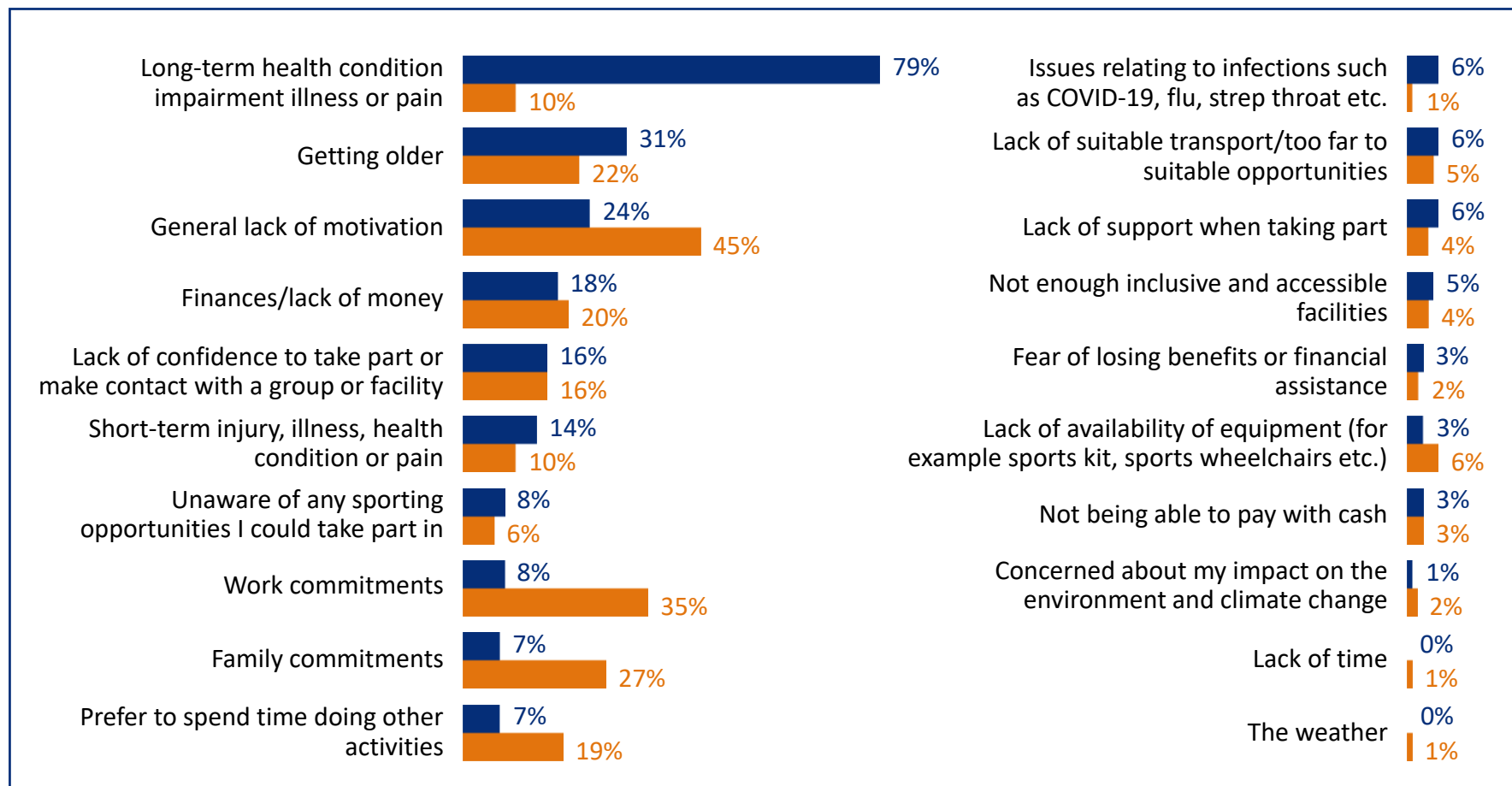
- The sample represents the general population of disabled people. There is a need for similar data for disabled people who directly engage with us and our partners.
- Not all questions were created or tested with partners and disabled people. However, we reviewed the inclusion of 10 questions with partners and disabled people to ensure we were asking the most important questions this year.
- Creating a short report means not all data captured in the survey is presented here. We focus on the key themes from a full analysis of the data, and input from Activity Alliance colleagues and disabled people.

Workshops

- People with profound and multiple impairments were underrepresented in the online workshops.
- Each workshop considered all key themes, meaning in-depth discussions were not possible on all topics.
- Workshop participants mentioned other topics that were important that were not covered in the survey. This included the importance of government funding, the Paralympics, societal campaigning, and disability awareness in schools.

Barriers to being active

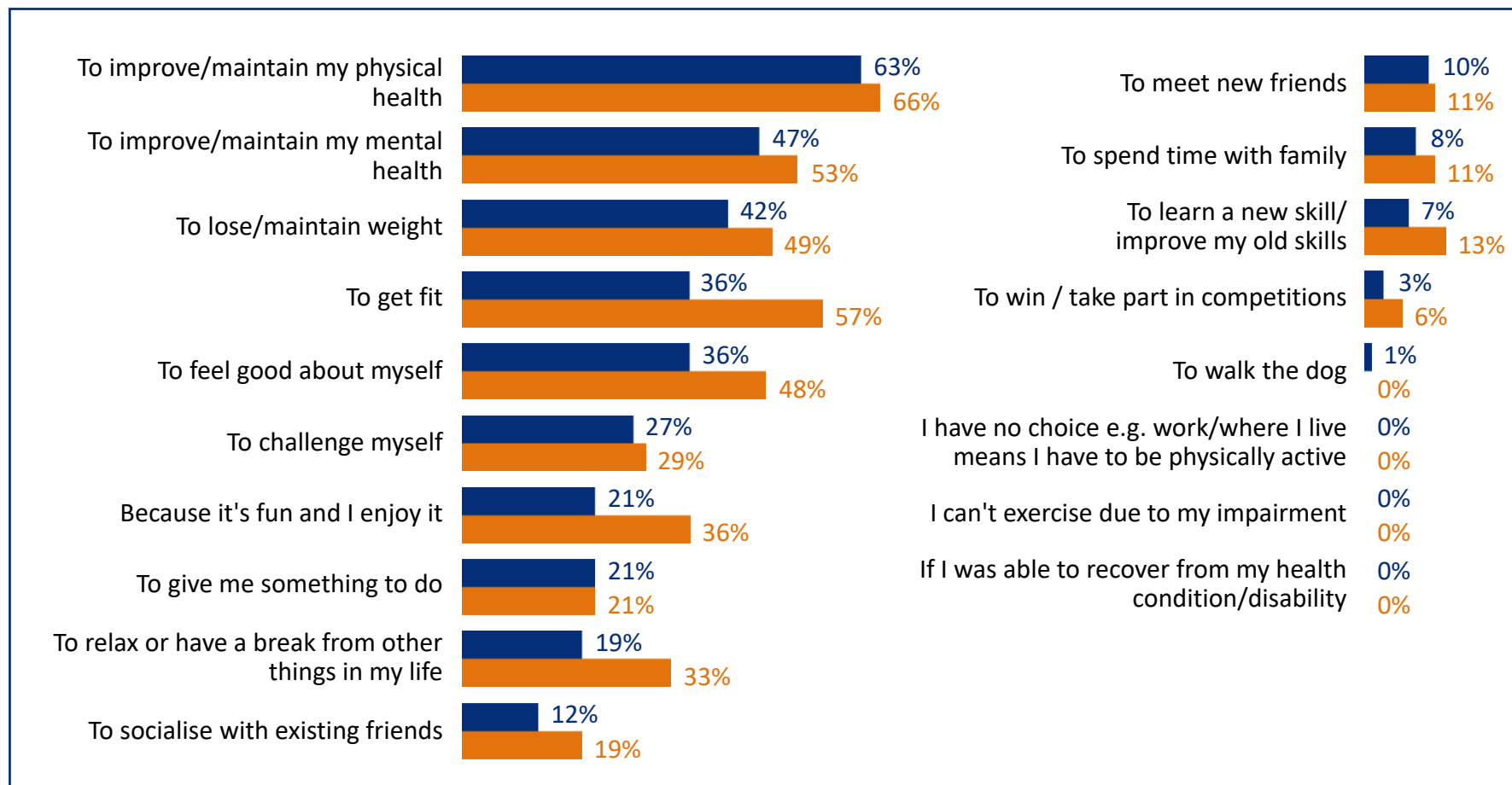
Figure 4
Barriers to being active.



Q: Which of the following reasons stop you doing as much sport, exercise, or physical activity as you would like?
Base: All respondents who would like to do more physical activity (742 disabled people; 766 non-disabled people).

Motivations to be active

Figure 5
Motivations to be active.

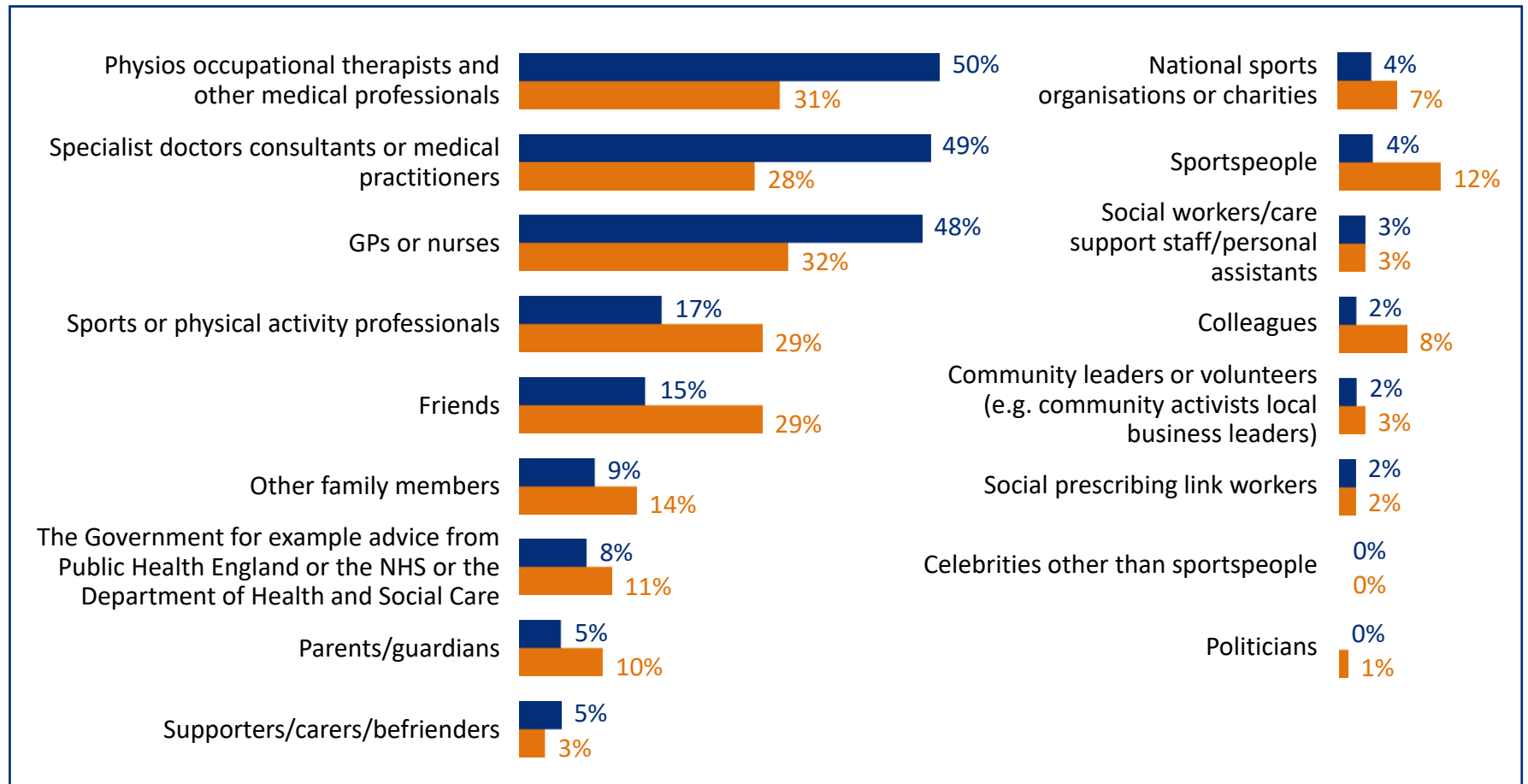


Q: Why do you/would you take part in sport, exercise, or other physical activity?

Base: All respondents (971 disabled; 1349 non-disabled).

Sources of advice

Figure 6
Preferred sources of advice for taking part in physical activity.



Q: Whose advice would you listen to about taking part in sport or physical activity?
Base: All respondents (971 disabled; 1349 non-disabled people).

Type of support and government policy changes or support

Table 8: Proportion selecting each type of support that would help them be more active

Type of support	2023-2024	
	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
Support to improve physical health	39%	22%
Greater awareness of activities that are suitable for me	28%	16%
Financial support	20%	17%
Support to improve mental health	22%	19%
Better facilities and environments	16%	19%
Practical support from a trained person or coach	22%	13%
Support getting to activities or facilities	15%	9%
Support from family and friends	14%	18%
Seeing more disabled people working in physical activity roles	8%	5%
Sport and physical activity staff to have better disability awareness	16%	6%
Support with taking part in online activities	6%	7%
More encouragement and motivation from the media and sporting organisations	4%	9%
Support from my workplace	4%	8%
Clear information about policies	5%	7%
Lack of time is the issue	0%	0%

Q: What kind of support would help you to be more active?

Support for different areas of government for policy

Table 9: Proportion selecting each type of policy as an area the government should focus on

Areas for government focus	2023-2024	
	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
Making sure activities are affordable	58%	50%
Improving outdoor spaces like parks and neighbourhoods	33%	38%
Listening to and engaging with the public on how they want to be active	33%	29%
Improving sport facilities and community spaces	32%	38%
Improve people's health so they can be active	37%	30%
Improving financial security/wellbeing	31%	29%
Giving people working in physical activity knowledge and skills to support disabled people	28%	19%
Improving transport links to local facilities	27%	25%
More support for sports clubs and groups	25%	30%
Making sure people's lifestyles allow them to be active	25%	25%
Tackle discrimination in sport and activity	18%	18%
Helping people access physical activity online	21%	19%
Increased taxation on things that affect healthy lifestyles e.g. junk / processed food, online gaming / televisions etc.	0%	0%

Q: What do you think the government should focus on to get more people active?



We appreciate everyone who contributed to this research project, including our participants, our cofacilitator Bob's Your Uncle Research, and co-researcher True Insights, for all their involvement and expertise. We're also grateful to the following organisations involved in this year's report and recommendations:

Autism Centre for Excellence, Mind, Richmond Group of Charities, Sport England, Streetgames, Together an Active Future, Ukactive and Women in Sport.

activity alliance

disability
inclusion
sport



08081 756991



ActivityAlliance



info@activityalliance.org.uk



@AllForActivity



activityalliance.org.uk

This document is also available in different formats. Please contact us if you need more support. Report published in June 2024.

IFF Research can be contacted about the project:

BeingActiveResearch@IFFResearch.com

Photo credit: Dwarf Sports Association UK, Special Olympics Great Britain and Cerebral Palsy Sport.

Activity Alliance is the operating name for the English Federation of Disability Sport. Registered Charity No. 1075180.



**SPORT
ENGLAND**



IFF Research

true insights

for the love of good research