

# Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23

Disabled people's perceptions and  
experiences of sport and activity

**Full report**  
**June 2023**

Activity Alliance  
and IFF Research

[activityalliance.org.uk](https://activityalliance.org.uk)

**activity  
alliance**

**disability  
inclusion  
sport**



# Contents



<b>1</b>	<b>Foreword</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>		Accessibility	<b>41</b>
	Background and methods	<b>6</b>		Defining disability and activity	<b>41</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Research findings</b>	<b>8</b>		Sample sources and profile	<b>42</b>
	3.1 Participation and experience	<b>9</b>		Additional data	<b>45</b>
	3.2 Physical health and healthcare professionals	<b>15</b>			
	3.3 The rising cost-of-living	<b>18</b>			
	3.4 Mental health and wellbeing	<b>24</b>			
	3.5 Representation	<b>28</b>			
	3.6 Co-production and influence	<b>31</b>			
	3.7 Outdoor spaces and active travel	<b>34</b>			

# 1. Foreword

# 1. Foreword

I was delighted to join Activity Alliance as the new Chief Executive in January 2023. I continue to be impressed by our charity's and partners' ambition to truly understand disabled people's experiences. This is an important step in breaking down the barriers as we strive for a fairer, more inclusive, and welcoming society to be active in.

Research and insight are central to our development as the leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity. This year is no exception, especially as we emerge from a national pandemic crisis that has significantly impacted disabled people.

We know many people are working to improve accessibility and provide inclusive experiences. But inactivity levels for disabled people remain high and this is simply not right or fair. Disabled people are the least active group in our society, despite seeing some positive changes in attitudes.

This 2022-23 report covers a vital period as we learn from the pandemic and are in the flow of returning or reinventing activities. Disabled people face ongoing challenges relating to the pandemic, health and wellbeing, and the rising cost-of-living. This report helps us to understand how these factors impact disabled people's activity.

We cannot forget the increasing pressure on sport and activity organisations too, especially with financial sustainability. This report provides evidence to think differently and improve disabled people's experiences in sport and activity.

I urge leaders and providers to use this annual report in your planning and to prioritise disabled people. It is essential we work together to create meaningful change for disabled people and positively impact unacceptable activity levels. Our team is here to help your organisation with a wealth of expertise and resources.

## Adam Blaze

Chief Executive, Activity Alliance

“ These actions are vitally important to raise attention. People and organisations have been trying to fix the situation before, and now it's even harder with the pandemic and rising cost-of-living.

We need to make sure disabled people can make choices about being active and make things more inclusive. Getting people's influence on projects is the way forward. This is how we, as disabled people, get our voices heard and make a change for everyone.

Disabled person

”



## 2. Introduction

## 2. Introduction

### Background

Now in its fourth year, our Annual Disability and Activity Survey continues to track disabled people's perceptions and experiences of sport and activity. The survey is the primary source of insight for organisations working to achieve fairness for disabled people in sport and activity. This evidence will help us, and our partners, achieve fairness for disabled people.

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

- Physical health and healthcare professionals.
- The rising cost-of-living.
- Mental health and wellbeing.
- Representation.
- Co-production and influence.
- Outdoor spaces and active travel.

### Method

#### Online survey

1,974 people took part in an online survey between August and October 2022.

- Disabled people: 998.
- Non-disabled people: 976.

The sample was representative of the UK profile of disabled people across demographics and is consistent with previous years of the survey. People with a range of impairment types took part, including 367 (37%) people with long-term health conditions. More information on the sample and profile of respondents can be found in the [appendix](#).

#### Workshops

Following the survey, the findings were explored in online workshops with four groups of survey participants and one group of young disabled people. 28 people with different impairments and demographic factors took part – together we explored the findings and built on ideas for actions to tackle the inequalities seen in the survey. We thank our participants for their time and expertise.

## 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.

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

To add context to our findings, we have referenced other research and evidence.

At the end of each section, we include key messages and commitments, for our own organisation and our partners. These were developed from conversations with disabled people, and feedback from a range of organisations that deliver and promote activity.

We have released a separate report focusing on the inequalities experienced by different demographic groups of disabled people. A separate report for differences for people with different impairment types will also be produced.

Please see the [appendix](#) for more information on how we defined disability and activity levels, and on the accessibility of the research.

Please contact our research team to discuss how to access, interpret and use the data:

Call **01509 227750**

Email [research@activityalliance.org.uk](mailto:research@activityalliance.org.uk)





## 3. Research findings



# 3. Research findings



## 3.1 Participation and experience

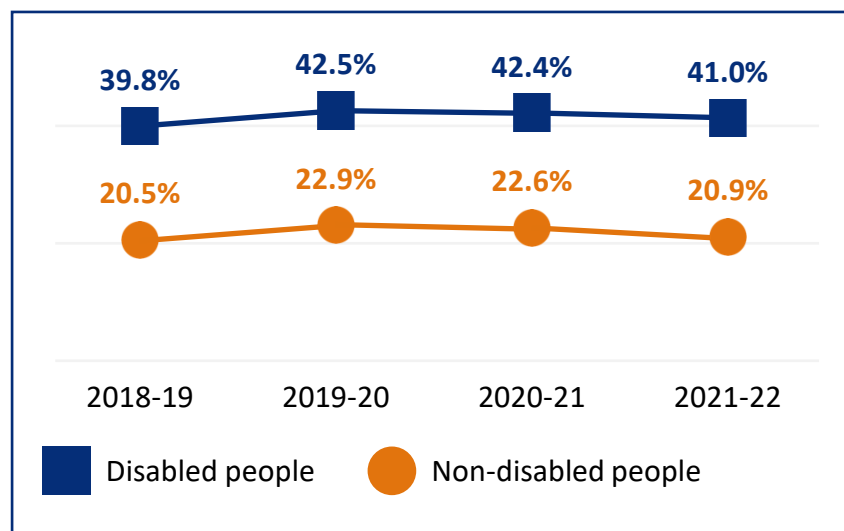
This section examines the differences between survey data from 2019 to 2022. Activity levels, participation, and experiences remain similar to 2019.

**Activity levels are improving, but a higher proportion of disabled people are inactive compared to before the pandemic.**

This report complements Sport England’s Active Lives Adult Survey, providing greater detail on issues of importance for disabled people. The Active Lives data from April 2023<sup>1</sup> showed that 41% (5.1 million) disabled people were inactive, compared to 20.9% of non-disabled people (Figure 1). This is a decrease for disabled people from 42.4% last year, but a slight increase from 39.8 in 2019 before the pandemic.

**Figure 1**

Active Lives data showing levels of inactivity for disabled and non-disabled people since 2018-19.



“ I am not impressed with the figures. We need to get activity for disabled people up to the same level [as non-disabled people], to have equity.

**Disabled person**



<sup>1</sup> Sport England, [Active Lives Adult Survey 2021-22](#) (2023).

**There has been no improvement in the proportion of disabled people who feel they are given the opportunity to be as active as they want.**

Disabled people remain far less likely to feel that they have the opportunity to be as active as they want to be (41% vs 70% of non-disabled people). This figure has not changed since 2019, with the challenges of the pandemic and restrictions preventing progress.

People who took part in the workshops recognised the last four years had been a challenging period, with most not being surprised at the lack of positive change, though others expressed frustrations at the lack of progress. Many had less choice of suitable and accessible ways for them to be active: due to facilities or sessions not reopening or reaching disabled people after the pandemic, having less support, restrictions on opening times or bookings, and finding it harder to afford costs associated with being active.

“ The pandemic has harmed progress a lot, and it’s not over. I stopped being active for reasons around accessibility and prohibitive costs too... so that’s why it’s similar when compared to 2019.

**Disabled person**

”

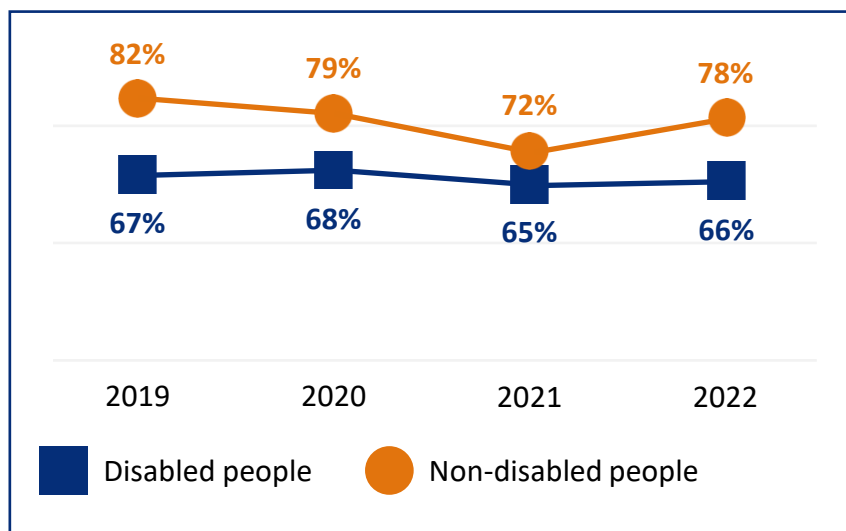


## There have been few positive changes on most aspects of enjoyment and experience.

66% of disabled people enjoyed the last time they took part in sport or physical activity (Figure 2). This has remained constant since 2019. Non-disabled people's enjoyment was more affected by the pandemic but has recovered this year.

**Figure 2**

Proportion who enjoyed the last time they took part in a physical activity session.



Q: I enjoyed the last time I took part in a sport or physical activity session. Base: All disabled and non-disabled people.

On most measurements of experience (based on [Activity Alliance's ten principles](#)), disabled people have not seen improvements. Compared to 2019, this year disabled people were less likely to agree:

- 'I was able find the information I needed before taking part in an activity' (73% vs 79% in 2019).
- 'Advertising reassured me that the activity would be suitable for my ability' (62% vs 70% in 2019).
- 'The activity session was welcoming' (91% vs 85% in 2019)
- 'The activity leader met my needs' (71% vs 80% in 2019).

Workshop participants agreed it was more difficult to find information about suitable local opportunities.

“ It is so frustrating. I am looking around, I am proactive about it, and it's just not happening. I am screaming in my head, that I can't access these things.

**Disabled person**

”

“ Nobody likes to feel useless about being active but if we don’t have access, support, a stress-free experience, dignified service, and friendly and inviting environment... I haven’t found anything close to having one or more of those requirements together.

Disabled person ”

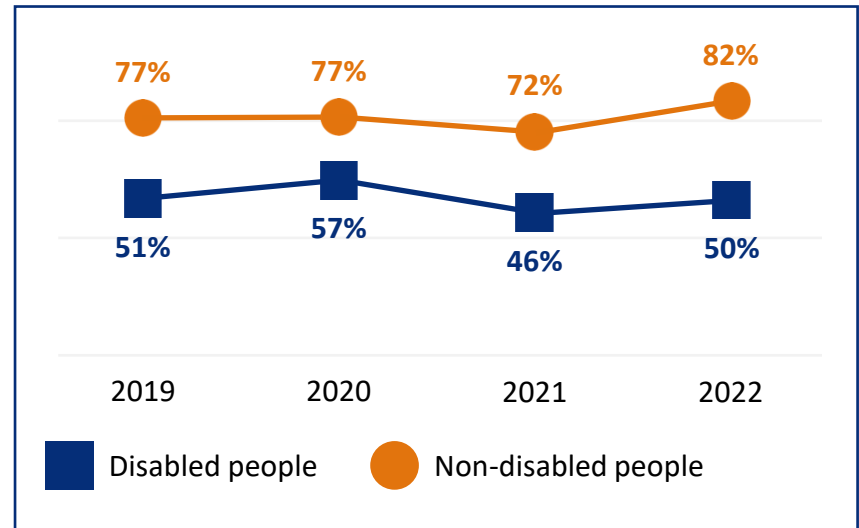
**There has been no improvement in disabled people agreeing that sport and physical activity is ‘for someone like me’.**

Compared to 2019, disabled people were equally likely to agree sport and physical activity is ‘for someone like me’.

- ‘Physical activity and exercise is for someone like me’: 50% in 2019 vs 51% in 2022 (Figure 3).
- ‘Sport is for someone like me’: 32% in 2019 vs 30% in 2022.

These proportions remain significantly lower than for non-disabled people (82% agree that physical activity is for ‘someone like me’ as shown in Figure 3, and additionally 65% agree that sport is for ‘someone like me’.

**Figure 3**  
Proportion agreeing physical activity and exercise is ‘for someone like me’.



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

Disabled people were more likely to agree in the first year of the pandemic (2020), but this increase has not continued. This shows disabled people can have an ongoing lack of connection to being active, and less positive views of the possibility of being active. 'Sport' continues to be less relatable than 'physical activity' for both disabled and non-disabled people. Survey participants said wording on sport and physical activities can be intimidating, with connotations about competitiveness, or requiring a high level of fitness or ability.

“ Some people (like me) need to do more slow/ gentle exercise rather than strenuous exercise. I think the best approach is to focus on enjoyment, socialising and movement. It shouldn't be about aesthetics or punishment! Being active should be about feeling good.

**Disabled person**

”

### **There have been positive changes in attitudes about disabled people and activity.**

Compared to 2019, disabled people were more likely to agree that sport and physical activity is 'for disabled people':

- 'Physical activity and exercise is for disabled people': 56% in 2019 vs 66% in 2022.
- 'Sport is for disabled people': 54% in 2019 vs 65% in 2022.

Non-disabled people were equally likely to agree with the above statements, and to have more positive attitudes compared to 2019. In the workshops, everyone agreed they had experienced positive changes in attitudes about disabled people in recent years. Specific examples included the Paralympics and Rugby League World Cup, as well as positive mainstream exposure in TV shows like 'The Last Leg' and media promotion by Ellie Simmonds with her appearance in BBC's Strictly Come Dancing.

However, we heard of ongoing experiences with negative perceptions. These include a lack of understanding from others of how impairments affect an individual, low awareness of hidden disabilities, and being excluded because of their impairment. Some people spoke of stigma or embarrassment relating to ability or body-image, as well as negative self-perceptions.

“ Other people have faced the stigma of ‘you can’t do that’. I’ve had people say ‘you can’t get dressed. You can’t do this’. I’m only blind, I can still do things. We need to have the mindset of ‘I might be blind, or I might be disabled, but that’s not going to hold me back’. I think a lot more people are doing that now.

**Disabled person**

”

“ We need to remove the stigma around different body types working out and have more faith in the motivation and abilities of disabled people, creating a genuinely positive environment.

**Disabled person**

”

### **Disabled people still want to be more active.**

Disabled people were more likely to say they wanted to be more active compared to non-disabled people (77% vs 54%). This “activity gap” has remained consistent with previous years, showing an ongoing unmet demand.

### **Key message 1: We are not seeing enough positive trends in disabled people’s perceptions and experiences of being active.**



**Our commitment:** We will collaborate with others to ensure inclusion principles drive physical activity planning and delivery, effectively targeting and engaging people who are not as active as they would like to be. As the leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity, we will push for greater investment and policy change.



**Our ask to sport and physical activity organisations:** Support us in changing attitudes and embedding inclusive practices so disabled people have more opportunities to play, work and thrive in your organisation. Increase availability and awareness of accessible and inclusive opportunities providing better, more meaningful experiences.

### **Resources:**

- Use [Activity Alliance's ten principles](#) and [inclusive communications guidance](#) to advertise sessions and activities.
- Promote the [Inclusive Activity Programme eLearning module](#) for deliverers to provide more inclusive experiences.
- Share inclusive opportunities through [Every Body Moves website](#), developed by ParalympicsGB in partnership with Toyota.



## 3.2 Physical health and healthcare professionals

### **Most disabled people are less able to be active because of changes to their health during the pandemic.**

Some disabled people are still recovering from the pandemic, leading to less confidence about their health and ability to be active.

- Two-thirds say COVID-19 has affected their health condition, impairment, or illness (66%, a decrease from 79% in 2021). They were more than twice as likely to feel less able to be active because of changes to their physical health during the pandemic (75% vs 30% of non-disabled people).
- The top form of support disabled people want to help them to be active is ‘support to improve physical health’ (43% vs 21% of non-disabled people).
- Disabled people were more likely to say that government policies should focus on improving people’s health to help them to be active (40% vs 28% of non-disabled people).

Like last year, the pandemic continues to impact workshop participants’ health. New concerns that affect activity levels include:

- Having less contact with healthcare professionals, as well as difficulties accessing preventative or non-urgent primary care, delays with treatment, and referrals to specialists. This, along with a lack of activity, has led to many people feeling less fit and capable than before the pandemic.
- Concerns about contracting other infections and/or having low immunity following restrictions on social interactions.

“ I have anxiety around being active and hurting myself, because I haven't had the input from my physios that I usually would. I had them for years until 2020. I'd check in with them and say I'm thinking about doing this and they'd tell me how I can adapt it. But now, I'm just on my own.

**Disabled person**



## The top barrier to being active remains ‘my health condition or impairment’.

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

- Eight in ten disabled people (80%) said that their impairment stops them from doing as much physical activity as they would like.
- General lack of motivation (30%) and getting older (31%) were the next most common barriers for disabled people.

## The top motivation to be active are about being healthy.

The reasons why disabled people (would) take part in physical activity or sport have not changed significantly in the last four years. The top motivations this year are:

- Improving or maintaining physical health (64%).
- To lose or maintain weight (48%).
- To improve or maintain mental health (45%).
- To get fit (41%).

Other common reasons to be active for disabled people include ‘to feel good about myself’ (39%), ‘to challenge myself’ (27%), and ‘to have fun’ (22%).

## Healthcare professionals (HCPs) remain the preferred source of advice about being active.

Consistent with previous years, disabled people were most likely to prefer advice on being active from:

- GPs, doctors, or nurses (64% vs 44% of non-disabled people).
- Physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and other medical professionals (53% vs 36% of non-disabled people).

Almost a quarter (22%) prefer advice from sports or physical activity professionals, and only 10% from national sports organisations or charities. Some participants want people working in sport and physical activity to be more confident in providing advice on what would be beneficial and safe. Like previous years, people with physical impairments or long-term health conditions had concerns about managing risk, pain, or fatigue.

“ I am surprised only 10% said sport organisations [were a preferred source of advice], I'd expect them to be more active. I think a lot of it is about trust, you trust your doctors, with their expertise but you should trust the people that are providing sports too.

**Disabled person**



More data on preferred forms of support, support for policies, barriers to being active, motivations, and sources of advice can be found in the [appendix](#).



## Key message 2: Healthcare professionals have a key role to play in supporting disabled people improve physical health and overcome fears about risk.



**Our commitment:** We will work with key partners in the health sector to influence healthcare professionals to have great impact on disabled people, activity levels and physical health and wellbeing. We will steer this work through lived experiences, insight, and understanding the barriers in health more.



**Our ask to sport and physical activity organisations:** Promote positive and consistent messages that activity is welcoming and safe for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions. Provider greater reassurance on being active for people whose physical health was affected by the pandemic.

### Resources:

- [Moving Medicine's risk assessment](#) helps address concerns around risk. It is a consensus statement to help us understand what safety advice healthcare professionals should to people in clinical practice.
- [Guidance from the Chief Medical Officers in the UK](#) on the amount and type of physical activity people should be doing to improve their health.
- [We are Undefeatable](#) is a movement supporting people with a range of long-term health conditions, developed by 15 leading health and social care charities.
- [Chartered Society of Physiotherapists Stronger My Way training and resources](#) are useful, and there is a forum to share information and experiences.



### 3.3 The rising cost-of-living

**The cost-of-living was the most important topic for many of our respondents.**

Other evidence shows that disabled people are more likely to experience poverty and unemployment, be paid less, and face extra living costs. These economic challenges, combined with the increased cost-of-living, have led to financial vulnerability, with disabled people being more likely than non-disabled people to find it difficult to afford bills, and to be using foodbanks.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, physical activity may not be the priority for many disabled people, and providers are also facing financial challenges and inflation-related costs.

New questions added to the survey this year revealed that disabled people are more likely to agree the increased cost-of-living has affected their activity levels, and how much they socialise (Figure 4).

“ Ideally, you want to do activities and you are able to afford them. But it is more important that you heat your home, you pay bills, you work, get things that your children need for school. They take priority over yourself. It's awful to say but other things come first.

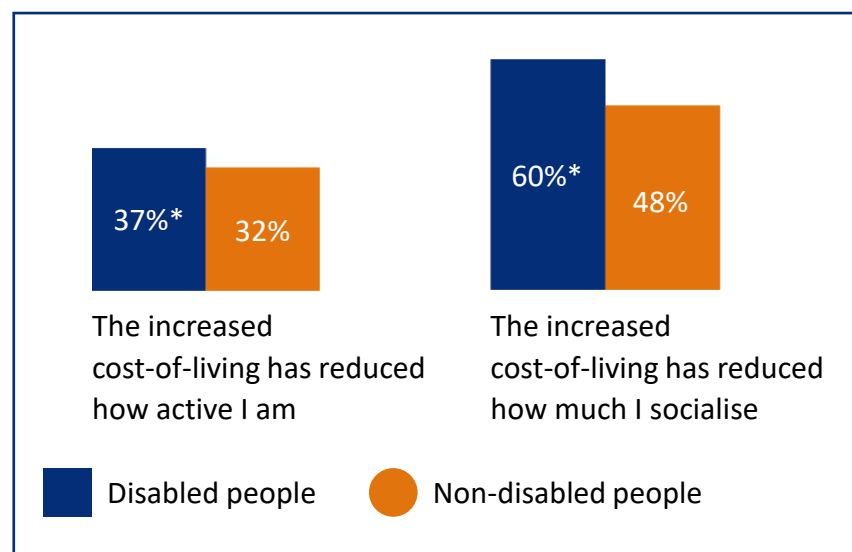
**Disabled person**



<sup>2</sup> House of Lords Library. [‘Cost of living: Impact of rising costs on disabled people’](#) (2022).

Young disabled people and people with five or more impairments were most likely to say the cost-of-living crisis has reduced how active they are (58% and 56%) and how much they socialise (74% and 75%).

**Figure 4**  
Proportion agreeing with each statement.



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



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

## Disabled people spend less on being active but want to spend more.

There is a clear spending gap of what disabled people are spending and want to spend on physical activity.<sup>3</sup>

- Disabled people reported spending an average of £13.40 less<sup>4</sup> than non-disabled people on being active each month.
- Over half of disabled people are spending £0 on activity (56%). For active disabled people, 35% are being active despite spending £0. This is similar to non-disabled people.
- It costs more for disabled people to be active: the average spend each month for active disabled people is £68, compared to £46 for non-disabled people. Disabled people who take part in group activities spend more than disabled people who take part alone – a difference not seen for non-disabled people.
- Disabled people want to spend more than non-disabled people on being active (34% vs 27%).

“ The cost-of-living crisis unfortunately means that everything we considered fundamental, or a foundation is now a luxury. And it’s more difficult to access because of our disability. There is a lot of cost to having a disability and that has increased. It means that people are less likely to accommodate for disabilities. In terms of facilities, as much as people are willing to go out of their way before and still want to, there's additional costs that now they can't necessarily afford, like making reasonable adjustments.

**Disabled person**

”

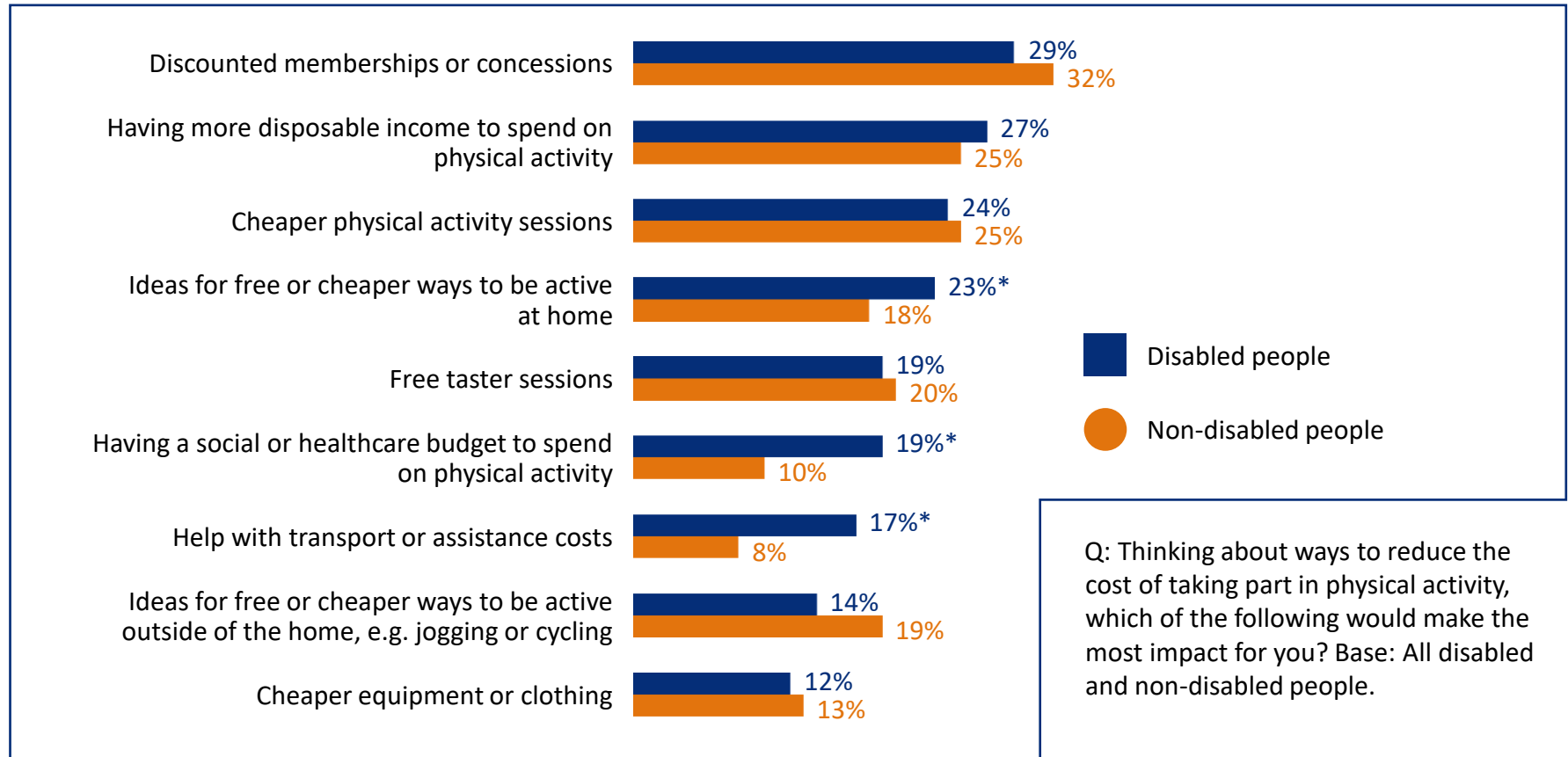
<sup>3</sup> Costs were specified to include everything relating to physical activity, like fees for sessions or membership, equipment or clothing, or transport costs. The data excludes those who answered, 'don't know'.

<sup>4</sup> Disabled people spent on average £32 in a typical month on being active and non-disabled people spent £45.

**Discounted memberships and concessions and having more disposable income will have the most impact for disabled people.**

We asked respondents what financial interventions could make the most impact on their activity levels (Figure 5). The most frequent response for both disabled and non-disabled people was discounted memberships or concessions (29% and 32% respectively).

**Figure 5**  
Proportion selecting each financial intervention as something that would impact their activity levels.



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

Disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people to say free or low-cost ways to be active, help with transport or assistance costs, and social and healthcare budgets would have an impact. Only 19% of disabled people said cost did not make a difference to how active they are.

Other ideas for responding to the cost-of-living crisis identified in the workshops included:

- Increasing awareness of local ways to be active for free or lower costs, including in outdoor spaces.
- Highlighting links between being active, financial challenges, and wellbeing.
- Advertising offers or initial reduced fees to encourage people to take the first step to taking part.
- Support for disabled athletes on development and travel pathways, for example travelling for training, competitions, and equipment.
- Wanting to 'give something back' for free activities, through volunteering or sharing skills.

Almost two-thirds (64%) of disabled people said the government should focus on making activities affordable to help more people to be active. Non-disabled people also chose this as a top area of focus.

“ It’s really important to get across to government that our health is literally our wealth, and this includes anyone who has a disability. By investing and ensuring that disabled people can access all these facilities in the long run, it's going to benefit not just us, it's going to benefit everyone.

**Disabled person**

”

### **Fears about losing financial assistance if being active continue.**

Nearly half (47%) of disabled people in our survey received benefits or financial assistance due to their health condition or impairment. This year, 60% said they relied on benefits or financial assistance to be active. As explored in our [‘The Activity Trap’ report](#) (2018), many disabled people fear that being more active will result in benefits or financial assistance being removed. This year, 37% agreed. Positively, this is less than last year, when 46% agreed.

### Key message 3: Disabled people continue to be hit harder by the rising cost-of-living and extra costs.



**Our commitment:** We will increase awareness of the financial challenges some disabled people are facing and promote ideas for low-cost accessible activities.



**Our ask to sport and physical activity organisations:** Recognise the challenges disabled people face and be creative with initiatives that support low-cost participation. Share your resources and approaches and be flexible with costs or fees.

#### Resources:

- [Get Out Get Active resources](#) help with ways to reach and engage the very least active disabled people and non-disabled people in your communities.
- [Sport England's cost of living guidance and insight](#) advises on how to get people active at a low cost, and how facilities and organisations can adapt to keep energy costs down.





### 3.4 Mental health and wellbeing

Physical activity provides a range of mental and social benefits.<sup>5</sup> It supports disabled people's wellbeing and leads to increased confidence, self-esteem, management of stress and anxiety, enjoyment, and sense of self-worth and belonging.

Respondents were asked questions about personal wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Our workshops identified mental health and wellbeing as a key topic.

“ Some people have a mental block or severe depression because of their disability. They feel they're not good enough to go out and do an activity. So, helping someone with the mental side is very important.

**Disabled person**



<sup>5</sup> Public Health England, [Health Matters](#) (2022).

<sup>6</sup> [Office for National Statistics personal wellbeing measure.](#)



**Disabled people are less positive about their lives than non-disabled people.**

As shown in Table 1, disabled people were significantly less likely to report a very high score (9-10/10) on satisfaction with their life (5% vs 17%), how happy they felt yesterday (11% vs 22%), and the extent to which they feel the things they do in life are worthwhile (16% vs 26%). Disabled people were significantly less likely than non-disabled people to report very low levels of anxiety (21% vs 29%).

Changes to health during the pandemic, social isolation, a lack of services or support, the rising cost-of-living, and being discriminated against have disproportionately impacted disabled people’s wellbeing. Young people’s mental health has been especially affected since the pandemic. Young disabled people were more likely to have been less able to be active because of changes to their mental health (68%).

**Table 1**  
Proportion reporting very high levels (9-10) of satisfaction with their life, happiness, that the things they do in their life are worthwhile, and very low levels (0-1) of anxiety.

	2019		2022	
	Disabled people	Non-disabled people	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
Very high life satisfaction	9%	22%*	5%	17%*
Happiness	15%	27%*	11%	22%*
How worthwhile the things you do in life feel	20%	29%*	16%	26%*
Low levels of anxiety	21%	29%*	21%	29%*

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

### **Loneliness levels are increasing among disabled people.**

Disabled people were nearly three times more likely than non-disabled people to feel lonely always or often (23% vs 8%). Over the last four years, there has been an upward trend in disabled people feeling lonelier, while non-disabled people report steady or decreasing levels of loneliness. This is likely linked to the fact that since the start of the pandemic, disabled people were more likely to feel isolated (54% vs 30%). Furthermore, as reported earlier, the cost-of-living crisis has disproportionately reduced how much disabled people socialise.

### **Being active could help disabled people feel less lonely.**

Nearly two-thirds of disabled people who felt lonely agreed that being active could help them feel less lonely (65%). Only 7% of disabled people disagreed with the remaining neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Over the last four years, there has been an increasing trend in disabled people being active alone (50% increasing to 59%). More often it is older disabled people and those with lower wellbeing being active alone. Respondents report being active with others promotes a sense of belonging and reduces feelings of loneliness. Both disabled and non-disabled people want to take part in group activities with a mix of disabled and non-disabled people or have no preference (78% and 90%), showing support for inclusive activities.

“ We need to bring people together as much as possible. Physical activity is great, but the social aspect would help not just physically but mentally as well and help with loneliness.

**Disabled person**

”

“ Disabled people, especially people on benefits, would benefit with any type of help to keep them being active. It's all I used to have in my life. I would go swimming twice a week, the only time that I would have company, but I can't afford it anymore... now I am so isolated, and my physical fitness is worse. I find it hard to walk from room to room, let alone along the streets.

**Disabled person**

”

#### Key message 4: For many disabled people, mental wellbeing is worse than ever.



**Our commitment:** We will engage with wellbeing experts to inform the support we offer to partners. We will promote how activity can help to improve disabled people's wellbeing and reduce loneliness.



**Our ask to sport and physical activity organisations:** Review the activities you offer to ensure you prioritise mental wellbeing throughout. Improve knowledge and skills in inclusive activity as a way to tackle loneliness.

#### Resources:

- Learn from [Get Out Get Active resources](#) on providing inclusive activities.
- Use Mind's resources including [Mental health and physical activity toolkit](#), [Mental Health Awareness in Sport eLearning course](#), and [supporting young people's wellbeing during physical activity handbook](#).





### 3.5 Representation

Participation in almost all sports and activities is lower for disabled people, and they are less likely to volunteer for sports organisations and events (especially in coaching roles).<sup>7</sup> We know that disabled people are underrepresented in employment in general.<sup>8</sup> There is a lack of data on disabled people working in delivering or supporting physical activity – but our insight confirms the significant inequality in how disabled people see themselves represented in the sector.

#### **Disabled people were half as likely to ‘see people like me’ playing and working in sport and physical activity.**

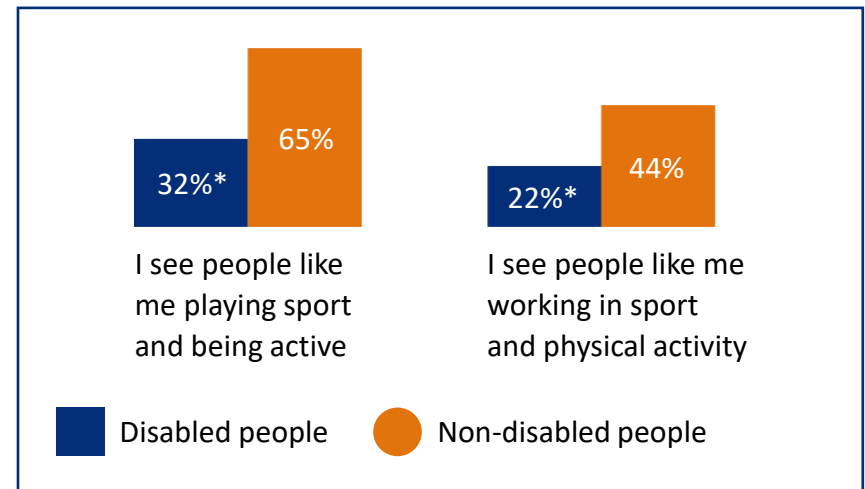
There is a clear difference between the proportion of disabled and non-disabled people seeing themselves represented in sport and physical activity (Figure 6).

‘People like me’ can encompass different identities, demographic factors, and perceptions of self, but disability is a key factor.

People who are disabled (according to the Equalities Act 2010), but don’t agree that they see themselves as disabled, are more likely to see ‘people like me’ playing sport and being active (41% vs 25% of those who do see themselves as disabled). The number of impairments a person has, how active they are, age, social grade and qualifications also influences the data. A similar difference is observed for agreement with seeing ‘people like me’ working in sport and activity roles.

**Figure 6**

Proportion agreeing with each statement.



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

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

<sup>7</sup> Sport England, [Active Lives Adult Survey 2021-22](#) (2023).

<sup>8</sup> Department for Work and Pensions, [Employment of disabled people 2022](#) (2023).

**Disabled people are less likely to want the opportunity to take on a role in delivering physical activity.**

12% of disabled people wanted the opportunity to become a coach or have a role in delivering physical activity (vs 17% of non-disabled people). This increased to 26% of disabled people who were taking part in organised activities, and to 31% of young disabled people.

Participants in our workshops gave insight into what representation means for disabled people:

- Participants want to see a broader range of disabled people being active or working in the sector - not 'elite' athletes or people with high levels of fitness, and more people with hidden impairments.

“ Representation is important. There is representation out there for disabled people but not for general disabled people, it is specific impairments that are visible. Like for myself, people think 'you're healthy enough', so expect I can do what everyone else is doing.

**Disabled person**

”

- Amplifying the voices of disabled people in the media and all levels of sports can lead to a wider understanding of the challenges faced by disabled people and reduce stereotypes.
- Some participants felt organisations needed to make their equal opportunities policy clearer and give greater detail on their ambition to improve representation.

“ You need to have not tick-box exercises but equality in terms of gender, age, race, religion. It needs to be the right people in the right job. As well as the right campaigns and advocacy that says we are all inclusive.

**Disabled person**

”

## Key message 5: Disabled people are half as likely to see 'people like me' both playing and working in sport and activity.



**Our commitment:** We will support organisations to measure and improve their workforce's representation. We will improve the diversity of our own spokespeople and ambassadors.



**Our ask to sport and physical activity organisations:** Ensure your workforce and workplaces become more inclusive and accessible. Increase the number of disabled people involved in your sport, whether taking part, volunteering, or working in paid roles.

### Resources:

- Use the [Get Out Get Active Volunteer Management Toolkit](#) and [Inclusive workforce practices resource](#) to make your workforce more inclusive.
- [Disability Inclusion Club Hub](#) supports clubs and groups to improve opportunities for disabled people.





## 3.6 Co-production and influence

Engaging with disabled people is important for organisations and deliverers who want to provide more inclusive opportunities. Meaningful co-design and co-production leads to improved knowledge, ideas, and decision making, as well as services that meet real needs and provide better experiences for disabled people.

### Understanding co-production, co-design, and consultation.

These three approaches are useful ways to engage with disabled people. All need to be inclusive and accessible. Co-design and co-production involve embracing a cultural change in organisational decision-making, delivery, and power dynamics.

- **Co-production:** A dynamic and ongoing way of working. Where we work in equal partnership with disabled people to make decisions and improve our services. Where we aim for increased collaboration on actions and delivery.
- **Co-design:** Designing, advising, and developing a specific idea or project, where disabled people contribute directly to the decision-making.
- **Consultation:** Seeking views and suggestions from disabled people on opportunities or plans, but decisions are made by others.

As we improve our use of co-design and co-production of physical activities, we explored the appetite for taking part with new survey questions.

**Only one in ten disabled people has had the chance to influence the types of physical activity they are involved in.**

10% of disabled people have been given the opportunity to influence or design the activities<sup>9</sup> they are involved in (vs 14% of non-disabled people).

- This increases to 25% for both disabled people who had taken part in organised physical activity, and for young disabled people.
- Only 58% of disabled people say it is clear how they can provide feedback on activities they take part in.

**There is strong interest in influencing policies that affect disabled people, and a third want to have more of a role in influencing the activities they take part in.**

Eight in ten (81%) disabled people agree that disabled people should have more of a say in policies that affect them (vs 73% of non-disabled people).

33% of disabled people want to be involved in influencing the types of activities they could take part in (vs 30% of non-disabled people).

- This increases to almost half of disabled people who are taking part in organised activities (48%) and half of young disabled people (49%). People with learning impairments or multiple impairments are more likely to want to be involved.
- People in lower socioeconomic groups, and people without higher educational qualifications, had less interest and less opportunity to take part in co-production.

“ If you are developing an inclusive programme, getting the voices of lived experience should become common practice and second nature. It’s a real opportunity for disabled people to showcase their knowledge. And that opens doors up for people to see their own ability, and for organisations to see it too. I cannot stress the importance of it. It offers a different perspective. Disabled people have a passion about this work, because they see the desire and impact that is needed within society and on a national level.

**Disabled person**

”

<sup>9</sup> This was defined as ‘This could include being asked by an organisation providing physical activity for your feedback, or ideas on how activities could be run (e.g., where or when they take place, what kind of activities are on offer, improvements to the environment or equipment).’



### Tips on co-production from our participants.

While co-production was not chosen as a key topic in all workshops, our participants gave us tips on engaging with disabled people:

- Include a range of people, not just established voices – proactively seek new people and different experiences.
- Good, inclusive engagement requires skills and resources – not an afterthought or tick-box exercise.
- Show people you value and respect their contribution, sharing their lived experience, and their skills and expertise. Show how working together has led to change.
- Use it to make sure resources are spent on initiatives that are accessible and meet a real need.

“ I'd like to help more organisations do this kind of thing. If you work for a leisure centre, then why can't you do these workshops with people in your community? Staff could be trained to have a group like this to speak to.

**Disabled person**

”

### Key message 6: Disabled people want more influence on the policies that affect them and the activities they are involved in.



**Our commitment:** We will increase our own co-design and co-production understanding and embed it more often. We will champion effective engagement with disabled people in sport and policy and share good practice for others to use.



**Our ask to sport and physical activity organisations:** Learn about and grow your co-design and co-production activities, so disabled people can influence the activities and spaces they want to access.

### Resources:

- Use and share [Disability Rights UK's co-production page](#) and [Mind's 'Involving people with lived experience in the design and delivery of your work' resource](#).
- Use [Activity Alliance's effective engagement factsheets](#) to improve your connections with disabled people.



### 3.7 Outdoor spaces and active travel

New questions added to the survey explored the places and spaces where people take part in sport and physical activity, as well as where they would prefer to take part. This supports Sport England's 'active environments' strategy, with our findings focusing on the wider built environment, rather than dedicated facilities. The workshops showed disabled people want to be more active in outdoor spaces and want more accessible active travel options.

**Disabled people are less likely to be active in almost all places, except for at home.**

Disabled people are less likely to be active almost everywhere compared to non-disabled people, apart from at home (Table 2). They were less likely to be active in 'outdoor spaces like parks, countryside, and woodland' (43% vs 57%) 'indoor: at a leisure or sport centre, swimming pool, gym or studio' (22% vs 27%) and at 'a sport-specific facility or club' (4% vs 11%).

People with learning and mental health impairments are more likely to be active at home. Disabled women, younger people, and people in higher socioeconomic groups are more likely to be using online or digital tools at home.



**Table 2**

Proportion of people who select each of the following as places where they are usually active.

	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
Outdoor spaces like parks, countryside, or woodland	43%	57%*
At home: not using online or digital tools	31%*	24%
Outdoor spaces like roads or streets	26%	33%*
At home: using online or digital tools such as a phone, laptop, or TV	23%	23%
Outdoor spaces near lakes, rivers, or the seaside	23%	30%*
Indoor: at a leisure or sports centre, swimming pool, gym, or studio	22%	27%*
Indoor: at a community centre or other local building e.g., school or village hall	8%	9%
Outdoor: at a leisure or sports centre, swimming pool, gym, or studio	5%	7%
At a sport-specific facility or club e.g., football, tennis, cricket club or climbing centres	4%	11%*

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

## Disabled people prefer to take part in physical activity in outdoor spaces, leisure centres, or at home.

Disabled people were most likely to say that they prefer being active in outdoor spaces, indoors at leisure centres, or at home, without online or digital tools. (Table 3).

**Table 3**

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	46%	57%*
Outdoor spaces near lakes, rivers, or the seaside	34%	42%*
Indoor: at a leisure or sports centre, swimming pool, gym, or studio	32%	29%
At home: not using online or digital tools	30%*	22%
At home: using online or digital tools such as a phone, laptop, or TV	24%	22%
Outdoor spaces like roads or streets	15%	22%*
Indoor: at a community centre or other local building e.g., school or village hall	13%	12%
Outdoor: at a leisure or sports centre, swimming pool, gym, or studio	12%	14%
At a sport-specific facility or club e.g., football, tennis, cricket club or climbing centres	8%	13%*

The places with differences between where disabled people take part and where they prefer to take part, were leisure or sports centres, roads and streets, community centres or local buildings, and sport-specific clubs or facilities.

Around 7 in 10 disabled people who prefer to be active at home say that is where they are usually active. In the workshops, some people were happy to be active at home, but others wanted to be more confident being active outside of the home.

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

**Outdoor spaces were a key area where disabled people want to see improvements.**

Improving outdoor spaces like parks and neighbourhoods was the second most often chosen area of focus for the government, by 41% of disabled people and 46% of non-disabled people. Disabled people in the workshops wanted:

- More awareness and advertising of accessible local opportunities to be active in outdoor spaces.
- More clarity and information about getting to outdoor spaces or any equipment or planning that needs to take place.
- To have routes that are suitable for different levels of ability, with clear communication of what is suitable.



“ Outdoor organisations, they show groups doing walks. But they're not actually inclusive. I saw a girl on Instagram, who is a disability advocate. She recently went to the Lake District. She hired a mobility scooter, one of those rugged outdoor ones. It's amazing, I'd love to do that.

**Disabled person**

”

“ We are lucky with lakes and forests around here. They built three different lengths of walkway around the forest, The shortest one is a mile round, and you know about the different gradients because of the colour coding. That's fabulous.

**Disabled person**

”

## Active travel has an important role to play in reducing inequalities.

Other research shows that disabled people take 38% fewer trips (across all modes of transport) than non-disabled people,<sup>10</sup> an outcome which is reflected in walking and wheeling data too. Sport England's Active Lives shows disabled people are less likely than non-disabled people to walk and cycle for travel: 21% vs 28%.<sup>11</sup>

Our research shows that disabled people are less likely to be active on roads and streets but are more likely to want to be active in these places (Tables 2 and 3). In the workshops, themes relating to active travel included:

- Walking and cycling are appealing as free or low-cost ways to travel.
- Walking longer distances is challenging for people with pain and fatigue, or who have a lack of support. This leads to isolation and difficulties travelling to places to be active, especially for those who do not drive or have good accessible transport links.
- For changes to streets and pavements to consider accessibility and safety, and allow for using bikes and scooters as a mobility aid.

“Swimming is the only exercise I can do without feeling frightened or anxious, but it would take a train and a bus to get there. I don't go because I am unable to walk the distances between public transport and my home/the venue.

Disabled person

”

“They have parking spots for scooters or bikes, but they are just on the pavement. So, with all the other kinds of street furniture it's just an added thing for people who can't see. It can be really difficult.

Disabled person

”

<sup>10</sup> Motability, [The Transport Accessibility Gap](#) (2022).

<sup>11</sup> Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey 2020-21 (2022). Proportion walking or cycling for travel at least twice in the last 28 days. Please see [Active Lives online tool for more recent data](#).

## Key message 7: Disabled people must have greater access to travel to and be active in more places and spaces, especially outdoors.



**Our commitment:** We will increase our influencing work to support commissioning, policy, and planning so that outdoor spaces and active travel investments are inclusive and accessible.



**Our ask to sport and physical activity organisations:** Local commissioning and investments must improve active environments and active travel. They need to work for people with the most barriers to accessing outdoor spaces.

### Resources:

- Use [Sport England's Active Design Guidance](#) to make outdoors spaces more inclusive.
- Read the [Disabled Citizens' Inquiry report and recommendations](#), giving disabled people a voice in walking and wheeling policy and practice.
- Find out more from [Sustrans and Arup guide on cycling for everyone](#), and learn about the challenges with access to outdoor spaces with [Groundwork UK Out of Bounds report](#).



# 4. 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. 155 respondents did so, and of these, 26 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 – 51 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. For disabled people, 198 responses were from the Active Lives sample and 800 from the panel.

## Profile of respondents

**Table 4: Age of respondents**

	Disabled respondents	Non-disabled respondents
16 – 34 years old	11%	19%
35 – 44 years old	11%	18%
45 – 54 years old	17%	14%
55 – 64 years old	22%	22%
65+ years old	38%	23%

**Table 5: Ethnicity of respondents**

	Disabled respondents	Non-disabled respondents
White	92%	89%
Ethnically diverse	7%	10%

**Table 6: Gender of respondents**

	Disabled respondents	Non-disabled respondents
Male	39%	47%
Female	60%	53%

**Table 7: Socioeconomic status of respondents**

	Disabled respondents	Non-disabled respondents
AB	25%	39%
C1	16%	21%
C2	10%	12%
DE	43%	23%

**Table 8: Number of impairments**

	Disabled respondents
1	23%
2	26%
3	20%
4	14%
5+	16%

**Table 9: Type of impairments**

77% of the sample had more than one impairment.  
The mean number of impairments was 2.9.

	Disabled respondents
Mobility	59%
Long-term pain	52%
Breathing or stamina	40%
Long-term health condition	37%
Mental health	30%
Dexterity	20%
Hearing	11%
Memory	11%
Learning or understanding	9%
Social or behavioural	9%
Vision	5%
Speech	4%

## Online workshops

We held four workshops with survey participants, and one workshop with a group of young disabled people. People with a range of impairment types took part, with most having more than one impairment type (9 mobility and/or dexterity, 5 mental health, 5 long-term pain, 5 long-term health condition, 4 breathing or stamina, 3 social or behavioural, 2 learning; 2 hearing, 3 visual). The sample had a range of ages, education levels, and ethnicities. There was a good regional spread, and a mix of activity levels.

Our approach was to present the data to hear participant reactions. Each group collectively decided on important topics, and worked on ideas for change for Activity Alliance and more broadly.

## 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](mailto:research@activityalliance.org.uk)

Phone: 01509 227750

## Survey

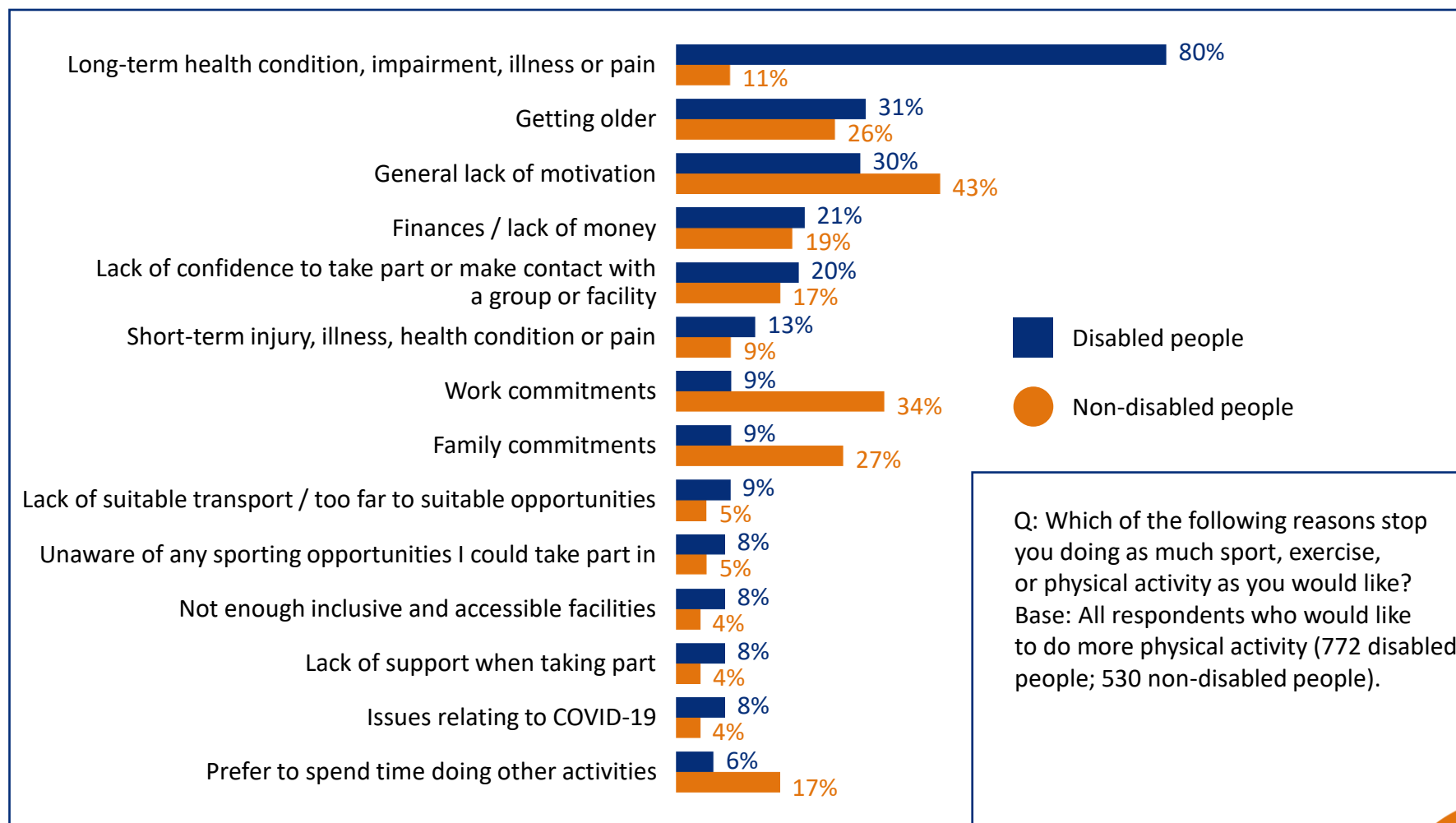
- The sample represents the general population of disabled people. There is a need for similar data for disabled people who directly engage with us and our partners.
- Not all questions were created or tested with partners and disabled people. We will review the questions in Year 5 of the survey with partners and disabled people.
- 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 findings, 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 physical education in schools, training teachers in disability awareness, availability or affordability of equipment and facilities, and quality of facilities.

## Barriers to being active

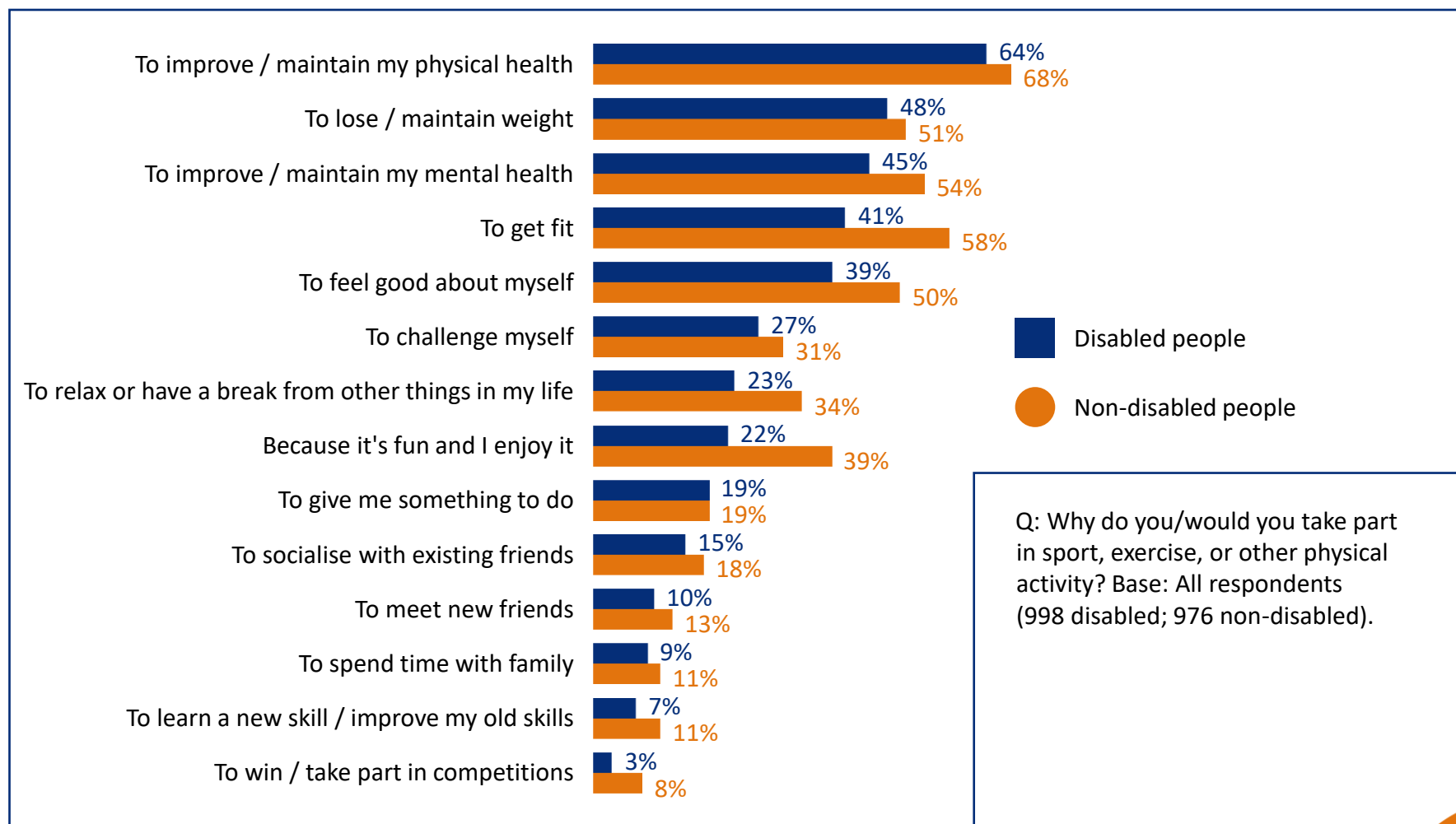
**Figure 7**  
Barriers to being active.



## Motivations to be active

Figure 8

Motivations to be active.

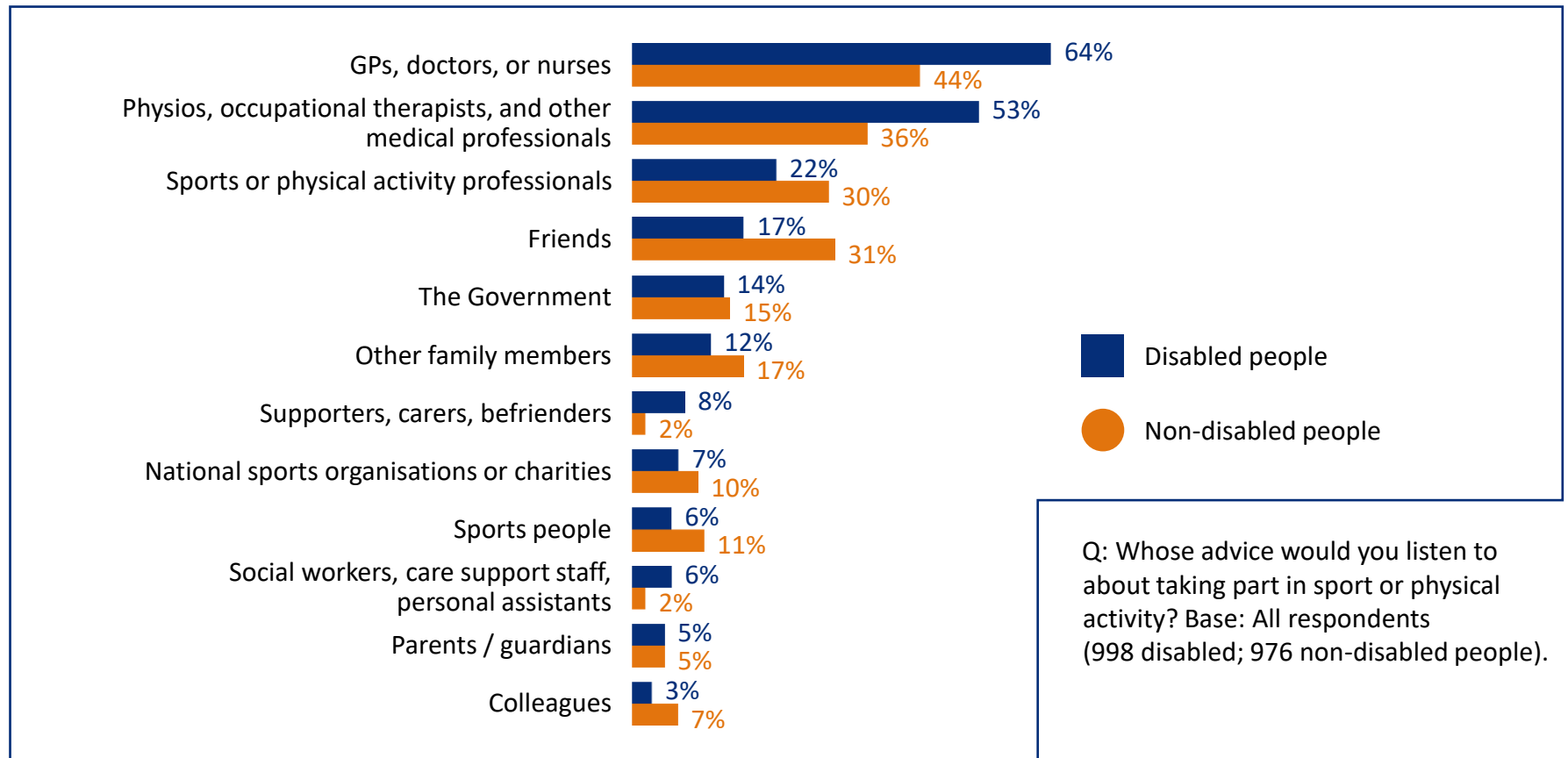


Q: Why do you/would you take part in sport, exercise, or other physical activity? Base: All respondents (998 disabled; 976 non-disabled).

## Sources of advice

**Figure 9**

Preferred sources of advice for taking part in physical activity.



## Types of support that would help respondents be more active

Table 10: Proportion selecting each type of support that would help them be more active

Type of support	2022	
	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
Support to improve physical health	44%	21%
Greater awareness of activities that are suitable for me	35%	19%
Financial support	27%	16%
Support to improve mental health	27%	17%
Better facilities and environments	19%	18%
Practical support from a trained person or coach	25%	14%
Support getting to activities or facilities	15%	6%
Support from family and friends	15%	15%
Seeing more disabled people working in physical activity roles	12%	4%
Support with taking part in online activities	8%	5%
More encouragement and motivation from the media and sporting organisations	6%	7%
Support from my workplace	4%	9%

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



## Support for different areas of government for policy

Table 11: Proportion selecting each type of policy as an area the government should focus on

Areas for government focus	2022	
	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
Making sure activities are affordable	64%	56%
Improving outdoor spaces like parks and neighbourhoods	41%	46%
Listening to and engaging with the public on how they want to be active	38%	30%
Improving sport facilities and community spaces	36%	42%
Improve people's health so they can be active	40%	28%
Giving people working in physical activity knowledge and skills to support disabled people	35%	21%
Improving transport links to local facilities	32%	24%
More support for sports clubs and groups	29%	32%
Making sure people's lifestyles allow them to be active	31%	27%
Tackle discrimination in sport and activity	25%	22%
Helping people access physical activity online	26%	17%

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



**We thank all participants for their contributions to this research project, and the following organisations for their involvement in this year's report and recommendations:**

British Paralympic Association, Disability Rights UK, Mind, Rise, Sense, Sport England, UK Deaf Sport, We Are Undefeatable, and WheelPower.

# activity alliance

disability  
inclusion  
sport



 01509 227750

 ActivityAlliance

 [info@activityalliance.org.uk](mailto:info@activityalliance.org.uk)

 @AllForActivity

 [activityalliance.org.uk](http://activityalliance.org.uk)

**This document is also available in different formats. Please contact us if you need more support. Report published in June 2023.**

IFF Research can be contacted about the project:

**[BeingActiveResearch@iffresearch.com](mailto:BeingActiveResearch@iffresearch.com)**

Photo credit: British Blind Sport, CP Sport, Dwarf Sports Association UK, Get Out Get Active programme, Special Olympics GB.

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