

Supporting disabled people from low-income households to be active

Research shows how important it is to be physically active and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Regular physical exercise provides many benefits. These include improving our overall health, quality of life, wellbeing and independence.

Many barriers can prevent disabled people from accessing opportunities to be active. This includes having the financial resources or essentials for a minimum standard of living. If a person's basic human needs cannot be met, it is often referred to as poverty. This can affect whether some disabled people can or want to take part in various activities.

We have created a number of engagement resources that encourage you to think about the ways to include disabled people. This factsheet provides insight on how deprivation affects some disabled people's lives and their opportunities to be active.



Poverty among disabled people

Poverty is a complex problem that affects millions of people in the UK. The causes and consequences of poverty are wide-ranging. They include social, economic and political elements.

There is a strong relationship between disability and poverty (Family Resources Survey, 2017/18):



14 million UK adults live in poverty.



Half of all people in poverty are either disabled themselves or live with a disabled person - that's around 7 million people.



4 million disabled adults in the UK live in poverty.



A disabled working-age adult is **more than twice as likely to be in poverty** as a non-disabled working-age adult.

Activity levels among low socioeconomic groups

Insight from Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey 2017/18 shows:

- Disabled people from lower socioeconomic groups are much more likely to be physically inactive than disabled people from higher socioeconomic groups (43% vs 29%).
- Disabled people from lower socioeconomic groups are three times more likely than non-disabled people from higher socioeconomic groups to be physically inactive (43% vs 14%).

Despite this, we know that four in five disabled people (81%) want to be more active (Activity Alliance Annual Survey, 2020). So here lies the challenge - how can we support disabled people from lower socioeconomic groups to be more physically active?



How low socioeconomic status impacts activity

First, we need to understand the impact that deprivation can have on activity levels. Here, we highlight some of the factors that can influence some disabled people:

Unemployment and low income

Low or unreliable income can prevent disabled people from accessing certain activity options. For example, signing up for a direct debit at the gym is often cheaper than the pay as you go option.

- Half of working-age disabled adults (50%) were unemployed in 2017/18. (DWP, Family Resources Survey, 2017/18).
- On average, disabled people work 13 fewer hours and take home nearly £200 less a week compared to non-disabled people. (DWP, Family Resources Survey, 2017/18).
- Seven in ten disabled people (70%) who receive disability benefits said they rely on them to be active. (Activity Alliance, Annual Survey 2020).

Personal experience and perceptions

Negative experiences and personal perceptions of sport and physical activity can lead some disabled people to see being active as a low priority in their lives.

- Disabled people in lower socioeconomic groups are less likely to have positive perceptions of physical activity and its outcomes. (Activity Alliance, Annual Survey 2020).
- Two in five disabled people (41%) say the fear of losing their disability benefits prevents them from being active. (Activity Alliance, Annual Survey 2020).
- Only a third of disabled people (31%) in skilled manual labour jobs think that 'sport' is for someone like them, compared to over half of disabled people (51%) in higher managerial positions. (Activity Alliance, Annual Survey 2020).
- Parents of disabled children in lower socioeconomic groups find it more difficult to get their children involved in sports and physical activity. (Activity Alliance, My Active Future, 2020).

On average, disabled people take home

£200

less a week, compared to non-disabled people.



Extra living costs

Financial strain can affect some disabled people's involvement. Additional costs such as buying trainers, paying subs or even washing sports kit can be a stretch too far after household expenses.

- Disabled people are likely to have a lower standard of living because they face extra inescapable costs. These include both necessities such as shelter, heating and clothing, and specialist goods and services.
- On average, disabled people face an extra £583 per month in costs.
- For almost a quarter of families with disabled children (24%), extra costs amount to over £1,000 a month (Scope, Disability Price Tag, 2019).



Social connections and neighbourhood environments

Loneliness, limited social connections and deprived neighbourhoods can reduce disabled people's opportunities. Individuals may not know what is available locally or be able to access them due to cost and transport barriers. There can also be a lack of suitable facilities and open spaces for sport and recreation.

- More than half (53%) of disabled people report that they feel lonely (Sense, A Right to Friendship, 2015).
- In 2019, disabled people in England were less likely than non-disabled people were to have accessed the internet, 78% vs 95%. In the same year, 18% of disabled adults had still never used the internet, compared to 4% of non-disabled adults (ONS, Internet Users, 2019).
- Across England, there are higher rates of disability in areas with higher levels of local deprivation (ONS, Census, 2011).
- Access to open space is not equal. In England, the most deprived areas have the least green space (CABE Space, Urban green nation, 2010).



Wellbeing and mental health

A person's mental health can have a big impact on their desire to be physically active. People with poor mental health experience many negative effects, including low self-esteem, anxiety, loss of confidence and increased isolation. These experiences can mean that taking up a sport or physical activity feels unimportant or too challenging.

- Higher rates of mental health problems are associated with poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage. Characteristics, such as gender, disability, age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and family status also influence the rates (Mental Health Foundation, Poverty and Mental Health, 2016).
- Disabled people report lower levels of overall wellbeing than non-disabled people. Wellbeing measures include life satisfaction, happiness, feeling things in life are worthwhile, feeling able to achieve goals, anxiety and loneliness (Activity Alliance, Annual Survey 2020).
- Two in five disabled people with mental health problems said they felt anxious yesterday (Activity Alliance, Annual Survey 2020).



Two in five

disabled people with mental health problems said they felt anxious yesterday.



Considerations for successful engagement and delivery

Engaging disabled people from low-income households to take part in sport and physical activity can be challenging. It requires understanding and flexibility of approach. When planning and delivering opportunities sport and activity providers should aim to:

Be informed about how deprivation can affect some disabled people's lives and the barriers it creates to being active. It is not just about having enough money. Personal safety, job security, previous experiences and mental wellbeing are also key.

Recognise that it is realistic and appropriate for disabled people from low-income households to give physical activity little or no priority. Life pressures and cost implications can overwhelm active mind-sets. Consider the affordability of your offer.

Be flexible in your approach and prepared to offer people extra, empathetic support to overcome issues such as low self-esteem and social confidence. Positive and considerate interactions at an early stage can be crucial.

Make time to get out into your community and ask inactive disabled people what would encourage them to move more. Tapping into personal motivations is key to changing behaviour.

Involve disabled people when designing and planning activity sessions. This is known as co-production and can lead to more people taking part in your activities.

Collaborate with local health agencies, primary care networks, voluntary sectors, and local authorities to reach the least active disabled people in your community. Think about local touchpoints and services.

Celebrate and share the positive impact your activities and events are having on disabled people's lives. Sharing success stories can encourage others to give it a go.

For more information, use [Activity Alliance's Talk to Me Principles](#) for effective engagement. These will support you to understand your audience and engage them in activities that are meaningful for them.

Find all our research on our website. This factsheet is part of our engagement resources.

Read all the sheets here activityalliance.org.uk/engagement

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This document is available in Word format. Please contact us if you need support. Activity Alliance is the operating name for the English Federation of Disability Sport. Registered Charity no. 1075180

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This factsheet was created in partnership with Professor Tess Kay, Deputy Dean and Head of Sport at the University of Stirling.

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British Blind Sport and Lawn Tennis Association.

