



Scottish Disability  
Sport

# Scottish Disability Sport: A Call to Action

This Call to Action is based on the voices of adults (16+) with disabilities in Scotland, along with input from partners and stakeholders across the public, private and third sectors.





# Introduction

A new national survey conducted by Scottish Disability Sport in partnership with the Queen Margaret University Centre for Health, Activity and Rehabilitation Research (CHEARR) has revealed that:

- Over 90% of respondents do not meet recommended levels of physical activity.

## YET

- 95% believe physical activity helps their mental health and wellbeing.
- 40% worry they could lose their financial help if they are seen to be more active.

This landmark survey gathered **335 responses**, which amplifies the voices of people with disabilities in Scotland and promotes evidence-based decision-making across sport, health, education and social policy.





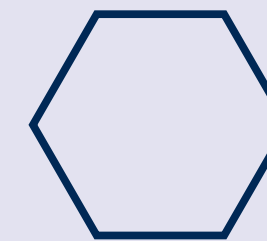
# The themes of the findings include:

- cost of-living factors
- the benefits and social care system
- public transport
- urban and rural challenges
- intersectionality.

The findings highlight urgent priorities Scottish society must address to create a truly inclusive society.

Policymakers must commit to safeguarding benefits for those who are physically active, rather than penalising them.

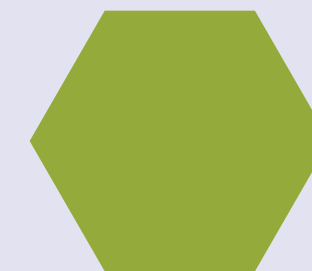
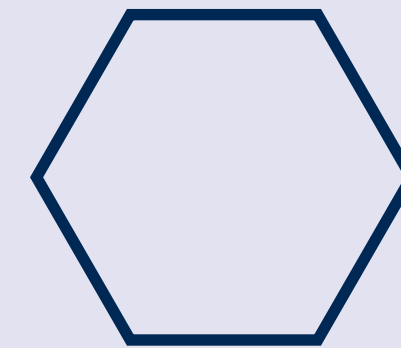
There is also clear intersection between poverty and disability which creates further barriers.





# Inspiring through Inclusion

Evidence shows that inclusive economies and societies grow faster, innovate more and are more resilient so getting this right is worth the time and investment. The actions laid out in this document will have clear positive impacts on current Scottish Government priorities.





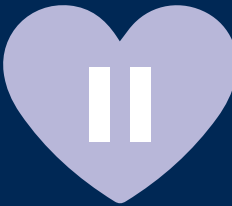
# Key National Survey Findings & other evidence

Over **90%** of people with disabilities do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity<sup>1</sup>, despite a **similarly high number (95%)** believing it has benefits for their mental health and wellbeing.

<sup>1</sup> UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines, 2019



Over **40%** of people are worried that their benefits will be removed if they are seen to be more active.

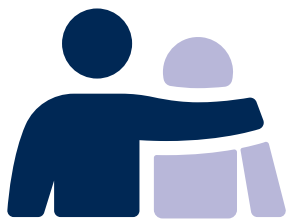


An estimated **3,185 deaths** and **over 11,000** disability-adjusted life years are attributable to physical inactivity in Scotland.

Public Health Scotland, 2024

There are **627,700** unpaid carers in Scotland.

Scottish Census, 2022



Over **70%** said public transport is **not a suitable alternative** for supporting their participation, pointing to broader access and infrastructure challenges across urban and rural communities.

In a typical week, **1 in 5** admitted to doing no physical activity at all, yet **73%** expressed a desire to do more.



**1 in 5** people know of someone who has had their **BENEFITS REDUCED** because of being active.



**12%** of children with disabilities in Scotland took part in sporting activity compared to 81% of children without disabilities.

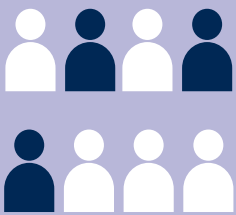
Observatory for Sport & University of West of Scotland Research 2021

People living with disability are **at least twice as likely** to be physically inactive as those without disability, increasing the risk of disease, poor mental health and social wellbeing.

The First Global Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for People Living With Disability, Carty et al, 2021



**Less than half** have received encouragement from a health or social care professional to be more active.



Over **80%** of participants think their disability or health condition negatively impacts their involvement in sport.



**67%** would find it very hard to take part without **SUPPORT OF FAMILY & FRIENDS**.

**2 out of 5** people are **NOT CONFIDENT** to take part in sport or physical activity because of factors related to their disability or condition.

**Intersecting characteristics** of a person negatively impact involvement in sport, **NOT ONLY** a person's disability.



On average, households with a person with a disability need an additional **£1,095 a month** to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households.

Scope, 2025



**Almost a quarter (24%)** of people in Scotland have a disability.

Scottish Census, 2022



# Scottish Disability Sport's 4 Point Call to Action

Scottish Disability Sport calls on organisations across Scotland to recognise the rights of people with disabilities, as laid out in Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and remove the significant barriers to sport and physical activity by collaborating across sectors to address the following factors:

## Plan to include

- Reduce inequalities for people with disabilities through inclusive strategy, policy, development and proportionate funding.
- Invest in systemic change to remove barriers to accessible travel, affordable and accessible facilities and inclusive spaces.



## A benefits and social care system that equips individuals to be active

- Provide safeguards to reassure people with disabilities that being active will not negatively impact any government financial assistance.
- Those in receipt of Self-Directed Support in Scotland should be able and encouraged to use their budget to engage in physical activity and sport.



## Deliver an inclusive whole system approach

- Every person with a disability has the right to take part in quality inclusive physical activity, physical education and sport.
- A health and social care system that prescribes appropriate physical activity opportunities at every stage of the individual's pathway.



## Champion intersectionality through a person-centred approach

- Collaborate with partners across sectors to champion intersectionality within policy, strategy and development.
- Ensure the needs of people with disabilities with intersecting identities are considered and met by co-design with those with lived experience.





# Video





# Plan to include

Key message:	Why this matters:	What needs to change:	What can you do to help:
<p>We must <b>reduce inequalities</b> by ensuring that <b>strategies, policies, and funding are inclusive, affordable and fair</b> for people with disabilities.</p>	<p>People with disabilities often face <b>exclusion and unfair access</b> in society and in physical activity and sport.</p> <p>People with disabilities face <b>significant financial challenges</b> due to cost of living and the additional cost of having a disability.</p> <p>Inclusive planning and development leads to <b>equality of opportunities</b> and an equitable approach in line with the SDS Activity Inclusion Model (AIM).</p>	<p>Make strategies and policies <b>fully inclusive</b> of people with disabilities from the start.</p> <p>Ensure funding is <b>proportionate</b> to the need (i.e. for true equality, more investment is needed for those with a disability).</p> <p><b>Invest in system-wide change</b> to remove barriers, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficult or expensive travel.</li><li>• Inaccessible facilities.</li><li>• Non-inclusive spaces.</li><li>• Equality of education.</li><li>• Proactive approach to change culture.</li></ul>	<p>Understand the challenges and create <b>inclusive and affordable access</b> within your programmes.</p> <p>Create <b>a sense of belonging</b> within your organisation and programmes for people with disabilities.</p> <p><b>Look outside your existing membership</b> and tailor messaging for people with disabilities with inclusive communication.</p> <p>Collect <b>meaningful and insightful data</b> that allows a <b>targeted</b> approach.</p>





# Deliver an inclusive whole system approach

Key message:	Why this matters:	What needs to change:	What can you do to help:
Everyone involved in sport, physical activity, education and health must work together to embed inclusion throughout the whole system – from training to care pathways.	<p>People with disabilities face <b>inconsistent experiences</b> across education, sport, and healthcare.</p> <p>People with disabilities are amongst those who face the most severe <b>financial</b> and <b>health inequalities</b>.</p> <p>A joined-up approach helps create <b>long-term, meaningful inclusion</b>.</p>	<p>Ensure <b>everyone delivering sport, PE or physical activity has quality disability inclusion training</b>.</p> <p>Build a health and care system that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The needs of individuals with disabilities are addressed within all strategy, planning and delivery.</li><li>• <b>Prescribes appropriate activity</b> at every stage of care.</li><li>• Strategically delivers physical activity as a <b>core driver of health and wellbeing</b>.</li></ul>	<p>Ensure your staff and deliverers are <b>comprehensively trained</b> and educated on inclusive practice.</p> <p><b>Lead</b> by example.</p> <p>Proactively link in with <b>referral programmes</b> to secure positive destinations.</p> <p>Implement <b>positive partnerships</b> with NHS, Public Health Scotland, Education Scotland and others to share resource and expertise.</p>





# A benefits and social care system that equips individuals to be active

Key message:	Why this matters:	What needs to change:	What can you do to help:
<p>The government must give <b>clear guidance</b> and implement <b>robust policy and processes</b> that reassure people with disabilities that <b>being active will not affect their financial support</b>.</p> <p>Government and local authorities must recognise physical activity as <b>a substantial or critical need and a fundamental right</b> and not a personal choice.</p>	<p>People with disabilities should <b>not fear losing benefits</b> for being seen as active.</p> <p>Current benefit rules and systems <b>can discourage participation and engagement</b> in physical activity.</p> <p>Although <b>Self Directed Support</b> is designed to prioritise choice and control, inconsistent implementation around accessing physical activity is <b>limiting</b> these choices.</p>	<p><b>Update benefit policies</b> to reflect the value of physical activity.</p> <p>Improve <b>clarity during assessments and applications</b>.</p> <p>Allow people to <b>use benefits confidently</b> to pay for sport and physical activity.</p> <p>Local authorities <b>must</b> acknowledge that <b>sport and physical activity is a substantial or critical need</b> and <b>allow self-directed support to fund activities</b>.</p>	<p>Encourage a <b>consistent, equitable approach</b> to Self-Directed Support (SDS) across local authorities.</p> <p><b>Champion the rights</b> of people with disabilities to use SDS to access vital sport and physical activity opportunities.</p> <p>Add your voice to advocate for <b>safeguards for government financial assistance</b> to reassure people with disabilities that they will not be penalised for being active.</p> <p>Reduce the need for care provision by using <b>early intervention and preventative practice</b> through physical activity.</p> <p>Recognise the <b>contribution of the paid and unpaid carer network</b> in supporting people with disabilities into activity.</p>





# Champion intersectionality through a person-centred approach

Key message:	Why this matters:	What needs to change:	What can you do to help:
<p>Inclusion must recognise that people have many identities. We must shape policies and spaces that reflect the full diversity of people with disabilities.</p>	<p>People with disabilities may face <b>additional barriers</b> due to race, gender, age, sexuality, religion or other identities.</p> <p>One-size-fits-all approaches will often <b>miss key needs</b>.</p>	<p><b>Collaborate and co-design</b> with people with disabilities from all backgrounds when shaping strategy and policy.</p> <p>Make sure policies, programmes and services <b>actively consider</b> the needs of people with <b>multiple, intersecting identities</b>.</p>	<p>Ensure <b>appropriate representation</b> across leadership, projects and consultations.</p> <p>Consider <b>alternative communication methods</b> that naturally include.</p> <p>Make <b>reasonable adjustments</b> to fully include.</p>





# About Scottish Disability Sport

Scottish Disability Sport (SDS) is a national charity and the Scottish governing body for sport for people of all ages and abilities with a physical, sensory or learning disability.

Our strategic plan, Inspiring Through Inclusion 2021-2029, directs the work of the organisation and contributes significantly towards the Scottish Government's National Performance framework, the Population Health Framework, Active Scotland's Physical Activity for Health Framework and sportscotland's Corporate Plan – Sport For Life.

SDS seeks to influence across to sport, health, education and the third sector. SDS is a national partner of sportscotland and our key partners are the Scottish Government, Scotland's governing bodies of sport and local authorities and leisure trusts, plus voluntary organisations representing people with disabilities.





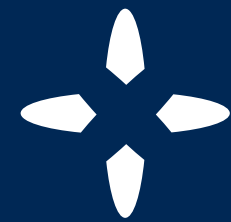
# Scottish Disability Sport's Commitment to Action

Our vision is that sport and physical activity in Scotland are welcoming and inclusive for participants and athletes with disabilities and all our work is undertaken with alignment to our underpinning values of **inclusion, respect, integrity** and **ambition**.

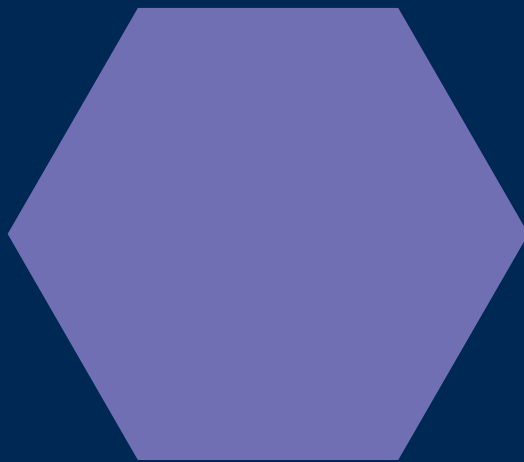
## We will:

- Recognise the power in collaboration and create regular opportunities for open communication
- Continue to influence our local and national partners to plan and programme inclusively
- Embed the Activity Inclusion Model within strategy, delivery and policy at all levels
- Deliver an extensive education and training programme to change culture
- Appoint a National Advisory Forum to ensure lived experience is ingrained in the co-design of developing strategy, policy and programmes alongside important consultations on relevant current affairs
- Drive an intersectional approach to equality, diversity and inclusion to sport and physical activity in Scotland
- Be trauma-informed and rights-led in our work and offer choice whilst empowering individuals to secure positive destinations
- Be evidence-based, take a holistic approach to action and seek continuous improvement
- Celebrate and champion our participants, athletes, volunteers, coaches and officials
- Advocate for and on behalf of people with a disability; raising awareness and championing change





# Scottish Disability Sport



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