

Manifesto for change

Fight for fairness: Disabled people's right to sport and physical activity

**activity
alliance**
disability
inclusion
sport



Developed with contributions and insight from disabled people, advocates and organisations in the sport, physical activity, and voluntary sector.

This includes consultation with the National Disability Sports Organisations and other disability partners.

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Back our manifesto

We all deserve the right to move, play sport or be physically active however we choose to be. Nobody must feel excluded or forgotten as we strive for a happier, healthier, more active nation.

There are 16 million disabled people in the UK. Yet, disabled people face many barriers that can make it more challenging to access and take part in meaningful sport and physical activity. It is not fair that disabled people continue to miss out on the physical, social, and health and wellbeing benefits of being active.

Activity Alliance is passionate about working together with partners to create more meaningful and lasting change for disabled people. Our manifesto outlines our top asks for the next government and policy makers across the country.



How you can help

- Champion disabled people's rights in sport and physical activity by supporting our asks. Use our evidence and insight to help in your advocacy work.
- See the power of inclusion in sport, by visiting an activity in your constituency.
- Ensure your campaign materials and social media are more accessible by considering communication barriers to information. Access our useful inclusive communication resources and support here – activityalliance.org.uk/communications
- Meet with Activity Alliance to discuss ways that can improve opportunities for disabled people. We can also introduce you to our expert partners for specific or targeted support.

Our asks

To ensure disabled people have equal access to sport and physical activity, we call upon the next government to:

**1**

Protect the benefits.

Provide clearer understanding and wider safeguarding to reassure disabled people that being regularly active will not threaten their social security and other forms of government financial assistance.

**2**

Equip health and care workers.

With NHS, 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.

**3**

Increase accessible outdoor spaces.

Take a leading role in promoting and legislating design standards that ensure accessibility in local and national spaces.

Email us at info@activityalliance.org.uk or call us on **0808 175 6991** for more information.



Facts and statistics

Our work uses the Social Model of Disability. This means people are disabled by the barriers that exist in society and the negative attitudes around them, not by the body or mind. This can include people who do not necessarily use the word 'disabled' themselves, including people who are Deaf, neurodivergent, or have visible or non-visible impairments, and long-term health conditions.

The Equality Act 2010 states that a person is considered to have a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has 'substantial' and 'long term' negative effects on their ability to do normal daily activities.

Population information

The number of disabled people is 16 million (24% of whole population).¹



- 26% of women (8.7 million) and 22% of men (7.3 million) are disabled.²
- Nearly a third of the adult population in England — around 12 million people — are in a lower socioeconomic group. Disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to experience poverty.³

Activity levels

41% (5.1 million) of disabled people were inactive,

compared to 20.9% of non-disabled people.⁴



- 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).⁵
- Disabled people were more likely to say they wanted to be more active compared to non-disabled people (77% vs 54%).⁶

Disabled children and young people

One third of disabled children take part in less than 30 minutes of sport and physical activity per

day during term-time (30% vs 21% of non-disabled children).⁷



- Only a quarter (25%) of disabled children say they take part in sport and activity all of the time at school, compared to 41% of non-disabled children.⁸
- Disabled children are less likely than non-disabled children are to be active at a park, leisure centre or friend's house.⁹



About us

Activity Alliance is a national charity, and our vision is fairness for disabled people in sport and activity. We want sport and physical activity to be genuinely inclusive and accessible and for disabled people to be prioritised, locally and nationally.

As the leading voice, we are proud to work with amazing organisations, groups, and people, across many sectors. We also deliver impactful programmes with and for disabled people.

Our ambition is to close the gap between disabled people's level of inactivity and that of non-disabled people. We call this the fairness gap, and we aim to close it by focussing on two key goals. These are **changing attitudes** towards disabled people in sport and activity and **embedding inclusive practice** into organisations.

We want to create a fairer society for everyone. A place where everyone can be as active as they want to be, and however and wherever they want to be.

We cannot do this alone which is why we are building a powerful movement to drive change by uniting with others. This movement includes member organisations, communities as well as, policy makers.




Foreword

Sport and physical activity play a huge role in how happy and healthy our nation is. At school, in the local park or working out in a nearby gym, we all have the right to welcoming, inclusive, and accessible opportunities. It should not matter how old you are or whether you are beginning an active lifestyle or a talented sports star. Every disabled child and adult should be empowered to take part in physical activity.

Activity Alliance wants to ensure there is a level playing field for everybody. But we know that disabled people are twice as likely to be inactive than non-disabled people. This means millions of disabled people are missing out on significant physical, social, and health and wellbeing benefits.

The next government needs to realise the potential and understand the power inclusive sport and physical activity can bring to this country. The inactivity crisis and deep-rooted inequalities for disabled people cannot be fixed by sport decision makers alone. It needs government commitment and leadership, across education, health, employment, and transport.

Engagement with current and future MPs is vital in our fight for fairness. **Almost one in four people in our population** ¹⁰ considers themselves a disabled person, a significant proportion of the electorate to be accounted for in policy. As voters, disabled people must feel consulted with, and part of future government priorities and policies.

We know from the growing portfolio of research that disabled people want more influence on policies that affect them, and we believe disabled people deserve greater influence. Our manifesto presents some of this insight and draws upon people's highly valuable lived experiences.

Disabled children and adults require a commitment from government to know they will not be excluded in sport and physical activity.

When everyone feels included, we all benefit.

Adam Blaze
Chief Executive



Our asks

We are calling on every parliamentary candidate to commit to supporting all disabled children and adults' access to sport and activity.




1 Protect the benefits

The government must provide clearer understanding and wider safeguarding to reassure disabled people that being regularly active will not threaten their social security and other forms of government financial assistance.

Disabled people must not fear losing such support as a result of being seen to be active. Changes to the benefits system, the conditions and wider action is needed to ensure that the number of active disabled people rises. A clearer understanding throughout assessment and application can enable more disabled people to use their benefit payments for sport and physical activity.



Evidence

- **The Activity Trap research** ¹¹ shows that almost half of disabled people fear losing their benefits if they are seen to be physically active.
- More than a third of people (34%) have had, or know someone who has had, benefits sanctioned or removed as a result of being physically active.¹²
- Four in five disabled people would like to be more active (77%) but six in ten (64%) stated that the government must focus on making sure activities are affordable.¹³



2 Equip health and care workers

The government and NHS must 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.

Health and care workers are the most trusted source for disabled people to seek advice about being physically active and can assist in developing ideas. We need to equip health and care workers so they can give disabled children and adults the best information and accurately signpost to a wider choice of activities. To do this with greater results, health and care workers need to know about, and have wider availability of, sporting opportunities in their area. This will help to improve the population's health and wellbeing outcomes in all age groups and reduce loneliness levels. It also means in time that more disabled people will feel closer to achieving the Chief Medical Officers in the UK's recommended guidelines for physical activity minutes per week.¹⁴

Evidence

- Disabled adults are more likely than non-disabled adults to report their current health status as poor or very poor (46% compared with 4%).¹⁵
- GPs, doctors, or nurses are the most trusted source of information for disabled people. (64% of disabled people compared to 44% of non-disabled people).¹⁶
- Four in 10 disabled people identify 'support to improve physical health' as their top form of support to stay active (43% compared to 21% of non-disabled people).¹⁷
- There has been an upward trend over the last four years for disabled people to feel lonelier than non-disabled people – 23% versus 8% in 2023¹⁸ and nearly two-thirds of disabled people who felt lonely agreed that being active could help them feel less lonely (65%).¹⁹





3 Increase accessible outdoor spaces

The government must take a leading role in promoting and legislating design standards that ensure accessibility in local and national spaces.

Everyone deserves the right to access the places and spaces near them. Most of us walk, wheel or cycle for our daily journeys and making active travel more accessible will play an important role in reducing wider inequalities including employment.

Design and active travel standards must be informed by disabled children and adults' barriers to outdoor spaces, sports and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space. The government should make a long-term commitment to address the inaccessibility of blue (water), green (land) and grey (urban open) spaces in local communities and reduce barriers to active travel.



Evidence

- Disabled people want to see improvements in outdoor spaces, like parks and neighbourhoods, and it was the second highest area for the government to focus on improving (41% of disabled people think it should be a government focus).²⁰
- Disabled people stated that they would benefit from more awareness of local opportunities to be active in outdoor spaces as well as, clear information about how to get there and how suitable they are for different levels of ability.²¹
- Disabled people are less likely to be active almost everywhere compared to non-disabled people, apart from at home.²²
- 41% of disabled people in the UK said they often experience problems reaching their destination due to the accessibility of the environment around them on a typical walking or wheeling journey.²³

Appendix

- 1 Department for Work and Pensions, Family Resources Survey, 2021-2022
- 2 Department for Work and Pensions, Family Resources Survey, 2021-2022
- 3 Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty Report 2019-20
- 4 Sport England Active Lives, April 2023
- 5 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 6 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 7 Activity Alliance, My Active Future: Including every child, 2020
- 8 Activity Alliance, My Active Future: Including every child, 2020
- 9 Activity Alliance, My Active Future: Including every child, 2020
- 10 Family Resources Survey 2021-22. (2023)
- 11 Activity Alliance and Dwarf Sports Association UK, The Activity Trap 2018
- 12 Activity Alliance and Dwarf Sports Association UK, The Activity Trap 2018
- 13 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 14 UK Chief Medical Officers' guidelines to physical activity, 2019
- 15 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2021-22
- 16 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 17 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 18 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 19 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 20 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 21 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 22 Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23
- 23 Sustrans (Disability citizens inquiry) (8 February 2023)





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0808 175 6991



info@activityalliance.org.uk



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This document is also available in Word format. Please contact us if you need more support. Manifesto published in April 2024.

Photo credit: Dwarf Sports Association UK

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