

# Annual Disability and Activity Survey

**2021-22**

**Differences for people with  
different impairment types**

Activity Alliance  
and IFF Research

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# 1. Introduction



This report outlines key findings from people with different types of impairments who took part in Activity Alliance's third Annual Disability and Activity Survey. [The full report is available on our website.](#)

941 disabled people and people with long-term health conditions took part in an online survey between October and December 2021. This research complements [Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey](#), providing a deeper level of understanding of disabled people's perceptions and experience of sport and physical activity. Active Lives data from April 2022 showed that disabled people are almost twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people: 42.4% compared to 22.6%.

This report outlines key data for seven impairment types, compared to the overall sample of disabled people. The sample size for each group was:

- Mobility (606)
- Learning, understanding, or concentrating (109)
- Long-term health condition (386)
- Mental health (276)
- Hearing (152)
- Visual (77)
- Social or behavioural (79)

Most people who took part in the survey had more than one impairment type (83%). We know the challenges experienced by disabled people can be similar, regardless of their impairment or health condition. This report provides more detail for groups who work with people with specific impairments, with a comparison to disabled people overall.

The negative changes this year reminds us that we need to place disabled people at the heart of recovery from the pandemic. We all need to create opportunities to be active that are inclusive, welcoming, and accessible like never before.

Please contact Activity Alliance's research team to discuss how to access and use the data, or how to implement the recommendations. Email [research@activityalliance.org.uk](mailto:research@activityalliance.org.uk) or call 01509 227750.

## 2. People with a mobility impairment

### About this group

- Most people with mobility impairments have more than one impairment (93%, significantly higher than the 83% for disabled people overall). The most common additional impairments were long-term pain (72%), long-term health condition (43%), breathing or stamina (41%), and dexterity (32%).
  - 606 people with a mobility impairment took part in the survey,
  - 11% were electric wheelchair, powerchair, or scooter users,
  - 10% were manual wheelchair users,
  - 4% were limb amputees or had congenital limb loss,
  - 2% had Cerebral Palsy, and
  - 1% had dwarfism or restricted growth.
- This group are more likely to think of themselves as disabled (69% versus 58% of disabled people overall).
- This group was older than the overall sample<sup>1</sup>. They were more likely to be in social grade DE<sup>2</sup>, and to be a state pensioner.
- People with mobility impairments are more likely to be inactive than disabled people on average<sup>3</sup>, with over half (54%) doing less than 30 minutes of activity a week. This has increased from 51% before the pandemic.

<sup>1</sup> 63% of the sample were 50 years or older. This is representative of the 61% of disabled people in the UK who are over 50.

<sup>2</sup> The social grade classification uses the ABC1 system produced by the Office for National Statistics, based on occupation and employment status. DE is the lowest social grade, representing semi-skilled & unskilled manual occupations and people who are unemployed.

<sup>3</sup> Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey November 2020-21 (2022).

## Research findings

### Attitudes and perceptions

- 79% want to be more active (compared to 77% of disabled people overall).
- People with mobility impairments are less likely to agree that sport is for 'someone like me' this year (23% vs 31% of disabled people) and that physical activity and exercise are for 'someone like me' (39% vs 47%).

### Participation and experience

- People with mobility impairments are less likely to agree that they are given the opportunity to be as active as they want to be (38% vs 42%).
- People with a mobility impairment were less likely than disabled people overall to have taken part in an organised activity session in the last year (14% vs 20%).
- In the last year, they were also less likely (than disabled people on average) to take part in:
  - recreational/fun individual sport (11% vs 16%),
  - recreational/fun team sports (7% vs 11%),
  - competitive team sport (5% vs 8%), and
  - competitive individual sport (5% vs 8%).

- Like other disabled people, people with mobility impairments are less likely than last year to say that activity leaders included them (74%) or met their needs (70%), and that the activity was inclusive and accessible (78%).

### Returning to activity after COVID-19

- Less than half of people with mobility impairments agreed that returning to sport and physical activity after COVID-19 was a positive experience (45% vs 53% of all disabled people).
- People with mobility impairments were less likely to feel encouraged to return to sport and physical activity after the pandemic (20% compared to 28% of disabled people overall). They were also less likely to be looking forward to face-to-face physical activities (24% vs 30%) after restrictions have lifted.
- People with mobility impairments who had returned to being active since COVID-19 restrictions were lifted were less likely to agree that safety measures were communicated effectively (57% vs 62%). They were also less likely to agree that COVID-19 safety measures were adapted to their impairment (32% vs 38%).

## Motivations

- The top motivations to be active are similar to other disabled people:
  - to improve or maintain physical health (67%),
  - to lose or maintain weight (53%),
  - to improve or maintain mental health (45%),
  - to get fit (44%), and
  - to feel good about themselves (39%).
- Like other disabled people, this group said 'maintaining health and wellbeing' was most important when returning to physical activity (69%).

## Barriers

- People with mobility impairments are more likely to say their impairment or condition stops them being as active as they would like (88% vs 78% of all disabled people).
- The other top barriers are similar to disabled people:
  - getting older (40%),
  - a lack of motivation (23%), and
  - finances (22%).

- Like other disabled people, few selected issues related to COVID-19 as a barrier to being active (12%). However, over three-quarters (77%) said COVID-19 and restrictions had affected their health condition or impairment. People with a mobility impairment were also more likely to have been shielding (41% vs 37%).

## Advice and information

- People with mobility impairments are more likely than other disabled people to say they would listen to advice on activity from GPs, doctors or nurses (65% vs 60%) and physios, occupational therapists and other medical professionals (64% vs 57%).
- The three most common information sources about physical activity opportunities are websites (33%), medical practices or professionals (29%), and friends and family (23%).

## Support and priorities

- The top forms of support that would help people with mobility impairments to be active were similar to disabled people overall:
  - support to improve physical health (48%),
  - greater awareness of suitable activities (44%),
  - financial support (35%),
  - support to improve mental health (31%), and
  - better facilities and environments (31%).

## Summary and recommendations

Activity Alliance, and the disabled people who took part in the study, identified four key areas for action. The full recommendations can be found in [our Annual Survey 2021-22 executive summary](#). Additional considerations for people with mobility impairments include:

- People with mobility impairments are less likely to feel connected to sport and physical activity. Attitudes and culture need to be more inclusive, representative, and to recognise individual needs.



Give us more support instead of closing each door - it's not nice to be pushed out because of being in a wheelchair, they need to see the person, not the wheelchair. We just want to be treated as equals.

**Person with mobility, learning, hearing, and visual impairment**



- Health is important to many people with mobility impairments – it is a top motivator, and healthcare professionals are the preferred source of advice and information.
- Almost 9 in 10 people with a mobility impairment say their impairment stops them being active. Providing more accessible environments, and suitable and appealing adapted activities will help encourage more people to be active.
- [WheelPower](#) offer online activities, multisport events, funding opportunities and free equipment for wheelchair users, and online training for coaches.
- [LimbPower](#), [Dwarf Sports Association UK](#), and [CP Sport](#) provide further information and advice on including people with physical impairments in sport and physical activity.

## 3. People with a learning impairment

### About this group

- Almost all people with a learning impairment had multiple impairments (99% vs 83% of disabled people overall). Mobility impairments were the most common additional impairment (61%), followed by mental health (59%), breathing or stamina (54%), and memory (50%). Social and behavioural issues, and speech impairments, were more common in this group.
- People with a learning impairment are more likely than average to think of themselves as disabled (70% vs 58%).
- People with a learning impairment were more likely to be younger than people with other types of impairments. 18% took part in the survey through an Easy Read version, and 9% were carers or supporters.
- Inactivity levels in this group are similar to disabled people on average: 43% were doing less than 30 minutes of activity a week<sup>4</sup>. This is similar to before the pandemic.

### Research findings

#### Attitudes and perceptions

- 76% want to be more active (similar to 77% of disabled people overall).
- People with learning impairments are more likely to feel that sport is for 'someone like me' (42% vs 31% of all disabled people. However, there was a decrease in the proportion who felt like physical activity was for 'someone like me': 63% in 2020-21, to 50% this year).
- People with learning impairments are more likely to aspire to want to take part in sport competitively (27% vs 16%).
- Two-thirds of people with a learning impairment agreed there should be more disabled people taking part in sport and physical activity on television (66% vs 52% of all disabled people).

<sup>4</sup> Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey November 2020-21 (2022).



## Participation and experience

- People with a learning impairment are more likely to say they are given the opportunity to be as active as they want to be (48% compared to 42%).
- They were more likely than other disabled people to have taken part in an organised sport or a physical activity session in the last year (28% vs 20%).
- They were also more likely than disabled people on average to take part in group exercise or physical activity (29% vs 20%), recreational/fun individual sport (26% vs 16%) and competitive individual sport (14% vs 8%).

## Returning to activity after COVID-19

- People with learning impairments were more likely to agree that returning to sport and physical activity after COVID-19 was a positive experience (60% vs 53% of all disabled people).
- People with learning impairments were more likely to feel encouraged to return to sport and physical activity after the pandemic (35% compared to 28% of disabled people overall). They were more likely to be looking forward to face-to-face physical activities (40% vs 30%) after restrictions have lifted.

## Motivations

- Compared to disabled people overall, people with a learning impairment were more likely to be motivated to take part in sport or physical activity to:
  - improve/maintain their mental health (58% versus vs 47%),
  - relax or have a break from other things in their life (38% vs 28%),
  - have something to do (35% versus 22%), and
  - to learn a new skill/improve their existing skills (23% vs 12%).
- Having choice when returning to being active mattered more to this group. 51% of people with a learning impairment said this was important, compared to 39% of all disabled people.

## Barriers

- Like other disabled people, people with a learning impairment were most likely to say that their impairment or health conditions stops them being as active as they would like (82% compared to 78% of all disabled people). They were more likely than other disabled people to say this was related to feeling less confident (43% vs 31%) and negative attitudes from others (22% vs 12%).

- They were more likely than other disabled people to choose most other barriers. These include a lack of motivation (37% compared to 27%), finances (31% vs 22%), lack of confidence (31% vs 21%), and a lack of support when they take part (16% vs 7%).
- A greater proportion reported 'fear of losing benefits or financial assistance' (22% vs 9% of all disabled people) as a factor that stops them being active.
- People with learning impairments were more likely to say issues relating to COVID-19 stop them from being active (18% compared to 11% of all disabled people). 86% said COVID-19 and the lockdown measures affected their health condition or impairment (vs 79% of all disabled people). They were more likely to have been shielding (55% vs 37%) or to have had long-COVID (18% vs 9%).

## Advice and information

- 38% of people with a learning impairment felt they did not get enough advice on how to be active during the pandemic, vs 23% of disabled people on average.
- Advice from healthcare professionals is less important for this group: 47% said they would listen to advice on being active from GPs, doctors or nurses, compared to 60% of disabled people overall.

- They are more likely to listen to advice from support/carers/befrienders (21% vs 11%), social workers/care support staff/personal assistants (19% vs 11%) and parents/guardians (11% vs 5%).
- The most common information source for opportunities are websites (49%), followed by family and friends, sports and leisure clubs or organisations, and social media (all 28% respectively). This group are more likely to use websites and social media, perhaps reflecting the younger age profile.

## Support and priorities

- People with learning impairments were more likely to say most forms of support would help them to be more active. The most common forms of support selected were: 'support to improve mental health' (53% vs 33% of all disabled people), financial support (50% vs 34%), and 'greater awareness of suitable activities' (50% vs 42%). They were more likely to say 'support getting to activities', 'support from a trained person', and 'support from family and friends' would be helpful.
- When asked what the government should focus on to get more people active, people with a learning impairment were more likely to say: 'listening to and engaging with people on how they want to be active' (49% vs 39% of all disabled people), 'more support for clubs and groups' (41% vs 29%), and 'tackling discrimination in sport and physical activity' (40% vs 27%).

## Summary and recommendations

- While perceptions about sports and activity can be more positive for people with learning impairments, they experience more barriers and would benefit from a wide range of support.
- Having choice and being listened to is important – use insight and coproduction to offer a range of suitable activities. Financial issues, and issues relating to COVID-19, could be bigger concerns.



Be a lot more creative and flexible about how you try to be inclusive. Run more drop-in/no booking required sessions. More encouragement, fewer restrictions.

**Person with learning and breathing impairments**



- People with learning impairments are more likely to experience negative attitudes, and to say that tackling discrimination is important. Creating a more inclusive and representative environment can help improve the culture of sport and physical activity.
- They have less preference for advice from healthcare professionals – family, friends and support workers are more important for providing advice, and support.
- [Mencap](#) and [Special Olympics Great Britain](#) provide further information and advice on including people with learning disabilities in sport and physical activity.

## 4. People with long-term health conditions

### About this group

- Nearly all (93%) of those with a long-term health condition also had at least one other impairment (higher than 83% among disabled people overall). The most common additional impairments were mobility (67%), long-term pain (63%), and breathing and stamina (46%).
- They were more likely than average to consider themselves disabled (68% vs 58%).
- People with a long-term health condition were more likely to be male.
- Inactivity levels in this group are higher than the average for disabled people: 48% were doing less than 30 minutes of activity a week<sup>5</sup>. This has increased since before the pandemic, when 45% were inactive.

### Research findings

#### Attitudes and perceptions

- 79% want to be more active (similar to 77% of disabled people overall).
- People with long-term health conditions have similar perceptions of sport and physical activity to disabled people overall: only 33% and 44% agree sport and physical activity are for 'someone like me'.

#### Participation and experience

- 42% of people with long-term health conditions say they have the opportunity to be as active as they want to be. This is the same as for disabled people overall.
- Over two-thirds of people with a long-term health condition enjoyed the last time they took part in a sport or physical activity session (69% vs 65% of all disabled people).
- People with a long-term health condition were more likely than disabled people overall to have taken part in: exercise or physical activity with a group (23% vs 20%), a recreational/fun team sport (14% vs 11%) and/or a competitive team sport (11% vs 8%).

<sup>5</sup> Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey November 2020-21 (2022).

## Returning to activity after COVID-19

- The experience of people with a long-term health condition was similar to that of disabled people overall: they were equally likely to say they feel encouraged to return (26%), to be looking forward to face-to-face activities (31%), and to say returning was a positive experience (54%).

## Motivations

- Motivations to be active are similar to those of disabled people overall. The top motivations are to improve or maintain physical health (65%), to lose or maintain weight (50%), and to improve or maintain mental health (46%).
- Among those who are **not** currently physically active, people with a long-term health condition were more likely to say they would exercise in future to: relax or have a break (22% vs 17% overall), give them 'something to do' (22% vs 16% overall), and meet new friends (14% vs 10%).

## Barriers

- People with a long-term health condition were more likely to report their impairment or condition as a barrier to being active (83% vs 78% of all disabled people). For people with health conditions, this barrier was more likely to relate to feeling less confident (37% vs 31%) or bad experiences in the past (24% vs 20%).

- 15% said issues relating to COVID-19 stopped them from being active – higher than the average of 11% for all disabled people. People with a long-term health condition were more likely to say they are or had been shielding (52% vs 37%), and/or have long-COVID (12% vs 9%).

## Advice and information

- Healthcare professionals were the top preferred sources of advice on physical activity (59% for GPs, doctors, and nurses, and 58% for physios, occupational therapists, and other medical professionals). These figures are similar to disabled people overall.
- Surprisingly, people with a health condition were only slightly more likely to have received information about being active from medical practices or professionals (28% compared to 25% of all disabled people). They were more likely to find information about opportunities from local groups or charities (21% vs 17%).

## Support and priorities

- The top forms of support that would help people with long-term health conditions be active were similar to disabled people overall: support to improve physical health (49%), greater awareness of suitable activities (44%), financial support (33%), support to improve mental health (32%), and better facilities and environments (33%).
- Like other disabled people, people with long-term health conditions thought the government should focus on: 'making activities affordable' (62%) and 'improving outdoor spaces' (46%). They were more likely to say 'listening and engaging with people on how they want to be active' was important (43%, vs 29% of all disabled people).

## Summary and recommendations

- There were few differences between people with long-term health conditions and disabled people overall. They are likely to consider themselves disabled, to have other impairments, and to want advice from healthcare professionals. This highlights the need for increased collaboration between health and disability organisations.



Every public area like GP surgeries should publicise health, fitness and wellbeing sessions run by local organisations. During every contact with a health worker, the benefits of physical activity should be discussed and encouraged.

**Person with learning and breathing impairments**



- Concerns about COVID-19 are slightly higher for this group, and over half have been shielding. They may need extra encouragement and support to return to activity after restrictions have lifted. Coproducing opportunities, as well as initiatives to tackle health and confidence, could help more people be included.
- Like other disabled people, people with long-term health conditions are feeling less connected to sport and physical activity and are having less positive experiences. Tackle this by promoting positive changes in attitudes and culture and increasing knowledge and skills in deliverers.
- [We Are Undefeatable](#) provide further information and advice on including people with long-term health conditions in sport and physical activity.
- Their [Physical Activity and Long Term Condition Resource Packs](#) provide tailored information for the health and care workforce, health organisations, and the sport and activity sector.

## 5. People with a mental health condition or impairment

### About this group

- Almost all people with a mental health condition had more than one impairment (94% vs 83% of disabled people overall). Long-term pain was the most common additional impairment (66%), followed by mobility (58%), and breathing and stamina (46%).
- They are more likely than average to think of themselves as disabled (65% compared to 58% of all disabled people).
- Respondents with a mental health condition were more likely to be younger, female, and be in social grade DE.
- People with a mental health condition are less inactive than people in other impairment groups: 37% were doing less than 30 minutes of activity a week<sup>6</sup>. This has increased from 34% since before the pandemic.

### Research findings

#### Attitudes and perceptions

- Respondents with a mental health condition were more likely to want to be active (82% vs 77% of disabled people overall).

- This group were slightly less likely to agree physical activity is for 'someone like me' (44% vs 47% of disabled people overall), and that sport is 'for someone like me' (27% vs 31%).
- More agreed that there should be more disabled people taking part in sport and physical activity on television (60% vs 52% of all disabled people).

#### Participation and experience

- Fewer people with mental health conditions feel they are given the opportunity to be as active as they want to be (30% vs 42% of all disabled people)
- A fifth (19%) of people with a mental health condition had taken part in an organised sport or physical activity session in the last year. This is similar to disabled people on average. They were less likely to take part in group exercise (15% vs 20%).
- The experience of people with mental health conditions is slightly more negative than disabled people overall: they were less likely to agree that the session was inclusive and accessible to them (75% vs 81% of all disabled people), and that they had the opportunity to explain their needs in private (60% vs 68%).

<sup>6</sup> Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey November 2020-21 (2022).

## Returning to activity after COVID-19

- Less than half (48%) agreed that returning to sport and physical activity after the pandemic was a positive experience, compared to 53% of all disabled people.
- People with mental health conditions are slightly less likely to feel encouraged to return to sport and physical activity after the pandemic (25% vs 28% of disabled people overall). They were less likely to be looking forward to face-to-face physical activities (27% vs 30%) after restrictions have lifted.

## Motivations

- This group were more likely to be motivated to take part in sport and activities to improve and/or maintain their mental health (59% vs 47% of all disabled people). Other motivations that were more common included: to meet new friends (17% vs 13%), and to learn a new skill or improve old skills (17% vs 12%).
- Having choice when returning to being active mattered more to this group. 48% said this was important, vs 39% of all disabled people.

## Barriers

- Like other disabled people, people with a mental health condition were most likely to say that their impairment stops them being as active as they would like to be (81% vs 78%). For people with mental health conditions, this barrier is more likely to be related to worries about making their impairment worse (50% vs 41% of disabled people), feeling less confident (40% vs 31%), and negative attitudes from others (22% vs 12%).
- Several other barriers were more common for this group: a lack of motivation (44% vs 27% overall), lack of confidence (38% vs 21%) and finances (36% vs 22%). Those receiving benefits were more fearful that being active may lead to their financial assistance being removed (58% vs 46% of disabled people overall).
- Issues relating to COVID-19 were a more common barrier: 17% compared to 11% of all disabled people.

## Advice and information

- Like other disabled people, listening to advice about taking part in sport or physical activity from GPs, doctors or nurses was the most common preference (56%).
- The most common information source for sport or physical activity opportunities was websites (38%). They were more likely to use social media as a source of information (25% vs 18% of all disabled people), reflecting their younger age profile.



## Support and priorities

- When asked what kind of support would help them to be more active after the COVID-19 pandemic, the most popular were: support to improve mental health (67% vs 33% of all disabled people), support to improve physical health (54% vs 46%) and financial support and awareness of suitable activities (49% respectively).
- People with mental health conditions were more likely to say the government can help people be more active by focusing on:
  - ‘making activities affordable’ (72% compared to 62% of all disabled people),
  - ‘improving outdoor spaces’ (50% vs 43%),
  - ‘giving people working in sport and physical activity more knowledge and skills to support disabled people’ (41% vs 36%),
  - ‘improving transport’ (36% vs 28%),
  - ‘tackling discrimination’ (38% vs 27%), and
  - ‘helping people access online activities’ (33% vs 26%).

## Summary and recommendations

- Though people in this group are more active than other disabled people, there’s still a large unmet need, with over 8 in 10 wanting to be more active.
- People with mental health conditions have less opportunities to be active and can have worse experiences than other disabled people. Lack of motivation, lack of confidence, and finance issues are more common barriers for this group.



People with disabilities should be entitled to free classes to help manage pain, fitness, mental health and help mobility in the long-term.

### Person with mental health condition and long-term pain



- Improving mental and physical health are key motivations, but this group have a wider range of reasons to be active, like meeting new people and learning skills.
- Many want tackling discrimination to be a priority. They are less likely to be given an opportunity to explain their needs. This suggests mental health is still often misunderstood, or attached to stigma.
- [Mind](#) provide further information and advice on including people with mental health conditions in sport and physical activity.

## 6. People with a hearing impairment (D/deaf people)

### About this group

- Nearly all (98%) of D/deaf people had at least one other health condition or impairment (significantly higher than 83% among disabled people overall). The most common additional impairments were mobility (66%), long-term pain (61%), and long-term health conditions (52%). Learning and visual impairments were more common in this group than in disabled people overall.
- This group were more likely than average to consider themselves disabled (66% vs 58%).
- Age and gender may be partly behind some differences in this section. D/deaf people were more likely to be older and to be male.
- Inactivity levels for D/deaf people are higher than for disabled people overall: 56% were doing less than 30 minutes of activity a week<sup>7</sup>. This has increased from 53% before the pandemic.

### Research findings

#### Attitudes and perceptions

- Most D/deaf people want to be more active (78%, similar to 77% of disabled people overall).
- D/deaf people were less likely to agree that physical activity is for 'someone like me': 39% vs 47% of all disabled people).

#### Participation and experience

- D/deaf people are more likely to agree that they are given the opportunity to be as active as they want to be (48% vs 42% of all disabled people).
- D/deaf people were more likely than disabled people overall to have taken part in an organised sport or physical activity session in the last year (26% vs 20%). D/deaf people who had participated in physical activity were more likely to have taken part with a group (31% vs 20%) and/or competitive team sport (13% vs 8%).
- D/deaf people who took part in the survey had better experiences than disabled people overall: they were more likely to agree the session was welcoming (95% vs 84%), that they could explain needs or ask questions in private (78% vs 68%), and that the activity leader met their needs (90% vs 68%).

<sup>7</sup> Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey November 2020-21 (2022).

## Returning to activity after COVID-19

- Only 26% of D/deaf people felt encouraged to return to physical activity, and 31% were looking forward to face-to-face activities. This is similar to disabled people overall.
- Among those who had returned to physical activity, D/deaf people were more likely to strongly agree it was a positive experience (35% vs 22%).
- Positively, they were more likely than disabled people overall to agree that COVID-19 safety measures were communicated effectively and adapted to their impairment (69% and 50%).
- People with a hearing impairment were more likely than disabled people overall to say they are or had been shielding (51% vs 37%), and/or have long-COVID (14% versus 9%). This may be related to their older age profile.

## Motivations

- They are more likely than other disabled people to say they are motivated to be active to challenge themselves (34% vs 28%), to socialise with friends (23% vs 15%) and make new friends (20% vs 13%) and to learn a new skill or improve their existing skills (20% vs 12%).

## Barriers

- Like other disabled people, most D/deaf people say their impairment or condition stops them being as active as they would like (76% compared to 78% of all disabled people). This group were less likely to say this is because they worried about making their impairment worse (32% compared to 41%), but more likely to say they have had bad experiences because of their impairment (24% vs 20%), and they experience negative attitudes from others (18% vs 12%).
- D/deaf people were more likely to report 'getting older' stopped them being as active as they would like (45% vs 36% of all disabled people), reflecting their older age profile.
- A wider range of barriers is more common in this group. For example, family commitments (15% vs 10% of all disabled people), spending time on other activities (13% and 8%), and a lack of support (13% vs 8%).

## Advice and information

- Advice on being active from healthcare professionals is slightly less important for this group. 57% and 52% say they would listen to GPs, doctors, nurses and physios, occupational therapists and other medical professionals respectively, compared to 60% and 57% of all disabled people.
- D/deaf people are more likely to listen to advice from social workers/care support staff/personal assistants (18% vs 11%).
- They are more likely to find information about sport or physical activity opportunities from supporters/carers /befrienders (15% vs 8% of all disabled people).

## Support and priorities

- The top forms of support that would help D/deaf people to be active are similar to disabled people overall: support to improve physical health (45% vs 46%), greater awareness of activities (43% vs 42%), and better facilities and environments (32% vs 32%). They were less likely to say financial support would help them to be more active. This likely reflects the older age profile, as young people are more likely to say financial support would help them to be active.
- When asked what the government should focus on to get more people active, D/deaf people choose similar answers to disabled people overall. They were more likely to say the government should 'listen to and engage with people on how they want to be active' (46% vs 39% of all disabled people).



## Summary and recommendations

- D/deaf people have some of the highest inactivity levels in our society and are less likely to feel being active is 'for someone like me'. Age, gender, and other impairments are likely to be important factors - using a person-centred approach is important in connecting to your audience.
- For D/deaf people who are active, they may have more positive experiences than for people with other types of impairments. This suggests that the physical activity workforce or customer experience could be well adapted for D/deaf people, but more needs to be done to encourage them to take part.
- D/deaf people are eager to be engaged in developing and designing physical activity opportunities. They are more likely to prefer advice from networks and friends, which could offer opportunities for sharing information and coproduction.
- Group and team activities appeal to this group and opportunities for socialising are motivators for a sizeable minority.
- [UK Deaf Sport](#) provide further information and advice on including D/deaf people in sport and physical activity.



## 7. People with visual impairments

### About this group

- Most people with visual impairments have more than one impairment (94%, higher than 83% for disabled people overall). The most common additional impairment was mobility (71%), followed by long-term pain (64%), and long-term health conditions (57%). Mental health conditions, hearing impairments, and learning impairments were more common in this group.
- They are more likely than average to think of themselves as disabled (68% compared to 58% of all disabled people).
- The age profile was similar to the overall sample, with 62% being over 50. 56% of people with a visual impairment were female.
- People with visual impairments are more likely to be inactive than other disabled people: 55% are doing less than 30 minutes of activity each week. This has increased from 50% before the pandemic.

### Research findings

#### Attitudes and perceptions

- Most people with a visual impairment want to be more active – 69%. This is lower than for disabled people overall (77%).
- This group were slightly more likely to agree physical activity is for ‘someone like me’ (51% vs 47% of disabled people overall).
- They were more likely than disabled people overall to agree that they want to participate competitively in sport (25% vs 16% overall).

## Participation and experience

- 44% of people with visual impairments say they have the opportunity to be as active as they want to be. This is similar to disabled people overall.
- 66% enjoyed the last time they took part in a sport or physical activity session. This is similar to disabled people overall.
- People with a visual impairment were more likely than disabled people overall to have taken part in an organised activity session in the last year (29% vs 20%).
- People who had taken part in physical activity were twice as likely as all disabled people to have participated in exercise/physical activity with a group (41% vs 20%), recreational/fun team sport (26% vs 11%), and competitive sport (22% vs 12%).

## Returning to activity after COVID-19

- 32% of people with a visual impairment were feeling encouraged to return to activity, compared to 28% of disabled people. They were more likely to be looking forward to face-to-face activities (35% vs 30%).
- 61% said returning to activity after COVID-19 was a positive experience – this is higher than for disabled people overall (53%).

## Motivations

- Motivations to be active are similar to those of disabled people overall. The top motivations are to improve or maintain physical health (65%), to lose or maintain weight (56%), and to improve or maintain mental health (50%).
- People with a visual impairment are more likely to say they would take part to have a break (32% vs 25%), for 'something to do' (35% vs 22%), and to meet new friends (25% vs 13%) to learn a new skill or improve existing skills (24% vs 12%) and to spend time with family (22% vs 9%).
- People with a visual impairment who had taken part in activity sessions were more likely than all disabled people to say that the following factors mattered to them when returning to sports and activities: their independence (57% vs 42%), having choice (55% vs 39%), and or social connections / community (45% vs 29%).

## Barriers

- 85% say their impairment or condition stops them being as active as they would like. This is higher than for disabled people overall (78%). This was more likely to be related to activities being unsuitable (47% vs 28% of all disabled people), a lack of confidence (44% vs 31%), and negative attitudes from others (31% vs 12%)
- People with a visual impairment were more likely to report they faced practical barriers. These include a lack of transport (21% vs 9%), lack of support (19% vs 7%), and lack of inclusive or accessible facilities (17% vs 8%). They were also more likely to lack confidence to take part or contact a group or facility (32% vs 21%).
- People with a visual impairment were more likely than disabled people on average to receive benefits or financial assistance (62% vs 49%). Those that did were more likely to say fear of losing them stops them from being active (63% v 46%).

## Advice and information

- The most common information source about sport or physical activity opportunities for people with visual impairments were medical practices or professionals (36%, higher than 25% for disabled people overall).

- They were more likely to find information from national charities or organisations (18% vs 9%), other disabled people (17% vs 10%) and/or supporters/carers/befrienders (16% vs 8%).

## Support and priorities

- The top forms of support for people with visual impairments that would help them to be more active were similar to disabled people overall: support to improve physical health (51% vs 45% of all disabled people) and greater awareness of activities (44% vs 43%).
- They were more likely than disabled people overall to say several other types of support would help them to be more active: financial support (44% vs 29% of all disabled people), support to improve mental health (42% vs 28%) and support to take part in online activities (26% vs 14%).
- When asked what the government should focus on to get more people active, the top choice was similar to all disabled people: making sure activities are affordable (64% vs 62%). People with visual impairments were more likely to say the government should focus on improving transport (40% vs 28%) and tackling discrimination (38% vs 27%).



## Summary and recommendations

- People with visual impairments are more inactive than other disabled people, but are also less likely to want to be more active. Encouraging and welcoming this group is important as we recover from the pandemic. People with visual impairments still feel health is important, but can connect more to other motivations, like having a break, having ‘something to do’ and socialising. Online activities appear to be more popular for this group too.
- Practical barriers like transport, a lack of support, and accessibility are more common for people with visual impairments. These barriers need to be considered when designing activities: coproduction can help make activities accessible and inclusive.

“

I like to swim but want my local swimming pool to understand that I need reasonable adjustments to be able to take part in a public swim. I am frightened to swim in a lane with strangers who are unaware that I cannot see.

**Person with a visual impairment**

”

- Group activities are more popular among this group, though attitudes from others can be a concern. Challenging perceptions, sharing positive stories, and increasing representation will help create culture change where everyone feels welcome.
- **British Blind Sport** provide an online coaching course and resources to assist those who are delivering sporting sessions with support and guidance on how to include people with sight loss. **British Blind Sport also provides research and insight** on including people with with visual impairments in sport and physical activity.



## 8. People with social or behavioural impairments

### About this group

- Almost all people with social or behavioural impairments have more than one impairment (99%). The most common additional impairment was mental health conditions (67%), followed by mobility (49%) and long-term pain (49%). Learning, speech, memory, and dexterity impairments were more common for this group.
- They are most likely to think of themselves as disabled (73% compared to 58% of all disabled people).
- People with social or behavioural impairments who took part in the survey were younger than people with other types of impairments.
- People with social or behavioural impairments are less likely to be inactive than other disabled people: 40% are doing less than 30 minutes of activity each week<sup>8</sup>. This is similar to before the pandemic (39%).

### Research findings

#### Attitudes and perceptions

- 73% would like to be more active (slightly less than disabled people overall – 77%).
- They are more likely to say sport is for ‘someone like me’ (42% compared to 31% of disabled people), and to say physical activity is for ‘someone like me’ (53% vs 47%).
- They are more likely to aspire to take part competitively (39% vs 16% of all disabled people), and to feel there should be more disabled people taking part in sport and physical activity on television (65% vs 52%).

#### Participation and experience

- People with social or behavioural impairments are as equally likely as other disabled people to agree that they are given the opportunity to be active (42%).
- They were more likely to have taken part in an organised sport or physical activity session in the last year (38% vs 20%).

<sup>7</sup> Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey November 2020-21 (2022).

## Returning to activity after COVID-19

- People with social or behavioural impairments were more likely to feel encouraged to return to sport and physical activity after the pandemic (43%, vs 28% of disabled people overall) and to be looking forward to face-to-face physical activities (49% vs 30%) after restrictions lifted.

## Motivations

- Like other disabled people, the top motivation in this group is to improve or maintain physical health (63% vs 61%). They are more likely to be motivated to take part to improve or maintain mental health (53% vs 43%), to feel good about themselves (55% vs 40%), to relax or have a break (40% vs 28%), and to have something to do (42% vs 22%), to make new friends (24% vs 13%) and spend time with family (18% vs 9%).
- Having choice and social connections mattered more to this group (52% and 43% of people with a social or behavioural impairment said this was important, compared to 39% and 29% of all disabled people).

## Barriers

- Like other disabled people, people with social or behavioural impairments were most likely to say that their impairment or health conditions stops them being as active as they would like (74% vs 78% of all disabled people). They were more likely than other disabled people to say this was related to bad experiences in the past (49% vs 20%) and negative attitudes from others (30% vs 12%).
- They were more likely than other disabled people to say a lack of motivation was a barrier (50% vs 27%), and a lack of confidence (43% vs 21%).
- For people with this impairment who receive financial assistance, the fear of benefits being taken away was more likely to stop them from being active (69% vs 46%).

## Advice and information

- Healthcare professionals are less preferred sources of advice about physical activity for this group – only 37% said they would prefer to listen to GPs, doctors, or nurses (vs 60% of all disabled people). They are more likely to prefer advice from carers or supporters than other disabled people.
- Friends and family and social media are more common sources of information on physical activity or sport (33% and 30%, compared to 24% and 18% of disabled people overall). Websites are the most common choice (34%).

## Support and priorities

- This group were most likely to say ‘support to improve mental health’ would help them to be active (57% vs 33% of all disabled people). They were more likely than other disabled people to say: ‘financial support’, ‘practical support from a trained person’, ‘support from family and friends’, and ‘more encouragement from the media and sports organisations’ would help them to be active.
- When asked what the government should focus on to get more people active, people with a social or behavioural impairment were more likely to say: ‘improving outdoor spaces’ (61% vs 43%), ‘giving people working in sport and physical activity more knowledge and skills to support disabled people’ (48% vs 36%), and ‘tackling discrimination in sport and physical activity’ (39% vs 27%).

## Summary and recommendations

- People with social or behavioural impairments may be more active and have more positive attitudes about being active than other disabled people.
- However, a lack of motivation is more likely to be a barrier. Appealing to their wider range of motivations, like feeling good about themselves or relaxation, could help overcome this. Mental health is important, so this should be considered when designing or delivering activities.



My advice would be don't be so bossy about the way things are done. Not like "do this this way and for this long" that thing that really didn't suit me.

**Person with a social or behavioural impairment**



- Support and motivation from carers and friends are more important – this also offers opportunities for sharing information and co-production.
- Overcoming negative past experiences, and bad attitudes from others, will help people with social and behavioural impairments take part. Challenging perceptions in society, sharing positive stories, and increasing representation will help create culture change where everyone feels welcome.

## 9. Appendix



### Defining disability and activity

Our survey determined whether respondents were disabled if they answered 'yes' to both of these 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 physical activity as: the number of days in a normal week people did 30 minutes or more of physical activity that was enough to raise breathing rate. This includes sport, exercise and brisk walking or cycling for fun, or to get to and from places.

### Sample

Two sample sources were used. People who had completed Sport England's Active Lives Survey in the last two years and agreed to take part in further research, and people from an independent research panel. For disabled people, 128 responses were from the Active Lives sample, and 813 from the panel.

The profile of the sample was representative of the UK profile of disabled people across key demographics and is consistent with previous surveys. [For more information, please access the full report.](#)



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