

## Social Prescribing of Physical Activity and Sport Scottish Parliament: Health and Sport Committee

August 2019

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### **Who should decide whether a social prescription for physical activity is the most appropriate intervention, based on what criteria?**

Age Scotland's partnership with different walking sports such as Walking Football and Walking Netball has found from experience that older people participate in walking sports for different reasons and have done so through different avenues.

We therefore believe that prescribing physical activity should have a flexible approach and not be restricted to those who work within Health and Social Care. Being told you need to change your habits such as diet and exercise can help to encourage someone to take part in physical activity but in certain cases further incentive is also needed for a person to participate. Pairing people with their passions will provide a strong incentive to make a lasting change, therefore, self referral has a role to play in the social prescription for physical activity.

GP referrals are only one part of walking football's success. The more well known the sport becomes the more accessible it is for people to self-refer themselves in order to be more physically active. Families can also play an important role in raising awareness with many players saying they had been told about the sport, and encouraged to attend by their partners.

There are now more than 2,000 men playing walking football at least once week across Scotland. The sport has had an important part in not just encouraging older people to be more active, therefore benefitting their health, but also tackling loneliness and social isolation feeding into the work of the Scottish Government's 'A Connected Scotland: Our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections'. Some men having been introduced to a new group of people then find themselves being referred to try other activities through this new network.

Age Scotland also believe that governing sports bodies have an important role to play in encouraging the uptake of walking sports and we are calling for a national strategy for walking sports in Scotland. This will help to ensure that older people throughout Scotland have the opportunity to take part, benefiting their health and wellbeing whilst feeding

into the Scottish Government's mission of reducing loneliness and isolation and promoting healthy living.

### **What are the barriers to effective social prescribing to sport and physical activity and how are they being overcome?**

Age Scotland has found that the success of walking sports is dependent on giving ownership of the club to its players. Whilst we believe that governing sport bodies do have an integral role to play it is often the case that older people are not their priorities, with more resources focussed on attracting children and young people, this is often due to lack of resource and capacity.

Evaluation of the benefit of social prescribing to sport and physical activity would help to make the economic case to why walking sports should be supported across local sports clubs. The cost for starting a walking sport club is relatively small which is why it is beneficial for established bodies such as football clubs to get involved in organising this as they can often provide a venue and equipment for free, but are more likely to benefit from a new pool of potential volunteers and advocates for the club.

Another barrier can be that walking sports can in certain cases be the victim of its own success with players' fitness levels improving meaning they want more of a physical challenge in order to keep progressing. The introduction of age categories has been useful for tackling this, that also takes into account player's mobility and ability taking a more flexible approach that can let players decide what sort of game they want to play.

## Want to find out more?

As Scotland's national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older people's lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our Policy, Communications and Campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland.

Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.

### Further information

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