

Social prescribing: physical activity is an investment, not a cost

Health and Sport Committee Debate

February 2020

Age Scotland welcome the opportunity to brief Members ahead of the Health and Sport Committee Debate about the benefits of social prescribing.

As our population continues to age it is vital that sporting opportunities are inclusive for all age groups. Walking sports is an excellent way for older people to build up their confidence and fitness level providing better outcomes for physical and mental health.

Social Prescribing of Walking Sports

Age Scotland partners with different organisations to help deliver the walking sport agenda. These include Walking Football, Scottish FA, Netball Scotland, Table Tennis Scotland, Scottish Indoor Bowling Association, and we have recently started working with Scottish Rugby Union to further develop Walking Rugby. Our work with our partners has taught us that older people participate in walking sports for a multitude of reasons.

Understanding the need to change daily habits such as diet and exercise can help to encourage a person to take part in physical activity, but in certain cases further incentive to participation is needed. Pairing people with their passions will provide a strong incentive to make a lasting change.

GP referrals are only one part of walking sport's success. The more well known the sport becomes

Benefits of Walking Sport

Improving health and fitness

Walking sports help get more older people active and engaged on a regular basis. The physical and mental health benefits are endless.

More than 2,500 men and women play walking football at least once a week across Scotland.

Studies have shown that participation in walking football has:

- **Reduced blood pressure and cholesterol levels**
- **Prevents heart disease and strokes**
- **Improves fitness and wellbeing**

Tackles loneliness & isolation

Walking sports can help connect older people to others with a shared interest whilst having a positive impact on their health. These connections can develop into long term friendships which foster regular social interaction off the field. Development of walking sports will help meet the Scottish Government's objective of reducing social isolation and loneliness as laid out in their "A Connected Scotland" strategy.

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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.

More promotion is needed, however, to ensure there is greater consistency across Scotland so that more GPs and communities are aware of the benefits and availability of Walking Sports.

Conclusion

With the ever increasing number of people across Scotland taking part in Walking Sports, there is a growing opportunity for more older people to participate in team sports to maintain and improve their fitness in later life.

Our vision is that whatever sport you've been involved in, you should have the opportunity to remain in that sport throughout your life.

Age Scotland believes in the power of walking sports for good. We encourage the Scottish Government, Health and Social Care Professionals, and Governing Sports bodies to actively promote the benefits of Walking Sports, as well as recognise the benefit of social prescribing physical activity for older people in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

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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