

## SAMH'S VIEW:

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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HANNAH BRISBANE

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### ABOUT THE SAMH'S VIEW SERIES

SAMH's View statements set out SAMH's position on a particular policy topic.

In developing SAMH's position, the issues of equalities, diversity and human rights are investigated.

SAMH Views are produced by the Public Affairs team.

## Context

The term "physical activity" does not only refer to sport and exercise, but can include any activity that involves bodily movement and energy expenditure, such as carrying heavy shopping, gardening or even housework.<sup>1</sup> One third of adults in Scotland don't meet the daily guidelines for moderate or vigorous physical activity<sup>2</sup> and people with mental health problems tend to be less active than others.<sup>3</sup> SAMH recognises that being active can have a positive impact on mental wellbeing, which is why we work in partnership with a number of sporting organisations, including [sportscotland](#), on projects that promote the power of physical activity. The benefits of being active are also reflected in the [Scottish Government's Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027](#) and [A More Active Scotland: Scotland's Physical Activity Delivery Plan](#), which aim to increase physical activity levels in Scotland.

## Key points

- Mental health problems can negatively affect self-esteem, energy and motivation making it harder for people to participate in physical activity.<sup>4</sup>
- Physical activity can help to prevent depression and anxiety.<sup>5</sup> Even small amounts of physical activity, for example between 10 and 15 minutes, can reduce stress and symptoms of depression, and boost self-esteem.<sup>6</sup>
- Healthcare professionals can prescribe Exercise Referral Schemes to help people manage mental health problems. However, there are no Exercise Referral Schemes in the Highlands, Orkney or Shetland and 46% of schemes in Scotland charge a fee for activity sessions.<sup>7</sup>
- People who have easy access to green spaces are three times more likely to be active. Being physically active in such spaces is linked to improved psychological wellbeing and social inclusion.<sup>8</sup>
- In Scotland, men (70%) are more likely than women (62%) to meet the daily physical activity guidelines.<sup>9</sup>
- Three quarters of people living in the most affluent areas adhere to the guidelines compared to just over half (54%) of those living in the most deprived areas.<sup>10</sup>
- People of South Asian origin, particularly Pakistani people, are less likely to meet physical activity guidelines compared to other ethnic groups in Scotland.<sup>11</sup>
- Office workers spend up to 81.1% of their time sedentary (not moving).<sup>12</sup> Promoting physical activity in workplaces can reduce absences and staff turnover while boosting mental wellbeing and productivity.<sup>13</sup>
- Over 400 sporting organisations have signed up to Scotland's Mental Health Charter for Physical Activity and Sport since it was launched by SAMH.
- Through the Changing Lives through Sport and Physical Activity fund, SAMH works in partnership with [Scottish Sports Futures](#) (SSF) to train young





Wellbeing Ambassadors.

- SAMH's Active Living Becomes Achievable (ALBA) programme helped over 300 people with mental health problems achieve a more active lifestyle.
- In partnership with [jogscotland](https://jogscotland.org/), SAMH runs the Community Strides project which supports people from Scotland's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to look after their physical and mental health by being active.
- SAMH operates five horticultural services in Scotland which aim to improve health and wellbeing in their respective communities.

### **SAMH calls for:**

- All sporting organisations to sign up to Scotland's Mental Health Charter for Physical Activity and Sport to show their commitment to making their sport accessible to people with mental health problems: this should be a requirement for those in receipt of Scottish Government funding.
- Better provision of social prescribing opportunities, such as Exercise Referral Schemes and horticultural therapies, across Scotland through:
  - i. Sustainable funding from the Scottish Government that ensures opportunities are available at no cost to participants; charges for gym memberships, transport and new appropriate clothing should be covered by a social prescription.
  - ii. Integrated Joint Boards commissioning a range of social prescribing opportunities for their communities.
- The expansion of the Community Link Worker Programme so more people across Scotland have easier access to local social prescribing opportunities.
- The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework to measure people's satisfaction with local green spaces -to supplement the current indicator on access - so that the quality of green space can be evaluated.
- The Scottish Government to create a Gender Beacon Collaborative for sport which will explore ways to increase physical activity levels of girls and young women, as recommended by the Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board.<sup>14</sup>
- Sporting organisations to use the Learning Notes on equality produced by sportscotland to make their organisations inclusive and accessible for people who face cultural and structural barriers to being active.<sup>15</sup>
- Continued Scottish Government funding and support for Action 31 of the Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027.
- Scottish employers to sign up for the Healthy Working Lives Award programme to promote physical activity in their workplaces.
- The Scottish Intercollegiate Guidance Network (SIGN) to refresh its guidance on non-pharmaceutical treatment for depression, particularly in relation to the use of physical activity interventions.



## Further detail:

### FURTHER READING

- [UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines](#)
- [A More Active Scotland: Scotland's Physical Activity Delivery Plan](#)

### SAMH PUBLICATIONS

- [Scotland's Mental Health Charter for Physical Activity and Sport](#)
- [Get Active for Your Mental Health: Top Ten Tips](#)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, [Physical Activity Factsheet](#), 2018

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government, [Scottish Health Survey 2018](#), 2020

<sup>3</sup> Schuch, F. et al., [Physical Activity and Incident Depression: A Meta-Analysis of Prospective Cohort Studies](#), 2018

<sup>4</sup> Knapen, J. et al., [Exercise therapy improves both mental and physical health in patients with major depression](#), 2014

<sup>5</sup> Teychenne, M. et al., [Do we need physical activity guidelines for mental health: What does the evidence tell us?](#), 2010

<sup>6</sup> Teychenne, M. et al., [Do we need physical activity guidelines for mental health: What does the evidence tell us?](#), 2010

<sup>7</sup> NHS Health Scotland, [Audit of Exercise Referral Schemes in Scotland: A snapshot of current practice](#), 2018

<sup>8</sup> Bragg, R. et al., [Wellbeing benefits from natural environments rich in wildlife](#), 2018

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government, [Scottish Health Survey 2018](#), 2020

<sup>10</sup> Scottish Government, [Scottish Health Survey 2018](#), 2020

<sup>11</sup> Scottish Government, [Active Scotland Outcomes: Indicator Equality Analysis](#), 2015

<sup>12</sup> Parry, S. & Straker, L., [The contribution of office work to sedentary behaviour associated risk](#), 2013

<sup>13</sup> NHS Health Scotland, [Promoting physical activity in the workplace](#), 2019

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board, [Levelling the playing field](#), 2019

<sup>15</sup> Sportscotland, [Equality in Sport: Learning Notes](#), 2016