Framework for Action
Physical Activity
1 Introduction

This paper:

- Specifies work on Physical Activity to be delivered by NPHS staff in LPHT in support of local partnership work during 2005/06
- Makes recommendations for activity to be delivered by local partners and for investment in Physical Activity
- Illustrates the importance of a framework for Physical Activity action at both national and local level
- Identifies the range of current activity supported by NPHS staff in local public health teams (LHPT)

It follows a review of the effectiveness of physical activity interventions and is written in the context of current government policy.

2 Priorities for Physical Activity Promotion

To deliver increased physical activity in the population to a level that benefits health throughout Wales, action should be based on the following principles:

- Prioritising interventions with known evidence of effectiveness
- Evaluating all interventions where evidence is lacking
- Assessing the relative cost and feasibility of delivery.

2.1 NPHS priorities

It is recommended that the NPHS should deliver the following activity during 2005/06 (subject to resource availability):

Children and Young People

- Support integration of Physical Activity within the local Healthy Schools Scheme.

Older People

- Support Older People Strategy partnerships in the development of programmes that promote physical activity for older people in line with the current evidence base.
Health Care Settings

- Work with LHB’s, NHS Trusts, Primary Care teams and others to develop, support and evaluate phase 4 cardiac rehabilitation and other tertiary rehabilitative programmes within local community settings.

- Support the development and evaluation of exercise referral programmes in line with the guidance produced by the Welsh Assembly Government and with a view to enhancing the present evidence base for effectiveness.

General Population

Prioritise strategies that promote walking and cycling among the inactive population including:

Walking the Way to Health

- Work with local community organisations, local volunteering bureaus, health alliances and local authorities to facilitate hand over and ownership of local schemes for further development and sustainability.

- Support local programmes in addressing monitoring and evaluation needs and joint training initiatives.

Big Lottery Fund Mentro Allan Programme

- Support the development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of local Mentro Allan pilot projects (if national partnership is successful in its stage 1 application).

Inequalities in Health Fund

- Continue to support, deliver, monitor and evaluate existing Inequalities in Health funded projects until March 2007 and explore opportunities for integrating effective projects into sustainable long-term programmes where appropriate.

NPHS in partnership with its stakeholders will constantly review the appropriate employment of evidence based programmes of activities as well as encourage innovation, exploration and evaluation of new ways of increasing physical activity in order to reduce the burden of chronic ill health.
2.2 Local Partners

In support of activity to be delivered by the NPHS, it is recommended that local HSCWB partnerships develop a comprehensive approach to addressing physical inactivity through the establishment of local Physical Activity/Active Living Networks or forums to co-ordinate the following activity:

- Map opportunities and gaps in provision for physical activity
- Identify potential for joint working, sharing resources, collecting and combining local data and information and co-ordination of activity
- Assess physical activity needs of ‘hard to reach’ and vulnerable groups
- Develop, implement and monitor local physical activity/active living action plan in support of the local HSCWB strategies
- Establish links with the Welsh Physical Activity Network
- Ensure that local planning, environment and transport plans consider their potential impact on physical activity opportunities, mitigating any negative impact and enhancing positive impact.

3 Policy basis

Physical activity contributes to well being and is essential for good health\(^1\). People who have a physically active lifestyle have approximately 50% less risk of developing coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke and type 2 diabetes compared to those who have a sedentary lifestyle, and can reduce their risk of premature death by about 20-30\(^%\). Evidence shows that the health impact of inactivity on CHD is comparable to that of smoking and almost as great as high cholesterol levels\(^1\). Regular physical activity is also associated with reduced risk of obesity, osteoporosis and colon cancer and with improved mental health and increased functional capacity in older adults\(^1\).

The historically high prevalence of many of these chronic diseases in Wales, particularly in those areas of worst socio-economic deprivation, coupled with high levels of sedentary behaviour, have brought the physical activity agenda to the fore of both the public health and political agendas in recent years. The evident downward trends in activity levels are one of the principal reasons for the conversely upward trends in obesity. As physical activity is one side of the energy balance equation, it must continue to be an important focus for national action in addressing this key priority area identified in Health Challenge Wales\(^3\).

There are Welsh Assembly Government’s health gain targets to reduce the deaths from cancer and coronary heart disease\(^2\) and there is a specific target for physical activity:

- To increase the rate of moderate-to-vigorous exercise undertaken by people aged 50 to 65 to 30 minutes on five days a week by 2012.

These targets are supported by three key strategic documents:

- Healthy and Active Lifestyles in Wales: A framework for action\(^4\)
• Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity ‘Climbing Higher’
• Walking & Cycling Strategy for Wales.

4 Prevalence and trends

The 1998 Welsh Health Survey indicated that levels of physical inactivity were even worse than those in England, with only 28% achieving the recommended minimum of 30 minutes moderate activity on five or more days per week. Provisional results from the latest survey (unpublished) indicate a slight improvement, with 30% achieving the recommended minimum (men 38% but women only 24%). Of particular concern is the finding that inactive lifestyles in England and Wales are more than twice as prevalent as smoking, hypertension or high cholesterol. Over the last 20-30 years there has been a decrease in physical activity as part of daily routine, though there has been a small increase in the proportion of people taking part in physical activity for leisure.

There is a strong correlation between social class and physical activity levels and low educational attainment also appears to be a strong predictor of high inactivity levels.

Despite the increase in obesity in children and young people, recent trends in physical activity offer some hope. In Wales between 1996 and 2000 there was an increase in young people participating in activity on four or more occasions a week, and in the percentage of those participating in activity for four hours or more a week. It should be noted, however, that about 30% of boys and 40% of girls are still not meeting the recommended activity guidelines and two in 10 boys and girls do less than 30 minutes physical activity a day.

Information on physical activity prevalence in Wales and by local authority area is available at [http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites/page.cfm?orgid=368&pid=4471](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites/page.cfm?orgid=368&pid=4471)

5 Investment for Health principles

Evidence suggests that interventions that concentrate on physical activity behaviour modification tend to work only in the short term. Individual behaviour is influenced by a range of external factors which in the case of physical activity, conspire to make maintenance difficult. There is an increasing realisation that these external influences must be addressed to reverse the trend of inactivity and to enable people to affect a sustainable transition to a more active lifestyle.

Those activities that are easy to incorporate into people’s daily lives are much more likely to offer long-term sustainability. Regular brisk walking, for example, can confer huge health benefits for an otherwise sedentary individual, and there are a number of high profile programmes designed to promote this. But in many areas it is perceived as simply not safe to walk, for a whole range of reasons, and, in many instances, street design and traffic flow priorities deliberately deter walking.
Changes in work patterns, increasing automation, the litigation culture, proliferation of media-based entertainment, town planning, diminishing green space, changing school curriculum and increasing reliance on the car have combined to provide what has been called the ‘obesogenic environment’\(^{13}\). Consequently the focus of public health attention in this field is now moving toward a social ecological model built on the five principles of the Ottawa Charter, but with rather less emphasis on ‘developing personal skills’ and rather more on ‘creating supportive environments’\(^{14}\).

**Ottawa Charter Principles Applied to Physical Activity (Local)**

- **Build Healthy Public Policy**
  - e.g. pedestrian friendly transport policies.
- **Create Supportive Environments**
  - e.g. Safe routes to School.
- **Strengthen Community Action**
  - e.g. Community walk programmes
- **Develop Personal Skills**
  - e.g. Exercise classes
- **Reorientate Health Services**
  - e.g. Exercise on prescription - GP Referral schemes, including exercise at home

**Increasing Physical Activity**

6 **Effectiveness of physical activity interventions**

There are large gaps in the review level evidence base on effectiveness of public health interventions in physical activity including the workplace, adults with physical limitations and adults from black and minority ethnic groups. The briefing on evidence of effectiveness of physical activity interventions on which this paper is based is available at:

http://howis.wales.nhs.uk/sites/page.cfm?orgid=368&pid=8994 or

http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites/page.cfm?orgid=368&pid=2786
7 Current activity supported by the NPHS

Staff based within local NPHS teams are involved in a wide range of initiatives to support physical activity. The physical activity agenda is broad, and, whilst there is some work with a specific focus on physical activity, there are a range of local programmes and projects that encompass elements of physical activity as a part of other initiatives. The breadth of this activity is identified in appendix 1. These supported activities will vary according to the expertise and capacity in local teams and is also influenced by local priorities.

8 Further information

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References


Appendix 1: Range of Physical Activity work currently delivered by NPHS staff

Local:

Partnership programmes with Communities First and Healthy Living Centres and workplace health programmes including the Corporate Standard\textsuperscript{15} may be addressing physical activity in some areas.

Amongst the specific projects in which LPHTs are presently engaged are:

- ‘Inequalities In Health’ funded projects.
- Exercise Referral schemes
- ‘Walking the Way to Health’ programmes and
- NOF funded projects.

Some of this work will be targeted on a disease specific basis, particularly CHD, whilst other work is targeted by population group, including older people, BME communities, and socio-economic deprivation.

National:

At a national level NPHS has engaged with WAG and other stakeholders on:

- The development of Exercise Referral guidelines for Wales.
- Guidance for local partnerships for developing Local Physical Activity Action Plans.
- A commitment to support WCH in the development and rollout of a national Physical Activity network.
- In partnership with WLGA, WCVA, the Sports Council for Wales and the Countryside Council for Wales, develop and manage the Mentro Allan programme on behalf of the Big Lottery Fund.
- Support and advise the WAG Walking and Cycling Forum