

# All Equal All Active

A CALL TO ACTION



A Call to Action to improve the health and wellbeing of disabled people in Northern Ireland by tackling increasing levels of inequality in sport and physical activity.

# The Challenge

## A CRISIS IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

Despite a gradual but welcome improvement in the sports participation levels of disabled people in Northern Ireland over many years, peaking in 2019/20, there has been **an unprecedented 18% drop in the number of disabled people participating in sport and physical activity** over the last five years.

**This reduction can be explained by a range of reasons, including:**

- The legacy of two years of COVID-19 related disruption and restrictions which has had a long lasting negative impact on the sports participation habits, support structures and routines of disabled people.
- The provision of fewer sports opportunities for disabled people by District Councils, largely as a result of the end of large Northern Ireland wide sports participation programmes like 'Every Body Active' funded by Sport NI. This programme actively targeted disabled people as well as other underrepresented groups.
- The disruption of Governing Bodies of Sport programmes by COVID-19 which has resulted in fewer sports opportunities for disabled people.
- The 'Cost of Living' crisis which has had a negative impact on disabled people's ability to pay for and travel to sports and activities.



# The Facts



**24% or almost one in four people in Northern Ireland have a disability or long term health condition.**

The 2021 Northern Ireland Census found that 24% of the population have a disability or long term health condition. That's an increase of 3% since the last Census in 2011 and is largely as a result of an increasingly older population profile in Northern Ireland.

## MEMBERSHIP



**Disabled people are less than half as likely to be a member of a sports club.**

In 2023/24, 13% of disabled people were a member of a sports club compared to 32% of non-disabled people.\*



**There has been an unprecedented 18% drop in the number of disabled people participating in sport in Northern Ireland over the last five years.**

The number of disabled people participating in sport and physical activity one or more days per week fell by six percentage points from 34% in 2019/20 to 28% in 2023/24.\* This means there are now 18% fewer disabled people participating in sport and physical activity.



**Disabled people in Northern Ireland are half as likely to participate in sport and physical activity as non-disabled people.**

In 2023/24, 28% of disabled people participated in sport and physical activity one or more days per week compared to 56% of non-disabled people.\*

\* (Experience of Sport in Northern Ireland. Findings of the Continuous Household Survey (Adults) 2019/20 and 2023/24)

# Our 5 Point Call to Action

Disability Sport NI calls on organisations across Northern Ireland to actively tackle the underrepresentation of disabled people in sport and physical activity by addressing the following five key issues:

## 1 More Inclusive Opportunities in EVERY Area

**To provide health focused sport and physical activity opportunities for disabled people in EVERY area of Northern Ireland.**

With the exception of the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area, community sport and physical activity opportunities are limited and are not being provided on the scale required to meet the needs of disabled people.

## 2 Active Places and Spaces Accessible to All

**To design, develop and manage accessible sports facilities and outdoor places that are inclusive of disabled people.**

Access for disabled people to public sports facilities in Northern Ireland is now generally very good, with some examples of excellent inclusive design prevalent. However, access to smaller community sports facilities, many outdoor places and the necessary equipment to fully participate in all sports and activities remains limited, greatly restricting the opportunities available to disabled people.

## 3 All Governing Bodies Actively Including Disabled People

**To challenge and support all Governing Bodies of Sport to proactively include disabled people in their participation and performance sport programmes.**

There are 74 Governing Bodies of Sport in Northern Ireland, 41 of which are funded by Sport NI (Jan 2025). Only 12 are actively working to include more disabled people in sport, through Disability Sport NI's accreditation scheme, the 'Inclusive Sport Award'.

## 4 Equal Access to Physical Education

**To ensure equal access to PE and school sport for all disabled children.**

Disability Sport NI, based on its awareness of disabled children's poor lived experiences of PE in Northern Ireland, is collaborating with Paralympics GB on its 'Equal Play' Campaign. The campaign calls on the UK Government to provide disabled children with equal access to PE and school sport as its research shows only one in four disabled children say that they currently take part.

## 5 Better Promotion of Inclusive Opportunities

**To promote the health and social benefits of sport and physical activity to disabled people and to signpost them to quality participation opportunities.**

In Disability Sport NI's experience the vast majority of disabled people understand the benefits of sport and physical activity but, like everyone else in society, they need encouragement to take the first steps into activity and more information on the inclusive opportunities available in their area.

# The Ask

	What is Required - Priority Actions	Examples of Good Practice	Who Can Help
<b>1</b> More Inclusive Opportunities in EVERY Area	<b>1.1</b> To develop and fund local sport and physical activity programmes and initiatives specifically designed to improve the health and wellbeing of disabled and inactive people.	'Get Out Get Active' (GOGA) Project Model.  The 'GOGA in Action' and 'Inclusive Sports and Leisure' projects in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area.	District Councils, Community Planning Partnerships, Sport NI, Department for Communities, Department of Health, Public Health Agency, Health Trusts.
	<b>1.2</b> To facilitate and promote more initiatives focused on the provision of information, training, advice and funding which will encourage and support local sports clubs and physical activity providers to be more inclusive of disabled people.	Sport NI 'Core Investment' in Disability Sport NI enables the charity to provide support to a limited number of clubs.	District Councils, Sport NI, Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations.
	<b>1.3</b> To develop and promote outdoor recreation initiatives across Northern Ireland which actively target disabled and inactive people.	'All Out Trekking Project', Gosford Forest Park, County Armagh.	Outdoor recreation providers, Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations.
<b>2</b> Active Places and Spaces Accessible to All	<b>2.1</b> To facilitate and support the provision of locally available inclusive equipment which improves access to sport and physical activity opportunities for disabled people.	Department for Communities/Sport NI funded 'Pool Pod' Submersible Lifts for Swimming Pools Project.  Department for Communities 'All Out Trekking Project'.  Department for Communities funded 'Disability Sports Hub' and 'Sports Wheelchair' Projects.	Department for Communities, Sport NI, District Councils, Department of Health, Public Health Agency.

	<b>What is Required - Priority Actions</b>	<b>Examples of Good Practice</b>	<b>Who Can Help</b>
<b>2</b> <b>(Continued)</b> Active Places and Spaces Accessible to All	<b>2.2</b> To fund a Disability Sport NI Access and Inclusion Officer to improve access within sports facilities, stadia and outdoor places across Northern Ireland and to further develop existing and new technical design and management guidelines.	Sport NI funded Guides: A series of 5 Disability Sport NI guides concerned with the design and management of sports facilities and stadia.  Public Health Agency funded Accessible Outdoor Places Guide.	Department for Communities, Sport NI, Public Health Agency.
	<b>2.3</b> Commit to meeting optimum levels of good practice in terms of access for disabled people within all new community school sport, sport and physical activity facilities and outdoor places by signing up to Disability Sport NI's Accessible Facilities Charter.	Disability Sport NI's 'Inclusive Sport Facility' (ISF) Accreditation achieved by 17 sports facilities in Northern Ireland.	Department for Communities, Department for Education, Department of Health, District Councils, Sport NI, Public Health Agency, Health Trusts.
	<b>2.4</b> To ensure that all public funded capital programmes, such as the Northern Ireland Football Fund, are inclusive of disabled players, officials and spectators.	NIFF has had ongoing consultation with Disability Sport NI throughout the development of the programme.	Department for Communities, Sport NI.
<b>3</b> All Governing Bodies Actively Including Disabled People	<b>3.1</b> To challenge and support more Governing Bodies of Sport to develop performance and participation programmes and clubs which are more inclusive of disabled people.	Disability Sport NI's 'Inclusive Sport Award' scheme - currently awarded to 12 Governing Bodies of Sport.	Department for Communities, Sport NI, Governing Bodies of Sport.
	<b>3.2</b> To develop more disability specific programmes including Paralympic Sports.	Successful Boccia and Wheelchair Basketball programmes, funded by Sport NI.	Sport NI.

**CONTINUE** →

	<b>What is Required - Priority Actions</b>	<b>Examples of Good Practice</b>	<b>Who Can Help</b>
<b>4</b> Equal Access to Physical Education	<b>4.1</b> To commission independent research into the inclusion of disabled children in Physical Education and School Sport in Northern Ireland.	In 2020 Activity Alliance published specialist research, conducted by EdComs, on the differences in experience and perceptions of sport and physical activity among disabled and non-disabled children.	Department for Education.
	<b>4.2</b> To enhance training for trainee teachers through the inclusion of Inclusive Physical Education modules for trainee primary, secondary and special school teachers.	Sainsbury's Active Kids For All Inclusive PE Training programme for qualified and trainee teachers - delivered in NI from 2013 - 2021.	Department for Education, Universities and Colleges.
	<b>4.3</b> To develop and fund a disability specific Physical Education CPD training course for practising Physical Education teachers in primary, secondary and special schools.	Sainsbury's Active Kids For All Inclusive PE Training programme for qualified and trainee teachers - delivered in NI from 2013 - 2021.	Department for Education, Education Authority, Education and Library Boards.
<b>5</b> Better Promotion of Inclusive Opportunities	<b>5.1</b> Active Living No Limits Forum to design and roll out a Media and Social Media Campaign to highlight, to disabled people, the benefits of participating in sport and physical activity and to raise awareness of local opportunities as advertised on the 'Active Living No Limits' opportunities website.	Sport England 'This Girl Can' Campaign.	Active Living No Limits Forum member groups, the media including public broadcasters.



## ABOUT US

Disability Sport NI is Northern Ireland's main disability sports charity working to improve the health and wellbeing of disabled people through sport and active recreation.

We work with people with physical, sensory and learning disabilities of all ages and with disability groups, schools, sporting organisations and clubs to ensure that everyone can benefit from the health, social and education benefits of sport and active recreation.

We believe that every disabled person has the right to participate in all aspects of life and are committed to building a more inclusive society where disabled people have the same opportunity as non-disabled people to lead a full, active and healthy lifestyle through sport and active recreation.

## WHY YOUR ORGANISATION SHOULD HELP?

- You will create a healthier, more inclusive society.
- You will improve the health and wellbeing of disabled people and reduce the effect of long-term health conditions.
- You will help build confidence and self-esteem and reduce social isolation for disabled people.
- You will create opportunities for disabled people to play an active role in their local community.
- You will positively influence the future health and lifestyle choices of disabled children in Northern Ireland.
- You will contribute towards achieving the goals within a range of strategies including 'Active Living', the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland, March 2022.

## HOW WE CAN HELP

- We can share resources and good practice examples.
- We can advise and work in partnership with you to deliver the priority actions within this document.
- We can provide a link to disabled people who want to be active.
- We can provide a wide range of inclusive training and education programmes.

## TO FIND OUT MORE CONTACT US AT:

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