

ESSENCE

One page overview of each 'condition' for addressing inequalities in physical activity

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Community-led action



Action is shaped and led by communities and supported by community focussed strategies.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Efforts to address physical activity (PA) inequalities anchored in community priorities, actions, and assets are more likely to be effective and achieve value by increasing the collective agency of communities to bring positive change, improving relationships and increasing trust. Local residents, who directly experience the barriers and enablers of physical activity, may already be acting within their communities to address these issues. In places where community-led action is more established, residents routinely shape and deliver PA initiatives, supported responsively by agencies. Agencies help by connecting local organisations and collaborations to develop and sustain PA opportunities.

Integration of physical activity across sectors

In sector-led initiatives, such as school or health settings, agencies may need to ensure resources are available to involve a diverse range of local people in design, delivery, and evaluation processes. This means working flexibly and taking time to build trust, as well as funding activities that address local priorities. Co-production, with equal community power in decision-making, is essential.

Strengthening individual and community capacities

Some community initiatives may already address specific PA needs. By supporting these activities with resources, such as access to facilities, training or funding, local agencies can help extend their reach and sustainability. Nurturing these efforts can also contribute to building confidence, networks, and capacity. Community connector roles can help facilitate networking, visibility and opportunities.

Tackling structural inequalities

Communities that feel heard and empowered to influence action can build ownership and confidence, leading to greater dignity, control, and positive change. Pro-active efforts should ensure it is not only the affluent and confident residents who give input. Support for community action includes agencies and organisations addressing national policy and cross government investment in order to remove some of the barriers in everyday living and working conditions that hamper local initiatives.

How can we support co-production and community power in the local context?

1. Prioritise support for community members working together on issues that matter to them.
2. Identify and nurture community-led activities that address local PA needs and priorities in ways determined by the communities involved.
3. Share community initiatives widely so that more people are aware of the range of things that are happening and can join in and develop them further.
4. Where agencies are supporting co-production, they need to move at a pace that works for community members and organisations, be flexible with planning and funding, and be clear about decision-making power and how community input makes a difference to design and priority setting for PA activities.
5. Communities are diverse, and it is important to reflect this in the ways insights and input are gathered and used – with proactive efforts to engage groups whose voices are less often heard.

Reflection questions

- Do you know what local resident led initiatives already exist in the local area?
- Are there opportunities to build on existing initiatives, widen awareness of them and link them with other activities locally?
- Are some groups in the local population not included and are there ways to address this?
- If you are funding activities and working towards co-production, is it clear what role and decision-making power local residents have, including around allocation of funding and resources?

Insights on community power are drawn from LDP process evaluations, Learning cluster and Learning seminar discussions and published research.