

ESSENCE

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

SEPTEMBER 2026



Collaboration



There is productive working around a common purpose.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Working with different organisations helps to drive innovative physical activity and/or inequalities policy and practice by drawing on different skill sets and networks. By reducing duplication and pooling resources, collaborative efforts can amplify impact. Working with organisations, as well as different departments in larger institutions, can support shared problem-solving and unravel contradictions in local settings that may inhibit physical activity or exacerbate inequalities.

Sector integration of physical activity: Partners working across varied sectors including health, education, transport, planning, community and housing, agree on how to make resources work effectively to tackle physical activity inequalities. This is built on finding a broader shared purpose, equitable decision-making, and pooling ideas and resources whilst avoiding siloed working. Partners work to resolve contradictory policies and practices to enable comprehensive physical activity opportunities, making collaboration practice the norm.

Strengthening individual and community capacities: Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations are supported to incorporate physical activity into their ongoing work in line with their broader aims. Local networks of organisations collaborate to pool resources, address shared challenges, widen their reach to underserved communities, and advocate for change. By working together, individuals can unite communities, engage seldom heard people, mobilise organisations, and influence strategic leaders to provide support.

Tackling structural inequalities: Organisations show commitment to tackle root causes of inequalities, even when this isn't their core business. There are diverse efforts and more explicit strategies addressing underlying inequalities, equitably distributing resources and developing assets that support local people to thrive in ways that they value, including being active.

How can we create collaboration within and across organisations?

- 1. Recognition of a shared purpose:** Appreciation of the scale and complexity of the challenge leads to conviction that collaboration is essential. Jointly developing this vision ensures all partners are aligned.
- 2. Mutual understanding, respect, and reciprocity:** Building a deep understanding of each other's objectives, roles, resources, strengths, and constraints, fosters a balanced and respectful relationship between partners. This mutual respect may require partners to share power and see how their own and other's priorities fit into a wider common purpose.
- 3. Honesty:** Effective collaborations require not only on friendly relations and alignment, but also challenging discussions to address issues that are not working and require change.
- 4. Resilience, fuelled by camaraderie:** Tackling inequalities is hard work and requires persistence. Working together in shared learning spaces boosts morale, builds collective confidence, and encourages bravery in actions.
- 5. Embedding process and structures:** Collaboration based solely on personal relationships may be fragile if people move on. Embedded processes for collaboration – such as joint teams, shared decision making, and collaborative funding models - fosters the endurance of long-term partnerships.
- 6. Centring community voice:** Empowering VCFSE organisations and integrating lived experience into decision-making strengthens the partnership and keeps collaborative efforts focused on genuine local needs.

Reflection questions

- Is there a widespread belief that collaboration is important to tackle physical activity inequalities?
- Who is included in collaborative arrangements, and how can you ensure equitable representation of diverse interests, including community organisations?
- Are there examples of collaborative work that is tackling some difficult, contradictory or entrenched issues in place?
- How resilient to change are partnerships across your place, are they supported by embedding processes?