

ESSENCE

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

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Identifying barriers and enablers of systems change



There are processes for developing a deep understanding and (shared) knowledge of what supports and/or prevents people being physically active, within the local context.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Processes for identifying local barriers and enablers to physical activity involves community members and local stakeholders recognising what helps or hinders physical activity in their area to inform future action. This ongoing process is crucial to addressing physical activity inequalities and requires a systematic approach, rather than relying solely on existing relationships. Actively involving affected communities and their diverse needs ensures decisions are more likely to produce positive, lasting outcomes without unintended negative consequences. Continuous investment is necessary to ensure processes are maintained as barriers and enablers of physical activity may change over time and may differ among individuals.

While valuable information about physical activity barriers may exist, it isn't always shared. Processes that enable fostering of communication and sharing knowledge are key to preventing community frustration and supporting collaborative solutions.

Sector integration of physical activity: Obstacles and facilitators for physical activity vary depending on context and therefore need to be identified in different settings and situations. For example, overcoming barriers to being physically active for people with a health condition may be different to stimulating movement in education settings.

Strengthening individual and community capacities: Different communities have different strengths and assets that support people to stay active. Processes start with listening to residents and open communication between different groups.

Tackling structural inequalities: Understanding how challenging living and working conditions impact people's ability to be active. By understanding the specific needs and experiences of disadvantaged groups, we can avoid imposing solutions that may not fit their reality. It's also crucial to recognise how social, cultural, and economic factors limit people's choices regarding physical activity.

How can we identify the barriers and enablers of physical activity in the local context?

1. **Build trust** with the local community to create an environment where people are willing to share their experiences and concerns regarding physical activity.
2. **Engage individuals or groups** who have a deep understanding of the local culture and community dynamics to facilitate discussions and gather insights.
3. **Invest in local insights and initiatives** that involve the community and leverage the expertise of people with that deep understanding to capture valuable insights.
4. **Address language and communication barriers** to ensure that community members and service providers can communicate effectively, enabling a genuine exchange of information.
5. **Establish feedback mechanisms** that allow continuous input and insights from the community to be integrated into decision-making processes related to physical activity initiatives.

Reflection questions

- Do we know how barriers and enablers of physical activity might change depending on where people are being supported to be active?
- What local strengths do we have? Who defines what we count as strengths in our place?
- Is there understanding of the ways in which local people's opportunities to be active are constrained? How does this influence our strategies and planning?