Cultures and Practices that enable physical activity

There is a culturally inclusive social environment for physical activity that enables people to have the freedom to be active in ways that suit them.

What does this mean and why is it important?

How physically active we are in our lives is shaped by what we intuitively feel is normal and expected for 'people like us'. This may vary with the contexts of our lives, whether we are at work or school, with family, or engaging with wider interest groups and communities around us, as we tend to take our cues from the actions and attitudes of those around us.

The ways in which physical activity is described, promoted, and offered, send implicit messages as to who is expected to engage. People may not relate to those they see engaging in physical activity, due to identity or culturally based differences, including gender, (dis)ability, social class, sexual orientation or ethnicity. These feelings may be reinforced by practical barriers, such as clothing or equipment needed, or past experiences of exclusion, humiliation or shame.

Sector integration of physical activity:

Workplace cultures and common practices in institutions like education and health services can either support or restrict opportunities for movement and physical activity. By adopting policies and practices that consider diverse needs, abilities, and backgrounds, we can better integrate movement into daily routines, improving mental and physical health, morale, and productivity. When our own practices, goals, and values align with those of the people we work with, it helps us promote the benefits of physical activity to individuals, organisations, and society.

Strengthening individual and community capacities:

Among many groups and communities, physical activity may be seen and felt as something that other people do, and not as something they value or identify with, making change difficult to achieve. By valuing diversity and working in equitable partnership with communities, we may realise the potential of resources and opportunities that exist within those communities, including institutions, organisations, cultures and traditions.

How can we develop culturally sensitive policies and practices?

1. Review practices and cultures within local settings, working inclusively with all people involved to find ways to facilitate, promote and normalise movement as an integral part of the working day.

2. Consider how to include people with lived experiences of inactivity and representative of diverse communities in both paid and volunteer workforces.

3. Embed cultural awareness knowledge and skills into the training and development of employees, volunteers and community organisations.

4. Reflect on and review how we work with less active communities or groups to support changes in expectations and attitudes, both within ourselves, our organisations, and the people we work with.

Reflection questions

- To what extent are workplace policies for physical activity in place across sectors, and how effective are these in changing working cultures and everyday practices?

- How well do partner organisations understand and respond to the range of cultural barriers and opportunities in disadvantaged communities?

- How might we build relationships with allies within less active communities to better understand and address the barriers and opportunities?

- What resources do we have across the partnership, and how might we enhance or redeploy these to engage with these issues?