We welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. Our comments are limited to those aspects that have direct relevance to the work and objectives of Paths for All.

Summary

- Increasing levels of physical activity is a big health challenge that requires a change in emphasis in funding.
- Preventative spending can improve health in a cost-effective way and help reduce health inequalities.
- Promoting physical activity is a key preventative measure – and much of this will be achieved through walking.
- More resources are needed for evaluation and improvement of walking promotion.
- There is a clear need for increased and sustained funding to support physically active lives – walking offers best value.

Background

Paths for All is a Scottish charity founded in 1996. We champion everyday walking as the way to a happier, healthier Scotland. We want to get Scotland walking: everyone, everyday, everywhere.

Our aim is to significantly increase the number of people who choose to walk in Scotland - whether that's for leisure or walking to work, school, the shops or to a nearby public transport hub. We want to create a happier, healthier Scotland where increased physical activity improves quality of life and wellbeing for all. We work to develop more opportunities and better environments not just for walking, but also for cycling and other activities, to help make Scotland a more active, more prosperous, greener country.


1 Do you consider that the Scottish Government’s health and sport budget for 2017-18 reflects its stated priorities (as set out in the National Performance Framework, the LDP standards and the National health and wellbeing outcomes)? If not, how could the budget be adjusted to better reflect priorities?
To a degree – increasing levels of physical activity, whilst also addressing inequality, is a big challenge that requires a change in emphasis in funding.

Physical inactivity has been estimated to cost Scotland £91 million annually – very probably an underestimate. In that context reallocation of more resources for effective physical activity interventions would be justified. In practice promotion of walking has been shown to be cost effective and accessible to most people

2 For the health and sport budget for 2018-19 where do you suggest any additional resources could be most effectively deployed and where could any further savings be found? What evidence supports your views?

There should be an increase in preventative spend in line with the recommendations of the Christie Commission. Prevention can improve health in a cost-effective way and help reduce health inequalities. The National Conversation on a Healthier Scotland showed a public appetite for more preventative approaches to health. It is worth noting that supporting a community development approach to delivering physical activity interventions is most effective and cost effective.

Promoting physical activity is a key preventative measure – and much of this will be achieved through walking. The most recent Scottish Household Survey results show that for the fifth year in a row, more people are walking recreationally. 69% of the population now walk regularly for recreation, an increase of 5 percentage points from last year and strong endorsement of the National Walking Strategy. The greatest increase between 2014 and 2015 was in those aged 75 and over, who are amongst those most likely to be inactive.

More information is needed on the health economics of physical activity interventions and walking in particular.

3 Is sufficient information available to support scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s health and sport budget? If not, what additional information would help support budget scrutiny?

More resources are needed to improve the evidence of impact and the evaluation of physical activity interventions. This will ensure future spending is as effective as possible.

There is an immediate need for more resources for the evaluation and improvement of walking promotion. Walking is a strategically valuable tool in delivering Scotland’s health, transport and natural heritage aspirations. Monitoring the progress of public investments requires robust data to demonstrate success and highlight priorities for further investment. The existing datasets to monitor and evaluate participation in walking are inadequate, do not allow for easy comparisons and can be expensive to collect.

There is an International Walking Data Standard – ‘Treatment of Walking in Travel Surveys: internationally standardised monitoring methods of walking and public
space’ (Oct 2015). This standard has not yet been utilised in Scotland. Paths for All is keen to explore using this in Scotland but there is a need for additional resources to take it forward.

The impact of other government activity needs to be considered. Transport policy and expenditure impacts on active travel and air quality; environmental policy and expenditure impacts on people’s access to opportunities for physical activity; planning policy defines whether or not our future towns and cities will be healthy. Taking account of these activities will reinforce that health is a cross-cutting issue of national significance that many government departments contribute to.

4 What impact has the integration of health and social care budgets had on ensuring resources are directed at achieving the Scottish Government’s desired outcomes?

Getting people active through walking is a key way to support better health and longer healthy lives – taking pressure off health and social care services. This is a key opportunity for effective preventative spend as recommended by the Christie Commission. This is particularly important in a time of increasing pressure on NHS budgets, reduced resources and an ageing population. It will be important to support self-management of long term conditions – including enabling people to keep active.

The National Walking Strategy is key to embedding walking in our daily lives and the promotion of walking should be at the heart of health and social care.

There is great potential for improved delivery of preventative measures – including promotion of physical activity – through health and social care integration. We feel that we are moving in the right direction on this but have a long way to go. We support projects right across Scotland – including 149 walking for health projects. Many of the projects we support are engaged with health and social care at a local level including promoting ‘Strength and balance’ support to care homes and the wider implications for loneliness and social isolation.

Our view is that there could be greater engagement and would like to encourage this. We believe walking for health can play a valuable role in the health and social care agenda in terms of prevention, treatment, social support, carers support and access/signposting to other services.

This is a key opportunity for effective preventative spending. One approach to improving delivery is through link workers and we have supported this.

We should learn from the delivery of transformation funds and build on activity that has been effective.

Walking – value for money

Walking is the most accessible form of physical activity and represents extremely good value for money.
The economic benefits associated with increased physical activity levels far outweigh any initial costs. Cost Benefit Ratios for walking developments show significant value for money. A Social Return on Investment (SROI) study to analyse the impact of the Glasgow Health Walk programme revealed that for every £1 invested in Health Walks in Glasgow, there were £8 of benefits generated for society. Two further SROI studies, in Stirling and the Scottish Borders, showed that for every £1 invested in Health Walks £9 and £8 worth of benefits were delivered respectively.

Health Walks deliver an array of social benefits including making people fitter, healthier and improving their mental health. This in turn makes cost savings to the NHS and local authorities such as reduced spend on care and prescriptions due to clients being more fit, healthy and able.

There is a clear need for increased and sustained funding to support physically active lives and promotion of walking offers the best value investment. There should also be better coordination between funders and the delivery of key policy outcomes.