HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT

SUBMISSION FROM PATHS FOR ALL

Summary

- More resources are needed for community interventions which promote physical, mental and social health.
- Community Link Workers can play an important role.
- For many, physical activity may not be the most pressing issue.
- There are costs associated with providing activities and also for evaluation and monitoring.
- We are involved in a range of relevant projects which are informing our views on what works.

Paths for All welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for views. This is an area of work we have been involved in, and promoting, for some time. We are happy to share our experience and would be delighted to offer more information if that would be of help. Some examples of the projects we are currently supporting are included in an Annex.

Our last annual Expert Lecture focussed on Social prescribing to get Scotland active. https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/news-post/social-prescribing-to-get-scotland-active

We currently chair the national physical activity referral development group.

Overall, we would recommend a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to how social prescribing is led. The landscape is complicated and varies considerably across Scotland. We would support a strategic framework coupled with funding aimed at developing a more structured network of projects.

1. To what extent does social prescribing for physical activity and sport increase sustained participation in physical activity and sport for health and wellbeing?

Health care has become about treating illness. It treats us when we are ill and does a great job of doing this - and we will always need high quality, free care of this sort. But there is a need to change our focus on to promoting wellbeing, and the balance of resources needs to move with this change.

The aim should be to keep us as well as possible for as long as possible - moving health care beyond the hospital and health centre into the community. Everything from the way we plan our communities, transport ourselves and live our lives will be part of this preventative approach.

Social prescribing is a part of this. We need to devote more resources to community interventions which promote physical, mental and social health. A good example of this is Paths for All’s Health Walks programme, but there are many others.
We support the Scottish Health Walk Network of community projects all over Scotland that organise free group walks every week. Health Walks are aimed at inactive people who would benefit most from doing more physical activity. This can include people who haven’t been active for a while and would like to start again, people recovering from ill health or who are managing a long-term condition and anyone who’s been told by a health professional that they would benefit from being more active.

https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/walking-for-health/health-walks

The evidence base is growing as this approach is explored – this is an area of work that does need more resources and attention so we can develop an approach that we know will work. Health Walks offers a free and on-going opportunity for physical activity; however, many social prescribing schemes are for a set period e.g. 12/14 weeks. Participants need to be able to seamlessly access opportunities once the social ‘prescription’ has ended to enable them to sustain their activity.

2. Who should decide whether a social prescription for physical activity is the most appropriate intervention, based on what criteria? (e.g. GP, other health professional, direct referral from Community Link Worker or self-referral)

There may not be a definitive answer as a range of approaches seem to have value depending on the situation and individuals involved.

There may be issues over how receptive people are to referral – there is a danger of appearing to “talk at” people rather than supporting them in finding what they need. For some people physical activity or sport may not “be for them”. Walking has an important role here – as it is more accessible than some other activity.

Walking is important in tackling inequalities faced in many communities in Scotland. Participation in sport varies by age, gender, area deprivation and household income, but when we include walking for recreation, these participation gaps narrow.

*Participation in all physical activity and sport remained relatively constant between 2007 and 2010 (around 72%). Since then people have become more active (rising to 75% in 2011 and again to 81% in 2017). The rise in physical activity is driven by the rise in recreational walking. 67% of adults walked for at least 30 minutes for recreation in the last four weeks, an increase from 57% five years earlier (SHS 2017).*

Physical activity should be one part of social prescribing – people often have pressing non-medical needs that bring them to health care settings. It is important to deal with these before people can address other needs. Often the social side of walking groups, walking football, etc are as important as exercise. This is about mental as well as physical health – and tackling isolation is part of that.

Community Link Workers can play an important role here as they have time to devote to this that health professionals may not be able to offer, and they can develop a good knowledge of opportunities locally. Our previous experience of referral to health walks has suggested that GPs may not have the time or information to signpost people in this way.
We worked with The Alliance Links Worker programme to make connections with walking opportunities. Participant feedback reflected the value of walking as part of the programme. We anticipate that the link worker system will have an important role in developing and delivering social prescribing.

Feedback from Walking for Health projects and health and social care professionals is that that most GPs are too busy, time-restricted and focused on medicine to prescribe alternatives, whereas other staff (e.g. practice managers, receptionists, link workers, OTs, physios etc) are more effective at passing on information about things like Strength & Balance and Health Walks.

3. What are the barriers to effective social prescribing to sport and physical activity and how are they being overcome?

For many of the hardest to reach people, physical activity may not be the most pressing issue – housing, debt, benefits, etc may be more immediate concerns. Once these are addressed, they may then be more receptive – reinforcing the need for continued support. A period of at least a year has been suggested.

Some barriers may be modifiable: e.g. training and awareness of allied health professionals. Others may be much harder (or impossible) to modify e.g. SIMD, ethnicity, age but these factors help to highlight groups where additional resource and support may be needed.

There are costs associated with providing activities – particularly if these are expected to be sustained and of a reliable quality There is a danger of assuming this can be done on the cheap. A menu of activities is required, as take up will depend on personal interests, experience, budget, location and time constraints.

There is a need to ensure health professionals have faith in the efficacy of the programmes they refer to – in the same way they have faith in drug prescriptions. The Scottish Health Walk Network offers support, training, funding and advice to projects delivering 550 Health Walks across Scotland every week. The Chief Medical Officer has endorsed the walks, saying that health professionals can feel confident about referring patients to Health Walks: https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/news/news-post/scotlands-chief-medical-officer-backs-our-scottish-health-walk-network

Over the years we have found referral to be a challenge – many GPs just didn’t have time or the information – even when there is a reliable “product” on offer. The link workers approach is a way of addressing this. For a lifestyle behavioural change, there needs to be a trusted individual supporting a person going through this change. That support needs to be tailored to the individual.

There is pressure on third sector and community organisations to deliver these programmes on limited resources – walking groups are not free - there is a resource required to set these up and run them.
4. How should social prescribing for physical activity and sport initiatives be monitored and evaluated?

There is a need for strategic leadership around building the evidence base for social prescribing to increase understanding of its effectiveness. Data management systems and processes to quality assure and record demand, access and capacity should be developed or recommended so a core data set can begin to be captured regardless of what project is being delivered.

As a general point, programmes need to have an evaluation programme in place so we can all learn the wider lessons of what works and get an idea of impacts. Clearly this isn’t simple and needs more work and longer-term commitment. It should be noted that evaluation requires resourcing in terms of time, funding, and personnel. It also requires training and support for those tasked with conducting evaluation and data collection for monitoring purposes.

This is an area we are working to evidence through evaluating projects that we fund. To support this, we have developed a walkers’ database that records the impact of health walks. It automatically follows up the individual after six months to record changes in behaviour such as increased levels of physical activity.

We are also currently developing our approach to evaluating three Smarter Choices Smarter Places funded projects that specifically look at social prescribing (see Annex). This will be Scotland-wide and could inform a similar model to evaluate all/other Social Prescribing initiatives.

Investing in walking and physical activity is an example of “preventative spend” and is important as pressure increases on NHS budgets, resources are reduced and our population ages. It is also important for supporting self-management of long-term conditions and enabling people to keep active for longer. A coordinated, whole system approach is needed if we are to achieve this preventative approach to health, as advocated by the Christie Commission in 2011.

The economic benefits associated with increased physical activity levels far outweigh any initial costs. Evaluation of initiatives and policy should include economic evaluation (both forward projection and retrospective analysis). Cost Benefit Ratios for walking developments show significant value for money. Social Return on Investment (SROI) evidence shows a return of approximately £8 for every £1 invested in health walk and path development projects.
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 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.

Our work supports the delivery of the Active Scotland Delivery Plan, National Walking Strategy, The Cycling Action Plan for Scotland and the Long-term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland, community and workplace health walking, path network development and active travel policy development. We are a partnership organisation with 30 national partners. Our funders include the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Macmillan and The Life Changes Trust.

Policy@pathsforall.org.uk
Annex

Examples of relevant projects

Paths for All is involved in a range of relevant projects which are informing our views on what works. Some examples of the projects we are currently supporting:

**Apple Clinic**

**Renfrewshire Leisure**

Renfrewshire Leisure in partnership with the NHS provide general surgery patients with weekly prehabilitation walking and educational sessions which health professionals will refer them into. Post-surgery, patients offered Strength & Balance exercise and a gradual introduction back into walking via buddy walks, with a view to finally being referred into community health walks.

**Forth Valley Active Hubs**

**Forth Valley Hospital**

Established Hub within Forth Valley's main secondary care site, providing information, support and encouragement to staff, patients and visitors while encouraging them to change their travel habits from driving to more sustainable forms of transport. The Hub also provides a point to which clinicians can signpost patients who, for health reasons, need to build more activities into their day to day lives.

**NHS Highland Prehabilitation Leaflet**

**Raigmore**

Leaflet promotes physical activity and walking for health for those who are about to undergo general surgery. This intervention can improve recovery times and reduce risks of complications.

**NHS Highland Active People**

**Inverness**

Supported information service, with two part-time Link Workers working with four GP surgeries where health professionals refer sedentary patients in need of increased physical
activity to Link Workers who will match patients to activities/projects, with a focus on increasing active travel, helping to remove barriers to participation.

Green Health Telephone Operator

Volunteer Dundee

Direct link for GPs and team to direct patients to healthy travel options, through Green Health Prescriptions. Working with community-based projects, supporting self-referrals to healthy travel, instead of car journeys, for sustainable lifestyle changes.

Spirit 2012 Perth and Kinross 'Care about Walking' Project

P&K Wide

Working with ten Care Homes intensely over two years to encourage residents to take part in more walking, strength & balance and walking activities. Development of indoor and outdoor environments to be more accessible and fit for purpose to increase walking. Work will also reach P&K wide as best possible and Care at Home development opportunities.

Dementia Friendly Strength & Balance Wall Vinyl Graphics for High Dependancy Unit

Royal Alexandra Hospital, Paisley

They have 'Exercise Alley' in which the Physio team use for walking and S&B exercises as part of post op recovery.

Walking for Wellbeing and Good Mental Health Toolkit

National

The ‘Walking for Wellbeing and Good Mental Health Toolkit’ resource aims to break down the barriers to engaging with physical activities. The resource provides tips on how to make Health Walks welcoming and inclusive for everyone, including those with mental health problems. It consists of guidance for Health Walk Project Coordinators, information and resources for Volunteer Walk Leaders, ‘conversation starter’ postcards for walkers and a short evaluation tool.
Weigh to Go

South Lanarkshire

Weigh to Go is a 15-week free adult weight management programme. The sessions all have a 45 minute physical activity element. The programme instructors have been trained as walk leaders, all leisure centres have had routes plotted and risk assessed. At least two of the 15 session will be a health walk and participants will be given information on the local free health walks to encourage them to continue after the 15-week programme.

Versus Arthritis

National

Seven Stepping Out health walk groups in Argyll & Bute, North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire. As part of programme to support people living with arthritis to get active and stay active within their own community, Stepping Out health walks have been set up in Campbeltown, Helensburgh, Dunoon, Rothesay, Troon, Prestwick and Eglinton Country Park near Kilwinning.

Move More Step Count Challenge (SCC)

Grampian Wide, Dundee, Aberdeenshire, Borders, North, East & South Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, P&K and Highland

Bespoke Move More (Macmillan) Step Count Challenges for Health and Social Care Professionals. The aim is to raise awareness of the local Move More service, provide information about the benefits of being active for people affected by cancer and provide information on how to refer patients into the programme through weekly email mailouts and online blog.

Meander Project - Hospitalfield

Angus

Hospitalfield House provides volunteering and walking opportunities in Arbroath. They work closely with support workers within Gowanlea Mental Health Team and Occupational Therapists in Angus and receive referrals to their volunteering and walking programme from these groups. They also work closely with local care homes.

Steps to Health
Dundee

Steps to Health (Leisure & Culture Dundee) provide walking opportunities in Dundee city. They interact with the NHS in many ways: referrals from Leisure & Culture Dundee's GP Referral Programme, walks for inpatients on Ward 42 Ninewells, weekly staff walk at Ninewells, walk for those with learning difficulties with an NHS Tayside trainee psychologist, antenatal walk in partnership with Ninewells, Dementia-friendly walk from Maggie's Centre, walking intervention in partnership with NHS Tayside's Weight Management Service.

Walk ER

East Renfrewshire

Walking co-ordinator based within East Renfrewshire HSCP: 12 weekly walks and two weekly S&B sessions (delivered at Kirkton Service in Barrhead and Eastwood Health and Care Centre), referrals from Eastwood's own physiotherapy department as well as GPs, recently launched a new walk leaving from a local Care Home, pilot use of GP surgery screens and reminder texts through NHS text service.

WDCVS - Health Centre Walks

West Dunbartonshire

Project delivering Health Walks leaving from Health Centres in West Dunbartonshire (also delivers health walks as part of wider programme). Pilot use of GP screens and NHS text service prompts.

Good Move (Glasgow Life), Walk ED (East Dunbartonshire Leisure & Culture), Walk-ER (East Ren HSCP), Inverclyde Co-ordinator (The Bothy), Walk West Dunbartonshire (WDCVS)

Greater Glasgow and Clyde

Walking for Health co-ordinator posts in all these areas.

Good Move Walking

Glasgow City

Project supports around 40 walks across Glasgow City, including those delivered by housing associations, care homes and hospices. We are working with them to better establish links between their walks and local AHPs who are looking to champion
movement, based at Acute Sites across GGC, and led by Dr Juliet Harvey (Practice Development Physio, NHS GGC).

**GP surgery walks**

**Glasgow City (Lochend, Pollok)**

Community Links Practitioners delivering walks from GPs surgeries in Glasgow (including) Lochend and Pollok.

**Leverndale Recreational Therapy Walking Group**

**Glasgow City (G53 7TU)**

Leverndale Recreational Therapy Walking Group provides walks for hospital clients and community-based clients who attend Leverndale Hospital's Recreational Therapy Department.

**Dundee Community Health Team**

**Dundee**

Community Health Team work to reduce health inequalities across Dundee. They provide a programme of community walks, including recovery walks. Some walkers are referred from Dundee's Sources of Support Team (Links Workers).

**STRiVE**

**East Lothian, EH41 3PF**

This TSI works in partnership with the NHS START team (short-term assessment and rehabilitation) to facilitate early supported discharge and the prevention of re-admission to hospital for the over 50s. Conditions include COPD, stroke, falls, reduced mobility and orthopaedic surgery. They will introduce health walks for patients within the new East Lothian Community Hospital in Haddington, recruiting walkers through their patient referral pathway.

**Midlothian Council**

**Midlothian-wide**
The council’s Sport & PA team (of which Ageing Well is a part) delivers PA interventions for various NHS Lothian depts and has well-established relationships with the HSCP. Promote established S&B activities and health walks throughout the region to health professionals and increase provision, e.g. establishing family walks linked to weight management programmes (Counterweight and Get Going for kids).

**Woodland Wanderers**  
**Midlothian**  
Entirely volunteer run, closed walk. Coordinator is an NHS volunteer and the walk is only open to referrals from local mental health services.

**SAMH/Royal Edinburgh Hospital**  
**Edinburgh**  
SAMH has a hub on the hospital grounds (the Hive). They've established health walks around the grounds. Keen to engage with health professionals in other parts of the hospital.

**Health in Mind**  
**Edinburgh**  
This mental health charity is piloting a Walk & Talk walks with a mental health, possibly in partnership with GP practice in Stockbridge, with the aim of establishing a regular health walk.

**The Breastfeeding Network**  
**Midlothian**  
Buggy-friendly walks led by trained Breastfeeding Network peer supporters for parents and wider families. They have good relationships with NHS colleagues and will promote walks via midwives and health visitors.

**Walk It**  
**Scottish Borders**
Area coordinator is co-managed by NHS and Council and delivers area wide walking project. Delivered a GP referral project in 2017-18: coordinator completed Level 3 Referral Training, developed a walking referral form for HPs, and met with various HPs & Lifestyle Advisors etc (at GP practice, Borders General Hospital and health-related charities and support groups) to promote walks and client referrals.

**Walk da Rock**

**Shetland-wide**

Area coordinator sits within the NHS Health Improvement Dept and tours various Health Centres. HPs refer patients to them for support to make healthy lifestyle changes, including becoming more active and losing weight (essentially a Link Worker function). They use motivational interviewing techniques and goal setting. WLs are recruited and supported via Disability Shetland.

**Walk on Hebrides**

**Western Isles-wide**

Area coordinator sits within the NHS Health Promotion Dept. Working in partnership with local SNH team and medical practice to pilot green prescribing. Work closely with Move More workers and other HW providers on the islands. Walks are promoted via HPs, GP practices, patient notice boards, community groups etc.

**Braveheart**

**Falkirk**

Walk with Braveheart is a project within the Braveheart Association, a health charity based in Falkirk which supports individuals to improve their health & wellbeing through walking, weight management and long-term conditions groups. Braveheart has an intrinsic buy-in from NHS Forth Valley including direct project funding including 'in kind' office space within the Community Hospital.

**Walk in the Park**

**Loch Lomond & Trossachs**

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs Countryside Trust run six health walking groups across the National Park. Currently connect with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and with NHS Forth
Valley. Also have operational relationships with GP surgeries and pharmacists in each of the communities they have walking groups.

Newest group in Arrochar will be unique in that the Practise Nurse from the GP surgery will be supported by the local GP to become a walk leader and help lead the health walk alongside volunteers.

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs Countryside Trust hopes to support the National Park Authority as it looks to set up a Green Health Partnership in West Dunbartonshire and are also planning to strengthen their links through NHS Forth Valley and with partners in NHS Highland.

South Ayrshire Walking Development

South Ayrshire

South Ayrshire wide project supported by Sports Development Officer in the Council. Worked with Barns Medical Practice to set-up a weekly health walk that is led by NHS staff and meets and starts from the practice. Also supported Ayrshire Action on Mental Health and Age Concern to set-up weekly health walking groups.

Stirling Walking Network

Stirling

Extensive walking project across Stirlingshire. Weekly walk starting at the Stirling Community Hospital. Looking to create links with Bellfield Centre (which is a new Intermediate Care facility and part of the Stirling Care Village) to see how people at the Bellfield Centre could take part in the walk.

Blarbuie Woodland Walks

Argyll & Bute

Blarbuie Woodland have a long-standing relationship with the adjacent Mid Argyll Hospital. NHS staff are actively involved in the health walks programme including encouraging patients to take part.

Dementia Friendly Prestwick

South Ayrshire
Dementia Friendly Prestwick support people with dementia, and their families/carers, in Prestwick to be included and remain part of their community for as long as possible. The charity is working to achieve this through a range of activities including weekly Health Walks - which promote inclusion and raise awareness of dementia locally.

**Paisley Puffins**

**Renfrewshire**

Walking project which enables residents of Renfrewshire's Council-owned Sheltered Housing to accessing a programme of walking.

**Walk Aberdeen – GP Surgery Walks**

**Aberdeen City**


**Walk Aberdeen - Stroll in Mind**

**Aberdeen City**

Mental health walking group established in 2018 in partnership with the Council's Healthy Minds Team and the Grampian Disability Sport's Get Out Get Active (GOGA) project.

**Walk Aberdeen - Link Worker Programme**

**Aberdeen City**

Liaising with the Link Practitioner Manager in Aberdeen, planning to train Link Practitioners at a walk leader course.

**Walk Aberdeen - First Steps Programme**

**Aberdeen City**

Starting their First Steps project, which will involve strength and balance exercises and very short walks for people who are inactive and/or have LTCs and couldn't manage a standard health walk.
Walk Moray

Moray

New Coordinator is employed by NHS Grampian, working closely with a local Link Worker, supporting one existing GP Practice walk in Elgin and setting up two new ones in high SIMD areas (Elgin & Buckie), supporting buggy walks as part of the NHS Baby Steps programme for mothers with a high BMI, and led Big Fit Walks in July 2019 for NHSG staff at Dr Gray’s Hospital, Elgin, linked to staff pedometer challenge.

P4W Walk

Highland

Partnerships for Wellbeing (P4W) is a health charity and has done a lot of engagement with local HPs over the years and produced several case studies. The Coordinator gives regular talks to patients at the Cardiac Rehab Centre in Inverness and has established health walks for local mental health services. Recently launched a big Dementia Friendly Walking Project with funding from the Life Changes Trust.

Aberdeenshire Health Walks

Aberdeenshire

Coordinator was based with NHS Grampian for two years, but post has recently moved to the Council. Good links with some local HPs and some involvement with the House of Care project, has produced a COPD case study, good links with the CAPA project which resulted in a new HW being set up for a care home & sheltered housing project, also supports two health walks run by a local mental health charity.

Brora Health Walks

Highland KW9 6QJ

Brora GP Practice walk set up in 2018 by High Life Highland (the local leisure trust) as part of the Sutherland Community Partnership’s (SCP) Social Prescribing Project. The project involves the GPs and health professionals based at Brora Medical Practice referring people who are not currently physically active to participate in health walks. When our funding ends in September 2019, HLH will hand the walk over to Practice staff to run. The SCP hopes to set up walks from other GP Practices in Sutherland and I have recently had an enquiry from the practice in Tain about starting walks.
Active Cairngorms Activity Tracker Health Walk project

Several LAs

Ran a 12-week Physical Activity Tracker health walk in 2016 with a GP practice with Spirit of 2012 funding.

Cairn Practice Walks

Highland

Five staff from Cairn Medical Practice in Inverness did walk leader training in 2017 and started running health walks for patients, as volunteers in their own time.

Reach Out Health Walks

Highland

A lecturer in Psychology and Care Practice at UHI Inverness College started running weekly Reach Out Health Walks (term-time only) on the new campus. They are open to all and run in partnership with the NHS Highland Reach Out campaign, which aims to tackle loneliness and social isolation and promotes the walks on its Facebook page.

Stride for Life

Perth & Kinross PH1 5HS

Coordinator has run strength and balance training for Perth College students.