Paths for All

Obesity

Summary
- Physical activity has an important role in preventing obesity and can play a complimentary role in addressing it
- Physical activity brings a range of other health and well-being benefits
- Walking is the most accessible form of physical activity and represents extremely good value for money
- The implementation of the National Walking Strategy will be particularly important in working to prevent obesity
- The work of Paths for All and our partners offers a range of support that complements efforts to reduce obesity in Scotland

Background
Paths for All was established in 1996 and is a partnership of 29 organisations. Paths for All is currently primarily supported by the Scottish Government to promote physical activity and walking for health in Scotland and is a key delivery partner for the Scottish Government’s National Walking Strategy, the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework and the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland.

Paths for All champions everyday walking in Scotland and we want to get more people walking - everyone, everywhere and every day. We aim to significantly increase the number of people who choose to walk in Scotland - whether that’s leisure walking or active-choice walking to work, school or shops.

Obesity and physical activity
The extent and the effects of the obesity problem are well documented. Physical activity plays an important role in preventing and reducing obesity. Paths for All believes it will be most effective if we can encourage people to be physical activity every day, supporting people to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines at every stage of life and ensuring that there are attractive and accessible opportunities for everyone.

Walking is the most accessible and practical way to achieve the recommended levels of physical activity, particularly for those suffering from obesity. Walking also, if incorporated into daily routines, reduces the risk of obesity and brings a host of wider health benefits.
To encourage behaviour change towards everyday walking, we must tackle obesogenic environments - creating places and spaces that encourage physical activity and promoting active travel.

The Review of the Obesity Route Map (2015) noted that: The recent walking strategy Let’s Get Scotland Walking should be included in future action on obesity. There are many health benefits from greater support for walking, cycling and active travel, but
new initiatives are needed, targeted specifically for prevention of weight gain (and regain). These initiatives will require environmental changes in transport and planning, including easy access to community facilities, and open and green space. Given the current level of investment in sport, and that which may be required to get inactive people active, consideration needs to be given to how cultural and behavioural change initiatives are resourced.

The benefits of physical activity

*Physical activity is the “best buy in public health”* (Faculty of Public Health)

*If a medication existed which had a similar effect to physical activity, it would be regarded as a ‘wonder drug’ or ‘miracle cure’* (CMO 2009)

Physical activity has a role in preventing and tackling obesity but it also has a raft of other health and well-being benefits. For example - benefits (reduction in risk) for adults and older adults: CMO 2011 ‘Start Active, Stay Active’

| Condition                        | Reduction
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 2 Diabetes</td>
<td>- 40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular Disease</td>
<td>- 35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Falls, Depression and Dementia</td>
<td>- 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint and Back Pain</td>
<td>- 25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cancers (Colon and Breast)</td>
<td>- 20%</td>
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The Scottish Government’s Active Scotland Outcomes Framework describes Scotland’s ambitions for sport and physical activity and the key outcomes over the next ten years. The headline measure of progress is the proportion of the population who meet the recommended level of physical activity. This is a National Indicator.

Walking – value for money

*Walking is the most likely way all adults can achieve the recommended levels of physical activity* (NICE 2012)

*Walking is highly cost-effective and demonstrates that prevention really is better than cure. The health risks of inactivity are stark – 7 Scots die every day due to inactivity, often long before they have to.* Shona Robison, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport – National Walking Strategy 2014

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, in this context, promotion of walking offers the best value
investment. There should be better coordination between funders (including Lottery) and the delivery of key policy outcomes.

**National Walking Strategy**

The National Walking Strategy action plan brings together local government, transport, planning, climate change, education and community sectors to create environments in Scotland which encourage and support walking and cycling for everyday journey’s and leisure.

It has three strategic aims:

- To deliver on creating a culture of walking where everyone walks more often as part of their everyday travel and for recreation and well-being
- To achieve better quality walking environments with attractive, well designed and managed built and natural spaces and places for everyone
- To enable easy, convenient and safe independent mobility for everyone

The SHS 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

**Walking for Health**

The national Walking for Health programme, managed by Paths for All, consists of 145 local projects delivering volunteer led health walks in communities across Scotland. We are working with health professionals and Community Planning Partnerships to signpost these opportunities more widely.

- 36% of new walkers report joining a walking group to lose weight
- 12% of new walkers report that they are overweight

As well as providing a supportive environment to encourage regular physical activity, health walks also help to manage and prevent other long terms conditions that arise because of obesity such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer and stroke.

Since I started walking I have lost a lot of weight and I am managing to keep it off” and “I have lost weight before but not managed to keep it off - this time I do because of the walking

**Stirling Walking Network Participant**

Joining the walk has made such a difference to my health as I have lost just over 2 stone in weight.

**NEG Walker**

Walking with the group gave me the motivation to make lifestyle changes which have improved my health. I have lost over 2.5 stone in weight, changed my diet and feel much healthier.

**Helix Walking Group Participant**
I’m so pleased to have lost just over a stone in weight & by walking longer every day I am managing to keep the weight off. 
Friends of Insch Walking Group Participant

**Step Count Challenge**
The use of pedometers has proven to be a valuable tool for many to manage their weight and set realistic and effective daily physical activity goals. We supply pedometer packs to health professionals and others encouraging people to be more active.

Paths for All’s Workplace Step Count Challenge has had 24,000 participations since it started 5 years ago, with many people reporting weight loss alongside other health, social and productivity benefits. The challenge has been particularly successful in highlighting levels of sedentary behaviour for some employees and is a strong motivator to increase physical activity levels and in weight reduction.

We have worked with the University of Edinburgh to look at the impact the challenge had on people’s activity levels and motivation to become more active. We found that people were walking more and sitting less. At the eight-week follow-up, the results showed that there was an increase in the amount of time people were walking each week. The biggest increase was around active travel (e.g. walking to work) where there was a weekly increase of 109 minutes. There was also a 55-minute increase in walking as part of people’s leisure time. This suggests that workplace walking interventions offer a scalable opportunity to effectively promote walking for health.

‘A maintained weight loss of 8kg. Dropped dress sizes to 12. Much fitter and able to participate in activities – I recently walked part of the West Highland Way and plan to do a few Munros and the Moonwalk. I have much more energy and I’m able to do more. People comment ‘you look so well’ and I don’t worry anymore about looking good in my clothes. My self-confidence and self-esteem have increased.’
Step Count Challenge Participant 2015

“Walking to work helped me with losing weight and also made me realise after many years doing nothing that I was capable and enjoyed exercise and led me to join our local sports centre. I now go to the gym/fitness classes 3/4 times a week as well as walking (weather permitting) in my lunch hour.”
Step Count Challenge Participant 2015

‘I lost half a stone just by walking’
Step Count Challenge Participant 2015

We have also been working with NHS Health Scotland in the development of the Exemplar Physical Activity Employer Award.

**Active Environments**
Creating an environment where people actively choose to walk and cycle as part of everyday life can have a significant impact on health and may reduce health inequalities.
The work of our Active Environments team offers support, funding and technical expertise to local communities across Scotland working to develop and maintain welcoming and safe routes. These routes allow people to be physical active where they live, every day. There is far more demand for the grant funding than we are able award.

The project has improved a key access route that local people use not only for recreational purposes but also as a life line to get to and from community facilities, bus routes and local shops. There is definitely a lot more people using the path to get to and from places and just people going out to enjoy themselves. Renfrewshire Environmental & Restoration Group, Paths for All Community Path Grant Recipients

Our partners, Living Streets Scotland, also support community organisations to develop greater capacity to ask for improved places for walking.

Active travel
Changes in mode of travel from car to active travel have been demonstrated to reduce BMI. Martin A et al, JECH. 2015

Twenty two percent of journeys reported in the SHS travel diary in 2015 had walking as the main mode of transport. A lot needs to be done if we are to meet our ambitions on active travel – with a significant change in priorities and spending on transport. The review of the National Transport Strategy offers an opportunity to address this and the recently announced Active Travel Task Force, chaired by Transport Scotland, should give focus to this.

Paths for All’s Smarter Choices, Smarter Places programme, now in its second year, is funded by Transport Scotland and supports local authorities and their partners to deliver active travel behaviour change interventions across Scotland.

The funds (£5m / year) have been allocated on a population basis to local authorities and the initiatives aim to support people to make walking and cycling part of their daily lives.

Schools
Our partners Living Streets Scotland are encouraging more pupils walk to school through the Walk Once a Week programme This session, by the end of September, 45,000 pupils in 185 schools were registered to take part across 16 local authority areas.

We are also working with The Daily Mile to promote the concept more widely within workplace and community settings.

Conclusion
The WHO (Obesity and Overweight Report) identifies physical inactivity and dietary choices as a major cause of obesity, much of it caused by increasing urbanisation, sedentary jobs and less active modes of transport.
A walkable environment can provide the basis to encourage a wide range of active and healthier lifestyles across the population. Investing in walkable environments and interventions can significantly improve lifestyles, increase peoples' resilience and reduce the number of people affected by chronic diseases.

‘Above all, do not lose your desire to walk. Every day I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts’ Soren Kierkegaard (1829-48)

Paths for All
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