

Copy for **Policy Update** (January 2008)

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An active week!

During one week in December, there was plenty of debate on the issue of physical activity. The National Coalition for Active Ageing (NCAA), a coalition of organisations which campaigns to raise about the importance of physical activity for older people, held one of its regular Forum meetings. Co-ordinated by Help the Aged, the NCAA meeting heard Kevin Marsh, Matrix Research make the economic case for promoting physical activity to older people.

Then Len Almond, British Heart Foundation highlighted the health benefits of increasing physical activity for older people. He noted that inactive people have higher healthcare costs but that reducing costs is only part of the story. The economic case is always made in terms of the cost of illness and that no economic data is available to incorporate the wider 'social' and other costs of inactivity. Strength is of great importance to older people as the loss of it puts older people at disadvantage and exercise helps people to flourish, enhances the body system and widens horizons. It provides a 'resource' so that people remain independent and a 'reserve' which helps people to recover quickly from illness.

The same week saw the publication of a Sport England survey which found only 16% of 55-64 and 6% of 75-84 year olds participate regularly (3 days a week) in sport or active recreation. However, the Department of Health released the findings of the Local Exercise Action Pilots (LEAP) which tested different ways to increase physical activity in deprived areas. Projects in Ashton, Wigan and Leigh and Nottingham targeted older people specifically. The conclusions were positive; interventions were cost effective and it was possible, with the right support, to engage people in activity, even those who had previous been sedentary or lightly active.