

Government urged to do more to remove barriers to physical activity for older people (July 2004)

Help the Aged has, this month, responded to the Government's consultation on physical activity by welcoming the Government's commitment to increase the levels of physical activity among the population.

There is a significant and growing body of evidence that suggests that diseases and conditions (including, for example, coronary heart disease and stroke), which are the primary cause of loss of function and independence in later life, are preventable and that physical activity can play an important part. The evidence is clear that physical activity can confer immediate and long-term physiological and social benefits, particularly for certain conditions directly associated with old age. While the preventative effects of physical activity remain a priority, there is increasing evidence of its potential contribution towards maintaining mobility and independence in later life and in improving quality of life through social integration, enhanced self-esteem and positive images of successful ageing.

In our response, we highlighted that for a range of reasons, not all older people are able to experience such benefits. The reasons are many and varied and include a lack of opportunity or understanding of the benefits, an absence of role models, concerns for personal safety, a loss of confidence, and inappropriate or inaccessible provision of services. Together with a lack of recognition of the importance of physical activity among national agencies and providers, this has meant that physical activity is not an integral part of the life of every older person.

In responding to the consultation, Help the Aged expressed that it was disappointed about the lack of ideas and content in the consultation paper in relation to older people and physical activity. Older people are absent from national sport and physical activity strategic thinking. As a result, funding and resourcing continues to ignore their needs. The consultation paper did not give any indication that this situation may change.

For a copy of the consultation response, please contact David Sinclair.

David Sinclair