Health and sport – a winning team

**Top tips**

- Speak to local professional sports clubs to identify the scope for collaboration.
- Focus on building partnerships – identify common goals and what each partner can contribute.
- One-off events do not tend to have much impact, so look at longer-term planning and initiatives.
- Ensure there is clear signposting for those who need follow-up tests or support, or want further information.
- Establish a sub-group or network of the health and wellbeing board to plan and coordinate activities.
- Use evidence from joint strategic needs assessments to support commissioner cases for including sport initiatives in joint health and wellbeing strategies.
- Evaluate and follow up all projects.
- Play a full part in the NHS Sport and Physical Activity Challenge.

This Briefing highlights the benefits of sport in improving the nation’s physical and mental wellbeing and aims to support NHS providers, commissioners and those with public health responsibilities to harness the opportunities provided by sport to improve the health of local populations.

The proven advantages of increased physical activity on physical and mental wellbeing makes the sports-health nexus a crucial area for the new NHS to tap into. The influence and ability of sporting personalities and clubs to reach under-engaged groups in society provide a valuable opportunity the NHS cannot afford to miss.

This Briefing outlines how NHS can build mutually beneficial relationships with sports bodies, both to promote sport as a way to physical and mental wellbeing, and to use the expertise, profile and attraction of sports clubs to reach greater numbers of people more effectively. It sets out some of the benefits that collaboration with sport can bring, and includes key lessons and case studies others can use to inform their plans. It also emphasises the value of the NHS Sport and Health Programme – a national initiative run by the NHS Confederation.

**What is ‘sport’?**

“All forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.”

European Sports Charter
Improving physical and mental wellbeing is a priority for members of the new health and wellbeing boards, including local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and local Healthwatch. In addition, the importance of meeting this objective to fulfil the NHS Mandate means the health benefits of sport and the vast opportunities presented by sporting organisations must now take centre stage.

**An unrivalled opportunity**

Organised sport plays a significant role in British society. For spectators and players, sport has wide-ranging appeal and reaches and engages people from different backgrounds. With a nation riding high on the legacy of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, sport provides an unrivalled opportunity to make a lasting difference to the nation’s physical and mental wellbeing.

**The benefits of health, wellbeing and physical activity**

It is hoped that the lasting legacy of the London Olympic and Paralympic Games will be an increased uptake in people engaging in sport and other forms of physical recreation. This in turn will help combat health issues caused by increasingly sedentary lifestyles and rising rates of obesity. Such lifestyles present risks of long-term health problems, both directly, through the increase in Type II diabetes, hypertension, raised levels of problematic cholesterol, fat-related cancers and dementia, and indirectly, through reducing social contact and heightened levels of stress, depression and poor mental health.

Achieving a healthier lifestyle is a significant side effect of participation in sport. It makes it easier to maintain a healthy weight, reduce the risks of inactivity and improve mental and physical wellbeing. It also provides a sense of purpose, widens social contact and gives additional structure to daily lives.

Over the last 20 years, there has been recognition of the influence sport can have in supporters’ behaviour. Most of the major sporting stadia are situated within the most deprived communities. However, historically the relationship has mostly been one way with fans attending matches and little effort made to reach the local population. A number of changes have emerged with the stadia recognising their responsibility to promote their supporters’ health and safety, such as smoking bans; alcohol restrictions; availability of sun screens; healthy eating.

**The role of sport**

- Football has over 7 million adult participants, in addition to 5 million participants in schools, and over 500,000 volunteers.
- Rugby Union and Rugby League have over 190,000 and 57,000 weekly participants respectively.
- Around 196,000 adults play cricket at least once a week. Angling has over 4 million participants in the UK.
- Many people do not play a sport but are part of a very large and loyal fan base of clubs: the Premier League reports annual matchday attendances of over 13 million; the Football League has over 4 million registered fans, with a matchday attendance of 16.2 million and TV coverage of 28.7 million each year; 2 million people attended Rugby League Super League matches in 2012, with 29 million viewers on TV.

**“If a million more people across the country played sport each week, it would save the taxpayer £22.5 billion in health and associated costs.”**

Sport England

**Realising the dividends of sporting organisations**

Sports clubs can use their relationship with fans to attract them to wellbeing-related activities. There is emerging recognition of the opportunities sports create for targeting previously under-engaged groups. Sports clubs often have attractive, iconic premises which fans feel comfortable accessing, and which can provide an ideal location for delivering health services. Sport clubs can also often engage fans more easily than statutory bodies. As such, collaborations between health and sports organisation offer significant mutual benefits.

Sport England
opportunities; safety issues; access issues and anti-vilification/anti-discrimination policies.

Today, stadia that have a capacity of over 10,000 have to comply with the requirements for a safety certificate, which include having adequate medical and first aid arrangements.

Some clubs, such as Millwall Football Club, are transforming their facilities beyond basic first aid, with GPs and nursing staff providing support to many individuals who are either identified as having problems while at the game or prefer to use the facilities over that of other local providers.

Building links with communities

Clubs have made greater efforts to integrate with their communities. Most have community development officers who undertake outreach work with schools, youth work and other local organisations. The larger professional clubs have charitable foundations or trusts whose focus is on working with local communities through schools, clubs and community groups, and the wider public.

Although much of this engagement relates to increasing participation in sport, there is a major focus on promoting health and wellbeing messages with specific programmes on healthy eating, being more active, self-esteem, mental wellbeing and avoiding the dangers of drugs and knife crime. They also advocate schemes in partnership with bodies like Job Centre Plus and specialist charities to support the local unemployed or older people who have become isolated. In many cases, these initiatives target those who may be disengaged from mainstream health promotion activities, but who are attracted to initiatives because they are being run by their local sports club.

Most sports are taking action to broaden their appeal and are developing different forms of their games to attract new participants. In Rugby League, ‘touch rugby’ has become a popular sport for people whose anxiety about injury deters them from the full contact game. Within the Yorkshire and Humber region, a Department of Health sponsored touch rugby league targeted those over 32 years old and attracted over 1,000 players in one season, for a minimal investment. All of the participants surveyed said they would like to carry on playing the sport.

Meeting local needs

There are a number of ways in which sports and clubs have developed their role to reflect the public health and wellbeing agenda. This is seen at club and national level, either as a response to campaigns, such as Change 4 Life, or in response to supporters’ needs, such as Premier League Health and Rugby League Cares/Sport Relief Mental Wellbeing programme (see case studies on pages 4 and 5). In both programmes, clubs worked with local health experts to uncover unmet needs and a complementary role for the club.

Many clubs have developed their own local initiatives. The Tackling Men’s Health programme with the Leeds Rhinos saw specialist men’s health nurses setting up store in bars, cafes and entrance areas before the matches started, to undertake health checks with fans. The club also ran a successful weight loss group for men, where retention levels and overall weight loss were higher than the standard programmes. Many of the participants reported that they had only joined because of the connection with the club.

Approaches tailored to the needs, preferences and behaviours of a target group are more likely to be effective. Many efforts to influence men’s ill health are challenging and activities delivered through traditional channels often have limited effect.

Within the English Premier League, a three-year initiative saw funding made available for 16 clubs to employ health trainers who worked in the club stadia and also in the community, to attract young men into physical activity. This group was selected as having significant unmet health needs while not engaging with local health services. Through making
‘The scheme highlights the wide range of audiences sport engages with and the contribution it makes to wider policy priorities’

the engagement enjoyable and targeting specific health advice in short interventions, the initiative was able to bring about changes in health behaviour. Each club responded to local needs and set up different initiatives, such as midnight badminton for south Asian shift workers, a football league for homeless men and stadium walks. The scheme highlights the wide range of audiences sport engages with and the contribution it makes to wider policy priorities.

Other initiatives have carefully considered the needs of other groups, including women’s health and that of teenagers and young adults (Sportivate). Many studies focus on encouraging and measuring changes in behaviour and identifying what does and does not work. Building on this, the Scottish Premier League is trialling a Football Fans in Training (FFIT) initiative to assess the effectiveness of an intervention aimed at men to improve their levels of physical activity and to lose weight.

Benefits of working with sports clubs

Building partnerships with clubs enables health and wellbeing boards to access a wide range of benefits, skills and expertise, including:

- services that are directly relevant to promoting better public health, such as healthy eating, physical activity and mental wellbeing, and working with specific groups, including younger and older people
- trained and qualified staff, including nurses, dieticians, physiotherapists and psychologists
- public relations and communications skills that can contribute to campaigns and initiatives; easy routes to accessing large numbers of people, including at matches, when it is known when a large crowd will be present, making planning easier
- fans are interested in what the clubs and players say and do
- locations, access and opening hours of clubs mean it is easy for locals to get to, which makes them an attractive place for activities. An activity at a well-known club may be more appealing than other venues, and fans may feel more comfortable in a familiar setting
- studies suggest that fans welcome health and wellbeing initiatives at the ground

Case study: Rugby League promotes mental wellbeing

As part of a wider programme to promote mental wellbeing in Rugby League communities, Rugby League Cares, in conjunction with Super League clubs, the NHS Confederation’s Mental Health Network, NHS Choices and Leeds Metropolitan University’s Institute for Health and Wellbeing, ran a pilot mental wellbeing campaign in September 2012 focusing on Round 27 (the last match of the main Super League season).

Its aim was to promote wellbeing through the Five Ways to Wellbeing, using media interviews with players, websites, t-shirts worn at matches, leaflets and a dedicated web page.

Leeds Metropolitan University’s research with fans showed that well over 90 per cent of fans welcomed the idea of a mental wellbeing campaign.
One of the largest academic studies of men's health in England found that Premier League football clubs have a powerful effect on changing men's health, especially those regarded as hard to reach and whose lifestyle choices lead to a substantial burden on NHS services.

Premier League Health, a £1.63 million three-year programme, was a national men’s health promotion initiative, engaging over 10,000 men. Sixteen clubs were awarded funding to run programmes to meet local needs, identified in conjunction with partner agencies. The programmes were delivered by health trainers, managers and health professionals who received education and training in behavioural change techniques and men’s health promotion.

The programme evaluation found that top-level football clubs can encourage positive lifestyle changes in working-age men and can deliver effective health promotion campaigns. Three-quarters of men made positive health changes through participating in Premier League Health. These included:

- a quarter reducing harmful lifestyle risk factors
- over 40 per cent improving their level of physical activity
- a third moving to a healthier weight category
- 30 per cent reducing harmful levels of alcohol consumption.

The study found that many participants had multiple problematic lifestyle behaviours, and many did not view themselves as having poor health. Over a third never consulted their GP and over half never used health advice and information services.

Why did it work?

The study gave a major insight into the types of intervention that work with this group.

- Combining the appeal of professional football clubs with the opportunity to develop health in a ‘male-friendly’ way represented a unique opportunity for reaching men.

- Football-based awareness-raising events and outreach activities were especially important for reaching men who were ambivalent about orthodox health-promotion activities.

- The informal approach of Premier League Health staff and familiar settings such as stadia were essential for encouraging regular involvement in physical activity and lifestyle sessions. Such surroundings were seen as having substantial advantages over conventional NHS locations.

- The interventions incorporated socially-supportive environments that facilitated a sense of belonging and a fun and enjoyable atmosphere. For many men, this experience supported maintaining newly-acquired healthier behaviours.

The study outlined key lessons for practitioners on how to assess needs, plan, implement and evaluate gender-specific health interventions implemented in and by football clubs. Central to Premier League Health was engagement with public bodies. Clubs communicated key health messages to a wide audience through one-off events and regular sessions to raise awareness and signpost people to local services. In some cases, the programme had wider benefits, for instance on employment.
• health and wellbeing boards and clubs could apply jointly for funding, particularly as most clubs have their own charitable foundations.

In addition to increasing participation in a sport, there are many possibilities for professional sports clubs to be commissioned to act as health-promoting organisations, including delivering health-related services and initiatives. There are already many successful examples.

Making change happen

One of the core commitments of the NHS Responsibility Deal is to increase levels of physical activity. The Responsibility Deal Physical Activity Network is being established to help coordinate action on the Olympic legacy. The Behaviour Change Network is tasked with identifying how national expertise in behavioural sciences can be harnessed to help guide approaches to improving public health.

The early work of both these networks reinforces the benefits to be had by engaging with sport as a way of ‘nudging’ participants towards health-enhancing behaviour. This work will be supported by the creation of the National Centre of Excellence for Sport and Exercise Medicine (NCSEM).

The NHS Sport and Physical Activity Challenge

The NHS Sport and Physical Activity Challenge is part of the wider NHS Sport and Health programme. It is specifically aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of NHS staff through sport and physical activity. It is led by NHS Confederation chief executive, Mike Farrar, in his role as the National NHS Sport and Physical Activity Champion.

The NHS Sport and Physical Activity Challenge was launched by Sir David Nicholson in 2010. It aims to use the power of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to engage NHS staff in sport and physical activity and create a lasting health and wellbeing legacy. It particularly seeks to encourage staff not currently engaged in sport or physical activity to make a change.

The challenge consists of a range of sport and physical activity programmes, from pedometer challenges between wards/departments, to the first NHS ‘funtriathlon’ and ‘NHS olympics’. The scheme has created partnerships nationally and locally to support NHS organisations who want to develop a programme as part of their staff health and wellbeing programme. Since its inception, many NHS organisations have gained their bronze, silver or gold accreditation certificate in recognition for the work they have done and their success in delivering on the challenge.

NHS organisations involved in the NHS Sport and Physical Activity Challenge report improved morale and team working, as well as an increase in positive responses to staff surveys.

• Over 75 per cent of NHS organisations in the north west have developed sport and physical activity programmes.
• 4,000 staff from Guy’s and St Thomas’s NHS Trust clocked up over 1 billion steps between them and tried out 20 new sports as well as raising over £65,000 for local charities.
• NHS staff across Leeds clocked up over 1 million active minutes and hosted a number of sporting events across NHS organisations.
• East of England SHA has led a staff health and wellbeing programme across NHS organisations and other local businesses.
• In Somerset, the challenge brought around £100,000 of savings and improvements in health, fitness, patient care, morale and team work as a result.
Get involved
The programme has traditionally been aimed at NHS provider trusts, but has now been extended to commissioning organisations with further opportunities for GPs and other primary care staff, as well as staff working for non-NHS providers of health services.

You will need:
• enthusiastic staff to promote this in the organisation (see also Implementing NICE public health guidance for the workplace – overcoming barriers and sharing success)
• commitment and support from your chief executive – leadership is crucial for success. All of the NHS organisations receiving an accreditation certificate from Sir David Nicholson had to demonstrate executive-level support for increasing sport and physical activity in the workplace, with many chief executives and board members participating in events.

NHS Sport and Physical Activity Challenge accreditation
Have you already taken up the challenge? You could be eligible to receive a Sport and Activity Challenge accreditation certificate. The deadline for submissions is 30 March 2013.

Email Sue Henry, national director, NHS Sport and Health, at NHSSportandhealth@hotmail.co.uk to put forward a submission or to find out more.

Further information
To find out more about the NHS Sport and Physical Activity Challenge, and view examples of what other NHS organisations are already doing, visit www.sportandphysicalactivity.nhs.uk

For further information, please contact Sue Henry, national director, NHS Sport and Health, at NHSSportandhealth@hotmail.co.uk

NHS Responsibility Deal
If you are already (or intend to get) involved in the NHS Sport and Physical Activity Challenge, we would encourage you to also sign up to the NHS Responsibility Deal and pledge your support to improving public health in England.

To find out more about the NHS Responsibility Deal and how to sign up, visit www.responsibilitydeal.dh.gov.uk
References and further information

Sport England provides a range of tools and research for purposes, including making the case for sport and understanding participation. These include:

- **Improving health through participation in sport: a review of research and practice**, British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group
- local sports profiles and mini sports profiles: [www.sportengland.org/support_advice/local_government/local_sport_profiles.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/support_advice/local_government/local_sport_profiles.aspx)
- sporting profiles for local areas, bringing together data on sporting participation and provision
- small area participation estimates: [www.sportengland.org/research/understanding_participation/small_area_estimates.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/understanding_participation/small_area_estimates.aspx)
- local sport maps showing participation at the middle-level super-output area (MSOA), with the option for overlaying facility data
- the Value of Sport Monitor: [www.sportengland.org/research/value_of_sport_monitor.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/value_of_sport_monitor.aspx) – an online monitoring service of the most up-to-date reference sources and critical reviews of published research evidence on the contribution of sport to a range of broader social issues, including both physical fitness and health and psychological health and wellbeing
- Sports Market Segmentation: [www.sportengland.org/research/market_segmentation.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/market_segmentation.aspx) – an online tool to develop understanding of local markets and allow more effective targeting.

Acknowledgements

The NHS Confederation would like to thank:

- Professor Alan White, Professor of Men’s Health, Institute for Health and Wellbeing, Leeds Metropolitan University
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- Jane Riley, independent consultant
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- Sue Henry, national director, NHS Sport and Health,
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