



CP-Life
Research Centre
Cerebral Palsy Lifespan Health
& Well-being Research Centre

POLICY BRIEF

Supporting Physical Activity for Young People with Physical Disabilities

Cross-Sector Collaboration for Community Participation

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Executive Summary

Physical inactivity has significant health and wellbeing implications for young people with physical disabilities, contributing to poorer physical and social health outcomes and increased health inequities. The importance of addressing this issue is recognised across a range of national policies.

These include:

1. 2025 Programme for Government
2. Sport Ireland's Inclusion in Sport Statement of Commitment and Action (2024)
3. Health Service Executive (HSE) Service Improvement Roadmap 2023-2026

Each of these policies make a commitment to improving access to physical activity for people with disabilities and improving their health and well-being. This policy brief presents 3 recommendations that address these policy priorities to improve the involvement of people with physical disabilities in sport and physical activity and improve their health and wellbeing. Additionally, the recommendations are aligned with Sláintecare & Programme for Government 2025 (SC2025+) ambition to “strengthen integrated care through the health regions and enhance productivity and value for money within available resources.”

Decision makers call to action:

1. Fund and implement cross sector initiatives to improve integration between disability services and community activities to improve efficiencies, leverage existing expertise and improve community physical activity participation for young people with physical disabilities
2. Develop and deliver joint training programmes with professionals to support improved knowledge, skills, confidence and attitudes to supporting community physical activity for young people with physical disabilities
3. Develop and evaluate national best-practice guidelines for cross-sector collaboration to strengthen the evidence base, support consistent implementation, and determine the impact on physical activity participation among young people with physical disabilities.

Evidence Base

This policy brief was informed by:

- 1. A scoping review of international literature**
- 2. Two World Café events**

The scoping review was conducted to determine how healthcare and community providers of physical activity collaborate to support young people with physical disabilities to be active in their communities. This review is published in a peer reviewed international journal. Accessible here: <https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.70209>.

We hosted two World Café events during school holidays in 2024 and 2025 within a community location. Seventy-Five young people with disabilities, their families, healthcare professionals, sport and physical activity professionals and volunteers attended. One of the key messages across these events was a need to reduce siloed working and develop partnerships across sectors, with a shared goal across sectors to support community physical activity for young people with physical disabilities.



System fragmentation across sectors is problematic there is a need for improved communication, confidence and utilisation of resources and expertise

Context

1. In 2021, a new model of disability services was introduced nationally with intent to provide fairer access to services, utilising resources more effectively
2. The new model primarily aims to ensure that every child can have a childhood of inclusive experiences across settings, developing relationships, new skills and interests
3. Despite this, the integration of disability services with community physical activity clubs and organisations is lacking, hindering participation
4. Simultaneously, there is an openness and willingness of sport and physical activity clubs and organisations to include people with disabilities in their activities, though they lack experience and confidence in their knowledge and skills to support participation.

What did we find?

- ✓ We identified nine examples of collaboration in six different countries across Europe, North America and Oceania
- ✓ Strategies included: financial support, equipment provision, logistics and administration, programme delivery, programme planning & development, knowledge sharing, safety provision, building a supportive network, individualised support
- ✓ There is a shift towards more coordinated approaches between sectors supporting physical activity participation for young people with physical disabilities
- ✓ Current strategies for collaboration show promise but are underdeveloped, underreported, and unevaluated, limiting our understanding of their effectiveness and ability to be scaled



**Knowing that there would be someone there
to guide you and support you just makes
participation in physical activity a lot easier**

Young person with physical disability

Summary

Improving physical activity participation for young people with physical disabilities requires coordinated action across sectors. By prioritising cross sector initiatives, investing in joint training programmes, and developing evidence-informed best practice guidelines, decision makers can strengthen service integration, maximise existing expertise and resources, maximise return on investment and create more opportunities for participation in community physical activity for young people with physical disabilities.

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