

## MENTAL WELLBEING

### PAUL FARMER

Chief Executive of Mind

"Regular physical activity has the potential to have a significant impact on the prevention, treatment and management of a range of mental health problems. Having a mental health problem should never be a barrier to being physically active so it's essential that those of us with a mental health problem have the opportunity to access appropriate, effective local services that can support the development of active lifestyles available for everyone. This report highlights the need for physical activity policy to go beyond speaking purely about physical health, and raises some practical measures that can impact on people's mental wellbeing."



Fig 13.

## POSITIVE STEPS

*Every person who has a mental health diagnosis should have access to an evidence-based physical activity intervention, and be central to its design and implementation.*



## INTRODUCTION

More than a million antidepressants are now dispensed in the UK every week – an increase of nearly 60 per cent in the last decade.<sup>26</sup> The UK is developing an expensive over-reliance on medication, despite the increasingly powerful evidence-base demonstrating the powerful, long-term positive effects regular activity can have on mental health and wellbeing.

From enhancing people's mood, to reducing stress and improving self-esteem, physical activity plays a crucial role in mental wellbeing and prevents the onset of symptoms of conditions such as depression, dementia and cognitive decline.<sup>27</sup>

People living with a mental health problem are more likely to be sedentary. Many feel like they face insurmountable barriers to getting active, compounding the damaging effect of their mental health problem with poorer physical health as well.

The positive effect physical activity can have on mental health is now understood. People living with mental health problems should be supported to get active as early as possible and physical activity incorporated accordingly in all management and treatment pathways. As well as being an effective treatment for specific mental health conditions, regular physical activity can play a huge role in improving overall mental wellbeing, affecting productivity, attentiveness and the confidence of individuals, more of which needs to be highlighted and championed by government, mental health groups and the activity sector.

<sup>26</sup> HSCIC, *Prescriptions Dispensed in the Community, Statistics for England - 2003-2013*, (July 2014), <<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB14414>>, [accessed 21/09/15]

<sup>27</sup> Mental Health Foundation, *Let's Get Physical: The impact of physical activity on wellbeing*, May 2013, <<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/awareness-week-2013-report/>>, [accessed 08/09/15] <<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/awareness-week-2013-report/>>, [accessed 08/09/15] <<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/awareness-week-2013-report/>>, [accessed 08/09/15] <<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/awareness-week-2013-report/>>, [accessed 08/09/15]



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

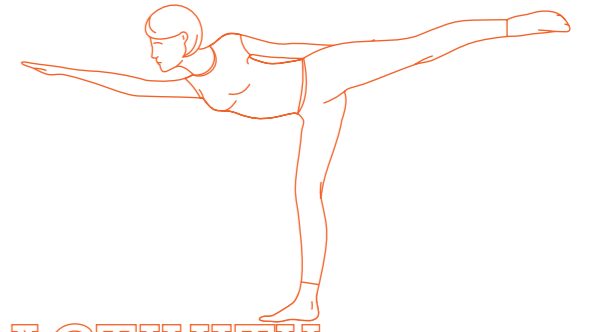
**1 Every person living with a mental health problem faces different obstacles and barriers to getting active. Varied, flexible activity solutions should be provided to allow each person to receive a tailored approach.**

>> Every person who has a mental health diagnosis should have access to a named physical activity intervention in line with NICE guidance, based upon proven evidence-based behavioural interventions such as motivational interviewing.

>> People living with mental health problems should be involved in the design and implementation of any physical activity intervention or scheme. Local authorities should work with volunteers from local mental health peer support groups such as Local Minds to inspire and train users to run local activity opportunities.

>> Targeted campaigns and programmes such as Sport England and Mind's Get Set Go programme and Bike Minded should be championed by funding bodies and the mental health awareness community in order to raise activity levels. The wider physical activity sector should act to support these initiatives and provide an inclusive environment for people with a mental health problem to enjoy physical activity.

TARGETED PROGRAMMES SHOULD BE CHAMPIONED BY FUNDING BODIES AND THE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS COMMUNITY TO RAISE ACTIVITY LEVELS.



THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES SHOULD MAKE A WIDER REFERENCE TO THE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

**2 All mental health practitioners should be fully informed of, and supported to act upon, the vast potential physical activity has to improve mental health. Mental health awareness groups should work closely with the activity sector to share knowledge and best practice.**

>> Mental health awareness groups should seek to partner with training providers in the physical activity sector to ensure that provision of physical activity for people with a mental health problem is widely acknowledged and recognised by the relevant deliverers within the physical activity sector.

>> Physical activity providers should make use of existing mental health networks to share best practice on supporting people with mental health problems to do more physical activity, especially in relation to existing physical activity on referral pathways for people with a mental health diagnosis.

>> The physical activity sector should work with mental health awareness groups to ensure that people with a potential mental health problem are given the appropriate guidance and support and that leisure operators and sports bodies are able to recognise signs of mental health problems and signpost accordingly.

**3 Although physical activity has a huge impact upon the treatment and management of specific mental health problems, physical activity plays a wider role in improved overall mental wellbeing. Government should recognise the unique role of physical activity in terms of its ability to positively affect other behaviours.**

>> The Chief Medical Officer's physical activity guidelines should make a wider reference to the positive mental health benefits of physical activity.

>> Public Health England, as part of its wider investment in the social marketing of physical activity, should – alongside local partners and the physical activity sector seek to promote the understanding of the mental wellbeing benefits of an active lifestyle and champion a campaign to boost the public's understanding the mood-improving impact of regular exercise.