

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
10 Downing Street
Westminster
London
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12 February 2021

Dear Prime Minister

We, a coalition of organisations and individuals from across sport, health, academia, and entertainment, are writing to seek your assurances that essential facilities such as gyms, pools, and leisure centres are given the fullest possible support to survive and recover from the economic crisis caused by Covid-19 – because they have a vital role in our recovery from this health crisis.

We fully appreciate that these are challenging times for our nation's decision makers, but despite the breadth of our group, we share a common belief that health solutions must be prioritised. To that end, we are deeply concerned by the latest forecasts from the trade body ukactive that up to 2,800 gyms and leisure facilities in the UK are at risk of permanent closure, resulting in the loss of 100,000 jobs and impacting about 6.6 million users, if they do not receive greater, tailored support.

There are around 7,200 fitness and leisure facilities in all, serving more than 17 million users, and we stand united in our belief that these places are integral to improving the physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing of our communities. The services they provide represent a clear extension into effective health and social policies at national and local government level.

We collectively know that physical inactivity is the fourth highest factor in premature morbidity in the UK, leading to 37,000 premature deaths each year. This will tragically be exacerbated by Covid-19, and the deep and significant drop in activity across all ages and backgrounds. Yet, these facilities will be needed to support not only the rehabilitation of millions of people recovering from the effects of Covid-19 and long-Covid, but to support the impact of wider health concerns indirectly impacted by the pandemic, especially among vulnerable groups, children and older adults.

We know that for every pound the Government spends on sport and physical activity, it gets almost four pounds in return: savings into the billions on serious physical and mental health conditions, healthcare, social care, and preventing an estimated 30 million GP visits a year. Fitness facilities help reduce rates of breast cancer, colon cancer, obesity, Type 2 diabetes, musculoskeletal conditions, dementia, anxiety and depression – not to mention boosting our resilience to cardiorespiratory diseases, including Covid-19. Furthermore, 66% of cancer prehabilitation and rehabilitation takes place in leisure centres.

The coronavirus pandemic is also having a profound impact on our nation's mental health. As we build back better, physical activity can help to reduce the risk of depression by 30% and can be as effective as medication for people with mild-moderate depression and anxiety. It brings people together, reducing loneliness and isolation. This is a sector with solutions to many of the issues in your in-tray.

The essential facilities provided by the fitness and leisure sector are also a cradle for developing our national sporting heroes, who in turn inspire greater physical activity among the next generation. For many sport stars, including our Team GB Olympians and Paralympians, their journey

started in their local gym, pool, or leisure centre. They will look to these facilities with a great level of gratitude, often as the birthplace of their dreams, helping them on the road to achieving success.

The threat of losing these places has brought us together as a collective voice, to express our concern and hope that everything is done to ensure these essential facilities are available to support our recovery from Covid-19, and enhance the health of the nation, now and long into the future.

Yours sincerely

Aging 2.0
Arthritis Action
Associated Retirement Community Operators
Association for Physical Education
Association of Chartered Physiotherapists for People with a Learning Disability
The Black Stork Charity
British Association of Sport Rehabilitators and Trainers
British Society of Rehabilitation Medicine
The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
College of Podiatry
College of Medicine
Design Council
Independent Neurorehabilitation Providers Alliance
International Longevity Centre – UK
Longevity International
Mind
MS Society
Muscular Dystrophy UK
The Physiological Society
Rehabilitation Workers Professional Network
Royal College of Occupational Therapists
Royal Osteoporosis Society
Spinal Injuries Association
Stroke Association
Versus Arthritis
Youth Sport Trust

Dr Nighat Arif
Zoe Ball
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Liam Heath
Alfie Hewett
Anna Hopkin
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Sarah Lindsay
John McAvoy
Davina McCall
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Bryony Page
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Keri-anne Payne
Jonnie Peacock
Leon Rolle
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David Walliams
David Weir
Max Whitlock
Prof Greg Whyte
Dr Zoe Williams