



Report:
**Involvement in
Physical Activity
during the Covid
Pandemic**





Contents

1. Aim of the Survey	3
2. Participants.....	4
3. Number of Disabled People or Those with an Impairment.	4
4. Gender Split	5
5. Breakdown of the Ages	6
6. Disabled Participants.....	7
7. Physical Activity Levels Since Covid-19.....	8
8. Activities engaged with during Covid-19.....	12
9. Satisfaction with Physical Activity Levels	13
10. Physical Activity Benefits and Positives.....	13
11. Challenges to Engaging in Physical Activity.....	15
12. Changes That Could Be Made to Enhance Experience	17
13. Latent Demand for Physical Activity Opportunities	19
14. Recommendations for Improving Physical Activity Opportunities for Disabled People Post-Covid	20
15. Comparison to the data produced by Activity Alliance...	24
16. Executive Summary	25



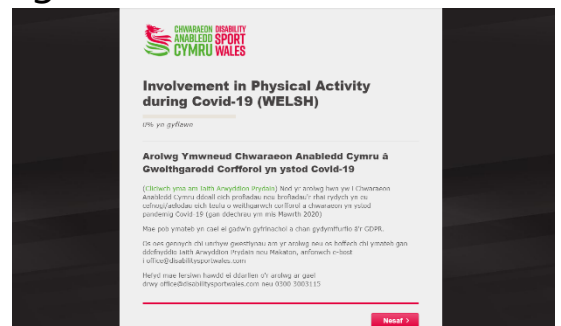
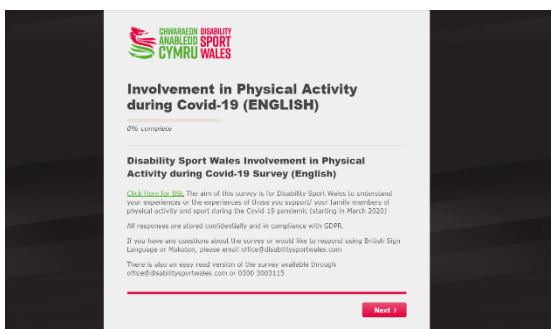


1. Aim of the Survey

The aim of the survey was for Disability Sport Wales to capture the experiences of disabled people taking part in physical activity during the Covid-19 pandemic. Following on from gaining a national picture of disabled people’s experience of accessing physical activity and sport, Disability Sport Wales created a number of recommendations and suggestions as to how disabled people’s experiences could be enhanced.

The survey was distributed online and paper format in English, Welsh, British Sign Language, and Easy Read.

The survey was distributed to all 22 local authorities, national governing bodies, national partner organisations (inc., Wales Deaf Sports, Learning Disability Wales), national and local advocacy groups, housing associations, support services, health board social media pages, local sports clubs, local leisure centres, support services, local access groups, local forum groups, Welsh Government social media pages, the GOGA team, WG Disability Equality Group, and the DSW social media pages.



2. Participants

Overall, there was a total of 234 participants who completed either the online or paper version of the survey.

There were 27 views of the British Sign Language videos. The breakdown of the participants was as follows:

- **197** participants completed the online English version of the survey
- **3** participants completed the online Welsh version of the survey
- **15** participants completed the online Easy Read version of the survey
- **19** participants completed the paper Easy Read version of the survey

**A total of 234
participants completed
the survey**

3. Number of Disabled people or with an impairment

Of the participants who completed the surveys, 197 of those identified themselves, their family member, or the person they were supporting to complete the survey, as having a disability. The breakdown of the participants disabilities was as follows*:

- **12** identified as Blind or partially sighted
- **8** identified as Deaf or hard of hearing
- **156** described themselves as having an intellectual impairment (including Autism spectrum, ADHD, or Downs Syndrome)

**197 identified
themselves/their
family
member/the
person they
supported as
disabled**

- **82** described themselves as having a physical impairment (including various types of wheelchair user and ambulant with support equipment)

*Within the Easy Read surveys there was no question to identify specific disabilities

4. Gender Split

The gender split of those who completed the surveys was as follows:

50% identified as **female**
49% identified as **male**
1% preferred not to say

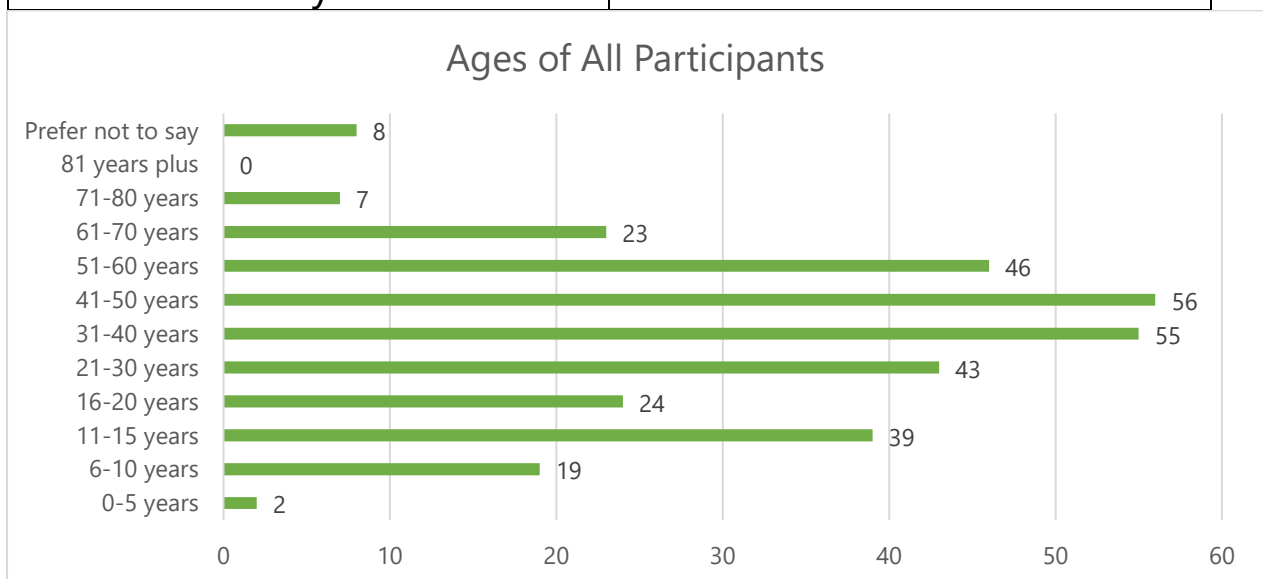
Of the disabled people who completed the survey the gender split was as follows:

41% identified as **female**
59% identified as **male**
0.5% preferred not to say

5. Breakdown of the Ages

Of those who completed the surveys, there was a spread across all age groups. This spread is shown below:

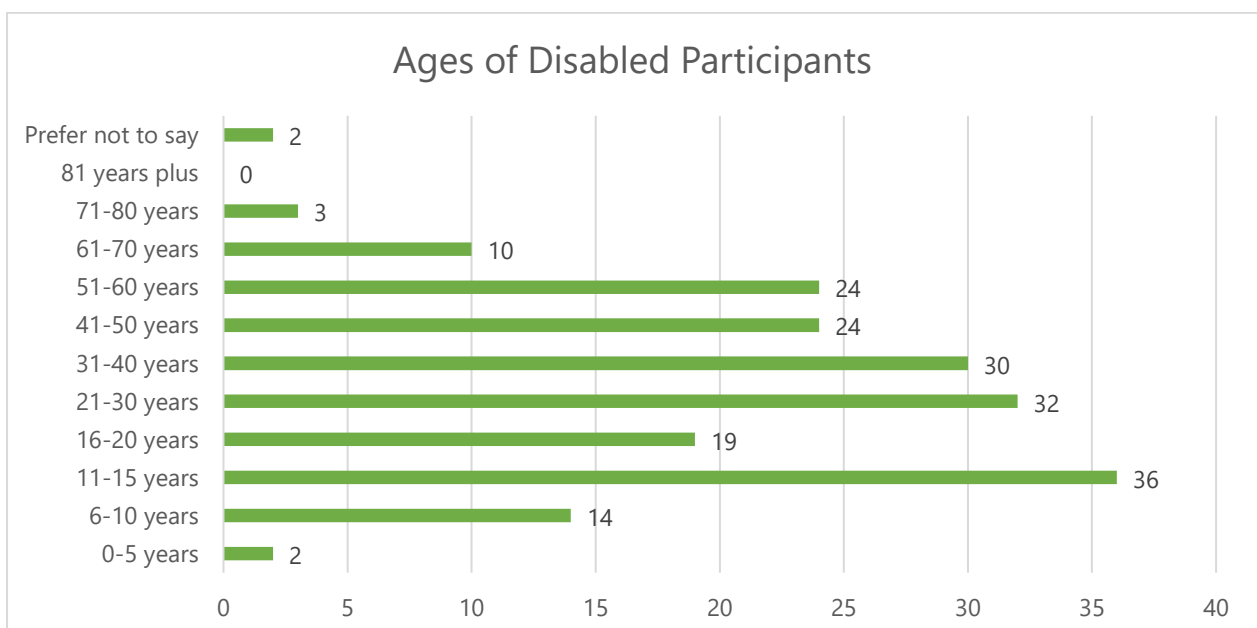
Age Categories	Participant Numbers
0-5 years	2
6-10 years	19
11-15 years	39
16-20 years	24
21-30 years	43
31-40 years	55
41-50 years	56
51-60 years	46
61-70 years	23
71-80 years	7
81 years plus	0
Prefer not to say	8



6. Disabled Participants

When breaking down the participants based upon whether they considered themselves to have an impairment, this was the spread across the ages:

Age Categories	Participant Numbers
0-5 years	2
6-10 years	14
11-15 years	36
16-20 years	19
21-30 years	32
31-40 years	30
41-50 years	24
51-60 years	24
61-70 years	10
71-80 years	3
81 years plus	0
Prefer not to say	2



7. Physical Activity Levels Since Covid-19

Disabled peoples' level of physical activity was negatively impacted by Covid-19, with **70%** of disabled people reporting that they did **less physical activity** during the pandemic.

Nineteen percent of disabled people reported that they had been able to **maintain their levels of physical activity** during the pandemic. **Only 11%** of disabled people reported that they were able to do **more physical activity** during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the physical activity levels of those individuals with certain impairments were more affected by Covid-19. For instance, it was found that **83%** of those with a **visual impairment were doing less physical activity**. **Fifty percent** of those with a **hearing impairment were doing less physical activity**. **Seventy-six percent** of those with an **intellectual impairment were doing less physical activity** and **71%** of those with a **physical impairment were doing less physical activity**.

As such, the physical activity levels of **those individuals with a visual impairment were most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic**.

When considering the ages of disabled people, the data showed that **79% of young disabled people** (0-20 years) were doing **less physical activity** during Covid and **54% of older disabled people** (over 61 years) were doing **less physical activity** during Covid. In comparison those disabled people

within the **middle age groups (21 to 60 years)**, **66%** were doing **less physical activity** due to Covid. Highlighting that the disabled people whose physical activity levels were **most affected by Covid-19 were the youngest people** within the population.

In contrast to the data collected by **Sport Wales**, where only **29% of young people** (16 to 34 years) were doing **less physical activity** and **44%** were doing **more physical activity** during the pandemic. Within **older age group** (55 years +) **40% were doing less** and **18%** were able to do **more physical activity**. In the **middle age groups** (35 to 54 years), **37%** were doing **less physical activity** and **31%** were doing **more physical activity**. As such highlighting that across the ages the physical activity levels of disabled people were much more negatively impacted by the pandemic than the general population surveyed by Sport Wales. This is particularly true for young disabled people who were found by Sport Wales to be generally doing more physical activity during the pandemic.

Age Groups	Disability Sport Wales	Sport Wales	
	Disabled	General population	Disability/ long standing health condition
Young people	79%	29%	N/A
Middle aged people	66%	37%	N/A
Older people	54%	40%	N/A
Across all ages	70%	36%	43%

The main reason that disabled people were unable to take part in physical activity during Covid-19 was that their normal **activities, clubs, or facilities were closed under the government-imposed restrictions**. Without these facilities, many disabled people were not able to take part in physical activity, as they were less able to exercise outdoors (e.g. lack of flat accessible places to take part in physical activity), not all the provisions for exercise were accessible for disabled people (e.g., exercise classes being run outside making hearing difficult and sessions not inclusive), and other disabled people reported that they did not have access to the equipment or support needed whilst these facilities were closed.

Other reasons for a reduction in disabled people's physical activity were:

- Worries about catching Covid, even when outside due to the busyness and overcrowding in places
- No motivation to take part in physical activity
- Having to home school children, so lack of time
- Reduced amounts of support available
- Increased levels of anxiety
- Schools limiting children's access to swimming pools and other facilities
- Either themselves or family members were shielding
- Reduced movement due to working from home

However, **92%** said they **wanted to do more or continue doing more** physical activity post-Covid-19. Therefore, this desire by disabled people to return to their pre-Covid levels of physical activity or continue doing more should be maximised




and an increased effort should be made to make physical activity opportunities inclusive.



8. Activities engaged with during Covid-19

The disabled people who were able to take part in physical activity detailed that the most common activity that they were able to do was walking or pushing. Seventy-four percent of disabled people reported having been **walking or pushing** over the 11 weeks prior to the survey being launched. Twenty-five percent took part in **digital classroom activities** and **20%** engaged in **cycling**. Beyond these activities disabled people have been able to take part in:

- Boccia
 - Running
 - Archery
 - Scootering
 - Dancing
 - Golf
 - Kayaking
 - Swimming
 - Lawn Bowls
 - Yoga
 - Trampolining
 - Swimming
 - Disability surfing
 - Using a static bike
- 

9. Satisfaction with Physical Activity Levels

During the Covid-19 pandemic, **only 29% of disabled people** were satisfied with the amount of physical activity they had been able to do, whereas **53% of non-disabled** who completed the survey **were satisfied** with the amount of physical activity they had been able to do. Showing that **disabled people are much less likely to be satisfied with their level of physical activity during Covid-19.**

10. Physical Activity Benefits and Positives

Of the activities that disabled people were able to take part in there were several things that worked well for them. These included being able to still gain **physical and psychological well-being benefits**, such as maintaining fitness levels, being able to socially connect through exercise with others, and spending time outside. In addition, the activities that disabled people were able to take part in gave them the opportunity to **feel more in control** and **have more autonomy**. For instance, they were able to choose when they took part in the activity, where they took part, for how long, the intensity, and the pace.

Online and outdoor activities were found by some disabled people to be **more inclusive and accessible**. For instance, outdoor and online activities allowed them to adapt the activity to suit their needs and use audio description. Whereas previously inside a gym or sports hall they had struggled to follow instructions. Furthermore, some disabled people were able to find/connect with an online tutor or coach who

understood their impairment and would adapt sessions to meet their needs, making sessions much more inclusive.

In addition to these benefits, there were also two disabled people who found that the online activities created during Covid-19 allowed them to train for and take part in competitions.

"The DSW you tube videos were the best available for us. Length, information, variety of sport and presentation. We are club secretaries and they were the ones we promoted most"


"The tutor's ability to adapt the exercise and class delivery to my own needs"

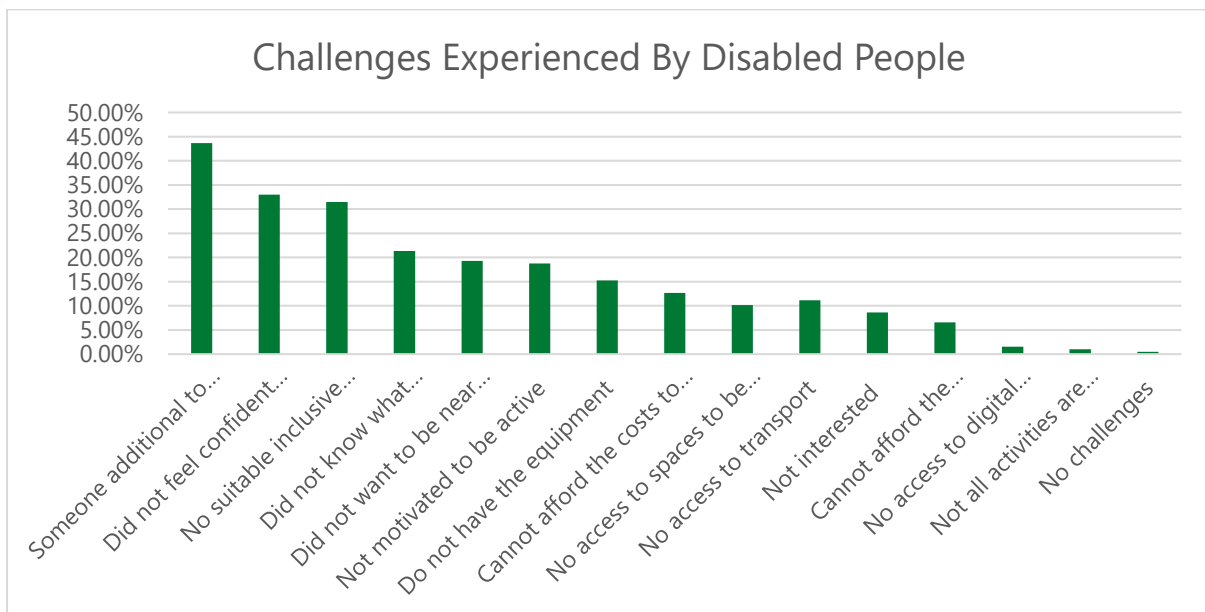
"Didn't have to worry about following instructions that I couldn't hear well or in buildings that were not suitable for hearing loss. Can go at my own pace & at a time convenient to me."

11.Challenges to Engaging in Physical Activity

Despite there being many benefits to disabled people taking part in physical activity, several challenges to engaging in physical activity during the Covid-19 pandemic were also experienced. These challenges included **44%** of disabled people needing **someone additional to support them** to take part. **Thirty-three percent** of disabled people **did not feel confident enough** to take part. **Thirty-two percent** said there were **no suitable inclusive activities available**. **Twenty-two percent of disabled people did not know what activities were available** and **20% did not want to be near other people**.

The other challenges that existed for disabled people were:

- No access to digital technology
 - No access to spaces to be active
 - No access to transport
 - Do not have the equipment
 - Not motivated to be active
 - Cannot afford the costs to attend
 - Cannot afford the transport costs
- 



"I was very anxious during lockdown as not everyone considered social distancing which made going out even for a walk a challenge."

"Cost of activities is a big issue. They are so expensive!"

"I don't like the new system of booking a gym slot, so I have cancelled my gym membership due to booking slots is too stressful"

"Access and affording transport is a challenge"



12. Changes That Could Be Made to Enhance Experience

To overcome these challenges that disabled people have faced, suggestions have been made as to how disabled peoples' physical activity opportunities could be enhanced. The following suggestions have been made:

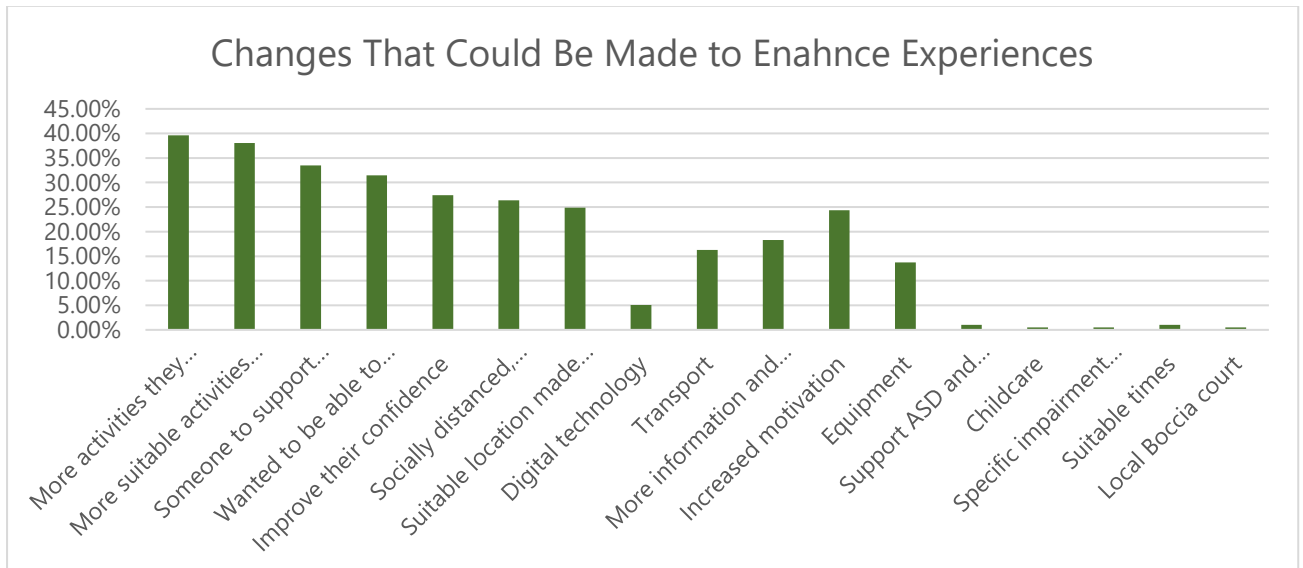
- **40%** of disabled people would like **more activities they were interested in**
- **38%** wanted more **suitable activities for their impairment** that were **inclusive**
- **34%** wanted **someone to support them**
- **32%** wanted to be able to **take part with friends**
- **27%** felt they wanted to **improve their confidence**
- **26%** wanted a **socially distanced, inclusive, and safe space** made available
- **25%** wanted a **suitable location made available** (e.g., a gym or a flat outdoor space)
- **24%** needed an **increase in motivation**

Some of the other suggestions to support disabled people to increase their levels of physical activity post-covid, include:

- Increased accessibility of digital technology
- Better access to transport
- More information and details of the activities available
- Suitable equipment being made available
- Support for ASD and mental health when accessing activities
- Childcare being made available
- Sessions being put on at suitable times



- Local Boccia courts being made available



"I would like to see more emails on all activities website, Facebook, etc. specified for deaf people. Some like me cannot phone or have special telephone"

"More focus on community not elite sports, particularly in rural areas. 83% of people acquire their impairments as they age. Little provision designed and targeted at the majority of disabled people who would like to still participate"

"I would like to go swimming if I had someone with me"

"More activities that caters for disabled children"



13. Latent Demand for Physical Activity Opportunities

When asked which physical activity opportunities disabled people would like available, **20% of disabled people reported wanting to engage with swimming.** This was either return to their previous sessions or swimming sessions that were supportive of intellectual impairments, suitable for those with epilepsy, where support was available, or there were more suitable sessions available (e.g., quiet swimming sessions, adult only, or inclusive aqua aerobics). Eleven percent **of disabled people wanted to take part in inclusive football sessions.** Eight percent **of people wanted more opportunity to engage in adapted cycling,** and **7% wanted to take part in gym activities with support.** For instance, disabled people wanted to return to gyms, but needed additional support to use equipment, be guided on which exercises to do, and have wheelchair access.

The other activities that disabled people wanted to take part in were:

- Water-based activities (e.g., surfing, rowing, kayaking, and canoeing)
- Martial arts (e.g., karate, judo)
- Racket based activities (e.g., badminton, tennis, squash, table tennis)
- Ball based activities (e.g., Boccia, wheelchair rugby, rugby, golf, basketball, cricket, bowls, rounders, hockey, ten-pin bowling, netball)

- Outdoor activities (e.g., cycling, running, horse riding, climbing, walking/ hiking/ pushing, dry slope skiing, archery)
- Strength and balance-based activities (e.g., yoga, Pilates, and tai chi)
- Gym based activities (e.g., boxing, trampolining, and gymnastics, dancing)
- Wheelchair or inclusive activities
- Soft play
- Singing
- Darts
- Multi-sports activities

In addition to the demand for more inclusive opportunities, to engage with these sports there was also a demand by disabled people to have more inclusive physical activity opportunities closer to them, particularly in the rural areas of Mid-Wales or where there were poor transport links (specifically Newport, Chepstow, and Bridgend).

14. Recommendations for Improving Physical Activity Opportunities for Disabled People Post-Covid

Outdoor Activities

- Provide inclusive outdoor activities with small groups for those who do not feel safe returning to indoor activities. Not all disabled people will feel safe returning to indoor


sport and physical activity due to not creating the immunity against Covid, despite having the vaccine.

- Provide accessible outdoor facilities for those who wish or prefer to exercise outside, but do not have access to flat spaces. This includes spaces for triking and pushing.

Well-being considerations

- Offer support and encouragement to those who may be feeling anxious or lacking the confidence to return to sport or physical activity. This may include a slow transition towards full face-to-face sessions by continuing virtual sessions or providing smaller groups or reaching out to everyone to show empathy and understanding.
- Physiotherapists and other health professionals to work closely with exercise providers to offer suitable exercises and activities using digital platforms while face-to-face sessions are not being provided.

Inclusive Sessions

- Across all disabled people there is a desire for more inclusive physical activity and sporting opportunities, in particular sessions that take into consideration their specific abilities.
 - Provide inclusive and safe opportunities for disabled children to take part in physical activity. Parents have reported that their disabled children have not had the chance to engage in safe physical activity and sporting opportunities within and outside of schools, whereas
- 

activities for non-disabled children have been able to return.

Virtual Sessions

- Provide virtual exercise classes and YouTube videos that are an hour in length, accessible, cover a variety of activities, and have adaptable options for disabled people to meet their specific abilities.
- If lockdowns do occur again or participants are not able to attend their regular session, ensure that every effort is made to keep interacting with participants and keep them involved.

Accessibility

- Have accessible and affordable transport available for disabled people to leisure centres and sporting activities.
- Provide free to access or minimal charge leisure or physical activity sessions for disabled people, as expensive costs can be a challenge.
- Invest in local leisure and sport centres to make them accessible, modern, clean, and suitable for all disabled people. This includes investing in catering facilities at leisure centres to ensure they are modern and clean.
- Provide details of leisure centre and physical activity sessions on accessible websites and social media platforms. When designing websites consider the needs of those with hearing impairments, visual impairments, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and intellectual impairments. Disabled people have reported struggling or finding it a



challenge to book sessions due to the methods of booking not being accessible. This includes avoid having to book leisure centre or activities over the phone, as this can be challenging for those with a hearing impairment.

- Within leisure centres, provide the opportunity for disabled people to safely access swimming pools and attend swimming sessions. Have support available for them should they require it.

15. Comparison to the data produced by Activity Alliance

When comparing this data to the data collected by Activity Alliance, there are a number of similarities. For instance, disabled people's physical activity levels across both data sets have been shown to have decreased as a result of Covid-19 and there has been an increase in the number of challenges that disabled people now face towards taking part in physical activity. As such the pandemic has disproportionately affected disabled people's ability to be physically active. Younger disabled people were more affected by Covid-19 than the overall disabled population.

One of the challenges, in a similar manner to what was found by Activity Alliance, was that disabled people did not receive information about the activities that were available to them and so did not know what activities they were able to do. There were other similarities in the challenges that disabled people faced, including; fears of not being able to socially distance, having less support, not being able to afford the activities, and not having or being able to access digital technology.

There was, however, some differences between the data, including disabled people being more affected by the closure of leisure facilities within Wales than non-disabled people. Those with a visual impairment were more likely to be affected by Covid-19 than the overall disabled population.

16. Executive Summary

Overall disabled people's physical activity levels have been affected by Covid-19 with young disabled people and those with visual impairments affected the most. The main challenge for disabled people when trying to take part in physical activity was the closure of facilities that they relied on to maintain their physical and mental health. However, disabled people did report being able to take part in some physical activity during the Covid-19 pandemic. These included engaging in outdoor or online activities, which for some was found to be a great positive as they were able to adapt the activity to their specific ability and go at their own pace. In particular, the Disability Sport Wales videos and online sessions were found to be the best online activities for disabled people. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, 92% of disabled people now wish to increase their physical activity levels.

As progress is being made to turn to the physical activity levels that existed pre-Covid, there have been some further challenges that disabled people have experienced. The biggest challenge has been gaining the support they need to access physical activity and having the confidence to return. This confidence is potentially due to having been isolated away from people for such a long time and because Covid has not gone away. Those with a compromised immunity and those for whom are unable to develop immunity even after vaccination still feel hesitant about returning to face-to-face indoor physical

activity. As such a number of recommendations have been made to help disabled people return to physical activity.

- 1. Continue to provide outdoor inclusive physical activity sessions in small groups.**
- 2. Enhance the outdoor spaces that are available for disabled people to exercise, such as improving flat areas for pushing, hand cycling, or triking.**
- 3. Recognise disabled people's concerns and lack of confidence to return to indoor physical activity.**
- 4. Health professionals to work in partnership with physical activity providers to offer specific guidance on returning to physical activity.**
- 5. Offer more inclusive physical activity sessions for all disabled people and impairment groups.**
- 6. Make every effort to continue to provide virtual sessions for those who require them and stay in contact if they are not yet ready to attend.**
- 7. Make leisure centres and physical activity sessions accessible through accessible transport and reducing the cost.**
- 8. Invest in leisure facilities to make them accessible for disabled people, including providing hearing loop technology and BSL trained staff.**
- 9. When physical activity sessions have an online booking system, make this easy to use and as accessible for all disabled people as possible. If**



there is an over the phone option, make sure there is an online alternative for those with hearing loss.

10. Within leisure centres, have support available for disabled people to access swimming pools and gym facilities.

