

RECONOMICS PLUS

Case
Study

Walking for Health

Aim: To enable everyone to have access to a short, free, friendly health walk within easy reach of where they live and to help them become and stay active.

Project summary

Walking for Health is an England-wide programme of health walk schemes. Local schemes run a regular programme of free community-based group walks, usually led by volunteers. It provides a sustainable, regular physical activity opportunity to support people to get active and stay active. With its focus on short, accessible walks it is particularly designed for participants with restricted mobility or fitness, people with declining health who want to remain active but at reduced levels, people new to physical activity and people recovering from ill health.



The national programme team, hosted by the Ramblers, work in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support, which helps provide the national infrastructure to facilitate consistent, high-quality local delivery. On a local level, schemes will link with other local organisations or community groups, and have formal or informal links with health and social care professionals to signpost their patients to the walks.

Impact

A recent independent evaluation of the programme found:

- A significant short-term overall increase in levels of weekly physical activity among participants after first joining the programme. However, this increase is generally not sustained and participants returned to the same level of activity they reported on joining the programme.

The fact that the programme encourages participants to maintain their activity levels is positive as the participants tend to be older, which is a time when many people decrease the amount of activity they do.



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Further information

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[@healthywalks](https://www.facebook.com/healthywalks)

www.walkingforhealth.org.uk

www.facebook.com/healthywalks

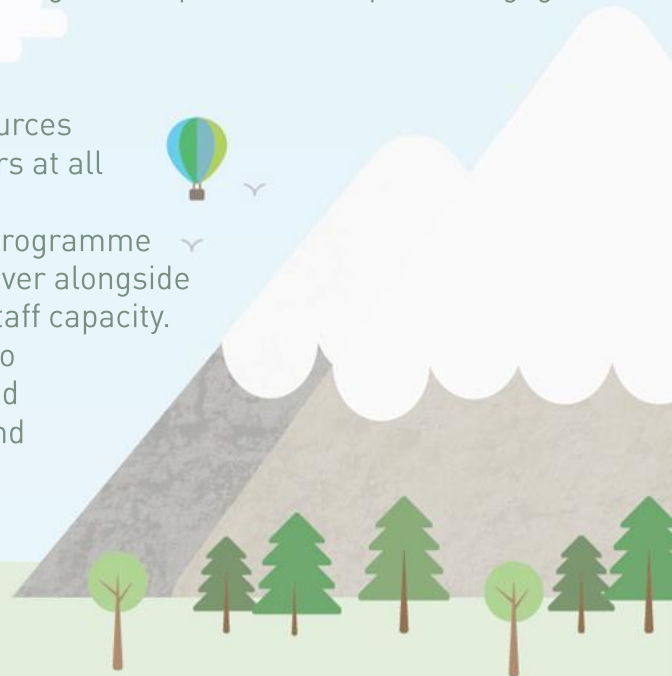
- There was an improvement observed in a number of measures of wellbeing, including general mental health, loneliness, and social interaction.
- An economic assessment indicates that Walking for Health has the potential to be highly cost-effective, at £3,775 per quality-adjusted life year (QALY) gained, while the financial return on investment to the NHS is estimated to be £3.36 per £1 invested.
- Walks provide participants with the opportunity to get to know their local area, opportunities for intergenerational communication and volunteers appreciate the opportunity to 'give something back' to their community.

Key learnings

- Walking for Health schemes need more support and resources to successfully engage under-represented groups and help them stay walking. More resources would increase schemes' outreach expertise, volunteer capacity and opportunities to establish local partnerships with community groups and health and social care professionals.
- Local volunteers are important 'champions' of the scheme in their local areas
- Integration of the promotion of walks with other health promotion activities helps reach the people who would most benefit.
- A range of short walk options – e.g. different lengths and paces – is helpful to engage people with different needs.

Future plans

- Improving the training, information and resources provided to schemes for supporting volunteers at all points of their volunteer journey.
- Testing how to roll-out a 12-week outreach programme called 'Every step counts' for schemes to deliver alongside their existing programme and with existing staff capacity.
- Testing new ways to support local schemes to establish formal partnerships with health and social care professionals to better engage and support people affected by, or at risk of developing, cancer and other long-term health conditions.



Key facts

Target audience

Open to all, but targeted activities are aimed at supporting inactive people or those at risk of inactivity

Setting

Across England

Length of the project

Walking for Health started in 2000. Since April 2012, the national programme has been led by the Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support. The partnership is set to continue until at least March 2018.

Funding

Macmillan and the Ramblers fund the national programme. Local schemes are funded by local councils, NHS organisations, charities and voluntary donations

Number of participants

Approximately 67,000 in the last financial year