



Exploring how physical activity can be better utilised within NHS Talking Therapies services to help improve mental health outcomes.

Webinar presenters



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What are NHS Talking Therapies services?

NHS Talking Therapies services provide support for adults with common mental health conditions

155 NHS Talking Therapies (formerly IAPT) service providers across England offering free support for adults

In 2021/22, 1.24m people accessed NHS Talking Therapies services

Talking therapies are psychological treatments for mental and emotional problems. The problems that talking therapies services can treat include:

- depression
- generalized anxiety
- social anxiety
- panic and agoraphobia
- other phobias
- obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- body dysmorphic disorder

Types of therapy:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- Guided self-help
- Counselling
- Behavioural activation
- Interpersonal therapy (IPT)
- Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR)
- Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT)
- Psychodynamic psychotherapy
- Couple therapy

Why is this important?

Evidence base

Despite the evidence base of the benefits of physical activity on mental health, physical activity is not routinely a part of treatment

High demand

Pandemic and cost of living impact on mental health. Services need to explore innovative ways that support patients to recover and self manage

Role of services

Services are positioned to support service users to overcome barriers such as motivation through the use of psychological techniques in traditional practice

Key Findings

Physical activity is widely acknowledged as important in improving outcomes for people with common mental health conditions

99%

of NHS Talking Therapies staff say it's very important

12 of 13

commissioners say it's very important

91%

of service users strongly agree or agree

There's widespread appetite to do more to increase physical activity levels through NHS Talking Therapies services

17%

of NHS Talking Therapies staff are satisfied with the support their service offers to service users to help increase their physical activity

9 of 13

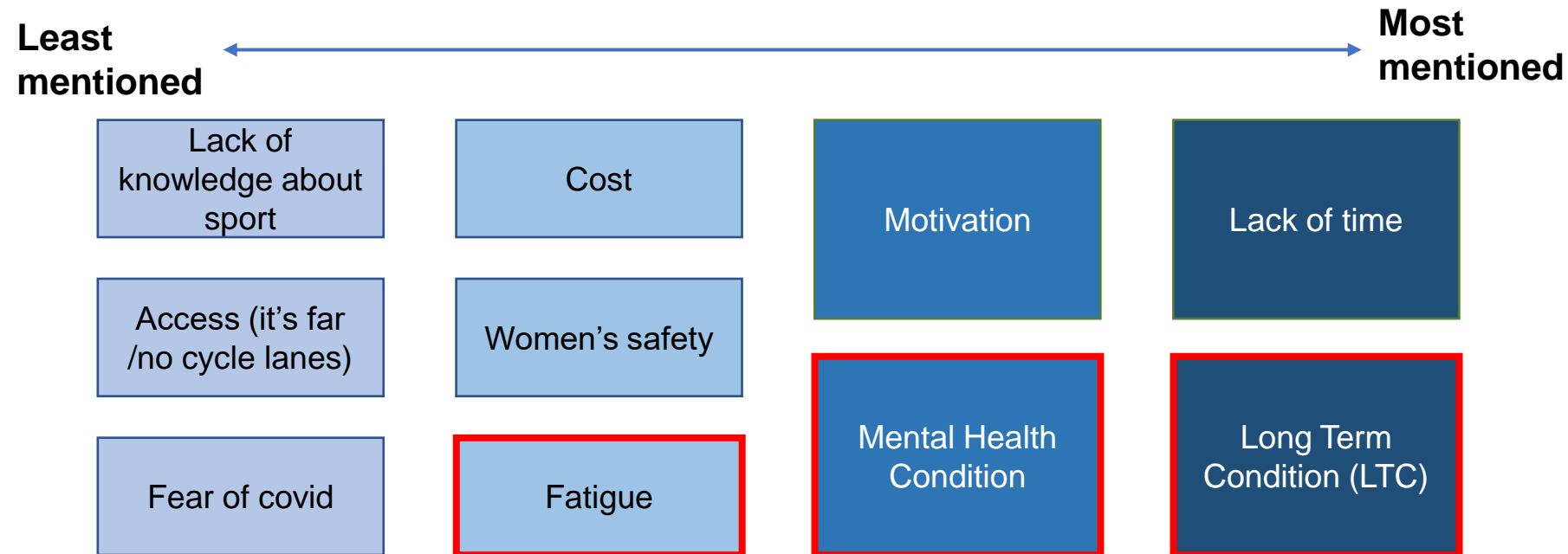
commissioners are NOT satisfied with the support on offer to increase service users' physical activity

82%

of service users strongly agree/ agree that physical activity is important to them

Service user perspectives

Service users experience a range of barriers to being physical active



"With mental health it's not the actual physical activity that's the issue - it's all the mental (and financial) barriers around starting or continuing the physical activity that are the issue. I'm not unfit because I don't know how or where to exercise: I'm unfit because I really struggle to overcome all the mental health issues (like anxiety, stress, depression and low self-esteem) that HAVE to be tackled before I end up in a location and outfit, ready to exercise." - Service user

"Finances, travel, motivation and especially knowing what is available and where to find it" - Service user

"Time for [physical activity] and health which is crowded out by life and work. Lack of motivation. Injuries. Bad weather. Lack of knowledge and support when it comes to things like starting Yoga or using the machines at the gym." - Service user

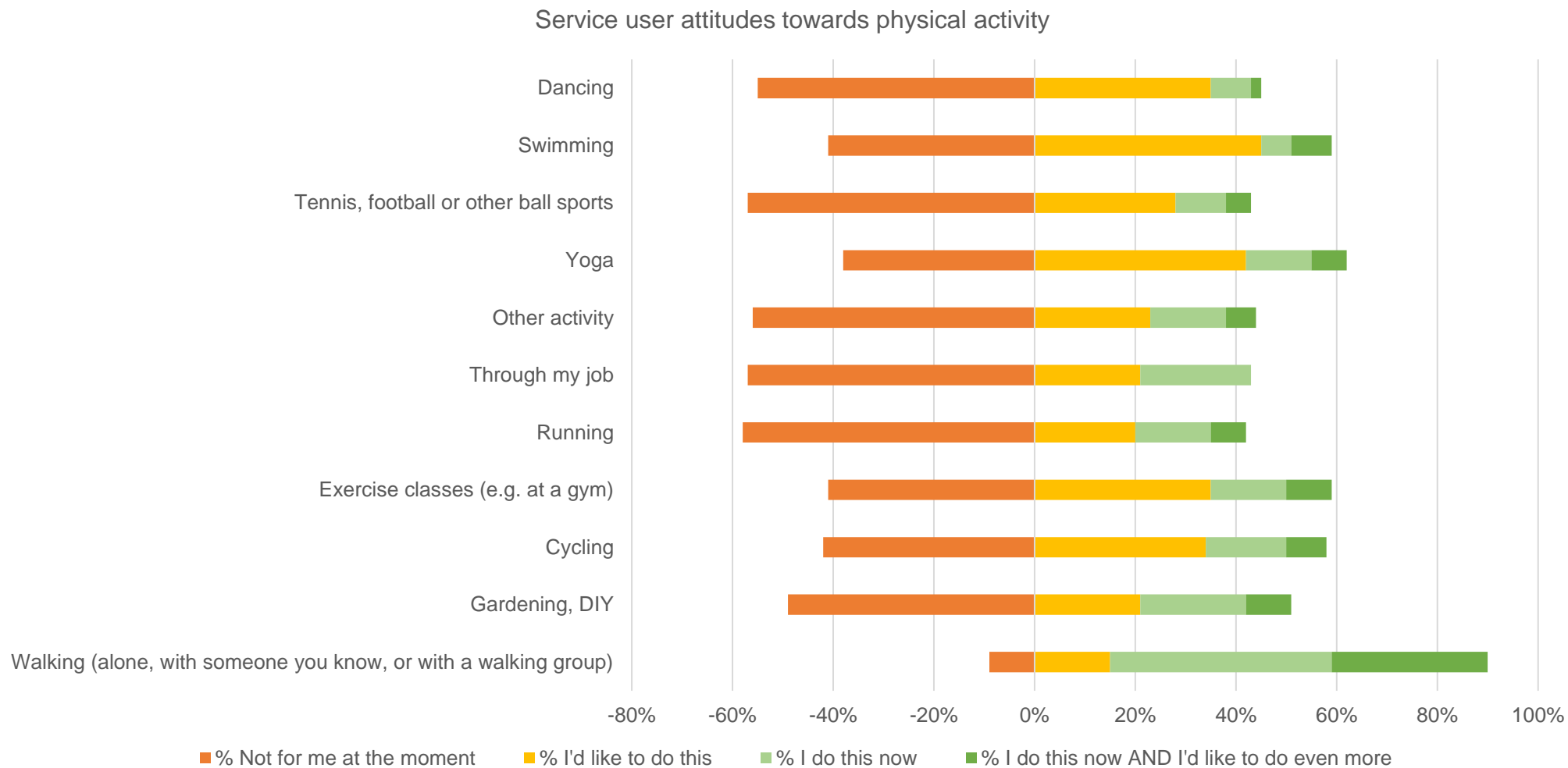
Long term physical and mental health conditions are common barriers to being active, both singly and together

- **1 in 10** (10%): of those who listed a physical condition as a barrier, how many listed more than one
- **1 in 7** (14%): of those who listed a mental health condition as a barrier, how many listed more than one
- **1 in 6** (17%): of those who listed a physical condition as a barrier, how many also listed a mental health condition

| Long term conditions mentioned as a barrier | |
|---|-----------|
| Physical health/physical disability | 8 |
| Arthritis (OA/RA/AS) | 6 |
| Injuries | 4 |
| Chronic pain | 3 |
| Endometriosis | 2 |
| Fatigue | 3 |
| Migraines | 2 |
| Heart condition | 1 |
| Total | 29 |

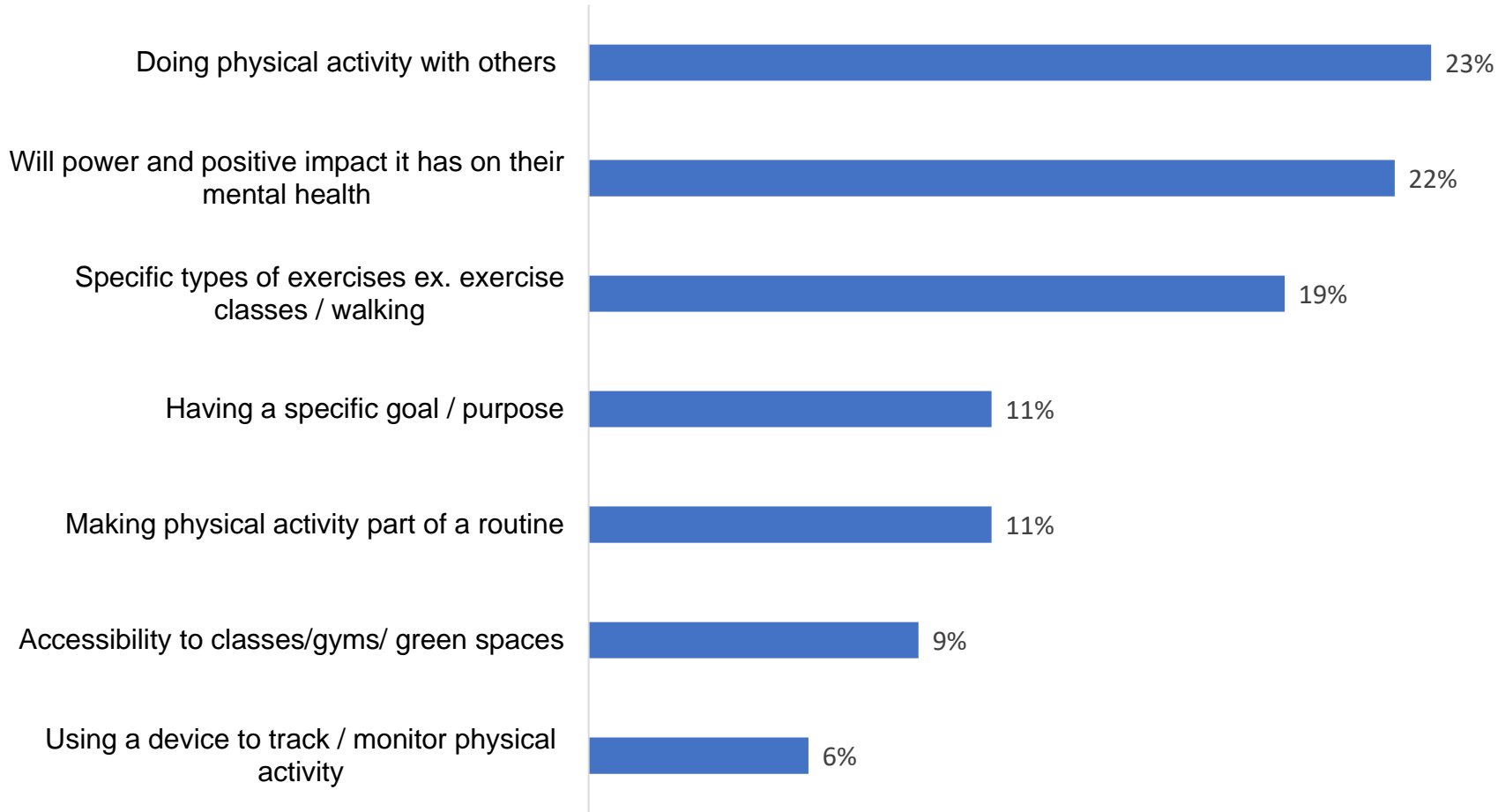
| Mental health conditions | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Depression | 8 |
| Anxiety | 5 |
| Mental health | 6 |
| PTSD | 1 |
| ADHD | 1 |
| Total | 21 |

Service users are interested in a variety of forms of physical activity



Service users described what has helped them become more active

In the past, what has helped you with increasing your physical activity?



n=80

“Going with someone of the same ability.”

“There needs to be a human/ friendly or community element for me to be consistent and stay motivated.”

“My mental health has helped me increase my physical activity because I need to remind myself how I feel after exercise.”

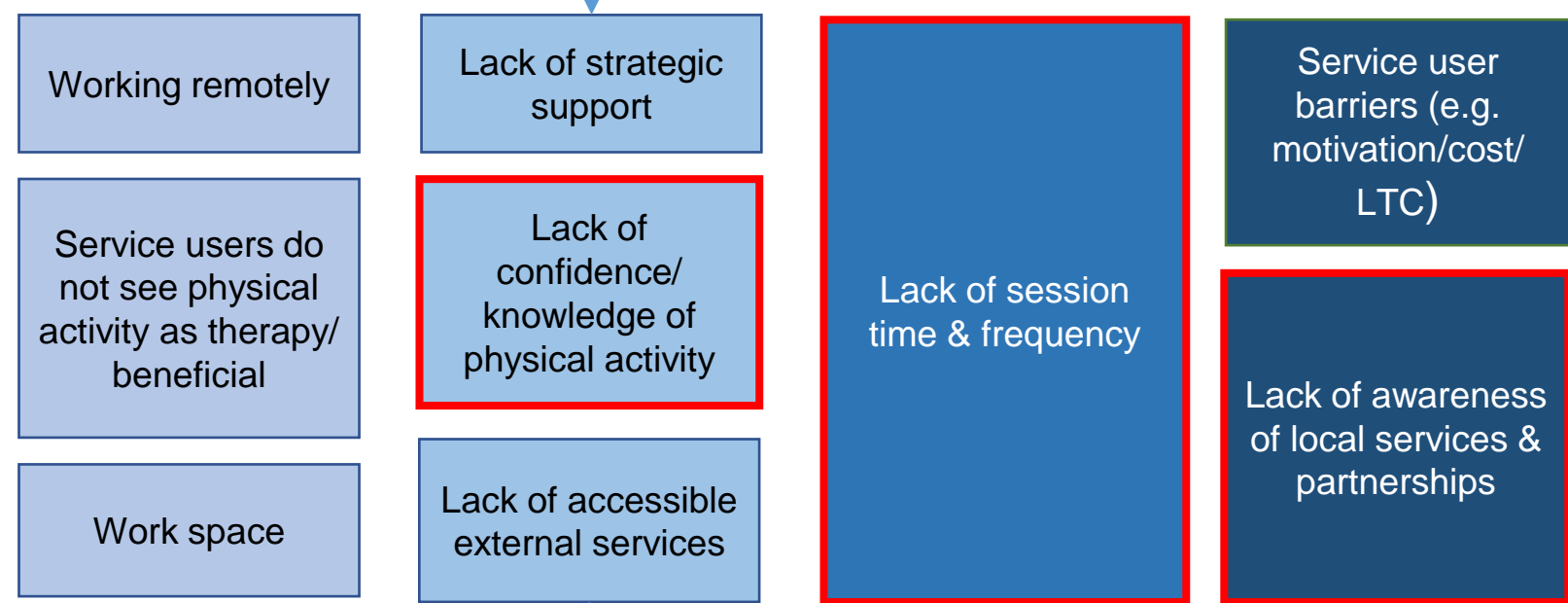
“Availability of classes.”

Talking Therapies service perspectives

NHS Talking Therapies staff frequently mentioned service user barriers and lack of awareness of local services and partnerships as barriers to increasing service users' physical activity

Least mentioned ← → Most mentioned

"I would love to see more of an emphasis on physical activity to improve mental health and also a more general holistic view of how what you do to your body e.g. food as well as movement, will effect the way you feel. Protocols and training may be helpful here in making it a regular part of treatment." – NHS Talking Therapies clinician



"It would be great to have more community links to free and low cost initiatives for physical activities and gyms the free options tend to be for over 60s so there isn't much available for young people." – NHS Talking Therapies clinician

"I think if I knew more about the different options in the area for physical activity, I would bring it up sooner and during treatment." – NHS Talking Therapies clinician

Physical activity is widely acknowledged as important for improving NHS Talking Therapies service users' mental health

"I would like activity and being outside, and the benefits of this, to play a part in designing better services for mental health improvement." – NHS Talking Therapies staff

NHS Talking Therapies staff

99% say it is very important

Commissioners

12 out of 13 say it is very important

Service users

91% strongly agree / agree

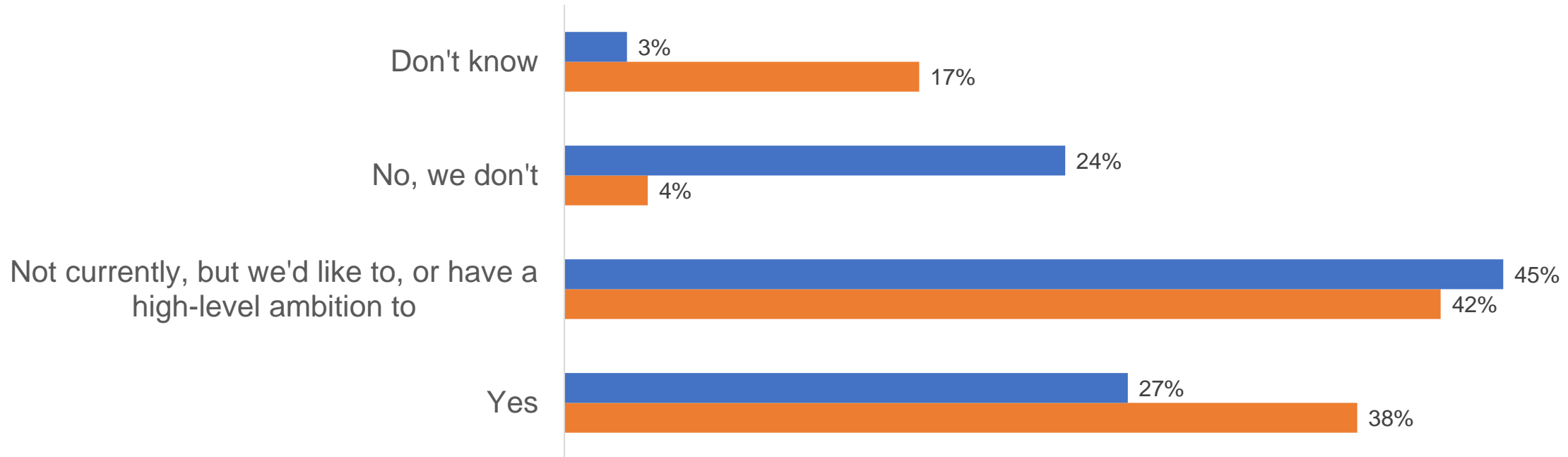
"Groups can provide a chance to meet new people too and have a chat, which is positive to your mental health." – Service User

"..physical activity has shown time and time again to have significant benefits to mental health and I personally feel it is difficult to separate both physical and mental health, **[physical activity] is a key element in helping people sustain good mental health and long-term physical health improvements.**"
NHS Talking Therapies staff

Community physical activity providers perspectives

Most community physical activity providers do or would like to work with NHS Talking Therapies services to help service users be more active

- Do you currently work with NHS Talking Therapies services?
- Do you have specific plans to increase support to NHS Talking Therapies?



Survey question:

Does your organisation have plans or an ambition to introduce or enhance the support offered to NHS Talking Therapies service users to promote physical activity to help improve their mental health?

Survey question:

Do you work with or receive referrals from NHS Talking Therapies services with the aim of increasing the physical activity levels of service users to help improve their mental health?

Community physical activity providers shared insights into working with NHS Talking Therapies services and their service users

1. Access and exclusion

- Service users can end up isolated if they are not informed of services in the area
- They don't always have good internet access, so cannot view our website to see what we offer
- Direct contact over the phone can be difficult
- People find travelling quite expensive

2. Social anxiety

- Fear of starting something new and joining a group
- Quieter classes with fewer people work better

3. Extra support

- Anxious people should be accompanied by their referrer when first attending
- Additional mentoring can be necessary
- Regular attendance is an issue. Regular contact is hard so it helps if referrers encourage ongoing attendance

4. Fit with their ability

- Activities need to be set at the right level for ability

5. Positive environment

- We create an informal, supportive and safe environment with emphasis on fun and peer support.
- We reduce anxiety when first attending by promoting our service with non-mental health slogans such as #Dontbeonyatod #unity #strongertogether etc.

6. Partnerships and communication

- Hosting NHS Talking Therapies services in our leisure centres bridges the gap in making referrals
- NHS Talking Therapies staff understand our service and the benefits: they easily identify and refer service users who would benefit
- NHS Talking Therapies staff understand the referral pathway and how to complete the referral forms

Active Partnerships are well-placed to bridge the gap between NHS Talking Therapies services and community physical activity providers



What are Active Partnerships?

- There are 43 Active Partnerships across England, all working on the same challenge: **physical inactivity and the inequalities within this.**
- Our shared purpose and ambition with Sport England is to **grow a Movement for Movement beyond ourselves.**
- A unique feature of Active Partnerships is their independence, working across all activities, providers and audiences, focused on the needs of their local communities.
- Active Partnerships work collaboratively with a range of National and Local stakeholders, across sectors, taking a whole systems approach, working in a place-based way to.
- To get in touch with your Active Partnership, use our [interactive map](#).

Practical steps for Talking Therapies services

Innovative approaches in NHS Talking Therapies services have the potential to make a difference if adopted more widely

Innovative approaches

Physical activity education such as videos, podcasts, workshops, and wellbeing apps

Incorporating physical activity and talking therapy, e.g., 'Walk and talk therapy' sessions

Delivering physical activity sessions e.g. activity groups by NHS Talking Therapies staff or co-delivered with external partners

Recruiting physical activity specialists / coordinators and champions into the service

Co-locating Talking Therapies services, e.g. within leisure facilities

Over half (56%) of NHS Talking Therapies staff feel that there is flexibility to incorporate physical activity in their interventions.

But less than 1 in 5 (18%) are satisfied with the physical activity support they offer.

"[Service users] enjoyed the running group. We joined in, had fun and even ran in the rain...It proved that there was more within them...Some came back to encourage and mentor others to join the groups". – NHS Talking Therapies staff

"Physical activity is something that I try to encourage clients to engage in as part of my interventions" - NHS Talking Therapies clinician

Recommendations

Recommendations

Our collaborative came up with a number of ways physical activity could be better utilised within NHS Talking Therapies services to help improve the mental health outcomes of service users.

These include practical ideas for implementation by the sport and physical activity sector and NHS Talking Therapies services:



1 Review and refresh national NHS Talking Therapies guidance and incentives to recognise physical activity as a priority for NHS Talking Therapies services.

For example, embedding physical activity as a priority within the NHS Talking Therapies Manual and protocols, and measuring the impact of these interventions on clinical outcomes.



2 Equip and empower NHS Talking Therapies staff with the knowledge and skills to give advice on physical activity and motivate service users to move more.

For example, exploring new or existing training opportunities for NHS Talking Therapies staff and sport and physical activity providers, and raising awareness of suitable digital and local sport and physical activity opportunities and pathways.



3 Facilitate collaboration and sharing of expertise between NHS Talking Therapies services and local partners to achieve shared goals.

For example, strengthening relationships between NHS Talking Therapies, Active Partnerships and local authority sport development leads, and exploring the role of Physical Activity Champions within NHS Talking Therapies services.



4 Develop a joint plan to better promote best practice and emerging work in this area with credible partners in physical activity and mental health.

For example, developing physical activity positive-practice guides, webinars and developing communities of practice.

Case studies

Case study

Camden & Islington and Buckinghamshire Talking Therapies services

Interventions

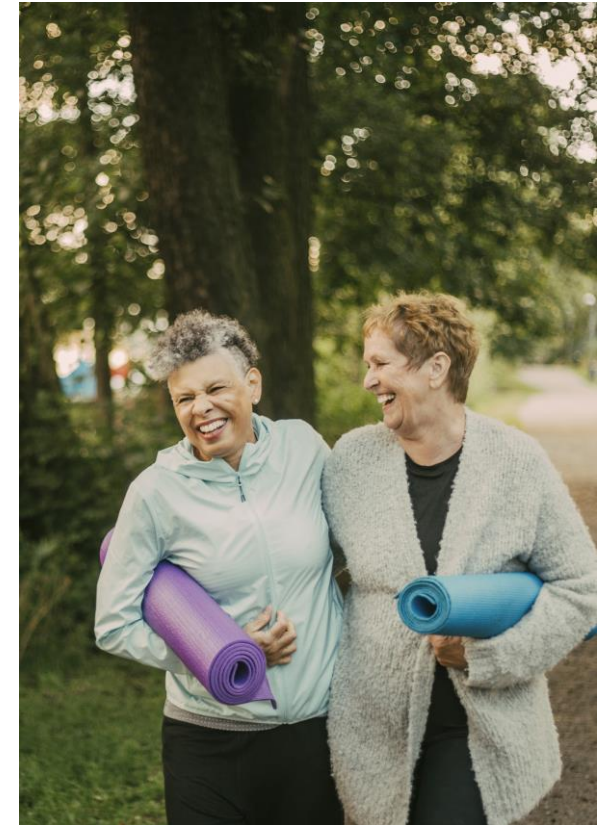
- CBT for depression group – Physical Activity integrated into each session
- Long term condition workshops
- Digital App
- Walk and Talk sessions – integrate walking into 1:1 sessions for depression
- Simply Walk pathway

Key elements of pilot

- Evaluation
- Service User involvement
- Upskilling workforce
- Collaboration with local partners

Next steps

- Project continuing
- Webinar (summer)
- Toolkit
- Evaluation



Case study

Living Well Consortium, Birmingham Talking Therapies services



Interventions

- Walking therapy – individual and group sessions
- Personal training and chair based activities using Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners taking place in parks or community venues

Partnership working

- Run of a Kind (ROAK) – couch to 5k sessions
- 6 week wellbeing run course alongside virtual Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner sessions
- Collaboration with local partners – working with local schools and care homes

Outcomes and impact

- Incredible feedback, greater client commitment to therapy
- High recovery rates and higher average attendance (standard MDS data)
- Developing ideas including group therapy walks, mindful walks and Couch to 5k

Next steps
