

Walking for our health

A vision for Walking Sports in Scotland



We believe in the power of walking sports, a standard game but where the players walk instead of run. It's all about supporting and enabling people to be more active regardless of their age and current fitness level.

There are now more than 2,500 men playing walking football at least once a week across Scotland. The sport has had an important role in encouraging older people to be more active, helping those who are recovering from injury and building friendships between players.

With the growing popularity of Walking Football and Walking Netball we want to work in partnership with others to develop more walking sports across Scotland. The infrastructure is already largely in place and the costs associated with starting a local walking sports club are minimal.

Governing sports bodies will also have an important role to play in developing the game and encouraging uptake.

Key Benefits

Improving health and fitness

Walking sports help get more older people active and engaged on a regular basis. The physical and mental health benefits are endless.

More than 2,500 men play walking football at least once a week across Scotland.

Studies have shown that participation in walking football has:

- **Reduced blood pressure and cholesterol levels**
- **Prevents heart disease and strokes**
- **Improves fitness and wellbeing**

Tackles loneliness & isolation

Walking sports can help connect older people to others with a shared interest whilst having a positive impact on their health. These connections can develop into long term friendships which foster regular social interaction off the field. Development of walking sports will help meet the Scottish Government's objective of reducing social isolation and loneliness as laid out in their "A Connected Scotland" strategy.

Age Scotland, Causewayside House, 160 Causewayside, Edinburgh, EH9 1PR

Tel. 0333 323 2400 Email: policycomms@agescotland.org.uk

Web: www.agescotland.org.uk Facebook: fb.me/agescotland Twitter: [@agescotland](https://twitter.com/agescotland)

Age Scotland is a registered charity (#SC010100), and company limited by guarantee (#153343), in Scotland at the above address.



Our vision

Regardless of whatever sport you've been involved in, you should have the opportunity to remain in that sport throughout your life.

Every older person in Scotland should have the opportunity to take part in a walking sport that interests them. This could be something they played earlier in their life or something they have always wanted to try. We will work with partners across Scotland from local clubs to sport governing bodies to support and enable the growth and development to make sure opportunities are available nationally.

Aims

- **Improve, maintain and promote the physical, mental and social wellbeing of older adults in Scotland through participation in walking sports**
- **Support and enable sports associations to develop a walking version of their sport**
- **Increase regular participation in the 50+ age group**
- **Increase volunteer opportunities for older people**

Support and enable

We believe that with some minor development every team sport has the potential to have a walking version available. This includes commonly played sports such as rugby, table tennis, cricket, basketball and much more regionally prevalent options such as shinty.

Age Scotland originally helped to set up Walking Football Scotland but recognised that for the long-term growth and sustainability it was something which needed ownership by the

sport and the players themselves. Once it was clear the sport was able to operate independently, Age Scotland happily stepped away and assisted through promotion of the game to older people.

The adoption of this model, used by Walking Football and Walking Netball, will help to ensure success and is easily replicable nationwide.

Governing sports bodies have an important role to play in encouraging the uptake of walking sports. This will help to ensure that older people throughout Scotland have the opportunity to take part, benefiting their health and wellbeing whilst feeding into the **Scottish Government's mission to reduce loneliness and isolation and promoting healthy living.**

Across Scotland, sporting facilities at clubs are unused for much of the week. This provides significant opportunity for walking sports teams to use the existing infrastructure such as pitches, changing rooms and equipment for training. The benefit to the club offering their space is that it develops their loyal fan base and provides a pool of willing volunteers which can be used on match days. It also provides the opportunity to enhance their position at the heart of the community.

Model 1: Specialist walking sport development officers

Requires development officers to represent the walking sport to assist in the initial set up. They will make links with community clubs, using the infrastructure that is already in place in each local authority. Once groups have been established a participant-led body will be tasked with developing the sport in the long term.

Model 2: Existing sport development officer network

Governing sport bodies take a leading role in the development of the walking sport, making use of Development Officers already employed and their networks. This would involve the adoption of getting older people active and the development of the walking sport to form part of the body's key performance indicators.

Potential partners

Walking Football Scotland

Walking Netball

Scottish Football Association

Netball Scotland

Cricket Scotland

Scottish Rugby Union

Table Tennis Scotland

Sport Scotland

Basketball Scotland

Camanachd Association (Shinty)

Case Study: Walking Football

Walking football began in Scotland in late 2012, initially starting in Midlothian with early games also played in Tranent through the Hibs Football Fans in Training programme. In less than four years has become one of the fastest growing sports in the country.

Membership in the groups and clubs go from 10 to over 100 with new participants joining every week. Many of the groups welcome participants with disabilities, dementia, and those recovering from major illnesses, offering an opportunity to greatly increase fitness levels and improve social integration.

For more active participants there is also the opportunity for competitive play with many groups organising friendly tournaments and festivals. In June 2015 the first National Walking Football Tournament, organised by Age Scotland, took place in Edinburgh attracting 14 teams, which grew to 24 in 2016 and produced a record entry of 32 teams from all over Scotland to Glasgow Green in June 2017.

Following several steering group meetings which included representatives of participating clubs and groups, it was decided to create a governing body to develop and promote walking football.

In April 2017 Walking Football Scotland was formed, a board of six trustees elected and in September 2017 achieved charitable status and affiliated to Age Scotland. Supported by Paths for All, Walking Football Scotland is now working in close partnership with the SFA, SPFL Trust, Age Scotland to raise the profile and support groups across Scotland.

In the longer term, discussions are also underway with local health services and other organisations to consider referral schemes into walking football programmes.

Want to find out more?

As Scotland's national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older people's lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our Policy, Communications and Campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland.

Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.

Further information

Contact the Age Scotland Policy, Communications and Campaigns team:

policycomms@agescotland.org.uk

0333 323 2400

Twitter [@agescotland](https://twitter.com/agescotland)

Facebook [/agescotland](https://www.facebook.com/agescotland)

Linkedin [Age-Scotland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/age-scotland)

www.agescotland.org.uk