



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROMOTION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN FINLAND

■ MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH

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Physical Activity Promotes Health and Wellbeing



The physical activity of local residents has substantial social and economic impact. Physical activity is important for the wellbeing and health of local residents, while also yielding positive experiences and pleasure and promoting a sense of community.

The Local Government Act calls for local authorities to promote the wellbeing and health of local residents. Physical activity is a basic municipal service, and under the Sports Act local authorities are required to provide opportunities for physical activity. Being autonomous units, local authorities are free to choose the ways in which they discharge this duty. This highlights the importance of a local

authority's own strategy regarding the service needs of various population groups and its policies on how to provide those services. The best results can be obtained when the sports department and other municipal administrative sectors cooperate, following the policies of the local authority.

These recommendations for promoting physical activity were drawn up by the municipal working group appointed by the Committee for Health-Enhancing Physical Activity, with representatives from the **Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of the Environment** and the **Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities**. The recommendations form part of the implementation of the Government Resolution on Development Guidelines for Health-Enhancing Physical Activity and Nutrition. The recommendations are intended as a tool for the municipal management, both elected officials and senior civil servants, and for the management of relevant administrative sectors.

The aim of the recommendations is to encourage local authorities to make physical activity a strategic choice. Checklists are provided to help the management of the sports, social welfare and health, education, youth, culture and library, technical services, environmental and urban planning administrative sectors, particularly to provide ideas for creating potential to promote health-enhancing physical activity.

We hope that these recommendations will help you in your important efforts to promote physical activity.

Physical Activity Is an Opportunity

Social and economic impact of physical activity

Major changes have happened in the exercise habits, weight and physical condition of Finns in recent decades. While the amount of leisure exercise has increased, there has been a marked decline in occupational, transport and household physical activity. These have contributed to increasing obesity and declining physical condition. What is particularly worrying is that the number of obese adolescents has tripled. A resident who does not get enough exercise for his/her health, who is overweight or obese and who is in poor physical condition is at a higher risk of falling ill and thereby creating social welfare and health care expenditure for the local authority. Therefore making cuts in sports services in the current challenging municipal economy will rebound – the bill for increased inactivity will fall due, with interest, some years later.

The positive impact of physical activity on society at large and on individuals is a relatively well-established fact. Physical activity is a key measure for the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of most of our major chronic diseases. Type 2 diabetes alone accounts for several billion euros in direct health care costs annually. In Finland there are half a million type 2 diabetics and even more persons at risk of diabetes; for these people to exercise and follow a healthy diet would save millions every year.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that up to 90% of all cases of type 2 diabetes could be prevented with sufficient physical activity and a healthy diet. Indeed, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has estimated that not getting enough exercise costs the Finnish public purse up to EUR 300 to 400 million annually. This bill could be slashed for instance by investing in the construction of safe pedestrian and cycle paths in built-up areas, by getting older people living at home to move around, by providing organised sports activities for children and adolescents, and by investing in sports as part of lifestyle consulting in health care.

Physical activity as a basic municipal service

Sports is a basic service which the local authorities are bound by law to provide. Sports is a cultural basic right as defined in the Finnish Constitution. However, this is not a subjective basic right; instead, it is the duty of the public sector to create the potential for residents to engage in physical activity. Local government, the level of government closest to citizens, is responsible for providing services. The central government allocates government transfers to local government to fund their services and also discretionary grants for building sports venues and for various development projects.

The Sports Act lays down that local authorities

have a duty to facilitate physical activity. The definition in the law is broad, however, and contains no specifics about the quality or content of the services to be offered, unlike the legislation on basic education, for instance. Being autonomous units, local authorities are free to choose the content and quality of the services they provide and the ways in which they discharge this duty. This highlights the importance of a local authority's own strategy regarding the service needs of various population groups and policies on how to provide sports services.

Expanded concept of sports

The concept of sports in this context goes beyond competitive sports to include all kinds of health-enhancing exercise and everyday physical activity. Physical activity belongs to the domain of

all municipal administrative sectors, not just the sports department. When engaging in exercise and everyday physical activity, local residents encounter the work of all municipal administrative sectors. Indeed, the best results can be achieved through cooperation and division of duties among the municipal administrative sectors on the basis of the strategic policies determined by the local authority.

Promoting physical activity forms part of a broader scheme of promoting health and wellbeing among local residents. It is important to ensure that health aspects are taken into account in all municipal functions and to engage in broad cooperation with other actors in the municipality. What is particularly important is to find the natural cooperation potential between the promotion of physical activity on the one hand and a healthy diet on the other. These recommendations focus on the promotion of physical activity in municipalities.

Recommendations for Promoting Physical Activity in Municipalities

An active resident and municipal administrative departments

Pirjo, a fifth-grader, cycled to school this morning even though it is winter. It was good that the street department had built a cycle path and that the snow ploughs had cleared it in the morning before starting on the road. This was a bonus considering Pirjo's two-hour daily exercise. Because there would be no gym class at school and no sports practice afterwards, her exercise opportunities today were limited. Fortunately, the school has proper playground equipment.

After school, Pirjo left home and went to the nearby sports field to skate. She was allowed to go there because she did not have to cross any big streets on the way. The urban planners, park department and sports department had managed to ensure this. The sports park attracted many others besides Pirjo. A group of day-care children in yellow safety vests was just leaving. Granny came to the park to walk her dog Onni and to see Pirjo doing pirouettes. Pirjo got a stamp on her exercise card, and so did her granny, for walking Pirjo home. The public health nurse had recommended exercise for granny during her previous check-up.

In the evening, Pirjo's mother went out to join the community college pole-walking group. Although her job as a home helper involved giving elderly people exercise, she had also taken up walking after her physician had given her an exercise prescription. Pirjo and her father had arranged for Santa to bring mother her own walking poles. But for now, she was using poles borrowed from the library.

In the evening, Pirjo had to make a choice about the next day. Would she go to a ping-pong tournament at the youth centre after school or with the children's culture group to the swimming pool to take underwater photos? She decided not to decide until the morning.



What the local authority should do to promote physical activity

The municipal management – both senior civil servants and elected officials – plays a vital role in making physical activity a key strategic choice. The municipal management must have the vision and the commitment to embrace both preventive and rehabilitative physical activity and to arrange the resources required so that health inequalities in the various administrative sectors can be narrowed. The aim is to achieve a municipality where residents get enough exercise for their health and where physical activity provides residents with opportunities for doing things together and communally. Efforts are needed not only from the sports sector; but also from the social welfare and health care, education, youth, culture and library, transport, environment and technical services sectors and local planning. Not only local government bodies but also private sports and exercise clubs, fitness businesses and other local actors need to contribute. Opportunities for physical activity and sports should be provided in natural educational contexts and living environments such as educational institutions, workplaces and residential areas. Although the impact of physical activity will not be seen in health and economic statistics until some time later; the positive impact of physical activity has been ascertained in numerous studies; investments in physical activity always pay off.

Checklist for the management of a successfully physically active municipality

- The municipal management has acknowledged the importance of physical activity for the health and wellbeing of local residents and also for their equality and participation.
- The exercise and health behaviour of local residents is monitored through regular studies and surveys.
- The local authority has drawn up a physical activity and wellbeing strategy as part of the municipal plan.
- The local authority has a system to monitor the effect of decisions in all municipal administrative sectors on the health and wellbeing of local residents.
- Promoting physical activity forms part of a broader scheme of promoting health and wellbeing.
- The roles of the various municipal administrative sectors in promoting physical activity have been agreed on, and the managers of the various departments have committed to promoting physical activity.
- Resources for creating potential for physical activity have been guaranteed for the various administrative sectors.
- The local authority supports the physical activity of its employees and is particularly proactive in respect of those who do not get enough exercise for their health. The local authority provides various incentives for exercise in the workplace and while commuting to increase physical activity and ensures that children and adolescents can safely exercise when going to and from school.

What the managers of municipal departments should do to promote physical activity

Each municipal administrative sector has its own duties and potential for promoting physical activity and exercise among local residents. In a successfully physically active municipality, all departments know and understand their roles and responsibilities in facilitating physical activity. By working together, they can offer local residents excellent opportunities for daily physical activity and exercise.

The following is a discussion of goals and opportunities in promoting physical activity by administrative sector. Checklists are provided to remind local authorities of key duties related to physical activity, by administrative sector.



Sports

Sports services are a statutory duty of local authorities. Under the Sports Act, local authorities must facilitate physical activity by local residents by developing local and regional cooperation, by promoting health-enhancing physical activity, by supporting citizens' activities, by providing sports venues and by organising sports activities, taking special needs groups into account. Physical activity is a basic municipal service whose purpose is to promote the wellbeing and health, physical activity and exercise of local residents and to enhance the vitality of citizens' activities in sports at the local level.

Checklist for the sports department management for promoting physical activity

- Plan the local authority's guided exercise and other services provided so that they form a smoothly running whole together with sports clubs, fitness businesses and other actors. The focus of guided exercise organised by the local authority itself is on health and special exercise.
- Enhance potential for offering opportunities for physical activity in the development environments of children and adolescents, such as educational institutions and residential districts.
- The municipality has an operating model and network in place for promoting physical activity, organised among various administrative sectors, NGOs and other actors and coordinated by the local authority sports department.
- The local authority conducts regular studies to monitor the number of local residents who get enough exercise for their health and of those who do not. The local authority analyses the physical activity service needs of various population groups and organises ways for providing these services.
- The local authority supports the work of sports clubs, fitness clubs and other associations promoting physical activity by awarding them grants.
- The local authority actively provides exercise guidance for local residents.
- The chain of services to turn a customer of the health care department into an active leisure-time exerciser is real and functioning.
- Municipal investments in building sports venues are principally allocated to projects that promote health-enhancing physical activity and involve as many local residents as possible.
- Venues and opportunities for local and everyday physical activity are taken into account when planning residential districts and are built at the same time as other local facilities.
- Pedestrian and cycle paths are planned, built and maintained so that they can be used for exercise, too. The pedestrian and cycle paths and other routes in the area form a logical network and offer access to a wider range of green areas and recreational areas.
- The sports department takes an active role in the planning and development of land use, traffic and environmental construction.

Social welfare and health care

The purpose of the social welfare and health care department is to offer expertise in health-enhancing physical activity to other actors and administrative sectors. It distributes information on the health benefits of physical activity and on health-enhancing sports services to local residents together with other actors. The department monitors municipal decision-making and together with other departments seeks to ensure that decision-making is favourable to health-enhancing physical activity. The social welfare and health care department influences the health of local residents and promotes health-enhancing physical activity by participating in and initiating cooperation with other departments and local actors. The social welfare and health care department uses physical activity as an education tool at day care centres, to improve the quality of life of those threatened by social exclusion, and to improve the functional capacity of the ageing population. The focus in the activities of the social welfare and health care department is on prevention and health promotion, with the aim of narrowing health inequalities.

Checklist for the social welfare and health care department management for promoting physical activity

- Physical activity as part of the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of illness for people of all ages has been acknowledged and maintains a presence in everyday work.
- Good exercise and nutrition in families with children are supported at maternity and child health clinics.
- Health check-ups for children and adolescents include monitoring of exercise behaviour and physical condition, together with guidance for independent or guided exercise. In health guidance, exercise and weight control are key areas, and more detailed monitoring is introduced if necessary.
- Day-care personnel have up-to-date information and expertise regarding the wellbeing benefits of physical activity. Day-care centres have designated a staff member to be in charge of exercise.
- Interaction between the day-care centre and the home, for instance through development discussions with the parents, helps lay the foundation for good exercise habits for the whole family.
- Day-care centres have appropriate facilities and equipment for exercise and safe yards conducive to physical activity. Day-care centres participate in various physical activity campaigns.
- Physical activity is included in open early childhood education and care (playgrounds, clubs, etc.).
- School health care and student health care support physical education and general physical activity at educational institutions.
- Evaluations of the mobility and functional capacity of adults of working age and age-group check-ups for the middle-aged are organised as required, combined with exercise guidance. Their findings are routinely entered in electronic patient records.
- Regular check-ups for mobility and functional capacity are organised for older people, combined with exercise guidance.

- Institutions and service homes have an inspiring and safe environment that favours independent mobility. Exercise programmes are offered to the older and other residents of such institutions, including muscle strength and balance programmes and guided exercise, both outdoors and indoors.
- Social welfare and health care personnel have the expertise and the equipment required for providing high-quality exercise guidance in keeping with national recommendations and to guide local residents to use local physical activity services.
- The Current Care recommendation for exercise and the exercise prescription are used as primary health care methods and are incorporated in the Patient Information System.

Education

One of the key duties of schools and other educational institutions is to promote physical exercise and to instil permanent exercise habits. Comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools, vocational education institutions and community colleges play an important part in ensuring the daily exercise of children and adolescents in particular. Schools and other educational institutions must offer a wide range of options for physical activity.

According to the national core curriculum for basic education, the aim of physical education is to make a positive contribution to the physical, mental and social functional capacity and wellbeing of pupils and to guide pupils to understand the positive health impact of physical activity. Physical education provides students with the skills, knowledge and experiences that enable them to adopt a physically active lifestyle. Physical education is an active subject where games and skill learning are used to promote independent activities.

Checklist for the education department management for promoting physical activity

Basic education

- Schools are encouraged to structure their days so as to include as much exercise as possible.
- The physical environment of schools is developed so that
 - school yards and the immediate vicinity inspire children and adolescents to undertake physical activity during the school day and in their leisure time,
 - there is an appropriately equipped indoor sports facility at or near each school,
 - schools have sufficient equipment for efficient physical education, break time sports and clubs.
- Schools offer as many children as possible the opportunity to participate in extracurricular sports clubs.
- School facilities can be made flexibly available to local residents for sports use in the evenings and at weekends. Schools actively cooperate with other local actors to improve the exercise opportunities of local residents by providing the use of facilities and yard areas.
- The municipality has a school physical education cooperation network in place to develop and plan how physical activity fits into the school day.
- The local authority supports the cooperation of home and school in increasing physical activity.
- All children have access to daily exercise to promote alertness in morning and afternoon activities organised by the local authority.
- Teachers have access to further education in the area of sports.

Community college

The purpose of a community college is to offer physical education with an aim to improve health and physical condition. Courses offered by the community college can be aimed for instance at older people, at those who do not exercise sufficiently for their health or who are beginners at exercising, at those who need applied exercise, or at other special needs groups.

Checklist for the community college management for promoting physical activity

- A community college offers physical education with an aim to improve health and physical condition, particularly to population groups for whom there are not enough physical activity services available locally.
- The community college cooperates closely with various municipal administrative sectors and local fitness associations. Responsibilities for providing physical activity services for various target groups have been agreed on.
- The community college has sufficient expertise to provide high-quality physical education.



Youth

The main aim of local authority youth work is to help young people become active citizens, to strengthen their social skills and to improve their living conditions to support their growth and independence. It is an educational goal of the youth department to promote an active and culturally aware lifestyle among children and adolescents. Physical activity is also an excellent tool in youth work for supporting young people at risk of social exclusion and for boosting their life management skills.

Checklist for the youth department management for promoting physical activity

- The youth department plays a crucial role in multi-sectoral service chains to guide young people to undertake physical activity.
- Physical activity is a key tool in various areas of youth work.
- Along with cultural services and youth work, physical activity plays a significant part in the integration of immigrants into Finnish society.
- The youth department promotes social inclusion of young people by providing physical activity opportunities according to their wishes.



Culture and library

According to the Municipal Cultural Activities Act, local authorities are required to promote, support and organise cultural activities in their municipalities. Local authorities are also required to provide local residents access to basic arts education and leisure time courses in various areas of the arts. According to the Library Act, local authorities are required to provide library and information services. Local authorities are free to organise these services themselves, or partly or wholly in cooperation with other local authorities, or in any other way.

Checklist for the culture and library department management for promoting physical activity

- The municipal culture department actively cooperates with the sports department in organising joint events, in planning combined cultural and exercise routes and in organising cultural and sporting events.
- Artworks are placed in municipal sports facilities, and landscape art is used to enhance outdoor recreation areas.
- Cooperation between the culture and sports departments has been increased for instance in the area of dance, figure skating, music, gymnastics, ballet and theatre.
- The local library cooperates with the sports and youth departments to promote physical activity.
- Libraries distribute information to local residents (brochures, event info) about sports and recreation opportunities. Library collections also contain material on physical activity (books, magazines, videos, DVDs, etc.).

Living environment

In a municipality with a positive attitude to physical activity, land use planning and local planning are used to ensure exercise and leisure sports opportunities for local residents. The purpose is to ensure access to sufficient recreational areas and to enable the building of a living environment that is healthy, enjoyable and conducive to an active lifestyle. Green areas and recreational routes form a coherent network suitable for exercise and outdoor activities. Maintaining and promoting a diverse urban environment goes hand in hand with promoting the exercise and recreation opportunities of local residents. Local residents enjoy a variety of green areas and recreational routes. Health-enhancing and everyday physical activity is pursued not only at sports facilities but also in parks, on streets and roads, and particularly on pedestrian and cycle paths.

Checklist for the technical services department management for promoting physical activity

- Ensure through land use planning that green areas and recreational routes form a coherent and unbroken network extending from residential districts to year-round trans-municipal recreational routes.
- Local planning must ensure sufficient and comprehensive allocations for sports facilities. Space for local sports facilities must be allocated in residential areas. Key basic sports facilities must be designed together with suburb design projects.
- Pedestrian and cycle paths must be planned, developed and maintained as a key mobility network for local residents as a cooperative effort by various municipal administrative sectors, private road associations and the relevant Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centre).
- Diversity of the urban environment must be promoted so that urban parks, open fields and other important breathing spaces are preserved as vital components of the urban landscape.
- Non-vehicular access to valuable cultural and natural sites must be improved, and these sites must be developed as integral parts of the everyday physical activity environment with a broad, positive experiential impact.
- Training must be provided for technical services personnel regarding the importance of health-enhancing and everyday physical activity, together with examples on how to design and build local sports facilities and how to adopt inspiring best practices.
- The civil servants responsible for sports, the sports department and local sports organisations must be consulted whenever the technical services department plans, develops and maintains the local environment in cooperation with various other parties.
- Various user groups must be taken into account when planning outdoor recreational routes.
- The local authority has drawn up a plan for renovating the yards of day-care centres and schools, involving the various administrative sectors, and has allocated sufficient resources for it. Local planning and traffic planning are used to ensure that schools and workplaces are easily and safely accessible.



Local authorities have a duty to enable local residents to undertake daily physical activity. These recommendations for promoting physical activity in municipalities are intended as a tool for the municipal management, both elected officials and senior civil servants, and for the management of relevant administrative sectors. The aim of the recommendations is to encourage local authorities to make physical activity a strategic choice. Checklists are provided to help the management of the sports, social welfare and health, education, youth, culture and library, technical services, environmental and urban planning administrative sectors, particularly to provide ideas for creating potential to promote health-enhancing physical activity.

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE
MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS
MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT
ASSOCIATION OF FINNISH LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

PO Box 33, FI-00023 Government, Finland
Mailing address: Meritullinkatu 8,
FI-00017 Helsinki, Finland
Phone (switchboard): +358 9 16001
Fax: +358 9 160 74126
E-mail: firstname.lastname@stm.fi

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