SPORT ENGLAND

The social value of sport and physical activity in England

This summary is based on work by State of Life, Sheffield Hallam University, and Manchester Metropolitan University for Sport England

October 2024

Sheffield Hallam University
Knowledge Applied

STATE OF LIFE

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Contents

Foreword 3

Glossary 5

Summary 6

Introduction 7

Primary value: individual wellbeing 9

Secondary value: wider value to society 13

The social cost of inequality 16

Conclusion 17

Read the supporting reports →

Foreword

It has long been known that sport and physical activity makes people happier and healthier, and that it can play a unique role in bringing communities together.

This is why creating more opportunities to play sport and be active, for those that need them most, is at the core of our strategy, Uniting the Movement.

It's also clear that, with so many challenges facing our society, it's more important than ever that we demonstrate the contribution that sport and physical activity makes to our nation.

We can already confidently and proudly make statements about the life-enhancing benefits of sport and physical activity and the huge social and economic value it generates for individuals, communities, and society because the evidence is clear. A central part of that evidence base has been the 'Social and Economic Value of Community Sport' research that Sport England published in 2020.

However, to keep pace in an ever-changing world, it is vital that we keep our knowledge and understanding of the value of sport and physical activity up to date.

That's why we commissioned a consortium of partners, brought together by social value experts State of Life, in partnership with leading sports economists from the Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) at Sheffield Hallam University, and the Institute of Sport at Manchester Metropolitan University, to develop an updated national model of social value for community sport and physical activity.

This new model reflects the best and most recently available evidence and incorporates the latest guidance for measuring and valuing social impact.

This deeper exploration of social value also directly supports the government's strategic ambitions around sport and physical activity – building the evidence and data that cements the connection between having an active population and improved outcomes, and giving us the tools we need to tell this story.

This report presents the findings from year one of this three-year study. It estimates that the total social value generated by community sport and physical activity in England was £107.2 billion in 2022/23.

It shows that £96.7 billion of this annual social value comes from the improved wellbeing that sport and physical activity creates for individuals through participation and volunteering. This includes £8.6 billion in wellbeing value for children and young people, an important area of value we haven't been able to quantify before.

This year one report also details how sport and physical activity adds a further £10.5 billion of annual social value through the cost savings that improved health outcomes in adults creates for the state and society – from the prevention of 1.3 million cases of depression and over 600,000 cases of type 2 diabetes, to savings of over £500 million due to reduced GP visits and over £750 million due to reduced mental health service usage, all a result of improved health from being active.

However, whilst demonstrating the overall size of the social value contribution that sport and physical activity makes to the nation is vast, this new analysis also paints a more nuanced picture of how this social value is generated and distributed across the population. We see that the value of being active is greater for some groups – such as women, older, and disabled adults – but also that the benefits of physical activity are far from evenly spread because of the inequalities we see in participation.

Indeed, it provisionally estimates the annual social cost of inequalities in adult physical activity levels to be £15.6 billion. Not only is this a huge amount of unrealised social value for society, but it also demonstrates the potential that can be unlocked if we are able to better confront the deep inequalities in participation that are still experienced by too many people in our society.

We ask partners and organisations to use this updated model of social value to understand fully the impact that being active can have on the lives of individuals and communities and the delivery of public services. It is also a valuable tool for showcasing the true power of sport and physical activity and helping ensure that, through our collective efforts, we are unrelenting in our support for those people and communities that, despite often having most to gain, are least likely to receive its benefits.

Tim Hollingsworth
Chief executive

October 2024

Glossary

Primary value

The direct benefit and value to individuals of improved wellbeing.

Secondary value

The wider value to society, including the state.

Active

For adults: 150+ minutes of moderate intensity equivalent physical activity per week.

For children and young people: doing an average of 60 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity a day.

Fairly active

For adults: 30-149 minutes of moderate intensity equivalent physical activity per week.

For children and young people: doing an average of 30-59 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a day.

Inactive (adults):

Fewer than 30 minutes of moderate intensity equivalent physical activity per week.

Less active (children and young people):

Less than an average of 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a day.

Inequalities Metric

A tool developed by Sport England to create a more holistic measure of inequalities in physical activity levels. It groups the population by the number of characteristics of inequality a person has (either 0, 1, or 2+).

Characteristics of inequality

The number of geodemographic characteristics a person has that are most strongly associated with being less physically active.

Social cost of inequality

The additional social value that would be generated if the physical activity levels of the whole adult population – and those most likely to experience inequalities – rose to the same level as adults with zero characteristics of inequality.

Summary

Our report presents year one findings from Sport England's study to develop an updated model for estimating the annual social value of sport and physical activity.

£107.2 billion
Total annual social value of sport and physical activity in England for 2022/23

£96.7 billion
Primary value (improved wellbeing)

£8.6 billion
Children and young people participation (ages 11-16)

£4,100
Average value per 'active' young person (aged 11-16)

£3,100
Average value per 'fairly active' young person (aged 11-16)

£79.9 billion
Adult participation

£2,500
Average value per 'active' adult*

£1,200
Average value per 'fairly active' adult

£8.2 billion
Adult volunteering

£2,100
Average value per adult from weekly volunteering

£1,000
Average value per adult from monthly volunteering

£10.5 billion
Secondary value of sport and physical activity*

£1.3 billion
Reduced GP visits and mental health service usage

£9.3 billion
Prevention of disease and chronic health conditions (across 14 health outcomes)

-£0.13 billion
Cost of sports injuries

£315
Average secondary health value per 'active' adult

£230
Average secondary health value per 'fairly active' adult

£15.6 billion
Annual social cost of inequality in adult physical activity levels**

* The secondary value research has focused on the wider savings to society from improved health outcomes in year one
** Calculated from both primary and secondary value

Introduction

Sport England awarded a three-year contract to a consortium of partners brought together by social value experts State of Life, in partnership with leading sports economists from the Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) at Sheffield Hallam University, and the Institute of Sport at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The study has created an updated model of the social value of community sport and physical activity for England in year one (covered in this report) and will provide two further annual updates in 2025 and 2026. It builds on previous studies by Sheffield Hallam University for Sport England published in 2014 and 2020.

The UK government defines social or public value as "all significant costs and benefits that affect the welfare and wellbeing of the population" (H.M. Treasury 'Green Book', 2020). This report quantifies two types of social benefit:

Primary values
The direct benefit and value to individuals of improved wellbeing.

Secondary values
The wider value to society, including the state.

We categorise activity levels based on Sport England's Active Lives Survey definitions for adults and children and young people (see Glossary).[1]

1 Detailed here: https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/data/active-lives?section=measures. Activities are broken down into broad groups (i.e. sporting activities), activity groups (i.e. team sports), activities (i.e. football) and disciplines (i.e. walking football). The data excludes household activities unrelated to formal sport and exercise, like gardening.

Scope of research (year one)

Year one of the research has prioritised wellbeing and health values as they are outcomes with the highest-quality evidence and capture some of the most significant benefits sport and physical activity generates for individuals and society.

Subsequent years of the study will deliver further analysis and reporting that builds our understanding of how the social value of sport and physical activity is generated and distributed between different people, places, activities, and stakeholders. We will also look at the evidence for additional outcome areas and their possible inclusion in the model.

Whilst the focus of this study is social value, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) have published separate research that measures the economic value of sport to the UK economy. This includes data for each home nation and therefore complements this analysis of social value for England.[2]

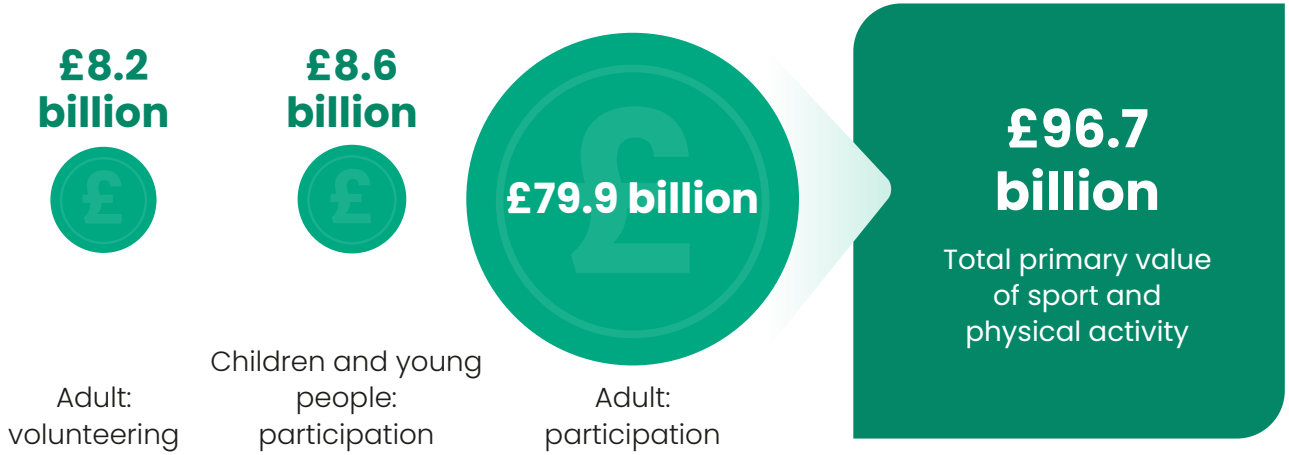
The estimates in this report represent the amount of social value generated by sport and physical activity annually. These figures are based on participation, volunteering, and population data for the year 2022/23. All figures are in 2023 prices.

2 Following Treasury guidance, impacts on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross Value Added (GVA) are typically excluded in social valuation. Macroeconomic impacts can however form part of the wider strategic case for investment, and so assessing these alongside social values is complementary.

Primary value: individual wellbeing

We measure changes in life satisfaction based on the question: "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?" Respondents answer on a 0-10 scale. A one-point change over 12 months is defined as a wellbeing year (WELLBY), valued at £15,300 in 2023 prices per Treasury guidelines.

Using Sport England's Active Lives Survey data, State of Life estimates differences in life satisfaction associated with threshold physical activity levels (see Glossary) and volunteering to support sport and physical activity.[3] The survey contains detailed information on each respondent's characteristics, so we can use statistical controls to identify the impact of physical activity and volunteering, other things being equal.[4] Data, methods, and findings are detailed in the primary value report.



Total primary value

For 2022/23, we estimate the total annual primary value of sport and physical activity in England at £96.7 billion. This includes £79.9 billion from adult participation, £8.6 billion from physical activity in children and young people[5], and £8.2 billion from adult volunteering to support sport and physical activity.

This testifies to the profound impact of sport and physical activity on our overall quality of life. While the analysis cannot unpack all the ways sport and physical activity improves wellbeing, this value likely captures the sheer enjoyment of being active, benefits to physical and mental health, and knock-on impacts for other aspects of life such as relationships, social connection, and work.

3 We use alternative data from the Understanding Society survey to verify our findings.
4 Our statistical methods, known as regression analysis, are well-established and reliable. We recognise however that they have limitations in identifying the true 'causal' impact of sport and physical activity on wellbeing.
5 Our analysis in year one covers children and young people aged 11-16.

Participation in sport and physical activity

For an adult, being 'active' is worth £2,500 a year in wellbeing value, while being 'fairly active' is worth £1,200. The average wellbeing value of participation is greater for young people aged 11-16, with being 'active' valued at £4,100 a year, and 'fairly active' at £3,100 a year.

Average wellbeing values (per person, per year)

All adults (16+)

Active | Fairly active

Children and young people (aged 11-16)

Active | Fairly active

Differences by adult subgroup

The average per adult values mask differences by subgroup. Certain key groups with significantly higher values for 'active' illustrate this variation:

- People with disabilities or long-term health conditions: **£5,100** per active adult.
- Women: **£3,100**.
- People aged 75+: **£2,800**.
- People from Asian backgrounds: **£2,800**.[6]

But we also recognise that people are a mix of multiple, intersecting characteristics. By applying Sport England's new Inequalities Metric[7], we also find higher wellbeing values for being 'active' – £3,800 – among adults that have 2 or more characteristics of inequality (see Glossary).

These differences highlight the potential for more targeted strategies and support for groups who stand to gain the most from the benefits of being physically active, but who may also be facing some of the greatest barriers to participation.

Average wellbeing values among selected groups for being 'active' (per adult, per year)

Disabled or long term health condition

2+ characteristics of inequality

Female

Aged 75+

Asian (Excl. Chinese)

All adults (16+)

6 This value is for adults from Asian backgrounds, excluding Chinese. Wellbeing values are also higher for adults from a Chinese background. Adults from 'Mixed' ethnic backgrounds also have higher wellbeing values per person. Levels of activity in the population vary by background, with adults of White or Mixed ethnicity being more active than those of Black, Asian or 'Other' ethnicity.

7 Sport England's **Inequalities Metric** provides a holistic measure of inequalities in physical activity levels. By grouping the population based on the number of characteristics of inequality a person has (either 0, 1, or 2+), it can account for the impact of intersectionality.

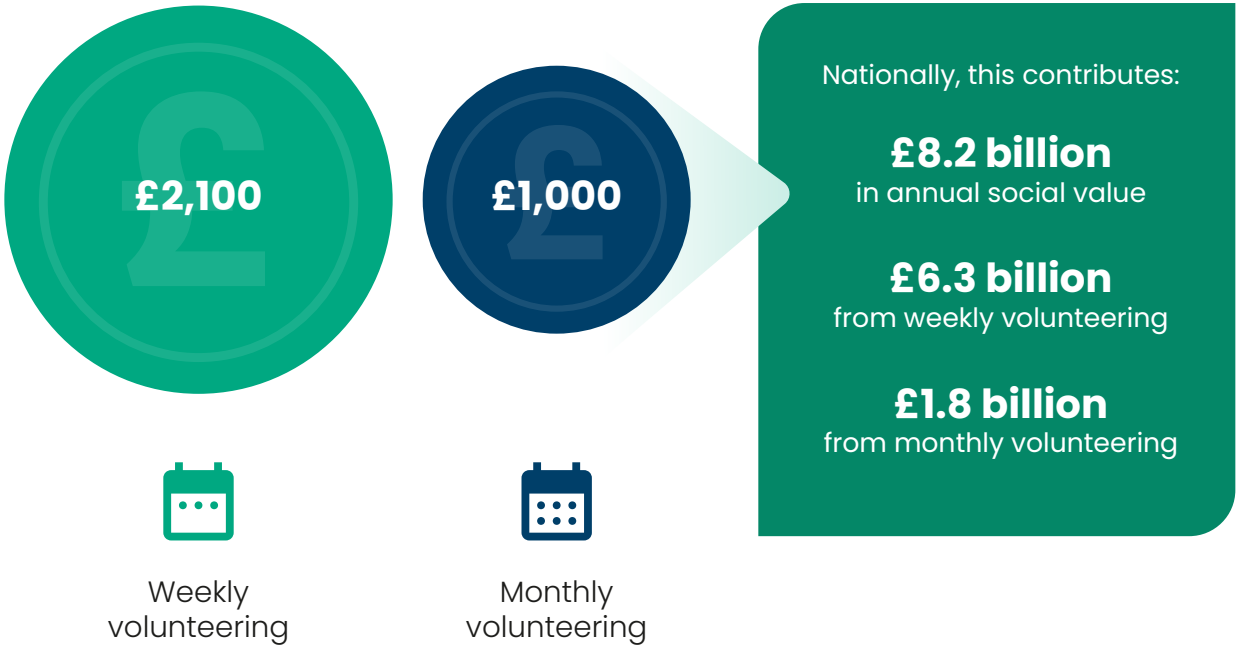
Volunteering to support sport and physical activity

Volunteering not only enables participation opportunities for others but significantly boosts the wellbeing of volunteers themselves, when undertaken at the following frequencies:

- Weekly volunteering: **£2,100** per adult.
- Monthly volunteering: **£1,000** per adult.[8]

These wellbeing values are in addition to any value that comes from being physically active.[9]

Average wellbeing values (per adult, per year)



8 Volunteering values for adults only. Monthly volunteering: at least once a month, but not once a week. Weekly volunteering: at least once a week.
9 Since our analysis for volunteering controls for the influence of activity levels.

Secondary value: wider value to society

While wellbeing values capture various health-related benefits to the individual, secondary values focus on the wider value to society, including the state.

Year one of the secondary value analysis focuses on health, as the research team prioritised the valuation of social outcomes with the highest quality evidence.

Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University constructed a model to quantify the health values associated with participation in sport and physical activity, refining previous models for Sport England.[10] Full details of the data, methods, and results are provided in the secondary value technical report, but are summarised briefly in this section.

The secondary value model covers 17 health outcomes:

- Reduced risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, seven types of cancer, dementia, depression, hip fractures, and back pain.
- Reduced GP visits and mental health service use.
- Sports injuries.

Most health outcomes were valued using a prevalence-based approach, where the reduced number of cases of disease through participating in sport and physical activity at a given threshold were estimated using data on the relative risk of disease, the population prevalence or incidence of disease, and activity levels. The number of cases prevented were then multiplied by the associated direct (healthcare) and indirect (social and informal care) costs per case. Health outcomes were only valued for the adult population (aged 16+) among those who were 'active' or 'fairly active' as defined by the Active Lives Survey.

The headline estimates presented in the following section provide a snapshot of the health value of sport and physical activity in England for 2022/23[11].

10 This analysis uses the same activity levels as the primary values but focuses only on adults (16+) due to limited evidence for younger populations.
11 The presentation of health value as a 'snapshot' conflates the dynamic process of continued investment and participation in sport and physical activity, which results in the generation of longer-term benefits. It makes the simplifying assumption that investment of resources (time and money) today produces health benefits in the future, and investments in previous years result in the benefits experienced today.

Total value

Across the adult population in England, we estimate:

- The annual value of participation is **£10.5 billion**, of which:
  - **£9.3 billion** is associated with the 'active' population, and
  - **£1.2 billion** with the 'fairly active' population.[12]
- Over **3 million** cases of non-communicable diseases or chronic health conditions were prevented.
- The largest estimated reductions were for depression (**1.3 million** cases), back pain (**0.9 million**) and type 2 diabetes (**0.6 million**).

Cases of non-communicable disease or chronic health conditions prevented among physically active adults in England and corresponding values (in 2023 prices)

Health outcome	Cases prevented	Value
Coronary heart disease	149,000	£0.88 billion
Stroke	107,000	£0.83 billion
Type 2 diabetes	619,000	£2.66 billion
Cancer (7 types)*	14,000	£0.31 billion
Dementia (65+ years)	57,000	£0.73 billion
Depression	1,293,000	£2.78 billion
Hip fractures (65+ years)	26,000	£0.50 billion
Back pain	917,000	£0.58 billion
Reduced GP visits		£0.54 billion
Reduced mental health service usage		£0.78 billion
Sports injuries		-£0.13 billion
TOTALS	**3.18 million**	**£10.46 billion**

12 Based on 2022/23 participation data from the Active Lives Survey. 2023 prices. As with primary values, total benefits are benchmarked against a counterfactual where the whole population is 'inactive'.

* The 7 types of cancer include: breast cancer, colon cancer, bladder cancer, endometrium cancer, oesophagus cancer, gastric cancer, renal cancer.

Value per person

Average secondary values were:

- **£315** per 'active' adult.
- **£230** per 'fairly active' adult.

Gender differences in value per participant are negligible in this analysis. Age differences are noteworthy:

- **£469** per 'active' adult aged 65+.
- **£279** per 'active' adult aged 16-64.[13]

  This is largely due to the inclusion of two additional health outcomes for older adults: dementia and hip fractures.

Value per adult participant, per year (2023 prices)

'Active' adult:

All adults (aged 16+) | Aged 16-64 | Aged 65+

'Fairly active' adult:

All adults (aged 16+) | Aged 16-64 | Aged 65+

13 Similarly, the value for fairly active older adults aged 65+ (£333) is greater than for those aged 16-64 who are fairly active (£196).

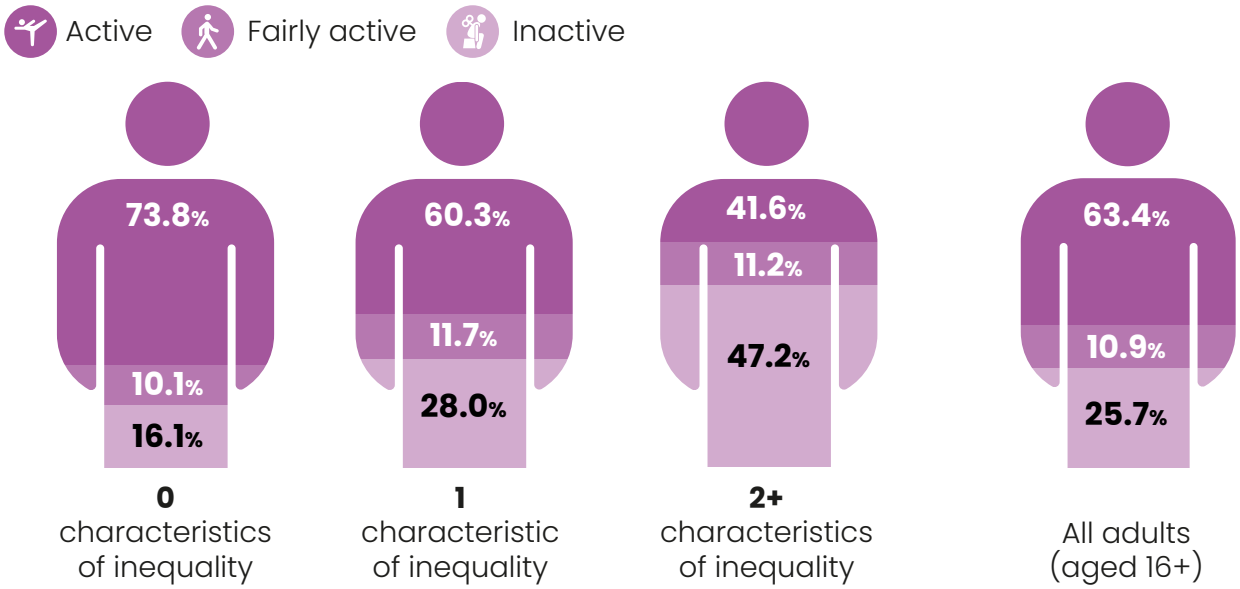
The social cost of inequality

We provisionally estimate the annual social cost of the inequalities we see in adult physical activity levels at **£15.6 billion**:

- **£14.2 billion** from primary value.[14]
- **£1.4 billion** from secondary value.[15]

This analysis considers a scenario where physical activity levels across the adult population – including for those most likely to experience inequalities in participation – increased to match the physical activity levels of adults least likely to experience inequalities.

Physical activity levels: all adults (aged 16+) – Active Lives Adult Survey 2022/23



There would be an estimated £15.6 billion more annual social value created by sport and physical activity if the wider adult population, including those with 1 or 2+ characteristics of inequality, were active at the same levels as those with zero characteristics of inequality.

This would equate to over four million more 'active' adults in England and mean that the benefits of sport and physical activity, and the social value they generate, would be more evenly distributed across the population.

14 & 15 Details of this analysis are contained in the primary value (section 3.7) and secondary value (section 3.5) reports, available here: www.sportengland.org/socialvalue

Conclusion

The values in this report lay the foundation for investment cases across the sector by providing a clear statement of how much social value sport and physical activity generates annually and the different types of benefits it provides for society.

This will further enable decision-makers to make informed and effective policy choices to boost participation in sport and physical activity, improve our national health and wellbeing, and support the delivery of public services. Furthermore, it shows that interventions and policies that address inequalities in participation play a vital role in both driving up the overall social value generated by sport and physical activity, but also in redressing the imbalance in how the benefits of participating are spread across the population.

This work provides a national, overarching picture of the social value of sport and physical activity, so may not completely meet the needs of every partner and stakeholder. However, it establishes an important basis for the sector to present credible and coherent arguments about its social value contributions and apply a consistent approach to how they are calculated. The work to date also provides values for population sub-groups that can be utilised when developing strategies and plans or making investment decisions, so that they can be more deeply informed by social value considerations.

Year one of the research has prioritised health and wellbeing outcomes due to the strength of evidence and because it captures some of the most significant benefits that sport and physical activity delivers for individuals and society. This provides a foundation for the further development of the model in subsequent years. Further iterations will seek to improve our understanding of the ways in which wellbeing value is generated through engaging in sport and physical activity, appraising the evidence for including additional outcome areas, and refreshing the model with the latest data and evidence. This will help ensure our findings, and the supporting guidance and resources that we develop, remain up to date and useful for the sector.

What is already clear is a compelling strategic case for widespread investment in sport and physical activity to improve health and wellbeing: we estimate a total annual value of sport and physical activity in England of over £107 billion in 2022/23. This represents improved quality of life for tens of millions of people and millions of prevented disease cases, underscoring the integral role of sport and physical activity in any effective public health and wellbeing strategy.

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October 2024