

Walking, wheeling and cycling for the over 60s



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Introduction

What

This guide is intended to get more people over the age of 60 walking, wheeling, and cycling on their everyday journeys.

It highlights effective ways for local authorities to make active travel more inclusive and enjoyable for the over 60s.

It is intended as a useful, practical document. We've undertaken and read existing research to ensure this guide promotes activities that work.

We welcome feedback from older people and local authorities. We will integrate this feedback into future versions of this guide.

Why

Active travel promotion can help keep and get people fit and mobile as they age.¹ Increased mobility in older people can improve quality of life, health and mental well-being. Walking can reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness.²

However, physical activity declines with age.³ This is a pressing issue as the UK has an aging population. There are over 866,000 people over the age of 60 living in Wales. They are predicted to make up over 31% of the population by 2031.⁴

To encourage more over 60s to travel actively, we need to take action to tackle barriers to walking, wheeling, and cycling for this age group. Age need not be a barrier to active travel.

How

Transport for Wales and the Welsh Government are working with local authorities to change the way people travel. We're doing that through targeted interventions that we know work.

This toolkit provides a number of campaigns to be run at a local level. These campaigns are intended for communications professionals to use to run active travel campaigns. It sets out key messaging to help overcome barriers to people walking more.

It highlights a number of interventions that have worked. We will update these case studies and campaigns as we better understand what works for communities in Wales.

Every year walking and cycling prevents 24,576 serious long term health conditions.⁵

Active travel improves social connectivity and reduces feelings of loneliness.⁶

A daily 15 minute walk or wheel can improve your physical and mental well-being.⁷



Key messaging

Physical health

Encouraging over 60s to walk, wheel or cycle on their everyday journeys can have significant benefits to their physical health.⁸ It benefits musculoskeletal, cardio-respiratory, sensory and neural systems.⁹

In Wales, 67% of over 65s reported living with one longstanding illness.¹⁰ Of all age groups, older adults are the least active and have the highest rates of inactivity-related health complications.¹¹

Research from Age UK has shown that focusing on the health risks of lack of exercise is not particularly motivating. They suggest stressing the link between physical activity for mobility and independence.¹²

Mental health

Walking, wheeling and cycling for over 60s can contribute to stress reduction and reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness.¹³ Benefits of active travel include being able to enjoy the outdoors and fresh air, being out in the community, and feeling independent and in control.

In Wales, 72% of over 65s have reported feeling lonely.¹⁴ Long periods of isolation during the coronavirus pandemic have contributed to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and increased anxiety.¹⁵ This makes it important to increase the number of older people benefiting from traveling actively.

Safety

Safety concerns are cited as a reason why driving remains the most common form of transport for older people in the UK.¹⁶

Active travel infrastructure and the positioning of street furniture plays an essential role in creating safe, inclusive and accessible environments for everyone to feel confident to walk, wheel or cycle in.¹⁷ Working with road safety teams and campaigns such as [Age Without Limits](#) can help tackle these concerns.

Physical environment

The physical environment plays a key role in whether over 60s choose to walk, wheel, or cycle everyday journeys.¹⁸ If an environment is a better fit for older people, there is a greater potential for them traveling actively.¹⁹

Lack of infrastructure create barriers for those who need to take breaks while walking, wheeling, or cycling. Ensuring access to benches and public toilets, increasing time on pedestrian crossings for people who walk more slowly and ensuring footpaths are clear of obstructions can make the physical environment more accessible to older people.²⁰



Campaigns that work

Start small

Start small. Travel behaviour does not change overnight. Success could be a person walking to their local shop, post office or railway station rather than driving.

One-off events that coincide with special days are a great place to start. 1 October is [Older People's Day](#) and you could build a series of active travel events around it. These one-off events can then build up to more frequent events throughout the year.

Working with older people and transport providers can help influence strategy and identify solutions that make a difference to people's experience of walking, wheeling, and cycling.²¹

Build a community

Building a communities of people walking, wheeling and cycling can encourage more people to begin and keep travelling actively.

[Living streets](#) promote healthier lifestyles and ensure people can stay active and connected with their communities in later life.

[Pedal Power](#) provides information on organisations and clubs that offer inclusive cycling services across Wales.

[Cycling Without Age](#) helps people regain social connection and experience the physical and mental health benefits of cycling.

Encourage public transport use

Over 60s living in Wales can [travel for free](#) on most bus services in Wales. Public transport use frequently involves walking and wheeling to and from bus stops which can help meet recommended guidelines for physical activity.²²

Accessibility to bus services and neighbourhood walkability may influence how readily over 60s engage in walking and wheeling. Promoting the use of free travel options will help boost overall active travel journeys among over 60s.²³

Endnotes

- 1 Chance Taylor Pistoll and Steven Cummins, [Exploring changes in active travel uptake and cessation across the lifespan: Longitudinal evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Survey](#), Preventive Medicine Reports (2019), pp57-61
- 2 Ilona I. McMullan et al, 'Is Physical Activity Associated With Loneliness or Social Isolation in Older Adults? Results of a Longitudinal Analysis Using the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing', Journal of Aging and Physical Activity (2020), pp562-572.
- 3 Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey November 2021-22 Report (2023), p7.
- 4 Older People's Commissioner for Wales, Understanding Wales' Ageing Population: Key Statistics (March, 2024), p4.
- 5 Public Health England, [Cycling and walking for individual and population health benefits: A rapid evidence review for health and care system decision-makers](#) (2018), p15.
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- 7 Age UK, [One step at a time](#) (2022), p7.
- 8 Cerin, E., Nathan, A., van Cauwenberg, J. et al. [The neighbourhood physical environment and active travel in older adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis](#), International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition Physical Activity, 14(15) (2017).
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- 10 Older People's Commissioner for Wales, Understanding Wales' Ageing Population: Key Statistics (March, 2024), p7.
- 11 Samantha Hajna et al, [Driving status, travel modes and accelerometer-assessed physical activity in younger, middle-aged and older adults: a prospective study of 90 810 UK Biobank participants](#), International Journal of Epidemiology, 48(4) (2019), pp1175-1186.
- 12 Age UK, [One step at a time](#) (2022), pp16-17
- 13 Centre for Ageing Better, [Active travel and mid-life: Understanding the barriers and enablers to active travel](#) (2021), p11; Ilona I. McMullan et al, 'Is Physical Activity Associated With Loneliness or Social Isolation in Older Adults? Results of a Longitudinal Analysis Using the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing', Journal of Aging and Physical Activity (2020), pp562-57.
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- 15 Age UK, [Loneliness and Covid-19](#) (2021).
- 16 Rosanne Barnes et al, [Age and retirement status differences in associations between the built environment and active travel behaviour](#), Journal of Transport & Health, 3(4) (2016), pp513-522.
- 17 CIHT, [Five minutes on... dismantling the physical barriers to walking and cycling](#) (2022).
- 18 Cerin, E., Nathan, A., van Cauwenberg, J. et al. [The neighbourhood physical environment and active travel in older adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis](#), International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition Physical Activity, 14(15) (2017).
- 19 Rosanne Barnes et al, [Age and retirement status differences in associations between the built environment and active travel behaviour](#), Journal of Transport & Health, 3(4) (2016), pp513-522,
- 20 Jenny Williams et al, [Ageing Better: Inclusive transport approaches and active travel research](#) (2022) p17.
- 21 Jenny Williams et al, [Ageing Better: Inclusive transport approaches and active travel research](#) (2022) pp18-19.
- 22 Rosanne Barnes et al, [Age and retirement status differences in associations between the built environment and active travel behaviour](#), Journal of Transport & Health, 3(4) (2016), pp513-522
- 23 Chance Taylor Pistoll and Steven Cummins, [Exploring changes in active travel uptake and cessation across the lifespan: Longitudinal evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Survey](#), Preventive Medicine Reports 7 (2019), pp57-61



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