



Physical Activity for People  
with Chronic Conditions

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR PEOPLE WITH  
CHRONIC CONDITIONS

# AWARENESS TRAINING SPECIFICATION

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## **Background**

It is estimated that half of people over the age of 50 in Ireland are living with at least one chronic condition <sup>1</sup>. Chronic conditions are long-term health conditions that require ongoing medical attention and/or have a negative impact on daily functioning <sup>2</sup>. Physical activity can be a powerful tool in the management of a variety of chronic conditions <sup>3</sup>. It can improve functional health and quality of life, among other benefits, in those living with chronic conditions. Physical activity and exercise are promoted and utilised in the management of chronic conditions within the healthcare system. The physical activity sector in Ireland can play a significant role in creating safe and appropriate physical activity opportunities for those living well with chronic conditions in the community. Most people with chronic conditions are considered non-complicated <sup>4</sup> and most can exercise safely in community settings <sup>5</sup>. However, there are gaps in the availability of structured and supported physical activity programmes in the community and gaps in locally based capacity to deliver physical activity programmes for people with chronic conditions. There are limited opportunities for healthcare professionals to signpost onwards to or for people with chronic conditions to present themselves to.

## **PACC**

PACC (Physical Activity for people with Chronic Conditions) is a multiagency collaboration of physical activity, health professionals and higher education academics. It was established in 2021 by the Carlow, Waterford and Westmeath Sports Partnerships, following initial grant aid received from the Dormant Accounts Innovation Fund, administered by Sport Ireland. The initiative arose from a recognition of the need for collaboration across systems to remove systemic barriers that prevent or reduce opportunities for people living with chronic conditions to participate in regular, appropriate, high quality and accessible physical activity in accordance with their needs and interests.

### ***PACC Competency, Qualification and Accreditation Framework***

PACC, through funding from the Dormant Accounts Innovation fund administered by Sport Ireland and funding from the HSE, commissioned the development of a national competency, qualification and accreditation framework as a capacity building measure to further the development of a workforce of exercise professionals as part of the continuum to work with

people living with chronic conditions deemed medically stable. The Frameworks sets out occupational competencies, qualification specifications and accreditation processes to guide standardisation of the upskilling and certification of *Long-Term Condition (LTC) Exercise Instructors*.

The Framework was developed through a comprehensive process with extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including representatives from medical health professionals, allied health professionals, clinical exercise service providers, local sports partnerships, patients and patient advocacy bodies, higher education providers and others. Stakeholder consultation, in particular with local sports partnerships, also discussed the need for broader awareness raising of chronic conditions across the physical activity sector. The agreed content of the Framework has been drawn on to develop *Awareness Training*.

## **Awareness Training**

### ***Aim***

The purpose of the *Awareness Training* is to increase awareness of chronic conditions and the role of physical activity in their management within the physical activity sector in Ireland. Through facilitating the development of a basic understanding of chronic conditions and the appropriate approach to physical activity for people with chronic conditions, the training will demystify chronic conditions within the sector. It will increase the sector's familiarity and comfort with the terminology used in relation to chronic conditions. It will enhance the value placed on the benefits of physical activity for people living with chronic conditions. It will increase foundational knowledge and therefore, confidence in suitable strategies and practices in the design and delivery of physical activity opportunities for people living with chronic conditions. Enhancing appreciation for the considerations specific to this population will lead to a more inclusive and chronic condition "friendly" and responsible sector.

*Awareness Training* may also serve as a bridging programme for exercise professionals prior to undertaking a *LTC Exercise Instructor* qualification. Undertaking a short course on the topic may assist with clarifying interest in the area and in pursuing further training.

The aim of the *Awareness Training* is to provide:

- a basic understanding of common chronic conditions,
- the benefits and risks of physical activity for people with chronic conditions, and
- an overview of the approach to safe and appropriate physical activity in this population.

Essentially, the training will address the following:

- What is a chronic condition and what are the main types?
- How does physical activity benefit chronic conditions?
- What is the best practice approach to physical activity for people with chronic conditions?

### **Scope**

*Awareness Training* does not constitute a qualification or professional certification and does not allow for use of the title of *LTC Exercise Instructor*. A separate comprehensive qualification is necessary to obtain accreditation as a *LTC Exercise Instructor*. *Awareness Training* does not allow for the promotion of expertise in physical activity for people with chronic conditions. It is designed to provide a brief introduction to the topic only. Any associated certificate is one of completion and not a formal certificate of qualification.

Notwithstanding this, the Competency, Qualification and Accreditation Framework for *LTC Exercise Instructor* does not set out to create a barrier to physical activity. People with chronic conditions do not generally require the supervision of accredited exercise professional to undertake physical activity. They can be physically active on their own, with exercise professionals or in other settings, such as community physical activity programmes, as suitable. *Awareness Training* will assist in this regard by sensitising the broader physical activity sector to the needs of people living with chronic conditions.

## **Eligibility**

There is no qualification or learning prerequisites to this training. It was designed for the physical activity sector and with the various players within that sector in mind, specifically:

- Local Sports Partnerships, including coordinators, development officers and tutors
- Leisure centres, gyms and recreation facilities, including owners, managers, personal trainers and exercise instructors
- Other community organisations or individuals working in physical activity
- Physical activity funders and policymakers

*Awareness Training* may be suitable for other parties with interest in physical activity for people with chronic conditions, including volunteers, coaches and others.

## **Learning Outcomes**

On successful completion of the *Awareness Training*, a learner will be able to:

1. Describe in brief common chronic conditions and associated signs and symptoms, in particular those which impact physical activity participation
2. Summarise the benefits of physical activity in the primary and secondary prevention of chronic conditions
3. Outline physical activity risks, screening procedures and general safety principles for exercise with people with chronic conditions

## Indicative Content

Table 1 outlines the indicative content, including the topics and syllabus recommended.

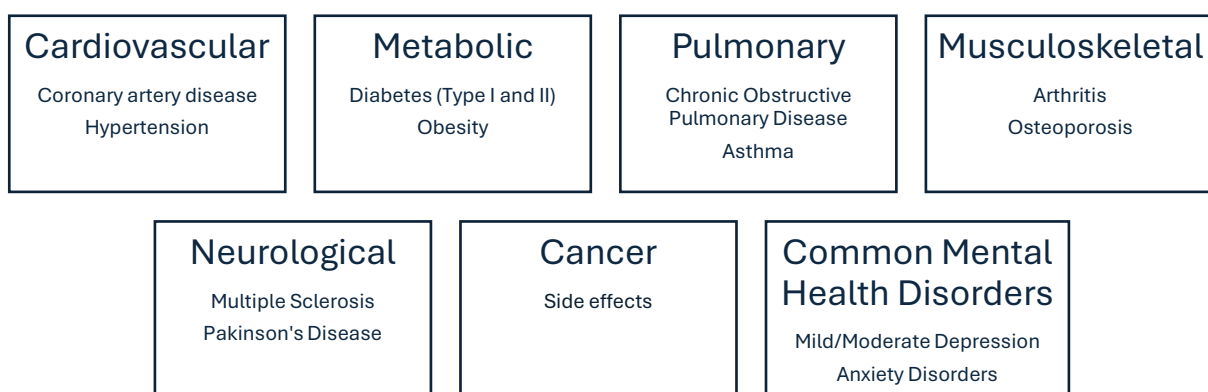
*Table 1: Programme Indicative Content*

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Learners will develop an understanding of:</b>
Chronic conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Definition of a chronic condition and multi-morbidity</li><li>• Overview of the prevalence of chronic conditions in the Irish population</li><li>• Definition and brief description of common chronic conditions*</li><li>• Primary signs and symptoms of common chronic conditions with particular emphasis on those relevant to physical activity participation</li><li>• Overview of features common to chronic conditions that impact daily life, including pain, fatigue, dyspnea, low functional capacity, low mood</li></ul>
Physical activity and chronic conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summary of the physical and psychological benefits of physical activity in common chronic conditions</li></ul>
Physical activity-related risks and screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overview of physical activity related risks in people with common chronic conditions, in particular cardiac and falls risk</li><li>• Purpose of and procedures for preparticipation and ongoing screening</li></ul>
Exercise safety principles for chronic conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Safety approaches to exercise that can be applied across chronic condition cohorts, including relating to supervision and monitoring, programme/class structure, selection of intensity and progression</li></ul>

## Educator Guidance

Educator guidance provides a narrative explanation of the indicative content to assist in the development and delivery of the *Awareness Training* programmes. The topic of 'Chronic Conditions' serves as an introduction to develop a basic understanding, with a particular focus on creating familiarity with the terminology associated with chronic conditions. It should develop the ability to recognise common chronic conditions. An overview of the profile of the Irish population in terms of the prevalence of chronic conditions and multimorbidity should seek to highlight the likelihood of encountering chronic conditions in the community and the need for physical activity opportunities for this population.

The chronic conditions to be introduced are those with the highest prevalence in Ireland, that account for the greatest proportion of healthcare spending, and that have an established evidence-base for physical activity in their management. Figure 1 outlines the common chronic conditions that should be addressed. This requires a definition and simple description of each of the conditions, highlighting the main characteristics, in particular those that impact physical activity participation. Many of these limitations are common across multiple chronic conditions and can therefore, be delivered in an integrated manner, avoiding repetition.



*Figure 1: Common chronic conditions included in the training*

*Note: Cancer is not further subdivided based on tumour site as rather cancer and treatment-related side effects are more relevant in an exercise context.*



The topic of 'Physical Activity and Chronic Conditions' should outline the benefits of physical activity for common chronic conditions. Again, many of the benefits of physical activity, e.g., improved functional capacity, enhanced quality of life, are common across chronic conditions and can be covered in an integrated manner. Summary-based rather than epidemiology/evidence-based is sufficient.

The topic of 'Physical Activity Related Risks and Screening' should provide a brief overview of risks associated with physical activity and factors influencing the level of risk, e.g., habitual physical activity, physical activity intensity. It is not the purpose of the training to educate on how to administer and interpret preparticipation screening tools. Rather, the objective is to impart knowledge on the purpose and principles of, or approaches to, screening. It focus on identifying individuals who might be at higher risk of adverse events during physical activity. This includes preparticipation screening but should also highlighting the importance of ongoing screening. Given the fluctuations in symptoms of chronic conditions, "check-ins" or screening prior to each exercise session is important.

Finally, the topic of 'Exercise Safety Principles for Chronic Conditions', takes an integrated, rather than condition specific, approach. Most exercise safety considerations overlap across various conditions and therefore, can be presented as general safety principles. This, for the most part, outlines an appropriate approach to exercise safety for common chronic conditions and other chronic conditions. This draws together the knowledge needed to reduce the risk of adverse events. It is not meant to equip learners with the skills to deliver physical activity opportunities but to understand the requirements of physical activity programmes for people with chronic conditions and to recognise the appropriateness of physical activity programmes.

## Education Delivery

Recommendations are provided for the delivery of the *Awareness Training* outlining appropriate arrangements to ensure the quality of the learning experience. In terms of pedagogical approach, if feasible it is recommended that the programme involve live interaction with a tutor as opposed to pre-recorded delivery. Learners will benefit significantly from interactive discussion, immediate feedback and clarification, tailored examples and peer collaboration. Training materials should be produced to facilitate learning and provided to learners, enabling them to refer to the content post training. Assessment of comprehension is recommended at the end of the training. This is not an assessment of competency and does not lead to formal certification. Its purpose is to gauge understanding and learning gaps. Formative assessment may be delivered during the training to facilitate discussion or identify the need for clarification or further emphasis.

*Learning Hours:* The minimum recommended learning hours is 3 hours.

*Learning Resources:* The assist in the delivery of the training, the following training resources are recommended:

Erham, JK, Grodon P, Visch P, Keteyian SJ. *Clinical Exercise Physiology: Exercise Management for Chronic Diseases and Special Populations* (5<sup>th</sup> Edition). Human Kinetics Publishers, 2022.

American College of Sports Medicine. *ACSM's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription* (11<sup>th</sup> edition). Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2021.

*Staffing:* Tutors delivering the training should have expertise in exercise for people with chronic conditions\*; or have undertaken a train-the-trainer programme for the *Awareness Training*, ideally in addition to undertaking the LTC Exercise Instructor qualification. More than one tutor can be engaged in the training delivery to ensure the different domains of expertise are fulfilled.

\*this expertise may arise from a qualification in exercise science, physiotherapy or related field.

*Education Provision:* Education provision requires a suitable platform and processes to register learners, deliver live online or in person workshops, share learning materials, assess comprehension, and administer certificates of completion.

## References

1. Taoiseach, D. of the. *National Risk Assessment - Overview of Strategic Risks 2018*. (2018).
2. Goodman, R. A., Posner, S. F., Huang, E. S., Parekh, A. K. & Koh, H. K. Defining and measuring chronic conditions: imperatives for research, policy, program, and practice. *Prev Chronic Dis* 10, 1–16 (2013).
3. Pedersen, B. K. & Saltin, B. Exercise as medicine - evidence for prescribing exercise as therapy in 26 different chronic diseases. *Scand J Med Sci Sports* 25, 1–72 (2015).
4. Disease, I. C. P. for the P. and M. of C. *National Framework for the Integrated Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease in Ireland 2020-2025*. (2020).
5. Woods, C. et al. *The National Exercise Referral Framework*. (2016).



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