



Physical Activity for People
with **Chronic Conditions**

The PACC Project

Physical Activity
for People with
Chronic Conditions

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

MAY 2024

WHO?

Who is PACC?

PACC involves a multiagency collaboration of physical activity and health professionals, alongside academics from Higher Education Institutions. 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 with chronic conditions to participate in regular, appropriate, high quality and accessible physical activity in accordance with their needs and interests.

Who is involved? Who governs? Who manages?

The core partners involved in PACC are representatives from the following bodies:

- Physical Activity:** Carlow, Waterford and Westmeath Sports Partnerships.
- Health:** HSE Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme and HSE Self-Management Support Programme.
- Academics:** South East Technological University, Carlow and Waterford, and the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest.



Representatives from these bodies participate in a Core Stakeholder Group which is responsible for the direction and oversight of the initiative. Waterford Sports Partnership, as project lead, manages the initiative and all associated funding on behalf of the core stakeholders.



Who initiated PACC? Who enabled or funded PACC?

PACC was initiated by the Carlow, Waterford and Westmeath Sports Partnerships following a successful funding application to the Dormant Accounts Innovation Fund, administered by Sport Ireland. PACC has also received other funding from the HSE, Sláintecare and Carlow Sports Partnership.

To whom is PACC relevant?

PACC aspires to equal opportunities for people with chronic conditions to participate in regular, appropriate, high quality and accessible physical activity in accordance with their needs, capacities and interests. Consequently, PACC is relevant to all those who share this concern, including individuals living with one or more chronic conditions.

WHY?

Why is PACC in existence? What is the rationale and context for the establishment of PACC?

The HSE estimates suggest that one in two Irish people over the age of 50 lives with at least one long-term, chronic condition and that these are inversely associated with socio economic status. Given the growth in the ageing population nationally and internationally, the prevalence of individuals living with chronic conditions is likely to increase.

One of the primary risk factors for the development of chronic conditions is physical inactivity. Similarly, physical activity has been found to result in health benefits for those diagnosed with chronic conditions.

In spite of the importance of physical activity in preventing, minimising and reducing the health impacts of chronic conditions, there remain gaps nationally in opportunities for people with chronic conditions to participate in regular, appropriate, high quality and accessible physical activity in accordance with their needs, capacities and interests. Among others, these gaps include:

- gaps in the availability of structured and supported physical activity programmes in communities;
- gaps in locally based capacity to deliver physical activity programmes for people with chronic conditions;
- gaps in the referral of people living with chronic conditions to physical activity; and
- gaps in the flow of information about suitable and available physical activity programmes.

PACC describes these gaps as systemic barriers to the participation of people living with chronic conditions in physical activity. A core rationale for PACC is the belief that collaboration across the systems of physical activity, health and academia is essential to remove those systemic barriers.

What are Chronic Conditions?

The HSE describes Chronic Conditions (also frequently referred to as chronic disease or chronic illness) as long-term health conditions that need ongoing treatment and management.

The HSE estimates that one in two Irish people over the age of 50 lives with at least one long-term, chronic condition. Physical activity is recognised as an important element in preventing and treating chronic conditions.

EXAMPLES OF CHRONIC CONDITIONS INCLUDE:

Respiratory Conditions *such as Asthma or COPD* | Cardiovascular Conditions *such as Angina, or Heart Attack* | Metabolic Conditions *such as Diabetes or Obesity* | Neurological Conditions *such as Multiple Sclerosis or Parkinson's* | Musculoskeletal conditions *such as Arthritis or Osteoporosis* | Cancer | Mental Health.

Why did the PACC partners come together?

The PACC partners came together to address gaps in the provision of physical activity opportunities for people living with chronic conditions. They believed that responsibility for addressing those gaps did not rest with any one single sector, but with a range of professionals from physical activity, health and academic backgrounds. Therefore, the PACC partners came together to promote collaboration across physical activity, health and academic sectors. At the time of PACC's inception, no structure existed in Ireland to facilitate the collaborative engagement of those disciplines.

The PACC partners have sought to innovate in the area of physical activity for people with chronic conditions. Part of that innovation involved different disciplines (physical activity, health, academic) collaborating with one another in ways that they had not previously collaborated.

PACC is designing, testing and evaluating practical innovations to increase opportunities for people with chronic conditions to participate in regular, appropriate, high quality and accessible physical activity in accordance with their needs and interests. These innovations have the potential to inform the practice of professionals from physical activity, health and academic backgrounds; to contribute to new ways of working and to offer new solutions to existing problems. A core objective of PACC is that innovations developed via PACC will be replicable by others and scalable to improve physical activity outcomes for a larger number of people living with chronic conditions.

WHAT and HOW?

What does PACC do and how does it do it?

PACC has convened partners from physical activity, health and academic sectors to plan, design, implement and evaluate initiatives that will improve opportunities for people living with chronic conditions to participate in regular, appropriate, high quality and accessible physical activity in accordance with their needs, capacities and interests – both now and into the future.

In 2021, the PACC Core Stakeholders undertook a short but comprehensive consultation process, designed to deepen understanding of the barriers limiting the opportunities of people with chronic conditions from participating in regular, appropriate and accessible physical activity. Participants in the consultation included individuals living with chronic conditions, health and social care professionals and community-based physical activity providers. The results of the consultation assisted core stakeholders in the initiative to build a shared understanding of one another and to agree a shared understanding of need within the initiative.

Based on the findings of that consultation process, PACC developed three pilot initiatives. PACC is also about to embark on a fourth project, focused on exploring possibilities of increasing collaboration between a range of non-acute, community-based physical activity providers (e.g. sports/activity/fitness providers, HSE community-based providers, clinically supervised providers and patient advocacy groups).

The pilot projects that have been enabled under PACC are outlined in some detail at the end of this booklet.

All of PACC's work operates to a set of core principles. These concern commitments to:

innovation: to testing new and sustainable responses to physical activity barriers for people with chronic conditions;

collaboration: to a process of multiple partners from multiple sectors working together to identify, develop and implement innovative responses to physical activity barriers for people with chronic conditions;

participation and, in particular, to improved physical activity participation outcomes for people living with chronic conditions in accordance with their needs, interests and functional capacities; and

learning and to informing practice and policy relevant to the physical activity needs of people with chronic conditions.

What makes PACC innovative?

PACC has innovated by bringing together stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to engage collectively in needs-based, outcome-focused interventions that increase the participation of people with chronic conditions in physical activity. PACC has developed a model of effective interdisciplinary working, optimising the strengths of participating sectors, while also setting out to address gaps in those sectors in a collective manner. In tandem, as noted above, PACC has initiated practical, evidence-informed, collaborative innovations, strategically designed to remove barriers and thereby contribute to increased participation of people with chronic conditions in physical activity.

WHAT and HOW?

What else is happening in this space alongside the work of PACC?

Since PACC was established, two other significant programmes have evolved nationally that are particularly pertinent to the work of PACC:

The Physical Activity for Healthcare Model (PAPHM): PAPHM is an initiative of the HSE, designed to develop, refine and implement a physical activity model in the Irish healthcare system that will enable people at risk of/living with chronic conditions to become and remain physically active in their communities. It seeks to respond systematically to the current absence of a standardised physical activity model in the healthcare system and is closely integrated with the HSE's *Making Every Contact Count (MECC)* framework and the HSE's *Model of Care for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease*.

The Physical Activity for Health Officer Pilot Programme: The Physical Activity for Health Officer pilot programme, funded by Sláintecare via Sport Ireland, aims to address physical activity as a risk factor for chronic conditions. The pilot consists of six *Physical Activity for Health officers*, housed within 6 Local Sports Partnerships (LSP). The officer role will seek to ensure that those who are ready and who need more attention and care transitioning to community physical activity will be facilitated with appropriate physical activity programmes on the pathway to mainstream LSP and other community programmes that are on offer locally.

What makes PACC different?

PACC is different to other initiatives on a number of fronts:

- It involves convening stakeholders from a variety of professional backgrounds to address barriers to physical activity for people living with chronic conditions.
- It focuses on collaboration across systems and on removing systemic barriers that prevent or reduce opportunities for people with chronic conditions to participate in regular, appropriate, supported and high quality physical activity in accordance with their needs and interests.
- Its focus is on creating pilot initiatives that can be replicated on a wide scale across the country.

From where is PACC operating? Is the work of PACC location-specific?

PACC operates under the leadership of Carlow, Waterford and Westmeath Sports Partnerships. PACC initiatives therefore tend to be piloted in the catchments of Carlow, Waterford and Westmeath Sports Partnerships. But the aim is to create pilot projects that can be replicated on a wider scale across the country. One of the PACC Projects, which is supporting the design of quality assured accredited training and continuous professional development packages for physical activity professionals working with chronic conditions, already works to a national remit.

PILOT PROJECTS INITIATED BY PACC

TITLE: **Quality Assured Education and Training for Exercise Professionals Working with Chronic Conditions**

PROJECT STATUS: *Project ongoing*

In 2021, the PACC Core Stakeholders undertook a short but comprehensive consultation process, designed to deepen understanding of the barriers limiting the opportunities of people with chronic conditions from participating in regular, appropriate and accessible physical activity. Participants in the consultation included individuals living with chronic conditions, health and social care professionals and community-based physical activity providers.

Consultations highlighted that, though awareness of the physical activity needs of people living with chronic conditions was growing within the fitness sector, it was acknowledged widely that there remained knowledge gaps and skill deficiencies in the sector. It was recommended that there was a significant need to upskill locally-based fitness instructors/coaches in working with people with chronic conditions, particularly in areas such as understanding levels of safety, how far to push participants, etc.

In parallel, health and social care practitioners expressed the desire to refer patients onward to physical activity services and programmes. It was noted consistently however that, for a medical practitioner to refer a patient to a physical activity programme or provider, s/he would have to be confident in the knowledge and capacity of the provider to cater safely to the needs of the patient.

Against that backdrop, PACC established a pilot project that would contribute to the development of a skilled workforce of physical activity professionals that would have both the knowledge and capacity to cater to the physical activity needs of people with chronic conditions. Specifically, the pilot project has spent the last year working on the development of a framework for *Quality Assured Education and Training for Exercise Professionals Working with Chronic Conditions*, seeking to address the capacity building needs of emerging graduates and those already working within the physical activity sector.

The pilot project is being led by a multi-stakeholder steering group, comprising representatives from physical activity, health and academic backgrounds. As of May 2024, membership of the Pilot Project Steering Group is comprised of representatives from the bodies as outlined under PROJECT PARTNERS below.

The South Eastern Technological University (SETU) has been commissioned to lead this project on behalf of PACC. For the past eight months, SETU representatives have engaged with a breadth of stakeholders across physical activity, health, academic and patient advocacy backgrounds, seeking input on the requirements of such a framework and building support for its development. It is anticipated that the framework will be completed by June 2024. Thereafter, there will be a need to ensure the availability of education and training packages that align to the standards within the framework, and to develop an appropriate governance and oversight structure to ensure that emerging qualifications and CPD packages are implemented to the highest standards.

PROJECT PARTNERS



PILOT PROJECTS INITIATED BY PACC

TITLE: **Waterford Community-based Information and Signposting Pilot Project**

PROJECT STATUS: *Project ongoing*

In 2021, the PACC Core Stakeholders undertook a short but comprehensive consultation process, designed to deepen understanding of the barriers limiting the opportunities of people with chronic conditions from participating in regular, appropriate and accessible physical activity. Participants in the consultation included individuals living with chronic conditions, health and social care professionals and community-based physical activity providers.

Consultations highlighted that, while health and social care professionals were keen to signpost patients to physical activity, they were inadequately aware of locally-based, accessible programmes and services. The need for an ongoing and effective flow of information between health, social care and physical activity professionals was emphasised. It was stated that ongoing, effective information flow was an important vehicle in promoting partnership between health, social care and physical activity professionals (and not simply as a one-off exercise at the time of signposting or referral).

In response, PACC established a pilot project in Waterford city and county that seeks to develop a formalised engagement process between healthcare professionals, social prescribers and community-based physical activity providers. The project has worked towards the following outcomes:

- increased information-flow, linkage and collaboration between Waterford Sports Partnership, the Waterford Social Prescribing Service and the Waterford Chronic Disease Management Hub;
- people living well with chronic conditions in Waterford city and county have i) increased knowledge of community-based physical activity opportunities and ii) increased confidence to participate in community-based programmes; and
- increased participation of people living well with chronic conditions in the programmes of Waterford Sports Partnership.

In the longer term, the project is also working towards the establishment of an evidence-informed, collaborative, community-based information and signposting process that, via evaluation, will be identified as an innovative and replicable good practice model in contributing to the participation of people with chronic conditions in physical activity.

The project began in 2022, while the actual signposting of people with chronic conditions to the programmes of Waterford Sports Partnership began in Spring of 2023. The project involves a collaboration between health, social prescriber, physical activity and academic partners. The project will be evaluated in 2024 by S3 Consultants.

As of May 2024, membership of the Pilot Project Working Group is comprised of representatives from the bodies below:

PROJECT PARTNERS



PILOT PROJECTS INITIATED BY PACC

TITLE: **The Provision of Community-based Clinically Supervised Exercise for Chronic Conditions in Carlow**

PROJECT STATUS: *Project commenced in March 2022 and concluded in March 2023*

In 2021, the PACC Core Stakeholders undertook a short but comprehensive consultation process, designed to deepen understanding of the barriers limiting the opportunities of people with chronic conditions from participating in regular, appropriate and accessible physical activity. Participants in the consultation included individuals living with chronic conditions, health and social care professionals and community-based physical activity providers. The consultation emphasised the importance of structured and supported exercise services being available in communities, while also highlighting the value of, and benefit from, group-based exercise programmes.

Against that backdrop, the PACC Core Stakeholders sought to commission a clinically supervised exercise provider to extend and adapt its service in a community in which no such service existed. ExWell Medical was selected as the exercise provider and in collaboration with SETU Carlow, Carlow Sports Partnership and other local partners, the ExWell model of clinically supervised exercise provision was launched in Carlow.

Over the course of 2022 and into the early parts of 2023, ExWell continued to provide weekly supervised exercise programmes to participants, initially in the SETU facility and also, in later stages, in Leighlinbridge. Participant numbers continued to grow, with between 70 and 75 participant visits per week.

In reviewing this pilot project, it was agreed that PACC's role was not to fund ongoing delivery of any service, but to use pilot projects to develop new and innovative responses to physical activity barriers for people with chronic conditions. Having supported the introduction of ExWell to Carlow, it was agreed that PACC would cease its investment in this project and this took effect in March 2023.

PROJECT PARTNERS



PILOT PROJECTS INITIATED BY PACC

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|------------------------|--|
| TITLE: | Exploring Avenues for Collaboration Among Non-acute, Community-based Providers of Physical Activity |
| PROJECT STATUS: | <i>In development</i> |

All of PACC's work operates to a set of core principles. These concern commitments to:

innovation: to testing new and sustainable responses to physical activity barriers for people with chronic conditions;

collaboration: to a process of multiple partners from multiple sectors working together to identify, develop and implement innovative responses to physical activity barriers for people with chronic conditions;

participation and, in particular, to improved physical activity participation outcomes for people living with chronic conditions in accordance with their needs, interests and functional capacities; and

learning and to informing practice and policy relevant to the physical activity needs of people with chronic conditions.

PACC emphasises the equivalence of all forms of exercise-provision for people with chronic conditions. It recognises that some people with chronic conditions need clinical oversight when engaging in physical activity; others don't. PACC therefore wishes to explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration between a range of non-acute, community-based exercise providers: Local Sports Partnerships; the fitness and leisure sector, national organisations involved in structured and clinically supervised exercise provision; patient advocacy groups, and HSE community-based healthcare practitioners, specifically in relation to the physical activity needs of people living with chronic conditions.

This collaboration would be established to create increased understanding of the challenges facing all sectors in engaging with one another, and consider new ways of working collectively to provide greater physical activity opportunities for people living with chronic conditions.

Consequently, in 2024, PACC will invite a range of stakeholders from the sectors named above to a series of exploratory discussions, focused on:

- understanding current obstacles to cross-sectoral collaboration in respect of physical activity for people with chronic conditions;
- generating responses to those obstacles; and
- identifying parties interested in piloting innovative – and potentially scalable - responses to those obstacles;
- committing to evaluation and capturing learning with the potential to inform replication.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PACC
Please visit: www.waterfordsportspartnership.ie/pacc

