



Physical Activity for People
with **Chronic Conditions**

Physical Activity for People with Chronic Conditions (PACC)

Summary Progress Report 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document is a summary report of progress in the PACC initiative throughout 2023.

1.1 PACC

The Physical Activity for People with Chronic Conditions (PACC) initiative involves a multi-stakeholder collaboration that was initiated in 2021 by the Carlow, Waterford¹ and Westmeath Sports Partnerships with funding secured under the 2020 Dormant Accounts Innovation Fund administered by Sport Ireland (SI). Other key stakeholders are the HSE, through its Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme, and Higher Education Institutions, specifically the South East Technological University (SETU), Carlow and Waterford and the Technological University of the Shannon (TÚS) in Athlone.

Since April 2021, a Core Stakeholder Group, involving the partners listed above, has worked together to plan, conceptualise and oversee the implementation of the project. The PACC Core Stakeholders aspire to an Ireland in which people with chronic conditions have equal opportunity to access regular, appropriate, supported and high quality physical activity in accordance with their needs and interests. Consequently, PACC has set out to understand and address systemic barriers to the participation of people with chronic conditions in physical activity through the creation of a replicable, multisectoral, evidence-informed, collaborative initiative that generates learning and builds on evidenced practice.

Over the past three years, 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. It has created three pilot initiatives to date, each driven by a specific multi-stakeholder working group, focused on:

- **Pilot Project 1:** Increasing participation in physical activity among people with chronic conditions by commissioning a clinically-supervised exercise provider to extend and adapt its service in a community in which no such service existed.
- **Pilot Project 2:** Commissioning a broad-based research, consultation and framework development process that will inform quality assured, multi-level, accredited training/Continuous Professional Development packages for exercise professionals working with chronic conditions nationally, and thereby increase opportunities for people with chronic conditions to access high quality community-based exercise opportunities.
- **Pilot Project 3:** Formalising working relationships between Local Sports Partnerships, Social Prescribing Services and HSE Chronic Disease Hubs (and associated services) in a manner that increases information-flow and service-linkage, and thereby increases information,

¹ Waterford LSP administered the project on behalf of all partners.

pathways and access of individuals living well with chronic conditions to existing community-based, non-medically supervised programmes.

2. ACTIVITY AND OUTPUT

The following offers a summary of the key activities and outputs delivered within the PACC programme over the course of 2023.

2.1 PACC CORE STAKEHOLDER GROUP

The PACC Core Stakeholder Group continued to provide governance, oversight and strategic direction to the overarching PACC initiative. Between January and December 2023, the Core Stakeholder Group met seven times. In addition to overseeing the strategic direction of PACC, and retaining responsibility for pilot projects and funding, the PACC Core Stakeholders spent considerable time throughout 2023 discussing its role and mandate.

Discussions on a communications strategy for PACC in the first quarter of the year sparked debate within the Core Stakeholder Group on the subjects of i) ownership of PACC and ii) from where PACC derived its mandate. This arose particularly in the context of a communications proposal that PACC should seek to establish itself as a **'go to'** structure in the physical activity/chronic conditions arena.

Throughout 2023, the PACC Core Stakeholder Group grappled with this issue, and spent time considering if PACC had a mandate beyond the delivery of the pilot projects to which it had committed, including having a conversation with Sport Ireland to this effect. For now, PACC retains responsibility for the implementation of the pilot projects it has initiated and for funding issued to it. In addition the PACC Core Stakeholder Group has expressed a commitment to *"constantly reviewing the physical activity landscape nationally, particularly as it pertains to the physical activity needs of people with chronic conditions, identifying appropriate policy and practice responses and, as appropriate, preparing submissions that add value to that policy and practice landscape²."*

2.2 PILOT PROJECTS

Pilot Project 1: The Provision of Community-Based Clinically Supervised Exercise for Chronic Conditions in Carlow

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

² PACC Core Stakeholder Group Terms of Reference.

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.

Pilot Project 1 concluded at the end of the first quarter of 2023. Over the course of 2022 and into the early parts of 2023, ExWell had continued to provide weekly supervised exercise-programmes to participants, initially in the SETU facility and also, in later stages, in Leighlinbridge. Participant numbers had 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.

Pilot Project 2: Framework Development & design of quality assured, multi-level, accredited training/Continuous Professional Development (CPD) packages for exercise professionals working with chronic conditions

Following a tendering process for a consultancy to resource Pilot Project 2, The South East Technological University (SETU) was commissioned to lead this project on behalf of PACC. A project Steering Group was established in July to oversee the work of SETU; to ensure that SETU's work remained on track in terms of scope, time and deliverables; and to provide guidance and support to the SETU project team. The steering group comprises a broad range of relevant stakeholders from the sports, health and academic sectors.

SETU commenced its work on this initiative during the summer months. The consultancy is being delivered over five phases:

- Phase 1: establishing the project
- Phase 2: engaging stakeholders
- Phase 3: framework drafting
- Phase 4: stakeholder symposium
- Phase 5: framework finalisation.

SETU has made significant strides in advancing the work of the project. Early stages of the work were devoted to undertaking a review of international literature to ascertain what might be learned from similar experiences in other countries. Information garnered from this review has been used to

draft an initial outline framework, scoping out occupational standards, provisional knowledge and competency outcomes, and curriculum content – all of which have facilitated discussion with stakeholders during the subsequent stakeholder engagement phase.

Stakeholder engagement has been ongoing and will continue to be the dominant activity of the project up to the end of January 2024. Engagements to date have been extremely positive, with consistent demand for training and an appropriate qualification within the exercise sector. The project remains within the timeline expected of it, with plans for a final stakeholder symposium (phase 4) set for May 2024, leading to the finalisation of the proposed framework.

Pilot Project 3: Community-based Information and Signposting Pilot Project, Waterford

Throughout 2023, the Pilot Project Working Group³ continued to work towards the following outcomes:

- increased information-flow, linkage and collaboration between Waterford Sports Partnership and i) Waterford Social Prescribing Service and ii) Waterford Chronic Disease 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.

Having put in place a process for information-sharing and signposting of participants in 2022, the focus of activity in 2023 was on implementing this process. Though output from the project partners has been high throughout the year, the realisation of outcomes⁴ has been lower than anticipated. Reflection by pilot project group members suggested a number of possible reasons for the lack of progress. Among others, these have included concerns around the timing of activities, the varied stages of development within participating HSE services, and inconsistent delivery of the signposting process in spite of the project working group's ambition to create a replicable, standard operating model.

In the latter stages of 2023, the PACC Core Stakeholder Group approved funding for the commissioning of a consultancy to support a year-long learning and development process that would be designed to strengthen the delivery of the signposting process in Waterford and to work strategically towards the development of a standard operating signposting model. Work to secure a consultancy will commence in the early stages of 2024.

³ Comprising representatives from Waterford Sports Partnership, the HSE, Waterford Social Prescribing Service and the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS).

⁴ In terms of those having been signposted to the programmes of Waterford Sports Partnership approaching, participating and completing programmes.

2.3 COMMUNICATIONS

Presentations

2023 began with the submission and acceptance of an abstract on behalf of PACC at the I-PARC Conference in January 2023. Feedback on PACC's presentation, which was delivered by one of the PACC Core Stakeholders, was remarkably positive.

In September, a member of the Pilot Project 3 Working Group⁵, made a presentation on the pilot project in Waterford at the National Physical Activity Pathways for Health Stakeholder Event. Titled, *Health Promotion in the Chronic Disease Hub*, the presentation referred to the multidisciplinary approach of the PACC pilot project to addressing barriers to physical activity participation of people living with chronic conditions; explained the approach to recruiting new participants with chronic illness to community-based exercise programmes, and highlighted how interagency respect and understanding had been generated through the operation of the Waterford-based pilot. The event was attended by representatives of both the HSE and Local Sports Partnership network.

Communications Working Group

Arising from recommendations in last year's process evaluation report, a Communications Working Group was created at the beginning of 2023. Comprising the Coordinators of the three participating LSPs, their respective Communications Officers and a Sport Ireland Regional Communication Officer, the Working Group was created to assist in:

- proposing the objectives, outcomes and timeframe of a PACC communications strategy;
- defining a set of activities and outputs to be delivered to address agreed communications objectives and outcomes;
- supporting the delivery of some of those activities, e.g. a stakeholder analysis and subsequent implications; and
- identifying the personnel and resource requirements to deliver a PACC communications strategy.

Aforementioned deliberations within the PACC Core Stakeholder Group regarding its role and mandate, alongside the conclusion of Pilot Project 1 in Quarter 1 had the immediate effect of diminishing attention to the subject of communications. In effect, the significance of a communications strategy reduced as other more pressing matters were prioritised within the PACC work programme. Equally, it was not possible to progress a communications strategy without agreement, and indeed direction, on the previously mentioned issues of role, identity and mandate. As a result, limited activity took place within the Communications Working Group after the first quarter of the year.

⁵ Community-based Information and Signposting Pilot Project.

2.4 PLANNED SEMINAR

A plan was put in place at the start of 2023 to host a PACC seminar in May. Invitees to the event were to include the Core Stakeholder Group, representatives from each of the Pilot Project Working Groups, the Communications Working Group and other relevant and interested parties⁶.

The purpose of the planned seminar was to:

- build the visibility of the overarching PACC initiative among those involved only at pilot project level;
- demonstrate the interlinked nature of all pilot initiatives;
- demonstrate how the work of individual pilot projects contributes to the overall vision and function of PACC; and
- strengthen the PACC identity and brand, locating each of the individual pilot projects within a wider PACC framework.

It was also felt that such an event would provide an opportunity for various stakeholders and contributors to individual pilot projects, who don't have an overview of other projects operating under PACC, to gain valuable insight on potential connections and innovations across projects internal and external to PACC.

While some initial planning took place in relation to this seminar, as in the case of communications, the emergence of other programme priorities in the first half of the year resulted in this planned activity not taking place. It is planned to hold this event at a point in the second half of 2024.

3. UPDATE ON FINANCE

3.1 INCOME IN 2023

In April, Waterford Sports Partnership, on behalf of PACC, submitted a funding proposal to Sport Ireland under the latest round of Dormant Accounts Innovation Funding. The maximum grant available for Innovation Projects stood at €70,000 and a submission for the full grant was made on behalf of PACC. In October, Waterford Sports Partnership was informed that its proposal had been successful in securing €54,000. This allocation was supplemented by the allocation of €50,000 for PACC from Sláintecare (via Sport Ireland).

⁶ For example, Physical Activity for Health Officers, stakeholders from within the respective agencies/organisations/ interest groups of core stakeholders, etc.

Similarly, funding from both the HSE (€60,000) and Carlow Sports Partnership (€15,000) was also made available to ensure that PACC could progress with the timely issuing of a tender in respect of Pilot Project 2 in early 2023⁷.

Consequently, a total income of €179,000 was recorded for PACC during 2023. The additional funding secured in 2023 brought the total funding secured for the initiative since 2020 to €379,000. See the summary information provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of PACC Income and Expenditure - 2020 to 2023

| | Total | General | Pilot 1 | Pilot 2 | Pilot 3 |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| INCOME | | | | | |
| • Dormant Accounts SI Innovation Fund 2020 | 100,000 | 48,260 | 30,000 | 13,140 | 8,600 |
| • Dormant Accounts SI Innovation Fund 2022 | 100,000 | 60,000 | | | 40,000 |
| • Dormant Accounts SI Innovation Fund 2023 | 54,000 | 54,000 | | | |
| • Slaintecare via SI 2023 Innovation | 50,000 | 50,000 | | | |
| • HSE PACC 2 Contribution 2023 | 60,000 | | | 60,000 | |
| • Carlow County Council/Carlow Sports Partnership PACC 2 Contribution 2023 | 15,000 | | | 15,000 | |
| TOTAL INCOME | 379,000 | 212,260 | 30,000 | 88,140 | 48,600 |
| ACTUAL EXPENDITURE | | | | | |
| • Year ending 2020 | (4,571) | (4,571) | | | |
| • Year ending 2021 | (10,246) | (10,246) | | | |
| • Year ending 2022 | (20,841) | (20,724) | | | (171) |
| • Year ending 2023 | (71,390) | (15,667) | (29,688) | (25,881) | (154) |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE | (107,048) | (51,208) | (29,688) | (25,881) | (271) |
| COMMITTED EXPENDITURE (NOT YET SPENT) | | | | | |
| • Project Facilitation | (10,500) | (10,500) | | | |
| • Pilot 2 Contract payments o/s CCC/HSE | (49,173) | | | (49,173) | |
| • Pilot 2 Contract payments o/s WSP | (11,090) | | | (11,090) | |
| • Pilot 3 Learning & Development | (40,000) | | | | (40,000) |
| TOTAL COMMITTED EXPENDITURE (UNSPENT) | (110,763) | (10,500) | | (60,263) | (40,000) |
| UNCOMMITTED BUDGET AVAILABLE 31/12/23 | 161,189 | 150,552 | 312 | 1,996 | 8,329 |

⁷ Framework development & design of quality assured, multi-level, accredited training/Continuous Professional Development (CPD) packages for exercise professionals working with chronic conditions

3.2 EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

Since 2021, PACC has committed a total of €166,740 to the innovative pilot projects it has developed. Expenditure on these commitments is ongoing.

Total PACC expenditure in 2023 stood at €71,390, centred principally on expenditure related to pilot projects and facilitation of the PACC initiative. As illustrated in Table 1 below, a total of just over €107,000 has been spent on the entire PACC initiative to date. In addition to this sum, a further €111,000 has been committed but remains unspent.

Against that backdrop, at the end of 2023, PACC retains an uncommitted budget of just over €161,000.

4. CHALLENGES AND KEY LEARNING

2023 was the year when PACC encountered significant challenges for the first time. The first two years of the initiative were centred around the conceptualisation and development of PACC, and the establishment of its pilot projects. Throughout those years, there was a clear and shared sense of purpose, and a consequent agreement on priorities to be progressed. However, in 2023, PACC encountered challenges, some internal and some external, but all of which impacted on the planned work programme for PACC during the year. That said, the PACC Core Stakeholders addressed each of those challenges, and learning was garnered that will inform the ongoing development of the initiative.

Perhaps the most significant challenge faced by PACC in 2023 was the realisation of the need to review and reconsider the *raison d'être* of the initiative. The creation of PACC in 2021 had sought to promote a systemic response to the obstacles to physical activity faced by people with chronic conditions, a response that would involve exploration, dialogue, collaboration and innovation across a range of relevant disciplines – sport and fitness, health, education, etc. At the time of PACC's inception, no structure existed in Ireland to facilitate the collaborative engagement of those disciplines.

The landscape in which PACC operates has changed considerably in the three years since its establishment, especially with the emergence of the PAPHM and PafHO initiatives within the HSE and LSP systems respectively. The PACC Core Stakeholder Group has therefore had to reflect on the ambition of its effort but it has struggled to articulate what PACC is and what it will become. Securing a clear mandate will be essential in supporting PACC to articulate its future role in the physical activity landscape for people with chronic conditions. It will be important, therefore, that the PACC Core Stakeholder Group would advocate with Sport Ireland for support and clarity in defining a mandate that goes beyond the testing of pilot projects.

In the interim, the Core Group's revised TOR, agreed in October, places greater emphasis on governance, oversight and strategic direction of PACC itself, with a particular prioritisation of the management of funding, and the design, implementation and evaluation of pilot projects. However, the Core Stakeholder Group has also retained a commitment to reviewing the physical activity landscape nationally, particularly as it pertains to the physical activity needs of people with chronic conditions; to identifying appropriate policy and practice responses and, as appropriate, to preparing submissions that will add value to that policy and practice landscape.

4.1 ONGOING COMMITMENT AND RELEVANCE

The commitment of existing PACC stakeholders to the work of the initiative, at both Core and Pilot Project Working Group levels, remains strong. PACC retains a constituency that is committed to – and engaged in the delivery of - the work that has been initiated under the PACC umbrella. This is particularly apparent currently in the commitment demonstrated by the Pilot Project 2 Steering Group and the Pilot Project 3 Working Group.

The work that PACC has been leading also continues to be relevant. This is evidenced particularly by feedback from stakeholder engagements in Pilot Project 2. Stakeholders have resoundingly endorsed PACC's initiative to provide a framework for training/Continuous Professional Development (CPD) packages for exercise professionals working with chronic conditions. Similarly, interest in the work of Pilot Project 3 is evident, with recent requests, for example, for information on the emerging information-sharing/signposting model in Waterford received from stakeholders in both Longford and Mayo.

The responses to PACC's input at the 2023 I-PARC Conference and the National Physical Activity Pathways for Health Stakeholder Event, have been extremely positive and suggest a high level of interest from external parties in the work of PACC.

5. MOVING FORWARD: PRIORITIES FOR 2024

Though this was a productive year, it is suggested that operational matters and deeper concerns about the role and mandate of PACC assumed greater priority within the initiative in 2023 over the fostering of innovative practice. Though these concerns with role and mandate were perhaps unavoidable, it is suggested that 2024 should restore priority focus to the core principles that underpin the operation of PACC:

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

- a commitment to *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
- a commitment to *learning* and to informing practice and policy relevant to the exercise needs of people with chronic conditions.

Recognising that all of PACC’s work is targeted at increased participation outcomes for people with chronic conditions, the following are proposed as priorities for action within the initiative during 2024 (under the other principles which underpin PACC):

In the context of innovation, it is proposed that:

- the PACC Core Stakeholder Group would continue to promote innovation and the development of pilot projects, offering guidance and direction to each of the pilot projects initiated by PACC, both current and emerging, and ensuring their relevance to, and consistency with, the mission of PACC;
- the PACC Core Stakeholder Group would review and finalise a decision on the initiation of a Pilot Project 4 , thereby enabling the establishment of new forms of innovation and collaboration under PACC in 2024;
- the PACC Core Stakeholder Group would remain open to new opportunities to develop further innovative practice;
- in accordance with its revised TOR, the PACC Core Stakeholder Group would continue to monitor the operational landscape in which the initiative operates and would continue to explore opportunities to add value to that practice and policy landscape;
- the lead agencies, alongside the PACC Core Stakeholder Group, would continue to engage with Sport Ireland around whether or not, from the perspective of Sport Ireland, PACC retains a role or mandate beyond the conclusion of its funding and the delivery of its pilot projects.

In the context of collaboration, it is proposed that:

- the PACC Core Stakeholder Group, and its associated Pilot Project Working Groups, would continue to promote physical activity opportunities for people with chronic conditions via collaborative efforts, involving exploration, dialogue and respectful challenge among relevant disciplines – sport and fitness, health, education, etc;
- opportunities to build the visibility of the overarching PACC initiative, and to demonstrate how the work of individual pilot projects contributes to the overall vision and function of PACC would be revisited as part of PACC’s 2024 work programme;
- in particular, planning towards a PACC Seminar/Conference, originally scheduled for May, 2023 would be rescheduled for Autumn, 2024;

- the PACC Core Stakeholder Group would review its need for a communications strategy and, depending on the outcome of that review, make decisions on the allocation of time and resource as required;
- PACC would seek out opportunities to link with the PAPHM and PAFHO structures, and engage with those platforms to identify and progress shared objectives.

In the context of learning, it is proposed that:

- commitments to the development of *how to*/implementation guides would be re-visited in the context of current and emerging pilot projects, particularly within the context of the planned consultancy to support Pilot Project 3;
- PACC would retain its commitment to capturing learning from its collaborative work at Core Stakeholder and Pilot Project levels, while also exploring opportunities for resource development and dissemination in 2024.

6. CONCLUSION

It has continued to be my privilege to work alongside and resource the deliberations of the PACC Core Stakeholder and Pilot Project Working Groups over the past year. PACC comprises a group of dedicated and engaged professionals, fully committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives, health, wellbeing and physical activity of people living with chronic illnesses.

Though 2023 presented challenges to the initiative and hampered delivery of certain plans for the year, the PACC Core Stakeholder Group addressed each of these challenges while retaining an ongoing commitment to the initiative and an ongoing enthusiasm around its work. PACC continues to be innovative and collaborative, and the recommendations presented above provide a pathway for that innovation and collaboration to continue in 2024 and beyond.

January 2024