

South Yorkshire
 Mayoral Combined Authority
 11 Broad Street West
 Sheffield, S1 2BQ

23 December 2021

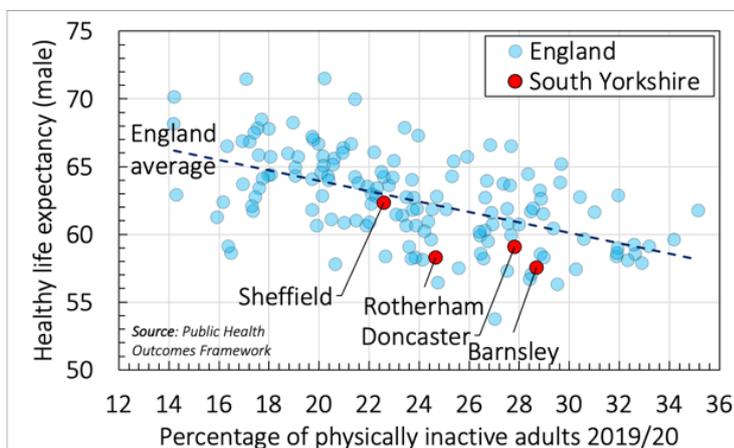
Dear Prime Minister

Re: Active Health Intervention

We are writing to ask that you prioritise the single most effective health measure and highlight this in any new year announcement: exercise. You have led both London and now the UK in prioritising walking and cycling for investment, and early in the COVID-19 pandemic you and your medical advisors have highlighted the need to take regular exercise during lockdown.

“It is central to a happy and healthy old age that people continue to exercise,” Professor Chris Whitty (November 2020)

If increased physical activity was a pill, it would be the most effective medicine for the region of South Yorkshire, and for the whole of the country. Healthy life expectancy reduces



drastically with inactivity as people are far more likely to have worse outcomes for a range of conditions and infections, including coronavirus. There are severe inequalities across the country as highlighted by Public Health England data (left) – for instance, many of the towns of South Yorkshire have both high levels of inactivity and low healthy life expectancies in their 50s.

January is a time when people traditionally make resolutions to do more exercise which often triggers lifestyle changes to behaviours such as diet, smoking and alcohol. We ask that you help the nation to pledge to take regular exercise once per day in their local parks, countryside or for a trip to a local shop or amenity. Walking, running and cycling cost very little and can be available to all, and most mobile phones will have apps to help, and track the amount of activity.

Activity is the most frugal intervention in health; vaccines and medical procedures are much more expensive and tend to be targeted at defined conditions. Through Sport England, Public Health England and link workers, physical activity is already prescribed to many and our aim is to inspire more people to do more activity more often. The NHS, for instance, has a very successful app called ‘Couch to 5k’.

In a recent visit to Burngreave Surgery in Sheffield, we saw how social prescribing can reduce the pressure on GPs and the health system from patients who repeatedly seek medical help. Link workers were able to treat the root causes of ill health by, for instance, walking to a local shop to buy fresh ingredients and be helped to cook a healthy meal. We learnt that 'walking for purpose' is one of the easiest ways to increase activity and is available in almost every situation.

We would like this message to be sung from the rooftops: we would like you to join us to inspire a new start for all in 2022 and help increase the population's activity. This is one simple way to help reduce pressure on the NHS.

With our best wishes,



Mayor Dan Jarvis MBE MP
South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined
Authority



Dame Sarah Storey
Active Travel Commissioner
South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined
Authority