

Question:

I am 67 years old and I try to keep as healthy as much possible but I find that it costs quite a bit of money to use the gym and sadly the dance classes I go to, which are very cheap, have to apply for funding on a regular basis so their future is never secure which is awful since I have found dance to be so important for keeping me fit and happy - it should be recognized as a treatment by GP's.

I was therefore asking why we don't get some direct investment for each older person - like a sort of health package - to help them remain healthy in order to prevent further expenditure on them later?

Response:

There are a number of free and reduced cost physical activities for older people in Hackney.

To encourage physical activity by older people in Hackney, the Council either delivers, commissions or offers a variety of programmes or opportunities:

a) Commissioned: The Council is committed to working with local community groups and organisations to increase participation in sport and physical activity by older residents. Some examples include:

- **The Sharp End:** The Sharp End is commissioned by the Council's Public Health Team to deliver provision for older people in the borough. This currently includes 15 weekly sessions run by the Sharp End at Queensbridge Sports & Community Centre.

b) Leisure Centres:

- **Better Club 50:** The Council and GLL provides discounted activities for adults that are 50+. The programme allows 50+ adults to access some of the leisure facilities for £2 a day. At Britannia Leisure Centre, the programme runs twice a week and provides a total of 34 hours of activities. At Kings Hall Leisure Centre, the programme runs every day with a total of 56 hours across 7 different activities. As part of this provision there is also 12 hours of social time, as we recognise that, for many of our 50+ users, this interaction is just as important as physical activity.
- **Concessions:** The Council and GLL offer a significant discount for concessionary memberships (direct debit and pay-and-play). These various concessionary memberships are available to people to access the facilities off-peak who are:
 - In receipt of benefits (statement of proof required in the last 3 months);
 - A student (of any age);

- Disabled or are a carer (you must have received carers allowance in last 3 months); and
- **Over 60** or if you are under 16 and your parent(s) or guardian are in receipt of benefits (in the last 3 months).

These various concessionary memberships demonstrate an average discount of 50% on the normal member rates. It is worth noting that neighbouring Boroughs generally offer a 30% discount for concessions.

- **Free Swimming:** The Council and GLL still offer free swimming at Britannia Leisure Centre (excluding the leisure water area), Clissold Leisure Centre and Kings Hall Leisure Centre, to residents of the Borough with a pay-and-play card who are:
 - Under 18;
 - **Over 60**; and
 - Disabled or a Carer.

c) Targeted Programming or Initiatives:

- **New Age Games (NAG):** NAG is the Council's free weekly exercise programme open to Hackney residents aged 50 +. It is currently delivering 18 sessions per week across the borough, 11 of which take place in the leisure centres.
- **Walking Together:** The Walking Together programme offers opportunities for people to engage in free health and heritage walks. The scheme targets those who are ready to engage in a supported physical activity through offering organised, supervised and led walks from community venues, which incorporate green spaces enroute within the borough.

Policy and Strategy

Hackney's Labour's new Manifesto also includes a commitment to invest in a network of new, free, outdoor gym facilities in our parks and green spaces, consulting on opportunities to develop new sports amenities, engaging with local campaigns and ensuring that we meet the needs of our local communities.

The Council has an Ageing Well Strategy that looks at how we make the borough more age-friendly and how we work with partners to consider and respond to the needs and interests of older residents. One of the priorities for this work is health and wellbeing and how this is incorporated into all of the Council's priorities with a focus on meeting the needs and interests of older residents. Part of this wider approach is also encouraging co-production. Examples of other strategies and council programmes that are considering older people's wider wellbeing include:

- gym equipment being fitted in parks through our parks strategy and ensuring they are accessible to our residents,

- Plans to pilot a health-based programme of activity in Hackney Marshes that focuses on ageing well
- Funding over 50s groups to run activities via our resident engagement programme
- Relaunching Hackney Circle (a Cultural Pathway for Hackney residents, with a view to supporting older residents to access the benefits of engaging in Hackney's vibrant cultural life).

Physical activity is also outlined as an action within our new Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which aims to improve mental health, increase social connections and support greater financial security over the next four years. An action plan is being developed in the upcoming months.

Encouraging residents to become more active

Locally, the NHS currently does not have a budget for prescribing exercise, although they strongly support the prevention of ill health through healthy lifestyles, including physical activity. Personal Health Budgets are only available to specific groups of people currently – including those who are eligible for Continuing Health Care, wheelchair users and some other groups including people with Mental ill health.

There are a number of professionals working in Hackney having discussions with Hackney residents about physical activity that can improve health and wellbeing. GPs, Social Prescribers and Health and Wellbeing Coaches refer and signpost residents to a number of low or no cost physical activities based within the community. There are a number of social prescribing and community connectors that refer and connect local residents to these opportunities.