

New research finds care home culture vital to boosting physical activity among older people

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Residents at Richmond House care home in Crieff, Perth & Kinross, which took part in the study. Credit: University of Stirling

Physical activity needs to be embedded into the culture of care homes in Scotland, according to new research by the University of Stirling.

The 'Sit Less Move More' study surveyed and interviewed more than 160 care home staff across the UK, to identify the barriers to activity faced by [residents](#) and how they could be overcome.

Backed by walking charity Paths for All, Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership, and Life Changes Trust, the research found that

a lack of time among staff to support residents in being physically active and a fear of falling were the main barriers to [physical activity](#).

Now the academic team behind the study say that significant changes and a "whole-home" approach is required to make physical activity part of all care home activities.

Dr. Grant Gibson of the Faculty of Social Sciences said, "A [sedentary lifestyle](#) can result in losing the ability to balance, to rise from a chair, and to walk, as well as increasing the likelihood of falls when attempting to move. Yet, how to ensure people with dementia in [care homes](#) have continuing access to activities that promote physical activity, or what the factors are in care homes that facilitate or present barriers to residents becoming more physically active, has seen relatively little research."

"We found a whole-home approach was needed to support residents to engage in physical activity and that it was vital that physical activity was encouraged as part of personal care, recreational preferences, [social activities](#), and daily tasks—not just as 'exercise'. Care homes need more resources, time and support to do that."

As part of the research, the academic team explored how care homes across the world address this problem and developed a set of key recommendations for governments, [local authorities](#), care home providers, staff, and managers.

The recommendations include: appointing care home staff in specific activities coordinator roles; introducing support for care home staff at all levels to be better skilled in order to encourage care home residents to be physically active; and creating effective resources and knowledge exchange networks for care home staff regarding physical activity.

Dr. Gibson added, "Many of the recommendations highlighted in this

report require significant changes in care home services, not least increasing resources from their current level. But many elements are achievable with relatively minor changes. Most importantly, many of our recommendations will give care homes the opportunity to build on their staff as their greatest resource available and will ultimately help them to provide care that is best for their residents."

Carl Greenwood, Paths for All Senior Development Officer, said, "We are delighted to see the publication of this timely report on the importance of promoting physical activity in care homes and how care homes can foster a culture around everyday movement."

"Our Dementia Friendly Walking team has been working with care home staff and residents for a number of years now to develop a range of support, training and resources, and we've seen first-hand the transformative effects that walking and physical activity can have for residents' quality of life and health and well-being."

"The report also highlights the pivotal role that activity coordinators play in facilitating this positive culture around movement and physical activity, and the need to recognize and support this critical role, with training, resources and networking opportunities."

"We hope that this will be taken on board by care homes, health and social care providers and [policy makers](#) and lead to more discussion around how we can support more physical activity in our care homes."

More information: Summary Report: www.pathsforall.org.uk/resource/sit-less-move-more

Provided by University of Stirling

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