

Ensuring Health Walks are accessible to people who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters and mobility aids

Paths for All worked in partnership with Get Out Get Active (GOGA) Tayside to produce this guide, aimed at supporting Health Walk projects looking to make their activities accessible to people who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters and mobility aids and to support those thinking about starting Health Walk projects.





We would like to thank the following organisations and groups who have shared their expertise:

Ceartas Walk 'n' Roll
Cumbernauld Walk 'n' Roll
Highland Disabled Ramblers
Parklea Branching Out
Scottish Disability Sport
West Dunbartonshire CVS



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Why it matters

Making Health Walks more accessible for people of all abilities to be active together



The context

- 74% of wheelchair users would like to participate in more physical activity and sport
- The top barrier to taking part in wheelchair physical activity and sport is lack of opportunity
- By providing <u>Health Walks</u> which are suitable for people of all abilities to be active together we can <u>create opportunity while benefiting participants and providers!</u>

Stats source: WheelPower Survey

The difference it makes to participants and providers

Physical activity in general makes us happier and more connected.

More inclusive activity can:

- Positively impact social skills, communication and confidence for all participants while creating a sense of belonging
- Enable providers to reach a wider audience, bringing access to new funding
 streams and an opportunity to develop and improve the skillset of those delivering
 activities

The guidelines

- These infographics for <u>Adults and Older Adults</u> and <u>Adults with a disability</u> show us why
 it is important to move more on a daily basis
- Moderate intensity physical activity (which raises heart and breathing rate while making you warmer - where you could talk but not sing) is encouraged - but any activity is beneficial!
- On two days of the week, it is also recommended that all adults should undertake
 activities to support their strength and balance
 Source: CMO Physical Activity Guidelines

Check it out...

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- <u>This video</u> from Scottish Health Walk Network members, Ceartas (based in East Dunbartonshire), showcases the difference their "Walk 'n' Roll" project has made to their participants
- Access the <u>Activity Alliance's research portal</u> for more evidence and context



Choosing your route

Use this quick guide to inform your route planning and risk assessment process



Better with...

As with all Health Walks, an ideal route should be **accessible**, **convenient** for participants to get to, offer an **attractive** environment and make use of well-established and **connected** paths.

The following will help to make your activity more accessible to wheelchair, mobility scooter and mobility aid users - remember, though, it is **key to 'ask your audience' from the outset** as they will know best what works for them:

- A variety of routes / options ensuring you have risk assessed routes which
 may offer a variety of longer or shorter options will help to make your activity
 suitable for a wider audience
- Pause points these enable separate groups of participants to catch up, chat, and maybe even take in a particular view of interest (these are a great opportunity to offer Strength and Balance exercises which can be done standing or seated supports may be required for standing exercises)
- **Buddies** those who provide support (either formally or informally) to individuals who face barriers to accessing Health Walks should be welcomed to attend and encourage opportunities to be active together. If an individual requires 1:1 support to participate, you may wish to explore the creation of a specific volunteer role or reaching out to another local organisation who may be able to provide this support (your local <u>third sector interface</u> may be able to help)
- Wider paths allow people to walk or wheel alongside each other; making it easier for everyone to participate and make things more sociable too
- Access to an accessible toilet great to have on any route, but particularly important if you are offering a post-walk social opportunity (<u>Changing Places Toilet Map</u> can help)
- **Disabled parking spaces** consider availability for those transporting a mobility scooter or wheelchair

Check it out...

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- <u>Euan's Guide</u> is a disabled access review site where disabled people, their family, friends and carers can find and share reviews on the accessibility of venues (including walking routes) around the UK and beyond.
- AccessAble is another accessibility guide, searchable by postcode
- The <u>Accessible Walks Scotland</u> blog highlights wheelchair-accessible walking routes - author, Connor Beveridge, <u>featured as part of Humans of the Walk 2021</u>

Choosing your route

Use this quick guide to inform your route planning and risk assessment process



Better without...

- Steep inclines and declines most wheelchairs are unstable on steep inclines and declines and can act in uncontrollable ways
- Pronounced cambers and crossfalls can cause wheelchairs and mobility scooters to tip over
- Steps, inaccessible gates or barriers avoid routes with steps and check that gates and barriers are suitable for wheelchair and mobility scooter users to move through or around
- Tricky kerbs make sure that there are dropped kerbs on each side of the pavement on any road crossing or onto any lower level surface
- Potholes and tree roots you should check that any potholes or tree roots can be safely negotiated
- Uneven, loose gravel or muddy surfaces choose routes with smooth, flat, firm surfaces
- Street obstacles such as 'A' boards, wheelie bins, cones and bollards
- Busy roads choose routes that avoid busy main roads. If you have to cross a busy road always use a designated crossing point.

Consider and communicate

- Share as much route information as you can beforehand this could include
 documenting and photographing/filming some of your route (with particular focus on any
 unavoidable obstacles) and sending these on so participants can make an informed
 decision before participating
- Considerations will vary participants using manual chairs may be able to self-propel without assistance or may require assistance in certain contexts (e.g. when tackling inclines) or at all times, others using powered wheelchairs (which can be wider and heavier) may find some gates a particular barrier bear this in mind when planning and risk assessing potential routes
- Ask for input from participants and volunteers mobility scooter, wheelchair or
 mobility aid users may be willing to support your route planning and risk assessment
 efforts and can share what they know works or doesn't work for them
- Think about punctures, power, speed and distance check that powered wheelchairs and mobility scooters are fully charged and that their users, and other participants, keep a safe distance apart while maintaining a pace which allows for easy conversation; remind wheelchair users to carry puncture repair kits
- Keep an eye out for dogs who can sometimes get in the way or get in a tangle!

Risk assessment

How risk assessments can help better inform your participants



What resources are there to help?

- Paths for All make risk assessment templates available to all those who have completed our Walk Leader training (see the Walk Leader Training Manual) or the Member Area on our website for more (<u>find out how to become a member</u>)
- A COVID-19 specific risk assessment template is also available via our <u>Member Area</u>

Sharing the work of the Network

- <u>Ceartas</u>, deliverers of regular Walk and Rolls in East Dunbartonshire, recommend taking photos of areas of caution/obstacles to add to risk assessments enabling prospective participants to make an informed decision about participation and/or raise any concerns
- Below are some examples of obstacles identified on one of Ceartas' Walk 'n' Roll routes, shared with their permission and our thanks. You can access one of their <u>full risk assessments</u> (which includes these and their mitigations) and use this to inform your own assessments.



Left: Parked vehicles can obstruct pavement

Right: Uneven surface
Image credit: Ceartas

 West Dunbartonshire CVS have created 'photographic route' videos to enable prospective participants to assess the route beforehand which you can find on their dedicated microsite



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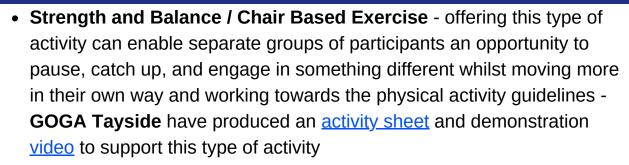
- <u>Living Streets' Healthier Safer Streets audits</u> from Perth and Kinross (complete with pictures) highlight some key issues to look out for
- Living Streets Walking Connects Guide to Getting Better Streets and Pavements

More to offer

Use these resources to introduce and promote wider physical, nature-based and local activity opportunities



On your walk and rolls





- Connecting with Nature think about ways to encourage your participants to
 engage more with the natural world during activity. Projects have shared that
 inspiring budding photographers on the walks can help people to engage with nature
 and each other, bringing other benefits (our mini guides on Noticing Nature and
 being Kind to Nature might also help spark some ideas)
- Tap into and share local knowledge use the group's pooled knowledge to promote local accessible venues / opportunities such as cafes, destinations etc (or find them through <u>Euan's Guide</u> and <u>AccessAble</u>)

Other useful resources

- Adapt to Perform and Ella's Wheelchair Workouts are YouTube channels providing wheelchair workouts for use at home
- <u>Skye for All</u> Focused on Skye, Sarah and Melanie's website showcases what can be
 done on a local level to assess and share the accessibility of routes, places of interest
 and amenities for those who use mobility aids you can also visit their <u>YouTube</u>
 <u>channel</u> to see videos of accessible routes they have identified
- Paths for All's <u>One Minute Movers</u> include two seated exercises developed in consultation with wheelchair users from Scottish Disabiltiy Sport

Check it out...

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Sarah Lister from Skye for All won our **Active Travel Volunteer of the Year** in 2020 for highlighting accessible path links throughout Skye.

Read about Skye for All and watch the video.

Spread the word

Use these top tips to help you effectively promote your activity



Use positive messages

- Research suggests that physical activity messages should focus on the short-term mental and social health benefits (e.g. "move to feel good")
- This <u>blog and infographic</u> outlines examples for different audiences identified by the Physical Activity and Health Research Centre





Add inclusive language and imagery



- Choose language and imagery which makes it clear your group welcomes wheelchair, mobility scooter and mobility aid users.
 For example, two projects within our Network have named their groups "Walk 'n' Roll"!
- The Activity Alliance <u>Talk to Me 10 Principles</u> as well as the
 <u>Activity Alliance Guide to Inclusive Marketing and
 <u>Communications</u> and <u>Scotland's Inclusive Communication Hub</u>
 can help you
 </u>

Provide the chance to connect

- Ensure you provide a variety of ways prospective participants can contact you
 to ask any questions, and encourage people to reach out being able to make
 contact prior to attending an activity can allay fears, build confidence and
 help people make informed decisions!
- Link in with relevant local organisations such as Leisure Trusts, residential services for people with disabilities, shopmobility organisations, the Care Inspectorate, student clubs, third sector interfaces and local charities to help spread the word
- Tweet and share with us <u>@PathsForAll!</u>

Check it out...

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Research: Disability, the communication of physical activity and sedentary behaviour, and ableism: a call for inclusive messages

Promotional resources

Resources to help Scottish Health Walk Network members spread the word



Posters

- Through our Member Area, SHWN members can download and order high quality posters to promote their activity free of charge
- We provide a number of options, including those with artwork featuring Walk and Rolls
- You can then write in your own information like days, times, meeting places and contact details





Postcards and social media graphics

Again, through our Member Area, SHWN
members can download digital social media
graphics, or order high quality printed postcards
which can be used to promote activity

Thinking about making your own?



- It's great to promote activity using photos taken in your own local area
- Remember Scottish Health Walk Network members can use our <u>Health Walks logo</u> and refer to <u>our brand guidelines</u> for help



Hear from wheelchair and mobility aid users



Get Out Get Active Tayside (GOGA) is a partnership between Scottish Disability Sport and NHS Tayside and launched in April 2020. The programme looks to provide fun and inclusive local opportunities for people of all abilities to not only be active together but increase social connections and reduce isolation. Due to launching a new programme at the beginning of lockdown 2020, GOGA Tayside developed an online all ability activity programme where individuals and families were able to go online, be active together and build friendships virtually.





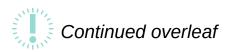
Lindsey Eppy is a GOGA Tayside participant who has attended GOGA's online activities from the beginning. Through discussions with Lindsey, it was clear how being active can positively support individuals physical and mental wellbeing. Lindsey agreed to be involved with the <u>Upper Body Strength and Balance resource</u> in this toolkit. Lindsey agreed not only because she was a regular with this activity as part of the weekly GOGA offering, but also to encourage others like herself who may use a wheelchair or other mobility aids, to get involved and know that there are options for everyone to be active together. Lindsey shares her story below...



My name is Lindsey and I live in Dundee. I have a condition that causes degeneration of the lower spine. I can't walk far and have an electric wheelchair that I use when I leave the house. I get tired quite quickly and have to adapt a lot of what I do.

This is a genetic condition which my dad lived with also. My dad used to be in his chair on a regular basis when his back was at its worst and he was in the mindset where he would not get out and about.

When I was diagnosed with this condition I thought I have watched my Dad not live life to the full and I am not going to do that, I want to try everything!



Hear from mobility aid users and participants attending Walk and Rolls



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I was a carer for 12 years before I was diagnosed with my condition. I loved being around and supporting other people. I always loved going hill walking and getting outdoors.

When I was first diagnosed, I had a little slump where I didn't want to do anything and then I thought what am I going to do, then I thought I can do whatever I want to do – I need to get out there!

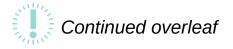
Around 8 years ago I saw an advert at my local park which was advertising Health Walks and I got involved. When people saw us on our walks and that I was in my wheelchair, it gave them confidence to join in as they thought if I was able to do it then they could do it too.

Having someone in a wheelchair visible during these activities meant that others who were in the same situation could see I was similar to them and were more likely to join in.

I then became a walk leader around 8 years ago. My local church were looking to start Health Walks and they asked me if I would be interested in leading the activity as they knew I had been part of a walking group.

The social aspect was really important to the walk, we would base the walk around the church cafe and have lunch and a cup of tea. It allowed others in the community to meet with one another and we have all been friends since. For some people with a disability, it can be easy to stay at home which means you can become a little isolated. Getting out and having the cup of tea or lunch at the walks each week gave people something to get out for and meet with others.

We started the walk around local streets but we realised that this wasn't good for people with a disability because of uneven paths, curves in the road and cars parked up on the pavements meant this route wasn't great for us.



Hear from mobility aid users and participants attending Walk and Rolls



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We started to use a local park as this was easier for us all to access, it was reasonably flat and we didn't have to worry about trying to make our way along the pavements or up and down the kerb.

I have also become involved with Forth and Tay Disabled Ramblers, we go out in scooters and have walkers there to support us also. My friend and I attend this together and really enjoy it, it is the best sense of freedom and you also are getting out in the fresh air too.

I would fully recommend anyone in a wheelchair or scooter to get involved with a local Health Walk. It really supports your mental health, shows that you can do whatever you want to do. You can have fun, life is all about fun. Most people who come along to a walk and wheel opportunity always enjoy it and never regret it.

I have been able to influence local community groups and share my experience for others to adapt what they are delivering.

If people are thinking of offering wheeling opportunities within their walk, think about the routes and how this can be accessed, if having a cup of tea or using a building before or after, think about access to this or where things are placed as these may not always be best placed from wheelchair users. Make it clear in the advertising that everyone is welcome and that routes have been thought about beforehand.



The project perspective

Hear from projects delivering Health Walks which are accessible to those who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other mobility aids

<u>Ceartas</u> are an independent advocacy organisation based in East Dunbartonshire. They have delivered a regular "Walk n Roll" for a number of years. We heard from their staff and participants about their experience of delivering and participating in this activity.





Roy Hunter Information Worker

"I have been a Path For All Walk Leader since 2014. Health Walks are a way for Ceartas to connect with people in the community we would perhaps otherwise not meet. This has certainly worked for us, with the added bonus that when you meet someone out on a walk, they are usually in a more stimulating environment than an office, and therefore more likely to tell you about their issues.

Some of our participants have been to places in their local communities that they have never seen before, or that they have only seen from the back of a minibus or taxi. On one notable occasion, one of our wheelchair users was quite keen to have a go on the skatepark that she had never been to before!

From the experience of getting together on a regular basis with other wheelchair and mobility aid users, and discussing the physical barriers that made it difficult to participate in the community, some of our participants helped to prepare a report on access issues in the local area, under the banner of Ceartas' collective advocacy group Changes.

Risk aversion can be a major barrier for a project like this. Even though our organisation promotes rights and participation, there was still some concern expressed about the potential risks. This risk aversion has been echoed if not amplified when working with partner organisations. The people we work with are adults: they are capable of making their own decisions and telling us if they are unhappy about risks.

In our experience, the best way to risk-assess a route for wheelchair- and mobility aid users is to include them in the process. They can tell you what is comfortable for them, what feels safe, what might be unsafe in the winter or in wet weather. We favour a circular route wherever possible because you can walk it the other way round and it is like a different walk. However, sometimes a drop kerb is OK to go down, but not to get back up; or you would be fine taking a wheelchair down an incline, but not back up it. We defer to the experts who have the experience.

Promoting the walk has always been a thorny issue, we have tried different methods, but printed business cards and postcards with the details seem to be the most reliable method. Sometimes just the sight of a group of wheelchair- and mobility aid users going up the main street, or along the canal towpath, is enough to pique someone's interest. It is still a relatively unusual sight, and has started a few useful conversations."

The project perspective



Hear from projects delivering Health Walks which are accessible to those who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other mobility aids

"I have been involved as a Walk Leader at Walk n Roll since its inception in 2016. The idea stemmed from a member of the Ceartas' ABI (Acquired Brain Injury) Café who had a conversation about not feeling comfortable participating in locally organised walks as they weren't really suitable for wheelchair users. I spoke to our Health Walks Coordinator in East Dunbartonshire and we looked at risk assessing certain routes to make them accessible to all.

Before COVID, the walk was rearranged from the 1st Thursday of the month to the last Thursday, which allowed more people to participate and for us to introduce a social element when returning to the Ceartas office, for tea/coffee and biscuits.

Whilst the walk allows people to have a less formal setting for a chat, it also encourages people to open up and build stronger relationships, Advocacy Link Worker helping break any barriers they experience to accessing advocacy and other supports in their community. The social element helps reduce social isolation and people to make new friendships together via our peer support we've championed for 16 years."



Linda McGavin

Image credit: Ceartas



Ronnie Whiteside Marketing & **Fundraising** Assistant

Image credit: Ceartas

"Walk n Roll has been a fantastic way to connect with people informally: the challenge of exercising and the sense of achievement after completing a walk helps people feel good and comfortable to chat about other things happening in their lives: this is when we can provide support or direct them to what's available.

Walking is a great way to see new places in the local community, even if they're only round the corner from our office or your home. We are very fortunate to have great routes in East Dunbartonshire and although we revisit these frequently, every walk is different and changes with the season.

And who better to lead on the development of the group than the Walk n Rollers themselves, who not only decide where to go in terms of the physical walk but on the future of the group for people who are coming or are thinking about coming to our fully accessible Health Walk.

Hear from mobility aid users and participants attending Walk and Rolls



My name is William McLachlan and I have been attending Ceartas Health Walks since August 2020.



I have weak joints and some challenges with my mental health but I don't let these conditions get the best of me and manage them in the ways I know how, including getting out of the house and going on Health Walks.

They give me an opportunity to get active which not only strengthens my muscles and joints but also my mind and improves my mood. Although challenging, Health Walks and my particular health conditions motivate me to prove myself by attending, and having something to get out of the house for is important.

I also enjoy helping others on the walks and talking about my experiences of local services: I heard about Walk n Roll whilst working in the local authority with East Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau and as part of the OPAL East Dunbartonshire Information Line partnership.

Apart from the odd late bus or bout of extremely bad weather, the only challenges I face when coming to the walk are uneven surfaces and potholes. I have to use a walking stick on most of the walks, but I can say that East Dunbartonshire is very good for walking routes.

I would recommend a Health Walk to anybody, no matter their own circumstances or situation. Getting out of the house is the hardest part but once you've done that, that's the first and biggest hurdle complete.

The most important part of organised Health Walks is the company, I enjoy being part of a very mixed group and I hope that we can get some more members to join us in future.

Hear from mobility aid users and participants attending Walk and Rolls

My name is Douglas McNicol and I've been coming to the Walk n Roll group since they started in 2016.





I have cerebral palsy and angina but my biggest challenge is with arthritis, particularly on damp or wet days (so most days in Kirkintilloch). I have medication for each of these but what helps the most is keeping active and coming to Ceartas Health Walks. Doing so helps ease my joints and muscles and although I feel great at the time, it's usually after exercising I feel physical pain. Sometimes my health conditions mean I am too knackered to attend the walk, but I always try to come anyway as getting out of the house and challenging myself is great for my mental health, so well worth it.

I heard about this walk through my involvement with Ceartas: I am a member of a number of groups and am secretary of the Service-User Forum in which we help shape the future of the service.

I'd certainly recommend going on a Health Walk. No matter the route, there will always be obstacles to deal with: short hills or busy canal pathways, either can become a bit of an annoyance so it's worth finding routes that minimise these when possible, like we do at Walk n Roll and other Ceartas Health Walks.

Sometimes we really need to meet in person to see how our friends are really feeling. The walks are a great opportunity to socialise, a chance meet old and new friends from other Ceartas groups and activities, and a way to keep active as part of a team but personally improving my own fitness.

A suggestion for developing a Health Walk would be; work with what you have, such as accessible local routes and points of interest; limiting the time of the walk, if it's too warm or wet; and consider using routes that allow for change whilst doing them, like taking an earlier turn and heading back.

Ceartas Health Walks and Walk n Roll are open to everyone, but there are others available out there for those at different levels of ability, which is a good way to mix it up and test your fitness.

The project perspective

Hear from projects delivering Health Walks which are accessible to those who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other mobility aids



Parklea Branching Out use horticulture and the outdoors to develop people with support needs including adults and children with physical and/or learning disabilities and those experiencing mental ill health. They deliver a regular wheelchair-accessible Health Walk from their base in Port Glasgow.



Below, we hear from Community Options Service Co-ordinator, Calum Easton, about the impact of their Health Walk.

What would you say are the main benefits your organisation / group has experienced by delivering accessible Health Walks?

Our clients have benefited massively from the Health Walks. It has also been a positive for our organisation as it has helped to raise our profile in the local area and strengthen relationships with existing partners. It has provided an opportunity for an easy to join, fun and healthy activity do with our clients.

What do you think are main barriers to projects looking to deliver this type of activity, and how could they be overcome?

The accessibility of the surrounding area is arguably the biggest barrier to organisations. Consider ways of working round this and also communicating with other organisations including the local council. They have a responsibility for routes to be accessible as possible for everyone.

What top tips would you give to an organisation / group looking to provide Health Walks which are accessible to wheelchair and mobility aid users?

Obviously considering your routes are crucial. Have walk leaders test out the routes and really think about what issues could arise. Additionally speak to people with disabilities. They may have experienced barriers in the past and knowing these may help to reduce them in your walk.

Continued overleaf

The project perspective

Hear from projects delivering Health Walks which are accessible to those who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other mobility aids



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Have you noticed any changes in your participants as a result of taking part? Participants have really enjoyed the Health Walks. They're definitely more eager to do the walks and exercise generally.

Has delivering your accessible Health Walk resulted in any unexpected outcomes (e.g. identifying changes needed in infrastructure, identifying a new need, etc.?)

Delivering our Health Walks has definitely made us consider accessibility more in the surrounding areas of our site. We want both our site and the nearby park and routes to be accessible and want to work with other parties to make this a possibility.

What methods have you used to promote your group and what has been successful?

We have used posters and social media as well as working with our partners. Partnership working is something we will be strengthening and looking to make sure that all relevant parties know what we're delivering and how people can benefit from this.

Is there anything else you'd be keen to share with projects looking to deliver this type of activity?

I'd definitely recommend going for it as the many benefits are clear to see and especially with those with disabilities. Unfortunately they may be used to being excluded from activities due to their disabilities. Making your walks as accessible as possible will really benefit these people and make a long lasting positive impression.

Broaden your knowledge

where you can go to learn more



Some further reading

- <u>Countryside For All Guide</u> a guide to disabled people's access to the outdoors from the Fieldfare Trust (currently being reviewed and updated)
- By All Reasonable Means: Least Restrictive Access to the Outdoors has been developed by Natural Resources Wales and the Sensory Trust
- The Path Manager's Guide to Grading Paths for All worked with NatureScot and
 Forest and Land Scotland to produce a standard waymarked path grading system for
 Scotland which includes a symbol for paths which meet the Countryside For All access
 standard
- <u>Guidance from Public Health England</u> regarding the findings of a review, analysis and research aimed at understanding the enablers, barriers & opportunities for increasing physical activity across inequality groups
- <u>Inclusive & Accessible events guide, VisitScotland</u> highlights a number of considersations for those looking to deliver more inclusive events / activities
- Accessible Travel Hub is a place to find information, articles and guidance about accessible travel in Scotland

Further opportunities to learn

- Access Scottish Disability Sport's Introduction to Inclusive Practice elearning module
- Look out for Paths for All and Scottish Disability Sport's new All Ability Walks training (which will be shared on our <u>training page</u>)
- Scottish Health Walk Network (SHWN) members can <u>view recordings and presentations</u> from our 2021 SHWN conference, which included a keynote and workshops dedicated to inclusive and accessible activity and physical activity messaging

Could you help us?

We will be continuing to further develop work in this area. If you would like to help us by sharing a case study, either from existing work or having used this toolkit, please reach out on our **SHWN**Slack channel or email info@pathsforall.org.uk