

Press release

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## ***We Are Undefeatable*: a major new campaign to support people with long-term health conditions to be active**

- Over one in four (15m) people in England live with a long-term health condition, such as diabetes, cancer, arthritis and Parkinson's, this figure is set to rise to 18 million by 2025<sup>1</sup>.
- New research shows that over two thirds (69%) of people with long-term health conditions say they would like to be more active. Despite this, they are twice as likely to be inactive.
- 15 leading charities have come together for the first time, with support from Sport England and the National Lottery, to launch the inspirational 'We Are Undefeatable' campaign to inspire people living with health conditions to get active in a way that's right for them.

An inspiring new campaign - *We Are Undefeatable* - is being launched to support the one in four (15 million) people in England who live with one or more long-term health conditions, such as diabetes, cancer, arthritis and Parkinson's. By recognising the unique barriers people with health conditions face, the campaign aims to help people build physical activity into their lives, by hearing from others who have become more active through the ups and downs of living with their condition.

Individuals living with a long-term health condition are twice as likely to be inactive<sup>2</sup> despite evidence that being active can help manage many conditions and help reduce the impact and severity of some symptoms.<sup>3</sup> Even small amounts of activity can make a significant difference to overall health and wellbeing.

New research released today<sup>4</sup> reveals that the majority of people with a long-term health condition do want to be active, and are aware of the health benefits. *We Are Undefeatable* has been launched to inspire, reassure and support people to be active by showing people living with a variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health (2012). Report. [Long-term conditions compendium of Information: 3rd edition](#)

<sup>2</sup> Sport England Active Lives Survey November 17/18 shows that 42% of people with a long-term health condition are inactive, compared to 21% of non-disabled people.

<sup>3</sup> The UK Chief Medical Officer's physical activity guidelines Start Active Stay Active 2011.

<sup>4</sup> DJS Research in 2019 surveyed 1,303 people aged 18+ in England living with long-term health conditions

conditions – both visible and invisible – on their own journeys to being active. One day, a short walk might be all that's manageable. For others it might be swimming or getting active at home. It all helps.

The research showed that:

- 69% of people living with long-term health conditions would like to be more active.
- 66% say it would help manage or improve their condition, with improved mood and wellbeing seen as the biggest benefit (52%).
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of people with a long-term health condition feared that physical activity would make their health issues worse and two in five (44%) would like more help and advice on how to be more active.

The survey of over 1,000 adults also revealed that people with long standing health concerns feel they face some unique barriers.

- Over a third of people (36%) cited lack of energy as the main barrier to increasing physical activity, two in five (40%) reported that pain caused by their health condition prevented them from increasing the amount of physical activity they do.
- Over a quarter (28%) of people with a long-term health condition reported that the unpredictable nature of their condition made it hard to commit to a routine.

*We Are Undefeatable* recognises these unique barriers and it is the first time a campaign has shown the emotional stories of men and women living with a variety of conditions getting active in ways that suit their needs.

Led by a collaboration of 15 leading health and social care charities, the campaign is backed with expertise, insight and National Lottery funding from Sport England, the organisation behind the award-winning This Girl Can campaign.

This includes hearing from people like Simone, 33, who was born with a congenital heart defect that led to a stroke at 19. She now tries to walk two miles every day after being encouraged by her doctor, and plays 'Just Dance' with her partner, which is often challenging, but always fun. Simone has seen a real improvement to her health and wellbeing.

The campaign will run across TV, radio and social media, encouraging people to visit [www.weareundefeatable.co.uk](http://www.weareundefeatable.co.uk) and use **#WeAreUndefeatable** for inspiration and tips on how to get active in ways that suit them. Campaign support packs are also being distributed to every GP surgery

and community pharmacy in England as part of a wider programme to support healthcare professionals to promote physical activity to their patients.

**Juliet Bouverie, Chief Executive of the Stroke Association and lead campaign spokesperson** said;

*“Whether you lose your breath from playing with the grandchildren or going for a brisk walk, this campaign is about enjoying being active on the good days and getting through the bad. As this survey shows, people want to be more active because it improves their mood and wellbeing. I’m hugely excited about helping more people living with a health condition feel that physical activity is possible, with lots of ideas about the ways that you can keep moving.”*

**Brian Dow, Deputy Chief Executive of Rethink Mental Illness and a campaign spokesperson** said;

*“We’re proud to support such an inclusive campaign that recognises the benefits of physical activity for people living with long-term health conditions. We know that physical activity can have a significant impact on our mental health, but it’s important to recognise the effect of different conditions means that we will all have different goals. Someone living with severe mental illness might consider a walk to the park in the same way that someone else prepares to take on a marathon. This campaign shows that it’s time to celebrate and enjoy the little wins that we can all achieve in our everyday lives.”*

**Tim Hollingsworth, Chief Executive of Sport England** said;

*“You’re twice as likely to be inactive if you have a long-term health condition. We believe we can change that, because our research shows the majority of people with a condition would like to be more active. That might be strengthening activities, walking, going to the gym or playing a sport. We are very proud to support our charity partners in delivering this new campaign because we know with the right support, sport and physical activity has the ability to change the lives of people living with long-term health conditions for the better.*

*“This campaign forms part of a longer-term drive by Sport England to change cultural and social norms around long-term health conditions and physical activity. We will continue to work with everyone from healthcare professionals, coaches, governing bodies, gym operators and even town planners to ensure that people with long-term health conditions feel able and supported to get active or play sport in whatever way suits them.”*

**Dr Zoe Williams** said;

*"I see people every day in my surgery who are unsure how to become more active whilst managing their long-term health condition. The evidence base for physical activity in the management of long-term conditions is extremely compelling and I love how this campaign highlights that even small amounts of regular physical activity can significantly improve people's physical health, and also their mental and psychological well-being. As a GP, I would wish for all of my patients to be active and I regularly prescribe physical activity alongside their other treatments. I think this campaign will give people with long-term health conditions the confidence to be more active from seeing how others with similar challenges have benefitted."*

**Dominic Littlewood, TV presenter with Type 1 Diabetes** said;

*"Living with a long-term health condition changes your life. But I've learnt that you can't let this defeat you. I've never been a gym person, so for me, getting active is all about taking things back to basics. I love walking, cycling and I always make an effort to take the stairs instead of a lift. I'm incredibly proud to be supporting this campaign and I hope I can inspire others to become more active."*

**Rory Cellan-Jones, BBC Correspondent and Parkinson's UK Supporter** said;

*"It's really sad that people with long-term conditions feel their health is a barrier to getting active, because this absolutely does not have to be the case. As someone living with Parkinson's, it's become clear to me that staying active is the best way to make sure I manage my symptoms and keep positive. For me that ranges from walking the dog to a weekly Pilates class and the odd bike ride – and I'm keen to explore other activities. It is so important to find the activity that works best for you, be it yoga, dance, walking, swimming or cycling. It's great to see this campaign kick-start a national movement, inspiring more of us to get active and live well."*

The people who feature in the *We Are Undefeatable* campaign, and many more people with long-term conditions, were involved in its development from the initial research right through to the design of the campaign films.

The charities behind the campaign include: Age UK, Alzheimer's Society, Asthma UK, Breast Cancer Care and Breast Cancer Now, British Lung Foundation, British Red Cross, Diabetes UK, Macmillan Cancer Support, Mind, MS Society, Parkinson's UK, Rethink Mental Illness, Royal Voluntary Service, Stroke Association and Versus Arthritis.

**-Notes to Editors-**

For more information on the campaign please go to [www.weareundefeatable.co.uk](http://www.weareundefeatable.co.uk)

For all media enquiries, please contact [therichmondgroup@freuds.com](mailto:therichmondgroup@freuds.com) / 0203 003 6300

**WAU Social media channels**

Facebook: [We Are Undefeatable](#)

Twitter: [@Undefeatable](#)

Instagram: [@We.are.undefeatable](#)

YouTube: [We Are Undefeatable](#)

Hashtag: **#WeAreUndefeatable**

The people featuring in the campaign films include:

Tony, aged 73, was diagnosed with Hodgkin Lymphoma two years ago, and decided to join a walking football group – the first time he'd kicked a ball since he was 13. Tony has found a community through playing walking football, whereby some of the team will go to the local café for a bite to eat before heading to the game. It helps him motivate himself to be as active as he can be, even if that means just making it to a match to cheer on the team.

Simone, aged 33, was born with a congenital heart defect that led to a stroke at 19. She now tries to walk two miles every day after being encouraged by her doctor and plays Just Dance with her partner – often challenging, but always fun.

**Charity Quotes:**

**Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director at Age UK** said;

*"We're delighted at Age UK to be part of the 'We are Undefeatable' campaign and hope it encourages many older people who feel physical activity is beyond them to get moving again. That's the point of this campaign - to explain that however big the health challenges you face may be there's always some kind of exercise for you, and you'll do yourself no end of good as a result. Even very modest amounts of activity make a difference to your physical health in later life and, just as importantly, to your state of mind too. For very frail and unwell older people it might simply mean doing some stretching*

*exercises while sitting in a chair - that's fine, we don't expect everyone to run the marathon and it's not appropriate that they do. Even the smallest amount will help, so why not give it a try?"*

**Jeremy Hughes, Chief Executive at Alzheimer's Society** said;

*"There are currently 850,000 people with dementia in the UK and with someone developing the condition every three minutes. Sport and physical activity can play an important part of life for many people with dementia, providing many benefits for both physical and mental health. Sadly though, we hear too often from people living with dementia that due to symptoms like memory loss and problems with understanding, more traditional classes can leave people with the condition feeling alienated and unable to keep up. Support to keep active at home and in their local area would ensure that people with dementia maintain that vital link with the community, as well as staying active. Physical activity can allow people with dementia to connect with other people by creating a shared experience. The places where we enjoy activities are important because they are often a constant feature throughout our lives and often the heart of the community."*

**Dr Penny Woods, Chief Executive, British Lung Foundation** said;

*"Some days, severe breathlessness can make even the smallest activity from washing the dishes to walking up the stairs seem like an impossible challenge. But we know that for those with lung disease being active can greatly improve quality of life and help people better manage their condition. That's why the British Lung Foundation is so excited to be supporting the We Are Undefeatable campaign, which uses real people's stories, including those with lung conditions, to inspire small changes that make a big difference. Our free activity support programme, Active Steps, run in partnership with Sport England and the National Lottery, has already seen how with a little help and advice people with lung conditions can find their way of getting active and become truly undefeatable."*

**Mike Adamson, Chief Exec of British Red Cross** said;

*"An active life is a healthier and happier life and can have a beneficial impact on both our physical and mental health. The British Red Cross supports many people who are taking steps to rebuild their lives after personal crises – whether they're coming out of hospital following an operation or a spell of illness, overcoming loneliness and isolation or responding to challenges that impede their ability to live independently – and we have seen the important part physical activity can play in supporting health and wellbeing. For people facing the daily challenges of multiple health conditions, physical activity can help improve strength and stamina as well as build self-confidence. It can also play a valuable role in connecting people with others in the community."*

**Chris Askew, Chief Executive of Diabetes UK and Chair of the Richmond Group of Charities** said;

*“Getting active and staying active can help the 3.8 million people in the UK living with a diabetes diagnosis manage their condition, and reduce the likelihood of developing Type 2 diabetes for the 12.3 million at risk. That’s why it’s vital to support everyone to enjoy the benefits of physical activity and provide practical solutions to get people with diabetes, including those who have already developed serious complications, as active as possible. Through this innovative partnership we can help millions of people take up physical activity and lead full and healthy lives.”*

**Lynda Thomas, Chief Executive of Macmillan Cancer Support** said:

*“We are proud to partner with Sport England as they bring this exciting new campaign to life, which will inspire people with chronic illnesses like cancer to become more active. This is about celebrating every victory, no matter how big or small – whether a walk up the stairs, a run round the park or exercises while sitting down. For the 625,000 people in the UK facing disability after cancer treatment, We Are Undefeatable is incredibly exciting and empowering, and we are so pleased to be part of it.”*

**Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind** said;

*“We know that physical activity can play a vital role in the lives of people with mental health problems. Unfortunately, we also know that many people who do want to participate in sport are being held back by their mental health, whether that’s feelings of low self-confidence, exhaustion or fear of crowded spaces. We’re proud to partner with Sport England for the ‘We Are Undefeatable’ campaign and believe it will encourage more people with health problems to be more active through taking small everyday steps. The findings of our Get Set to Go programme, funded by Sport England and the National Lottery, have already shown us that being more active can improve resilience, build your support networks and be the first step in recovery.”*

**Nick Moberly, Chief Executive of the MS Society** said;

*“It’s a common myth that people with multiple sclerosis (MS) will make their condition worse if they exercise. In reality, physical activity can actually help manage symptoms like fatigue, balance problems, or muscle spasms – as well as improve your mood and generally keep you as healthy as possible. MS is unpredictable and different for everyone. But whether your symptoms are minimal or severe, it is possible to be active with MS – you just need to find something that works for you. It could be cycling, gardening, or simply stretching. This campaign is designed to challenge the misconceptions of life with a chronic condition like MS, and show that exercise can be for everyone.”*

**Steve Ford, Chief Executive at Parkinson's UK** said:

*"People with Parkinson's frequently tell us that exercise is equally, if not more, important than their medication, but just as experiences of living with any condition is unique, there is no one-size-fits-all approach for people when it comes to keeping active. At Parkinson's UK we are passionate about shattering the misconceptions about what is 'suitable' and 'unsuitable' exercise or physical activity for people living with Parkinson's. We offer tailored advice and support for all stages of the condition so that they feel empowered and inspired to take control and manage their symptoms. That's why we are excited to be part of this new campaign, working alongside other leading charities to engage everyone affected by a long-term health condition to get active and live well."*

**Catherine Johnstone CBE, Chief Executive of Royal Voluntary Service** said;

*"Living with a long-term illness can take its toll on the mental and physical health of the individual, their family and friends. We know that staying active and connected with your community can help, and volunteering is a great way to do this. Royal Voluntary Service offers a number of flexible volunteering opportunities, many of which can be adapted to suit people of all backgrounds and abilities. Whether it's volunteering in one of our hospital cafes or shops, serving food in a lunch club or providing company to an older person on a hospital ward, our volunteer opportunities encourage people to remain socially integrated which in turn has a positive impact on their overall health and wellbeing. Not to mention the sense of purpose and joy that can be derived from volunteering and supporting others, which stays with our volunteers for life."*

**Liam O'Toole Chief Executive of Versus Arthritis** said;

*"People living with arthritis live with daily pain which impacts their ability to move and stay active. We know that physical activity can help to ease these symptoms but when you are in pain and are exhausted from fatigue, it can be the last thing you want to do or feels your body needs. That's why we are proud to participate in the 'We Are Undefeatable' campaign, to help, support and encourage people with arthritis to be more active, in a way that suits them."*

### **About We Are Undefeatable**

We Are Undefeatable is a national campaign and movement to inspire and support people with long-term health conditions to be active. Featuring the real-life experiences of people with long-term

health conditions, We Are Undefeatable aims to support people to build physical activity into their lives, in a way that their condition allows.

The campaign is led by 15 of the major health and social care charities and is backed by expertise, insight and significant National Lottery funding from Sport England, the organisation behind the award-winning This Girl Can campaign.

The charities are: Age UK, Alzheimer's Society, Asthma UK, Breast Cancer Care and Breast Cancer Now, British Lung Foundation, British Red Cross, Parkinson's, Diabetes UK, Macmillan Cancer Support, Mind, MS Society, Rethink Mental Illness, Royal Voluntary Service, Stroke Association and Versus Arthritis.

### **About the survey**

DJS Research surveyed 1,303 people aged 18+ in England living with long-term health conditions between Monday 5<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> August. Fieldwork was a mix of online and face to face CAPI interviewing. To ensure the views of people with the broadest range of health conditions were represented, quotas were set for twelve specific conditions. These included heart disease, arthritis and other mobility issues as well as MS, cancer, dementia/Alzheimer's and long-term depression.

**Eligibility criterion:** Eligibility was based on answering "yes" to this question "Do you have any long-term or ongoing mental or physical health issues or conditions? By this we mean anything that has troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect your health over a long period of time?" and reporting at least one of 15 named health conditions

**Health conditions covered:** Arthritis (Osteoarthritis, Rheumatoid Arthritis, other), a long-term limiting mobility condition (excluding Arthritis), Alzheimer's, Asthma, Back pain, Breast cancer, Cancer (excluding breast), Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease/Lung Condition, Dementia, Heart Disease, Stroke, hypertension (or other heart related condition), Long -term depression or anxiety, MS, Parkinson's, Type 1 Diabetes and Type 2 Diabetes