

Written evidence submitted by the Football Foundation (PHS0171)

I am responding to this inquiry on behalf of the Football Foundation to call for the Committee to consider ways of using physical activity to help prevent both poor mental and physical health.

The Football Foundation is the Premier League, The FA and Government's charity that delivers outstanding grassroots facilities, more and better places to play, transforming lives and communities where it is needed most. This investment is matched with local partnership funding and awarded as grants to create outstanding grassroots facilities.

Since its creation in 2000, the Foundation has awarded more than 23,000 grants to improve facilities worth more than £877 million – including 1,000 3G football turf pitches, 11,000 natural grass pitches and 1,300 changing rooms. This has attracted an additional £1.23bn of partnership funding – totalling over £2 billion investment in grassroots football so far.

After these 22 years of experience, we know that this investment in grassroots facilities can help address some of the long-term health challenges facing our country, such as obesity and mental health. According to a report conducted by The FA in partnership with Portas Consulting, grassroots football prevents over 200,000 cases of physical and mental health disorders in adults in England every year.¹ The same report found that adults who play regular football are also happier, more confident and have better communication skills than those who don't, and that this impact is three times greater in adults from lower income groups.

As part of our Hubs programme, the Foundation has invested in 14 large multi-pitch sites across the country, which not only provide great places to play but also help improve health, widen access to education and support tackling inequalities. In one year alone, Foundation funding of £35.5m into seven Hub sites across Liverpool and Sheffield provided a socio-economic return of £16.2m. Of this return, £2.4m came in the form of physical and mental wellbeing benefits, including 4,500 fewer GP visits.²

Foundation funding has also delivered facilities for Everton in the Community (EitC) to support mental health through football and physical activity in an area of high deprivation. Since 2018, EitC has delivered mental health programmes across Merseyside, supporting 7,000 people to improve their mental health and move into volunteering or employment, reduce their reliance on the NHS, no longer require medication and become physically active.

The Foundation has awarded EitC a total £2.1 million in grant funding, including £340,000 towards an Education Hub, £469,000 for a Disability Community Hub, and last year £500,000 for a new Mental Health Hub. This latest investment into the "The People's Place", which is due to open in March 2023, will enable EitC to deliver a range of physical activity programmes as a vehicle to improve mental health and promote suicide prevention. The project will also have economic benefits to the area through the employment of new staff and the provision of education to boost qualifications and employability for the local community.

It's extremely timely that the Committee explore further how physical activity and sport can be used to prevent poor physical and mental health. While Sport England's latest Active Lives Survey found that overall activity levels among children have recovered to pre-pandemic levels, this has not been true for all groups and inequalities remain.³ For example, the survey found that activity levels among

¹ The FA (2021). *The Social And Economic Value Of Grassroots Football In England*. Available [here](#).

² The FA (2021). *The Social And Economic Value Of Grassroots Football In England*. Available [here](#).

³ Sport England (2022). *Active Lives Children and Young People Survey*. Available [here](#).

boys and girls living in deprived areas or among children from ethnic minorities have still not recovered from the effects the pandemic.

To address these inequalities and to help unlock the benefits of grassroots sport for mental and physical wellbeing, the Foundation would like to see the Department explore ways to bring primary care closer to community sports facilities. This could include social prescribing to encourage people to take part in physical activity and participation in sport, which has thus far been under-utilised in general practice.