



Office for Health  
Improvement  
& Disparities

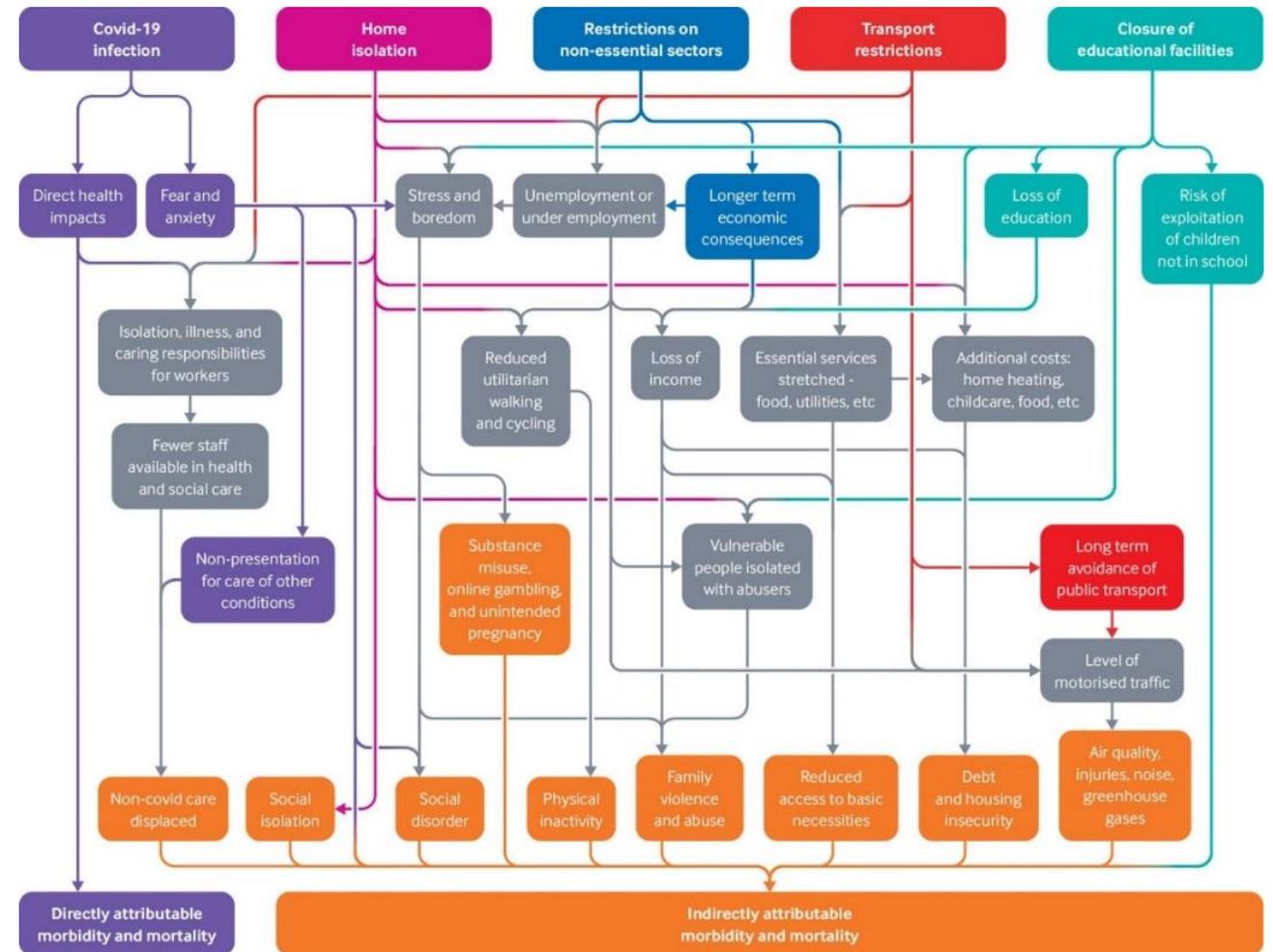
# **Reconditioning and the Adult Social Care White Paper**

**Dr Oliver Rashbrook-Cooper**  
**Healthy Ageing Team**  
**OHID**

# Introduction: COVID-19 and Deconditioning

## Background

- COVID-19 has affected almost every aspect of our lives, and these wider impacts will have consequences for a range of health outcomes.
- Evidence suggests that some of the wider impacts of COVID-19 have affected older people's physical and mental health disproportionately. One of the most acute impacts is reduced physical activity, leading to **deconditioning** (physical, psychological and functional decline).
- Physical activity levels – in particular strength and balance activity - were reduced during COVID-19 lockdowns, but this reduction continues to persist despite the relaxation of restrictions.



Source: Diagram taken from Douglas et al 2020

# COVID-19 and Physical Activity

- At population level, levels of physical activity amongst older adults (aged 65+) have fallen during the pandemic.
- When we look at the kinds of physical activity people are engaged in, the greatest declines are seen in **strength and balance** activity.
- In 2020, the average duration of strength and balance activity per week decreased from 126 minutes to 77 minutes compared to the previous year (~40% reduction)
- And when we look in more detail, about 22% of older adults reported doing more physical activity, about 50% the same, and about 26% less – people were not affected **equally**.<sup>1</sup>

1. The Physiological Society 2021, [A National Post-Pandemic Resilience Programme](#)

Those most likely to have seen a decrease in physical activity include <sup>1 2</sup>:

- people from more deprived backgrounds
- women
- people from black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds
- people from urban areas
- people who shielded
- people living with long-term health conditions
- people living with multimorbidity
- people living with dementia
- people living in social care settings

1. PHE 2021, [Wider impacts of COVID-19 on physical activity, deconditioning and falls in older adults](#)

2. Sport England 2021, [Active Lives Survey May 2020/2021 Report](#)



# Modelling The Impact on Falls

The PHE report, '[Wider Impacts of COVID-19 on Physical Activity, Deconditioning and Falls in Older Adults](#)' models the potential national impact of reduced strength and balance activity on falls.

This modelling puts the number of additional falls nationally at over **250,000** a year, leading to costs to the health and social care system of £210 million. Based on the usual healthcare pathways for falls, it is plausible that:

- nearly 26,000 of these additional falls will require a GP visit
- 30,000 will require an ambulance call out
- over 14,000 will require an inpatient stay
- over 12,000 will require a care home package

Modelling predicts that these figures will continue each year for as long as the reduction in physical activity persists.



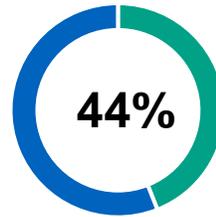
# The Impact of Deconditioning, and Reasons for Reducing Physical Activity

As well as the more immediate impacts set out in the Age UK survey, deconditioning has a range of **medium-** and **long-term** impacts, including:

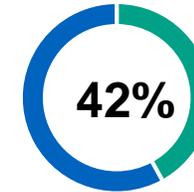
- falls
- depression
- type II diabetes
- cardiovascular disease
- musculoskeletal problems

An area of concern is the relationship between physical activity and health:

A **third** of adults aged 50+ report that they have reduced their activity levels due to a decline in overall health.<sup>1</sup>



Report a decline in motivation



Report being out of the habit

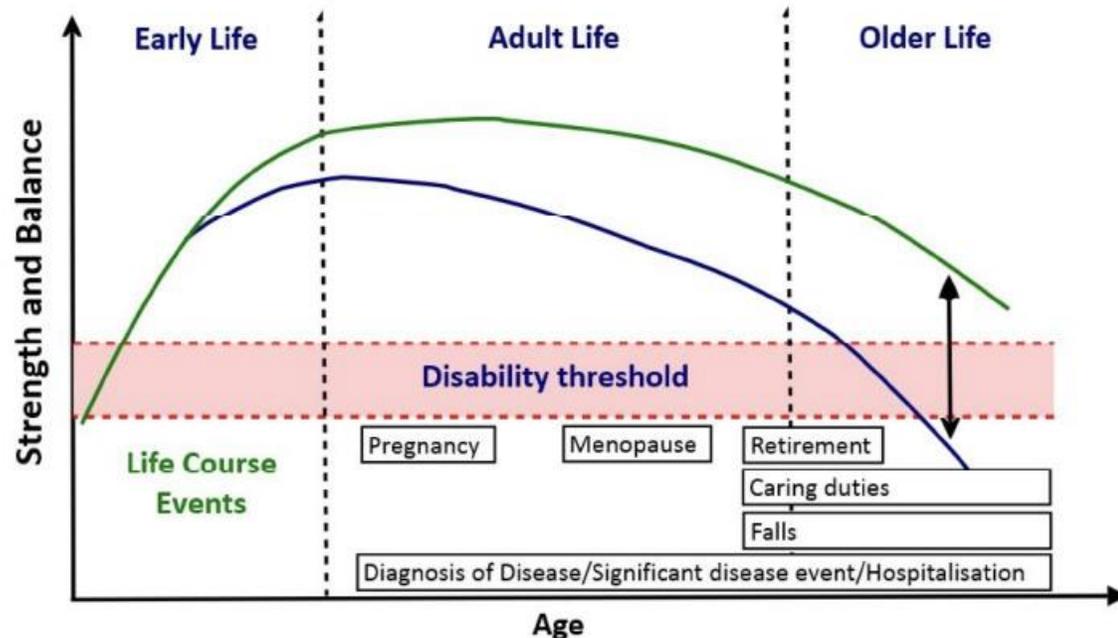
Whereas 23% of adults aged 50+ report anxiety about catching coronavirus as a reason for a reduction in physical activity.

1. The Physiological Society 2021, [A National Post-Pandemic Resilience Programme](#)



# Strength and Balance Activity Across the Life Course

Strength and balance ability over the life course and potential ages or events that may change the trajectory of decline with ageing



Key: Green Line denotes successful ageing with good health and regular strength and balance activity. Blue line denotes the decline in strength and balance if not part of activity throughout lifespan.

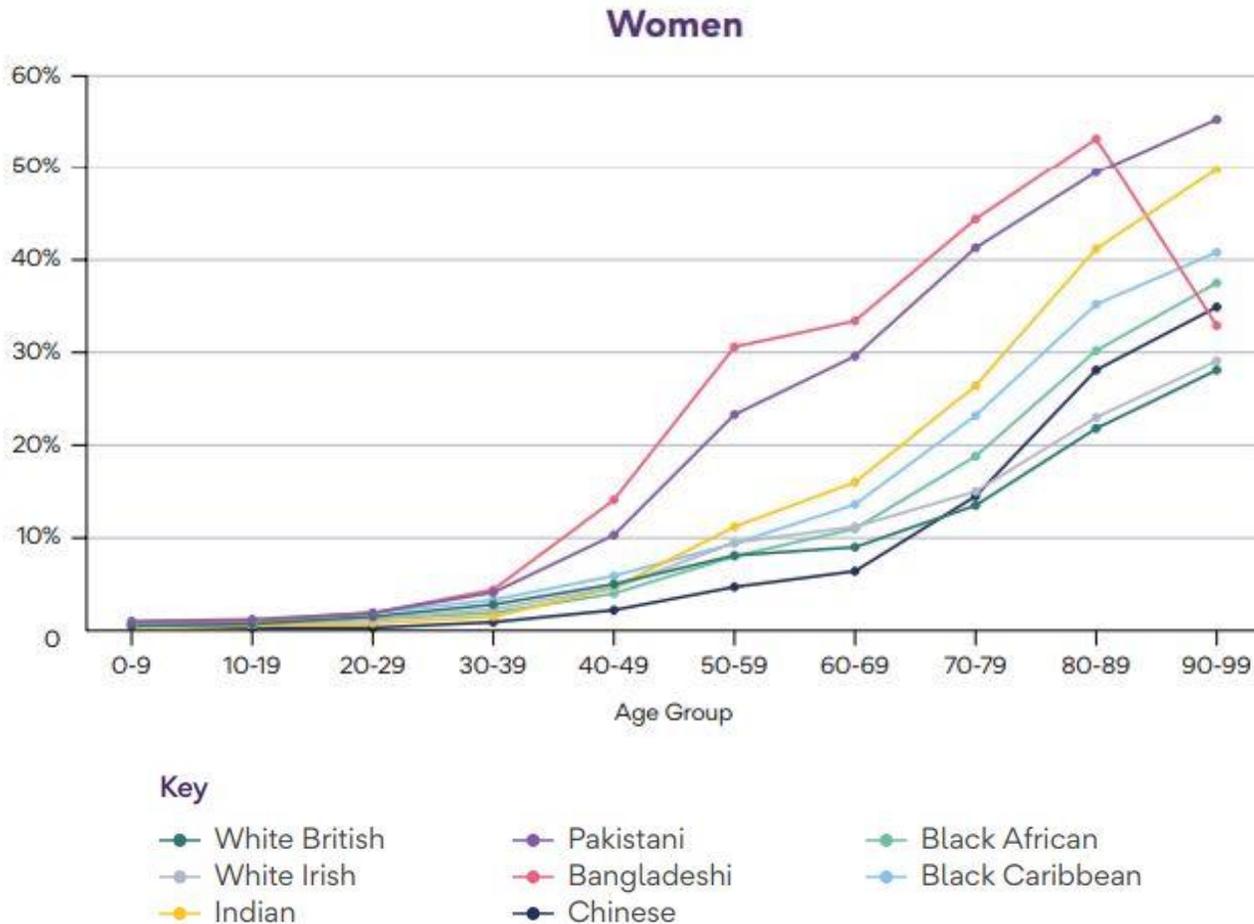
Source: Skelton DA, Mavroei A (2018) How do muscle and bone strengthening and balance activities (MBSBA) vary across the life course and are there particular ages where MBSBA are important. *Journal of Frailty, Sarcopenia and Falls* 3(2): 74-84

- Over a lifetime there are events that may lead to a reduction in a person's strength and balance ability.
- Health risk (e.g. due to sedentary behaviour) can also accumulate over the life course.
- Physical activity is important over the life course to maintain functional capacity, to prevent morbidity and mortality.
- This is part of reducing health and social care need, e.g. by maintaining the capacity to perform activities of daily living independently.



# Health Inequalities Across the Life Course

Percentage of men and women with poor self-rated health by age and ethnicity.



- It is important to consider how health inequalities manifest themselves over the life course.
- Self-reported poor health is broadly similar amongst different ethnicities until people reach their 30s.
- However, structural disadvantages accumulate over the life course, resulting in large health disparities.
- **22%** of White British women in their **80s** report poor health, the same proportion as for Pakistani women in their **50s (23%)**.<sup>1</sup>
- Approaches that emphasise prevention and which affect people earlier in the life course are therefore crucial to addressing health inequalities.

1. Centre for Ageing Better, 2022, [Ethnic Inequalities in Later Life](#)

# Recommendations

The PHE wider impacts report contains the following recommendations, combining whole-population and targeted elements:

- **Measures aimed at the whole older adult population**

- Promote awareness of deconditioning, and the need to gradually build up activity levels to individuals, unpaid carers, and health and social care professionals.
- Increased access to and promotion of strength and balance activities for all.
- Ensure falls prevention activities are promoted using positive messaging, aimed at specific communities, emphasising the benefits of strength and balance for wellbeing and safely resuming previous activities.

- **Targeted measures for specific groups:**

- Individuals with appreciable functional loss or transition towards frailty: support from rehabilitation, falls and physiotherapy services.
- Individuals with deconditioning related to post-acute COVID-19 syndrome: support from post-acute COVID-19 syndrome NHS services.

This work has been selected for inclusion in the prevention strand of the [Adult Social Care white paper](#), which commits to funding of £3m over 3 years to pilot new ways of addressing deconditioning, as well as to set up a 'deconditioning network' to find and share good practice (e.g. Falls Prevention in Greater Manchester).

