

# Connecting the community with Oldham Pharmacy Walks

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## A whole system approach to healthcare and activity

A high percentage of residents in Oldham (9.7%) have both diabetes and undiagnosed diabetes. There's also evidence to suggest that between 20-50% of those who contracted Covid 19 during the pandemic who had severe symptoms/complications also had diabetes.

In 2021, three community health pharmacies launched a local pilot programme offering a diabetes testing service. Pharmacy walks were developed to build on this work in an effort to get more people walking and moving as well as spreading the word about healthcare services available to those who may not be able to access the support they need.

Andrea Tait at [Oldham Council](#) initiated the project, alongside Claire Marshall at Oldham Sports Development as part of the [NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme](#).

“Public Health wanted to tie place-based working together. The connection with pharmacies was based on a previous pilot, which used point-of-care blood testing machines at two pharmacies to help identify pre-diabetes within ‘high-risk groups’. With the pressures and difficulties of GP access due to the pandemic, residents were increasingly relying on the trust and knowledge of their local pharmacies. They were the ideal meeting point to bring groups of local people together in physical activity and benefit their overall health.” - Andrea Tait, Oldham Council



## Getting local pharmacies involved in organised walking

Andrea and Claire approached the pharmacies who had been involved in the diabetes pilot scheme about getting involved in weekly health walks. Then, they enlisted the help of Alan Keene at UProjects: a small, Oldham-based business providing outdoor physical activities with proven health benefits. Alan and his team began conversations with pharmacists to develop the programme, targeting those in areas where public health was a concern.

“Pre-diabetes pilot scheme participation levels at Glodwick and Failsworth pharmacies were low, so we identified these as areas of primary focus. To date we have three pharmacies involved - Failsworth, Glodwick and Wereneth - and there’s interest in other areas beyond Oldham too.”

Alan has been championing walking for health since 2002 and has always done a lot of research on the ground to find out what local people want and what matters to them. He talked to Oldham’s residents and discovered there was a clear gap in the market for accessible local walks. Organised walks, such as hikes or treks are easy to find, but simply not suitable for everyone and Alan knew that had to change.



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## Developing walks to meet local residents' needs

Planning appropriate walking routes was the priority, and U Projects worked closely with the pharmacies to understand and develop routes that would be easy for all abilities. The organisers produced flyers to invite people along, sharing the message that the walks were 'not far and not fast!' to encourage all ages and abilities to come along. U Projects led a walk beginning outside Focus Pharmacy in Failsworth, and Saima Nadim at BAME Connect organised walks from Lees Road Pharmacy in Oldham.

The walks start as close as possible to the pharmacy doors so that walkers can readily find out about the health services available to them, and they can be encouraged to visit the pharmacy if they need support. Imran, Head Pharmacist at the Failsworth location, always meets with the walkers. He talks to them about health and lets them know when they can come in and book their flu jab, for example.

“The community is in need of projects like this in order to prevent conditions like diabetes and/or other long-term illnesses, and the walks have been fantastic. We’ve had a good turnout every week. Alan and Saima have been fantastic organising the walks, and the feedback around the planning and the routes taken has been excellent. What’s more, the pharmacy staff are now much more confident having physical activity conversations with residents. We completed 57 of these discussions in July alone.” - Mohammed Shahzad, Glossop Lead Pharmacist



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## Building connections through accessible walking routes

The reach of the walks has been impressive. Many of the walkers are people who struggle to socialise and get out and about. Some have been encouraged to do more physical activity due to a health condition, while others are simply looking for companionship. The walks open up new chances to connect.

- Over 20 people now take part in walks every single week
- South Asian middle-aged women and men have attended in Glodwick
- Men, women and children of all ages have joined walks in Failsworth
- Pharmacists have supported people on the walks and offered advice on other health concerns
- Staff from Health Watch also frequently take part in the walks and find it a really beneficial and insightful way to get opinions on people's experiences of the NHS
- Walkers have reported improvements in both mental and physical health

'I hadn't been out of the house until I came to collect a prescription, and now attend the weekly walks. It is lifting my mood. I talk to some nice people, and I have started walking a bit more in the week too.'



## Growing a sustainable pharmacy walks programme

Many in-store health conversations in the pharmacies have centred on key topics such as loneliness, isolation and weight gain. The pharmacists have also spoken to residents about diabetes and referred 30% of 'at-risk' people to the NDPP National Diabetes Prevention Programme. Joint working across the wider system has included large, multi-agency meetings to develop action plans, timescales and responsibilities according to walking group needs.

“For a long-term sustainable approach, we’d like to see one pharmacy in each of the five districts involved, with all local community assets, social prescribing and leisure offers linked to the pharmacy walks initiative. It will need a small amount of funding. Yet two of the pharmacists are already happy to signpost onto local services as part of their Healthy Living Pharmacy status.”

– Andrea Tait, Oldham Council





Mohammed and the Glodwick team are also keen to encourage more walkers to take part. They would like to see more men coming along, so that they can encourage and signpost everyone to have relevant health conversations. Alan also knows these strong relationships are key to the programme's sustainability.

“It's simply not possible for me to lead every walk we hope to run. From the outset, we knew we'd need to find volunteers to take ownership and lead the walks themselves. People have registered their interest already, and we're looking at the support local agencies can give them, such as providing relevant training. It'll really help us reach more people.” – Alan Keene, U Projects

Walking alongside someone and chatting to them helps people open up. One lady said if she didn't join the walks, she'd never see anyone outside her home. That's really powerful, knowing someone's life can change so hugely through simple physical activity. It's why it's crucial these walks continue long-term.

For walking inspiration, ideas, routes and groups visit [www.gmwalking.co.uk](http://www.gmwalking.co.uk)



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