

- A vital service at risk

“I’m a mum of three kids and have wrestled perinatal depression for almost the whole time I’ve been a mother. When I was drowning in life, Healthy Active Minds answered my call. Now I feel stronger, more content and more resilient.”

About Healthy Active Minds

Healthy Active Minds is a vital service harnessing the benefits of physical activity to support adults in Edinburgh aged 18 and over who experience mild to moderate depression, anxiety, stress or low mood. Since its inception in 2009, Healthy Active Minds has supported over 11,000 people becoming an integral part of Edinburgh’s mental health support system.

Over the past year, 1,392 adults from diverse backgrounds were supported to be active to improve and protect their mental health.

- 46% of participants were aged between 40-64, with the oldest participant being 84 years old.
- 43% of participants were from the most deprived areas of the city (SIMD areas 1 and 2).
- 56% of participants were female and 43% male (1% unknown).
- We continue to see high demand for the service (receiving over 120 referrals each month).

What We Deliver

Healthy Active Minds is a person-centred and preventative project designed to provide wellbeing support to people before their mental health reaches a critical stage requiring intensive or specialist care. Through referral by a health or social care professional, participants access tailored physical activity support aimed at equipping them with the tools to enhance and protect their mental wellbeing. The program includes:

- One-to-one support from a Wellbeing Instructor to explore individual needs, set goals, monitor progress and provide ongoing motivational support.
- A personalised physical activity plan offering options such as swimming, gym sessions, walking, fitness classes and yoga.
- Opportunities to join group activities alongside peers, including boxing, racquet sports, and group gym sessions.
- 12 weeks of free access to Edinburgh Leisure facilities, followed by an additional 12 weeks of subsidised access.
- Guidance and support to maintain an active lifestyle after completing the programme.

The project is run by our Healthy Active Minds Team, who are experts in delivering successful physical activity interventions for people experiencing mental health conditions in Edinburgh.

The Need

Mental health places a significant financial burden on health and social care services. In Scotland, 1 in 4 people will be affected by mental health issues in their lifetime, with 1 in 8 using anti-depressants, 1 in 3 GP appointments relating to a mental health problem, and the cost of poor mental health to the Scottish economy estimated to be £8.8 billion per year. The impact is even more pronounced among those living in poverty; individuals in the most disadvantaged

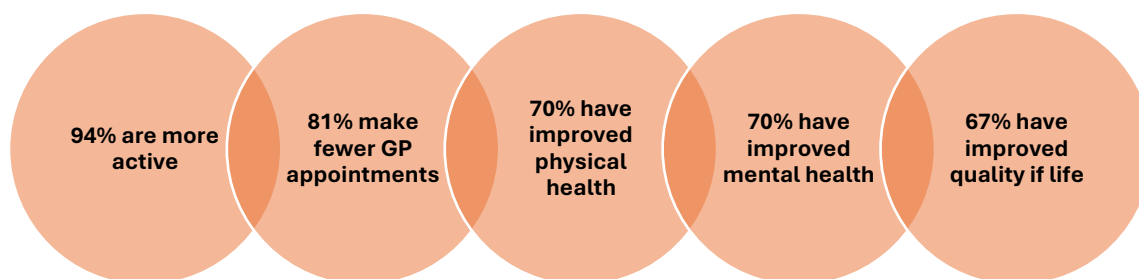
- A vital service at risk

areas are three times more likely to be hospitalised for mental health conditions compared to those in the least deprived areas. Physical activity, however, offers a proven way to enhance mental health and wellbeing. Research highlights its numerous benefits, such as improved mood, reduced stress and anxiety, strengthened social connections, heightened self-esteem, and clearer thinking.

Despite widespread awareness of these advantages, people experiencing mental health challenges often face significant obstacles that prevent them from embracing an active lifestyle. Tailored and targeted support is vital to help overcome these barriers and ensure individuals can reap the mental health benefits of physical activity.

Impact

Widespread, existing evidence clearly demonstrates the physical, mental and social benefits, in addition to the wider societal benefits accruing (including economic). Our Monitoring and evaluation of Healthy Active Minds show that participants become more active, make fewer GP appointments, have better mental and physical health, improved quality of life, and demonstrates an economic return of £13.36 for every £1 invested.



“I can honestly say that Healthy Active Minds has been the most important factor in getting me through my mental health crisis. As my recovery continues, it’s something that continues to be so important for structure and ongoing inspiration.”

Colin, aged 59

“Exercise is one of the keys to good mental health. The motivational and non-judgemental support that Healthy Active Minds provides has helped my patients to improve their outlook on life and build their confidence. I’m sure this service has, quite literally, saved people’s lives.”

Practice Nurse

“Some patients I have referred are on low incomes and don’t have a lot of disposable income, which makes committing to a gym membership particularly difficult. This project has proven to be particularly valuable to them. They have shared that they’re now more active, have a greater sense of wellbeing, are sleeping better, and feel less stressed. One patient recently told me that the project played a pivotal role in enabling them to return to work after an extended period of sick leave.”

Psychiatrist

- A vital service at risk

The Future of Healthy Active Minds

Healthy Active Minds is instrumental in encouraging people with mental health challenges to stay active, thereby reducing their reliance on health and social care services. It empowers them to lead healthier, happier, and more fulfilling lives.

Healthy Active Minds is currently funded by the Edinburgh Integrated Joint Board (EIJB) through the Thrive budget. Despite this programme being vital to our community, the EIJB has informed us that all Thrive contracts are under review, with recommendations for EIJB contract related savings going to the EIJB meeting on 26th August 2025. We were informed on 8th August that the contract for Healthy Active Minds would not be renewed beyond its planned expiry date of 30th November 2025. This development is deeply concerning, as we have six dedicated staff members currently delivering this project, receiving over 120 referrals each month, 200 on our waitlist and supporting approximately 1,400 people every year. This decision marks a reversal from previous assurances, which indicated that EL's contract for Healthy Active Minds would continue.

Regrettably, if we are unable to secure the required funding package to support the continued delivery of Healthy Active Minds, we will be forced to explore withdrawal or significant reduction of this life-changing service from November 2025.