

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release:

17 July, 2023

87% of Irish sports clubs want to do more to support individuals with disabilities, but joined up approach required to overcome ongoing challenges

Research published by Liberty Insurance in advance of symposium analysing participation rates amongst individuals with disability in Irish sport

- Key challenges cited include inadequate facilities and / or sports equipment (65%), lack of funding (35%), lack of appropriate training amongst volunteers / staff (33%), with others unsure if there would be sufficient interest to justify investment (19%);
- 94% believe all sports clubs should cater to individuals with disabilities, however, only less than three in ten clubs have it specified in their club charter or mission statement;
- 42% of clubs have players or athletes with disabilities, 37% of clubs have no disabled members;
- Liberty symposium to bring together stakeholders, including the GAA, IRFU, Sports Ireland, to discuss how we can grow participation rates amongst individuals with disabilities.

More than four in five (87%) grassroots Irish sports clubs want to do more to support individuals with disabilities, however, there is an urgent need for a more joined-up approach to overcome existing practical and perception challenges, according to new research published by Liberty Insurance.

The new research highlights numerous challenges in growing participation rates amongst individuals with disabilities, including inadequate facilities and specialised equipment (65%), inadequate funding (35%), a lack of available training for volunteers (33%), an uncertainty amongst clubs whether there would be sufficient interest levels amongst those with disabilities to justify the investment (19%).

AccessAbility symposium

The research was published in advance of the AccessAbility Symposium, taking place on Thursday, 20 July, in Croke Park, Dublin. The event, hosted by Liberty Insurance, will seek to explore how the Irish sports community and its stakeholders can grow participation rates amongst individuals with disabilities.

The symposium will feature leading disability advocates, including The Irish Times columnist Joanne O’Riordan, podcast host and activist Jack Kavanagh. It will be hosted by Newstalk Off The Ball’s John Duggan and will include contributions from Minister for Disability, Anne Rabbitte TD, Active Disability Ireland and Sports Ireland. The GAA and IRFU will also be in attendance.

Existing participation rates

PRESS RELEASE

As part of the research, polling company Ireland Thinks surveyed 232 grassroots clubs around the country on the theme of growing participation rates amongst individuals with disabilities.

According to the research, 42% of clubs have players or athletes with disabilities amongst their membership. Clubs also reported having members with disabilities in non-playing roles, including volunteers (16%) and coaches (5%). 37% of clubs have nobody with a disability amongst their membership.

When clubs were asked if somebody with a disability could join their club, 79% said yes, as a full member. 10% said yes, but not as a player or athlete, and the remaining 12% were either unsure or said no.

Lack of facilities

One of the most prominent challenges cited by sports clubs in growing their membership amongst individuals with disabilities is inadequate facilities and specialised sports equipment. Approximately only half of Irish sports clubs have wheelchair accessible parking (55%), or basic wheelchair accessible facilities including bathrooms or changing rooms (50%), and wheelchair accessible ramps (49%). Only 9% of clubs have wheelchair accessible kitchen or canteen facilities. Nearly three in ten (29%) clubs have no wheelchair accessible facilities at all.

The need for Government funding

Irish sports clubs typically derive their funding from membership fees (59%) and fundraising (29%), with only four per cent of clubs benefiting from Government grants.

Despite funding and inadequate facilities being one of the key challenges facing clubs in their efforts to support individuals with disabilities, only 21% of clubs have availed of the relevant Government grants. Over half (52%) of clubs were unaware of the available Government grants, meanwhile 28% were aware, but had not applied or availed of these grants. In total, 93% of clubs believe that more Government grants should be made available to sports clubs in supporting individuals with disabilities.

A chicken and egg dynamic

Speaking in advance of the AccessAbility symposium, Sylvia Coldrick, of Liberty Insurance, said:

“Ireland is fortunate enough to boast an incredible network of volunteer-run sports clubs that do brilliant work in the community on a weekly basis, particularly for young people. Many of these clubs represent the very heartbeat of their communities, and their existence is only made possible by the good-will, enthusiasm, and generosity of spirit of their volunteer coaches and administrative support.

“Our research demonstrates that there is a clear appetite on the part of these clubs to do more to support new and existing members with disabilities, and to ensure that they feel welcome and involved at all levels of the club.

“However, there are practical barriers at play, and resource-thin clubs need greater support on this journey. There is clearly a need for greater Government investment at all levels of Irish sport, but particularly in making sports facilities more accessible to those with disabilities. There is also

PRESS RELEASE

an evident disconnect relating to what Government grants are currently available and how to go about applying for this funding.

“Secondly, there is an evident chicken and egg dynamic at play whereby sports clubs want to do more to welcome and engage individuals with disabilities, but are unsure if there is sufficient levels of interest on the part of those with disabilities to justify the investment. This suggests a need for greater dialogue between sports bodies and the relevant support functions in their community.

“We hope our AccessAbility symposium will help shine a light on the practical and cultural challenges at play, and identify how we can make organised sport more accessible and inclusionary to everyone in the community.”

Liberty is committed to creating a more inclusive society for people with disabilities and according to the European Commission*, sport provides people living with a disability an opportunity to increase their participation in society, showcase their talents and challenge stereotypes. The commission further states that sport and physical activity promote tolerance, solidarity and inclusiveness.

Post-symposium, Liberty Insurance will publish a set of recommendations to be shared with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Sport, with the shared goal of making sport available to everyone in the community.

In September 2023, Liberty Insurance, in partnership with the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA), will host its annual Run’n’Roll 2.5k/5k in St Annes Park, Raheny. The purpose of the race is to demonstrate solidarity and allyship with individuals with disabilities.

For more information and to register, visit iwa.ie/runroll

ENDS

For more information, please contact:

- **Gerard O’Shea, 360, A FINN Partners Company:** gerard.oshea@finnpartners.com / 087 413 7471
- **Darragh Duncan, 360, A FINN Partners Company:** darragh.duncan@finnpartners.com / 085 121 5011

* <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/policies/sport-and-society/social-inclusion>

Notes to the editor

About Liberty Insurance

Liberty Seguros, Compania de Seguros Y Reaseguros, S.A, trading as Liberty Insurance is authorised by the General Directorate of Insurance and Pension Funds in Spain and is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland for conduct of business rules.



PRESS RELEASE

Research Note

Research commissioned by Liberty Insurance and carried out by Ireland Thinks using a combined telephone and online survey. 232 interviews were conducted between 6 – 16 July with grassroots sports clubs based in Ireland.