

# Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2020-21

## Differences for impairment type

Activity Alliance

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# Introduction

- This report outlines the key findings for Activity Alliance's Annual Disability and Activity Survey across different types of impairment. [A summary report and full report are available on our website.](#)
- This is the second year of our Annual Disability and Activity Survey. This study is designed to track changes in disabled people's perceptions and experiences of sport and physical activity across years. This year, it also shows the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This survey provides a further level of understanding of the activity levels of disabled people, complementing [Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey](#). Its aim is to provide robust insight for Activity Alliance and other stakeholders to develop support and guidance for disabled people which will reduce the activity gap between disabled people and non-disabled people's activity levels.
- Fieldwork for the online survey took place during June to September 2020, when lockdown restrictions were being eased.
- Survey respondents were asked in which areas their impairment affected them. (This includes: mobility, long-term pain, breathing or stamina, long-term health conditions, dexterity, mental health, hearing impairments including D/deaf people, memory, learning or understanding or concentrating, social or behavioural, vision, or speech). This report shows the data for six impairment types (sample shown on following slide). The number of people who were wheelchair users, amputees, and who had cerebral palsy or dwarfism, was recorded but not analysed due to low sample sizes (reflecting low incidence in the general population). This data is available on request.

# Sample information

Type of impairment	2019/20 survey	2020/21 survey
All disabled people	1182	1023
Mobility	772	672
Learning or concentrating or understanding	95	91
Visual	71	76
Long-term health condition	439	420
Mental health	324	252
Hearing (including d/Deaf people)	191	167

- Two sample sources were used. People who had completed Sport England's Active Lives Survey (from May 2018 to May 2020) and agreed to take part in further research, and people who were part of an independent research panel.
- Weighting has not been applied to the data as the sample was representative of the UK profile of disabled people across key demographics.
- The demographic groups were largely consistent with the 2019/20 survey.

# Notes on understanding the data

The following definitions and notes will assist you in understanding the research findings and how activity levels are calculated in this survey.

**Disability:** is defined as anyone that has a long-term health condition, impairment, or illness that has a substantial effect on ability to do normal daily activities. This included physical, sensory, learning, social, behavioural or mental health conditions or impairments that have lasted, or are expected to last 12 months or more.

**Activity:** is defined as the number of days in a normal week people did 30 minutes or more of physical activity that was enough to raise their breathing rate. Physical activity includes sport, exercise and brisk walking or cycling for fun, or to get to and from places. It does not include housework or physical activity that is part of work. This survey uses the following groupings:

- **Inactive:** person does less than a total of 30 minutes physical activity in a week.
- **Fairly active:** person does 30 minutes or more physical activity on one to four days in a week.
- **Active:** person does 30 minutes or more physical activity on at least five days in a normal week.

To ensure accessibility, the question we used to capture activity levels is a simpler version of the Sport England's Active Lives Adult survey question. Please see the full report for more information.

**Statistical differences** were analysed but are not included in this report due to low sample sizes for some impairments.

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## Key findings

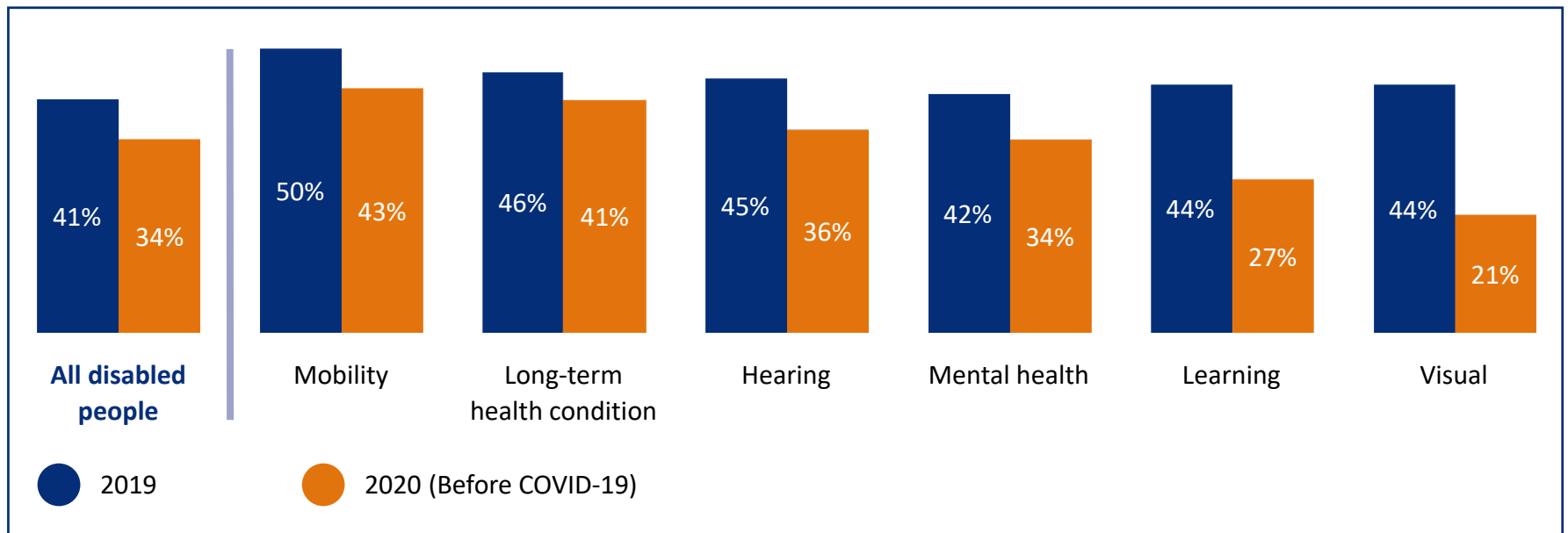
Disabled people's experience  
and attitudes towards physical activity  
before the COVID-19 pandemic

# Before COVID-19, inactivity levels were decreasing

There were less inactive people across all types of impairments, with an average of 34% of disabled people being inactive this year, compared to only 10% of non-disabled people. Individuals with learning and visual impairments saw the biggest decrease. Individuals with mobility and long-term health conditions are the most inactive.

**Figure 1**

Proportion of people with each impairment type who were inactive.



Q: Before the coronavirus outbreak, on how many days do you do a total of 30 minutes or more of physical activity that is enough to raise your breathing rate? Base: All disabled people that stated their activity level.

# Activity levels (before COVID-19) – commentary

People with visual impairments and mental health conditions reported higher levels of activity this year (prior to the pandemic). The proportion of people with visual impairments who were inactive halved (from 44% to 21%), and the proportion who were fairly active increased from 35% to 55%. As a result of this, they reported lower levels of inactivity this year than the average disabled person (21% vs. 34%); a change new to this year of the survey.

In both years of the survey, people with mobility and long-term health impairments reported the lowest levels of activity. New to this year, they were more likely to report being inactive compared with people with learning and vision impairments. This was the case even though a smaller proportion of people with mobility and long-term health impairments reported they were inactive this year, suggesting activity levels are increasing among other impairment types at a faster rate. The change compared to people with learning impairments may, in part, be driven by the age profile of each impairment type, but there were no differences in age profile for people with vision impairments. Mobility, then, is a key impairment type in relation to activity level, suggesting people with mobility impairments may need more support to be active.

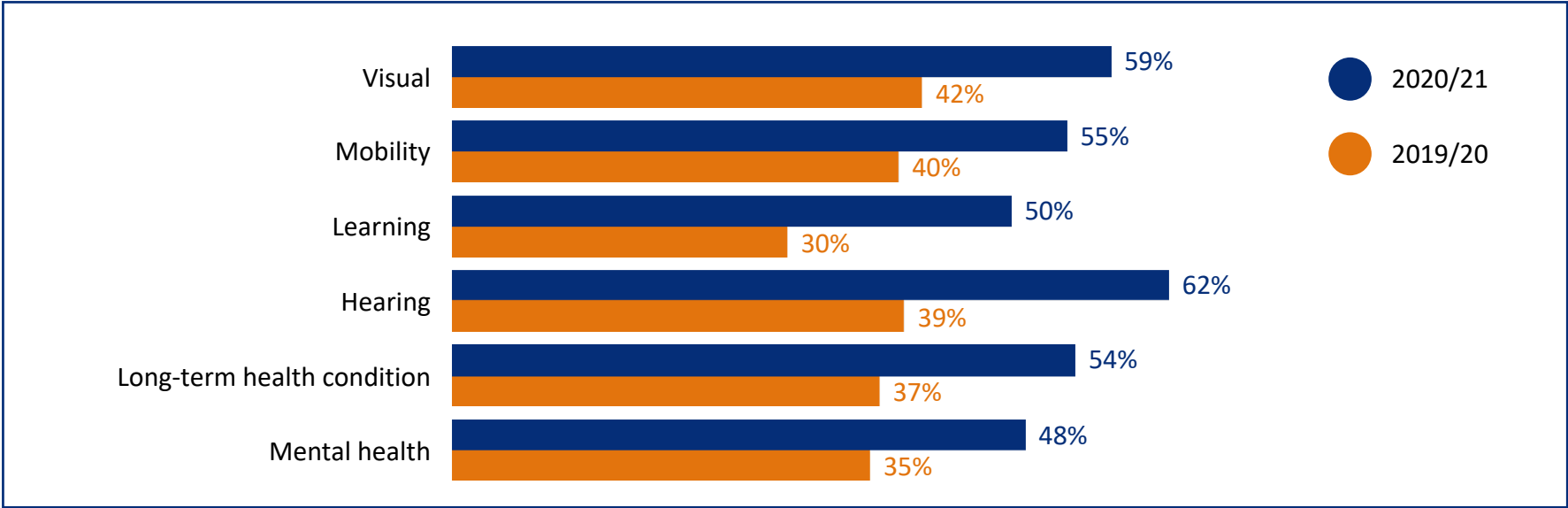
Only 25% of disabled people took part in an organised activity in the 12 months prior to completing the survey, compared to 36% of non-disabled people. People with a learning impairment were more likely to have taken part in an organised activity (34%) and people with mobility impairments were least likely (21%). The figures for other impairments are: long-term health condition - 26%, hearing - 26%, mental health - 25%, visual - 25%.



# Disabled people felt they had more opportunities to be active (before the pandemic)

People with visual and hearing impairments were more likely to feel they had the opportunity to be active in 2020 before COVID-19. The average for disabled people was 58%.

**Figure 2**  
Proportion of disabled people who felt they were given the opportunity to be as active as they wanted to be before the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 and in 2019/20.



Q: Do you feel that you were given the opportunity to be as physically active as you want to be at the moment (2019/20)/ before the COVID-19 outbreak (2020/21)? Base: All disabled and non-disabled people.

## Opportunity to be active – commentary

Reflecting trends among disabled people more widely, people with hearing, visual, mental health, chronic and mobility impairments were significantly more likely to report they felt they had the opportunity to be active this year. People with learning impairments also saw an increase. The largest change was among people with visual impairments (up to 62% in 2020/21 from 39% in 2019/20).

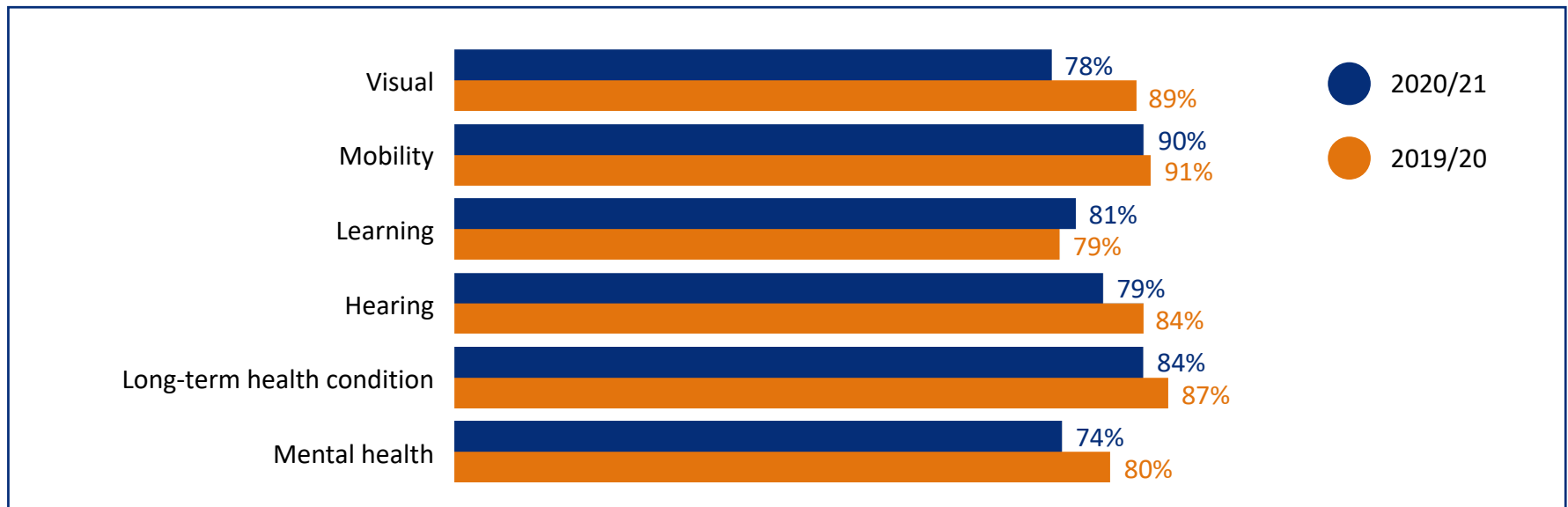
Differences between impairment types were limited, although people with mental health conditions were more likely to feel as though they were not given the opportunity to be as physically active as they wanted to be in both years (36%, compared with 30% on average in 2020/21).

# Impact of health condition on being active

People with mobility impairments were most likely to report that their health condition, impairment, or illness affected their ability to be active in both years of the survey. There was a slight decrease across impairment types, with the average being 77%.

## Figure 3

Proportion who say their health conditions, impairments or illnesses affect them doing sport or physical activity 'a lot' in 2019/20 and 2020/21.



Q: How much do your health conditions, impairments or illnesses affect you doing sport or physical activity (if you wanted to)?

Base: All disabled people.

# Impact of health condition on being active – commentary

Most disabled people across all impairment types reported that their health condition affected their ability to be active 'a lot' (ranging from 74% of those with mental health conditions, to 90% of people with mobility impairments in this year of the survey).

People with visual impairments were less likely to report that their condition impacted their ability to be active this year (78%, compared to 89% last year).

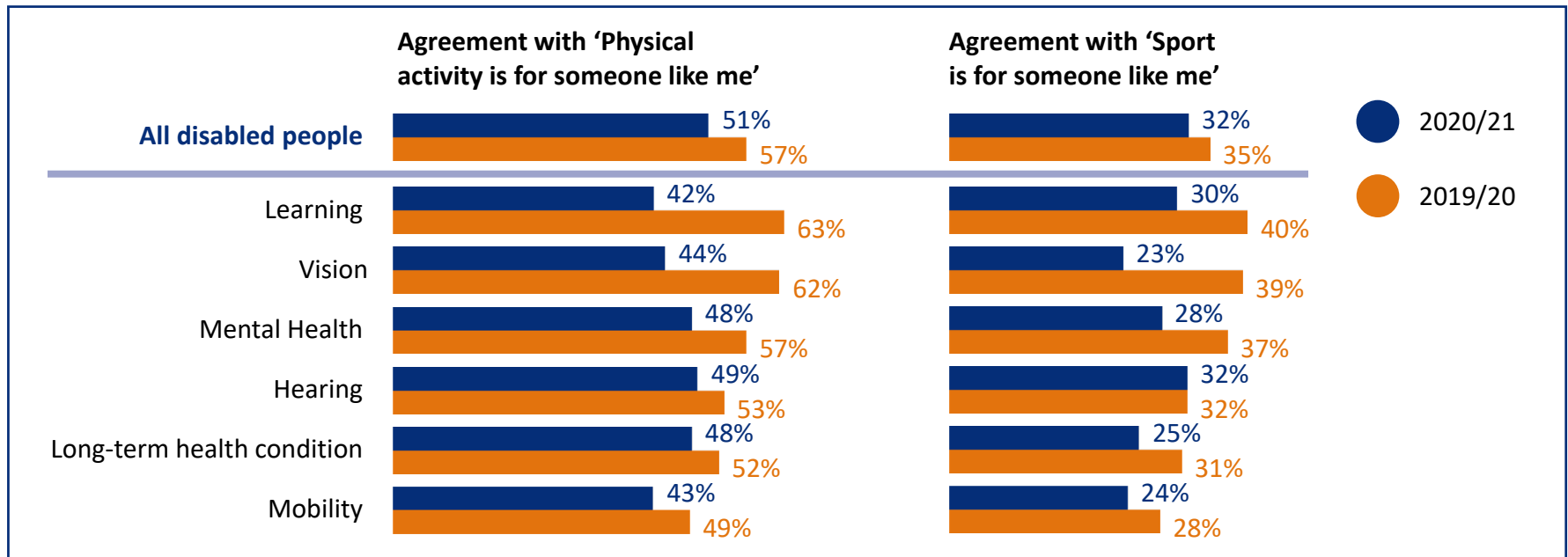
Differences between impairments were also relatively stable between the surveys, with people with mobility and long-term health impairments consistently more likely to report their health condition affecting their ability to do sport a lot in both years (90% and 84%, respectively, compared with 77% on average this year).

# Perceptions of sport and physical activity

Disabled people were more likely to agree that 'physical activity is for someone like them' this year, with positive changes across all impairment groups, particularly for people with a learning impairment, visual impairments and mental health conditions.

**Figure 4**

Proportion who agree with each statement.



Q: How much do you agree or disagree with the following comments about sport and physical activity...?

Base: All disabled and non-disabled people.

# Perceptions of sport and physical activity

Disabled people were significantly more likely to agree with the statement 'physical activity and exercise is for someone like me' in the 2020/21 survey report (57%, compared with 51% in 2019/20). This highlights a positive trend in disabled people's perceptions of accessibility to sport and physical activity. Despite these positive changes, disabled people still have more negative perceptions than non-disabled people, especially with the word 'sport'. This is true of all impairment types.

People with different impairments appear to have different perceptions of whether sport or physical activity is for them. People with learning and visual impairments are most likely to feel physical activity is for them (especially in the 2020 survey). People with mental health conditions and visual impairments were more likely to feel sport is for them this year.

People with mobility and long-term health conditions were least likely to agree with either statement. These groups did not see as much improvement this year as other impairments types.

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# Key findings

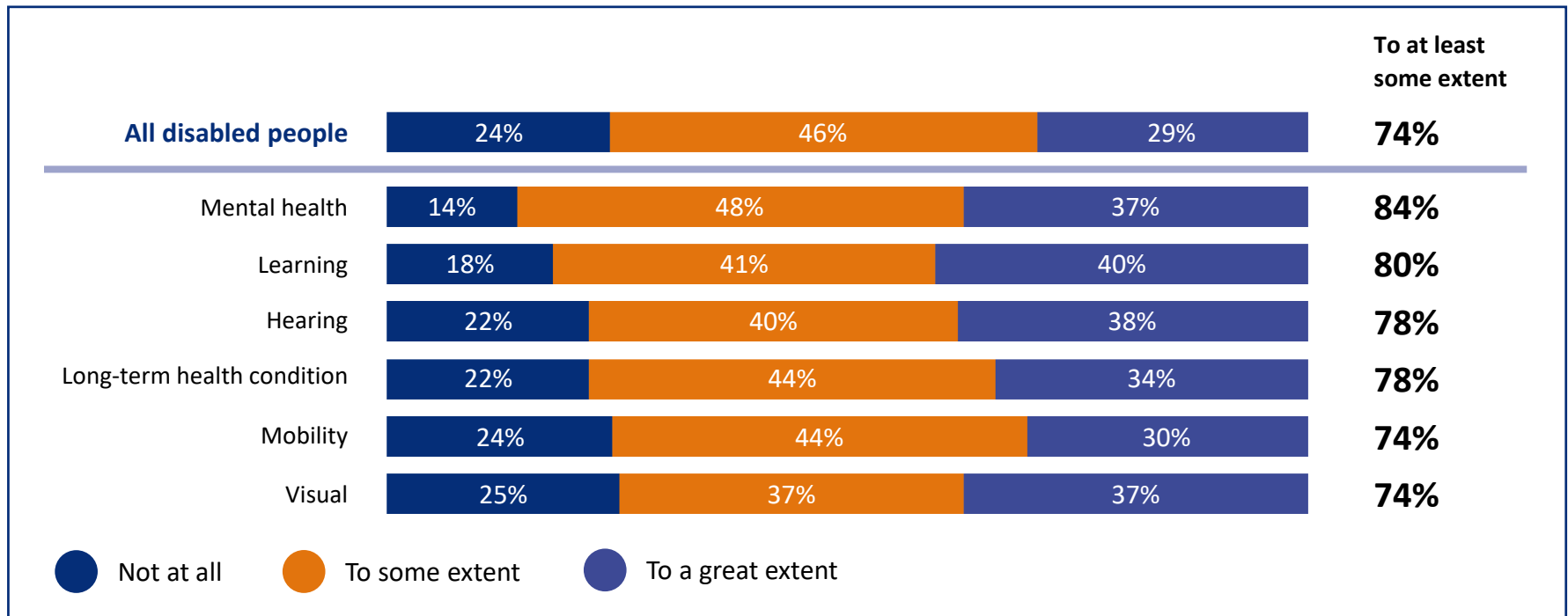
## The impact of COVID-19 on physical activity

# Impact of COVID-19 on impairments and health

Most disabled people's impairment or health was affected to at least some extent by COVID-19. People with mental health, learning, or hearing impairments were more likely to be affected to a great extent.

**Figure 5**

Extent to which coronavirus has affected disabled people's health conditions or impairment.



Q: To what extent has the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, and the lockdown measures, affected your health condition, impairment or illness? Base: All disabled people.



# Impact of COVID-19 on impairments and health

## – commentary

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on disabled people across all impairment types. Between three-quarters (74%) and four-in-five (84%) disabled people in each impairment type reported their impairment or health condition had been affected to at least some extent by COVID-19.

There were, however, some key differences in the proportion reporting that COVID-19 had affected their impairment to a great extent. People with mental health, learning, and hearing impairments were significantly more likely to report their health condition or impairment had been affected to a great extent (compared with the average disabled person). People with hearing and mental health impairments were also significantly more likely than people with mobility impairments to report their health or impairment had been greatly affected by COVID-19.

“I haven’t been able to go out and this has affected my depression. I have panic attacks wearing a mask and going shopping.”

**Person with a mental health condition**

“I have not been able to get a doctors appointment and all hospital appointments have been cancelled due to COVID-19.”

**Person with hearing impairment**

# The pandemic led to more disabled people feeling they did not have the opportunity to be active

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on disabled people’s opportunities to be active, especially for people with mobility, visual, chronic and mental health impairments.

**Figure 6**  
Proportion of disabled and non-disabled people who **do not feel** they have the opportunity to be as active as they would like to be.

Type of impairment	2019/20	2020 before COVID-19	2020 during COVID-19
All disabled people	39%	30%	44%
Mobility	37%	32%	46%
Learning	35%	37%	44%
Visual	39%	26%	45%
Long-term health condition	40%	31%	46%
Mental health	30%	36%	51%
Hearing	42%	31%	41%

Q: Do you feel you are given the opportunity to be as physically active as you want to be at the moment? Base: All disabled people.

# Opportunities to be active during the COVID-19 pandemic – commentary

The pandemic had a significant impact on disabled people's opportunities to be active. While the six impairment groups generally reported an improvement in the extent to which they had the opportunities to be as active as they wanted between the 2019/2020 survey and 2020/2021 prior to COVID-19, much of this development was overturned by the pandemic and associated lockdowns.

People with mobility, visual, chronic and mental health impairments were significantly more likely to report that they did not have the opportunity to be as active as they would like during the pandemic.

"I've been in total isolation for months during lockdown, not seeing family or my friends. I'm not doing any external activities at all."

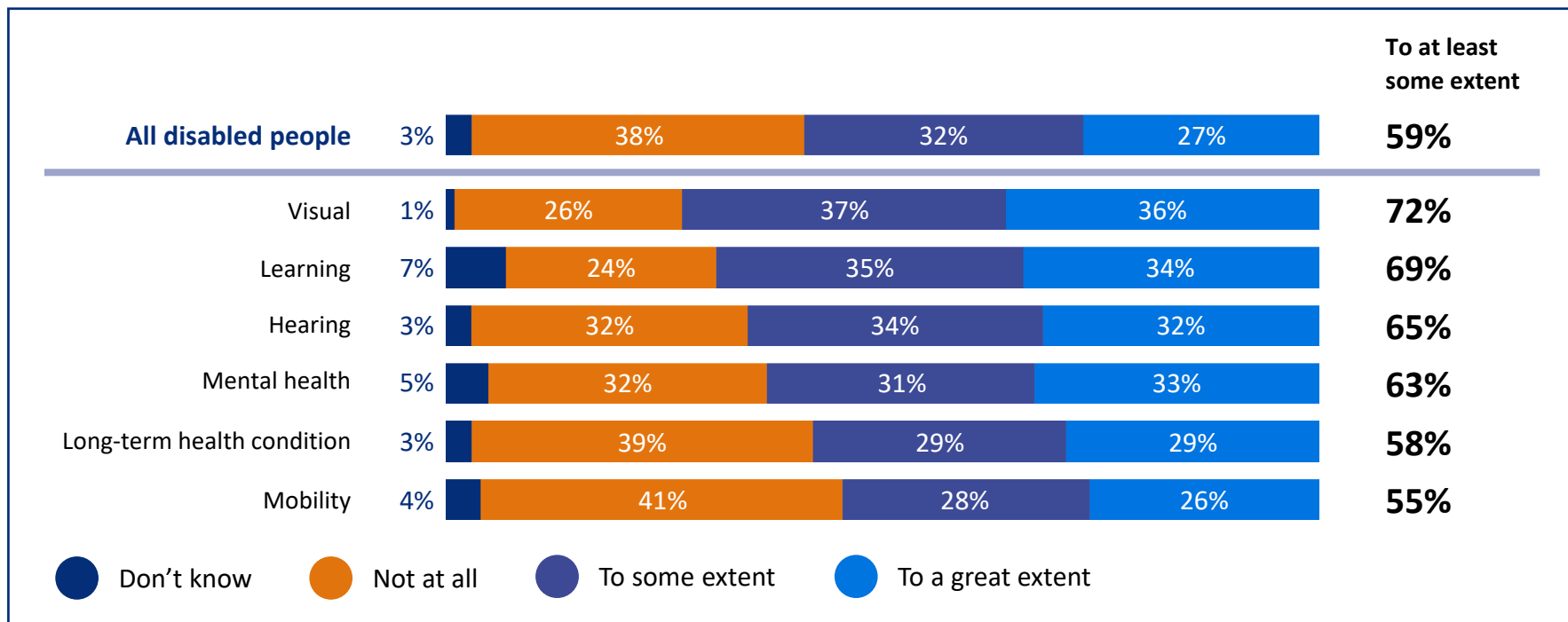
**Person with a mental health condition**

# Disabled people were more likely to feel the pandemic reduced their ability to be active

Bigger proportions of people with visual and learning impairments said they were affected to a great extent. People with mobility impairments were more likely to feel their ability to be active was not affected.

**Figure 7**

Extent to which the coronavirus has reduced ability to be active, by impairment type.



Q: To what extent has the coronavirus (COVID-19) reduced your ability to do sport, exercise or physical activity? Base: All disabled people.

# Impact of COVID-19 on being active - commentary

People with learning and vision impairments were more likely to say their ability to be active had been reduced by at least some extent, compared with the average disabled person.

People with mobility impairments were least likely to report that COVID-19 had reduced their ability to be active. As shown earlier, they are also less likely to feel the pandemic had affected their health condition and impairment. However, people with mobility impairments were more likely to feel they don't have the opportunity to be active. This suggests that some people with mobility impairments think about opportunities to be active as separate from the impact COVID-19 has had on their ability to be active. However, many people with mobility impairments are still affected by the pandemic.

## Less affected:

"I have not noticed a great deal of difference to what I do normally."

**Person with mobility impairment**

## More affected:

"Having to remain at home for months has reduced my overall stamina. I find every step painful because of my joints and sitting at home since lockdown with nowhere to go has made my bones and muscles weaker and more painful."

**Person with hearing impairment**

# Barriers to being active

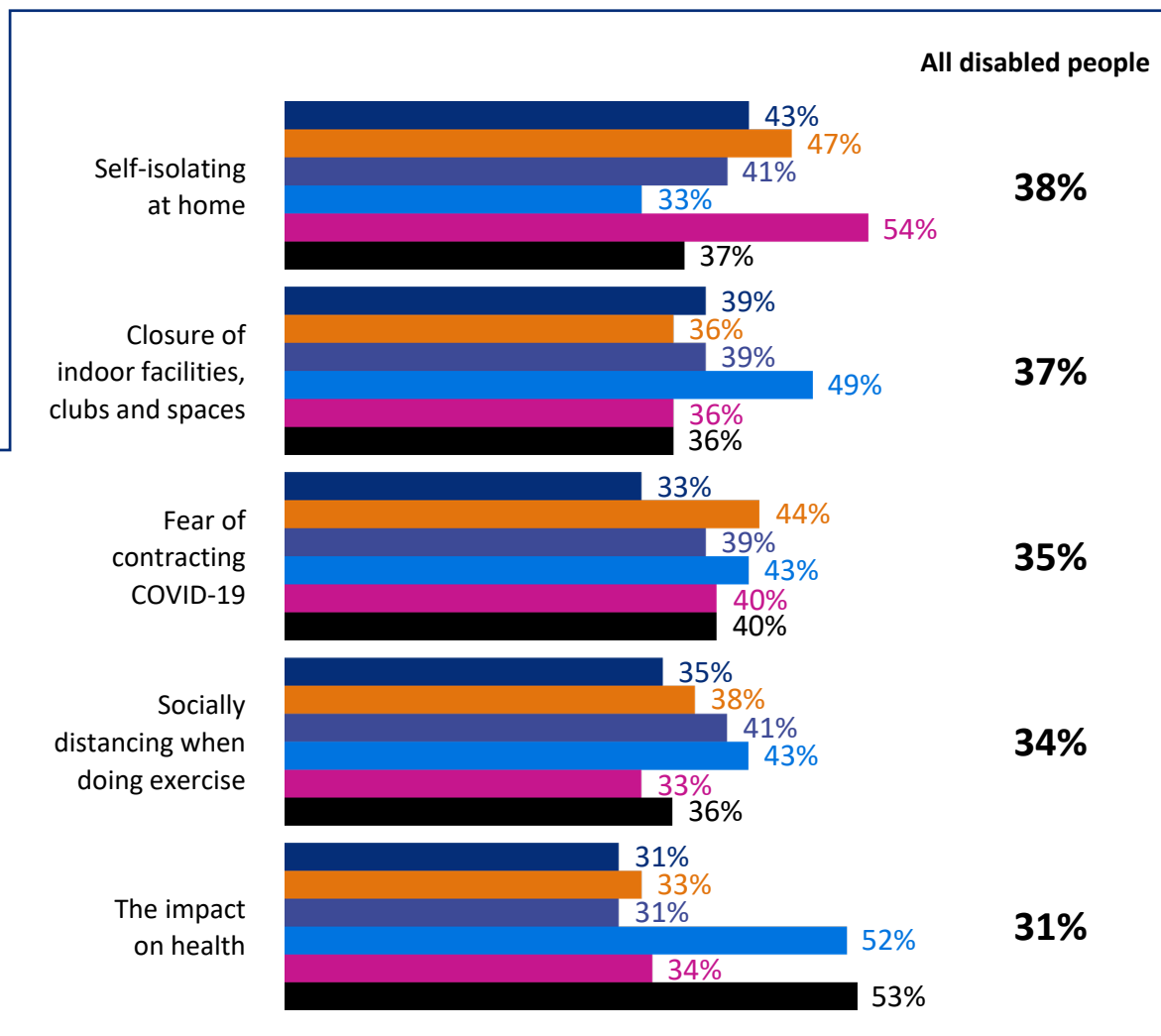
The extent to which new barriers were experienced differed by impairment type. Self-isolating is most common for people with long-term health conditions, but the impact on health is most important for people with learning and mental health impairments.

- Mobility
- Visual
- Hearing
- Learning
- Long-term health condition
- Mental health

Q: Which of the following ways has the coronavirus (COVID-19) stopped you from being as active as you would like? Base: All disabled people that think COVID-19 has reduced how active they can be.

**Figure 8a**

Proportion of disabled people choosing each barrier, by impairment type (top 5 barriers).



# Barriers to being active

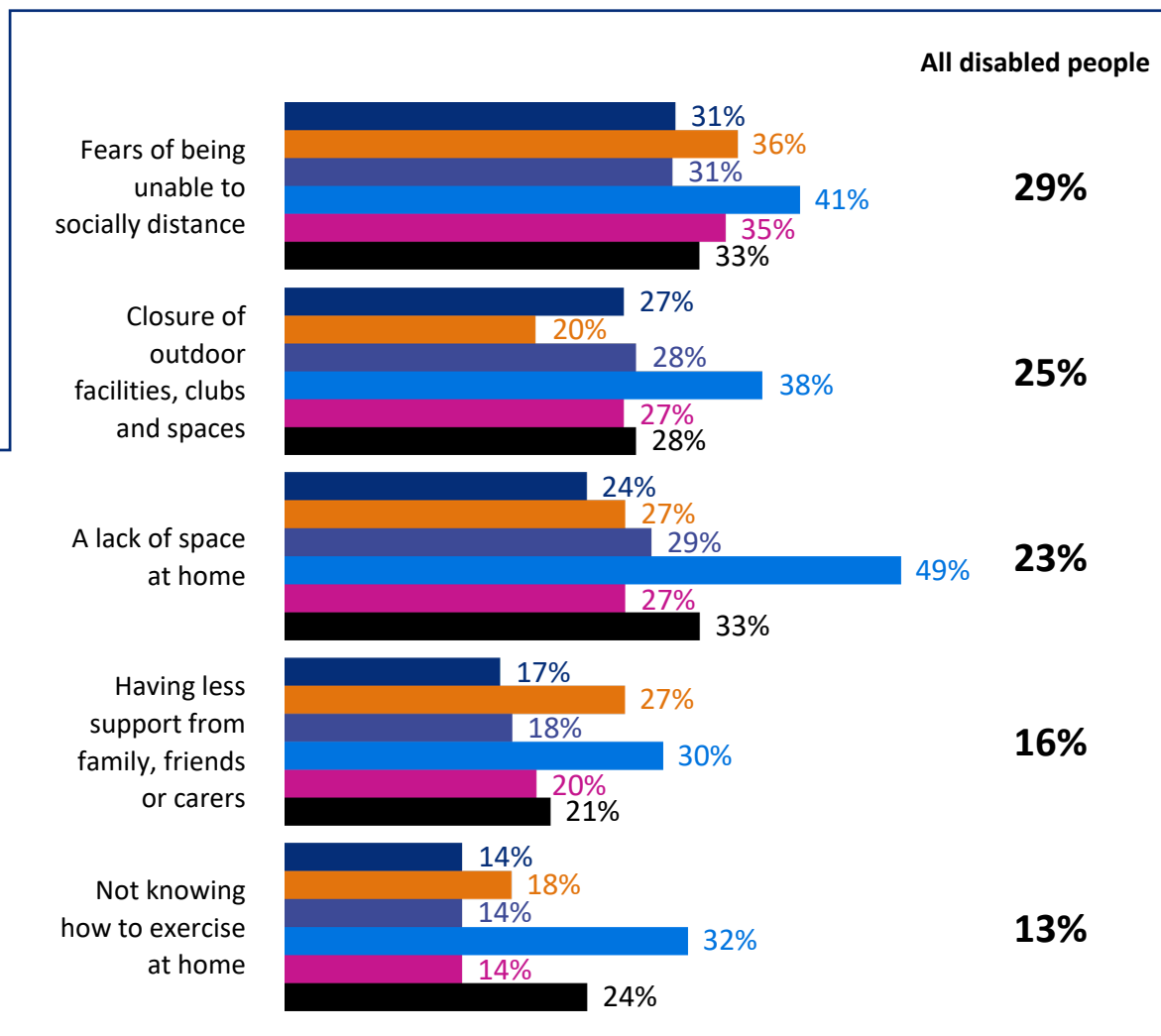
People with learning impairments were more likely to choose many of the barriers, highlighting barriers relating to being active at home. People with visual impairments were more likely to say worries of socially distancing or support were an issue.

- Mobility
- Visual
- Hearing
- Learning
- Long-term health condition
- Mental health

Q: Which of the following ways has the coronavirus (COVID-19) stopped you from being as active as you would like? Base: All disabled people that think COVID-19 has reduced how active they can be.

**Figure 8b**

Proportion of disabled people choosing each barrier, by impairment type (top 6-10 barriers)



# Barriers to being active (COVID-19) – commentary

Disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people to face new barriers to being active during the pandemic. The previous two slides show the top ten barriers for disabled people.

People with learning impairments were most likely to cite a larger range of barriers relating to the pandemic than the average disabled person. In particular, a lack of space at home, not knowing how to exercise at home, the impact on their health, and fears about socially distancing.

The closure of indoor facilities was a common barrier for both non-disabled and disabled people. It was most likely to affect those with mobility and hearing impairments (39%) and people with visual impairments (36%).

Other barriers, including not having the practical support, the affect on finances or benefits, and not knowing how to access online sessions, were more common among disabled than non-disabled people. These are not included in this report due to the small sample size when looking at each barrier by impairment type.

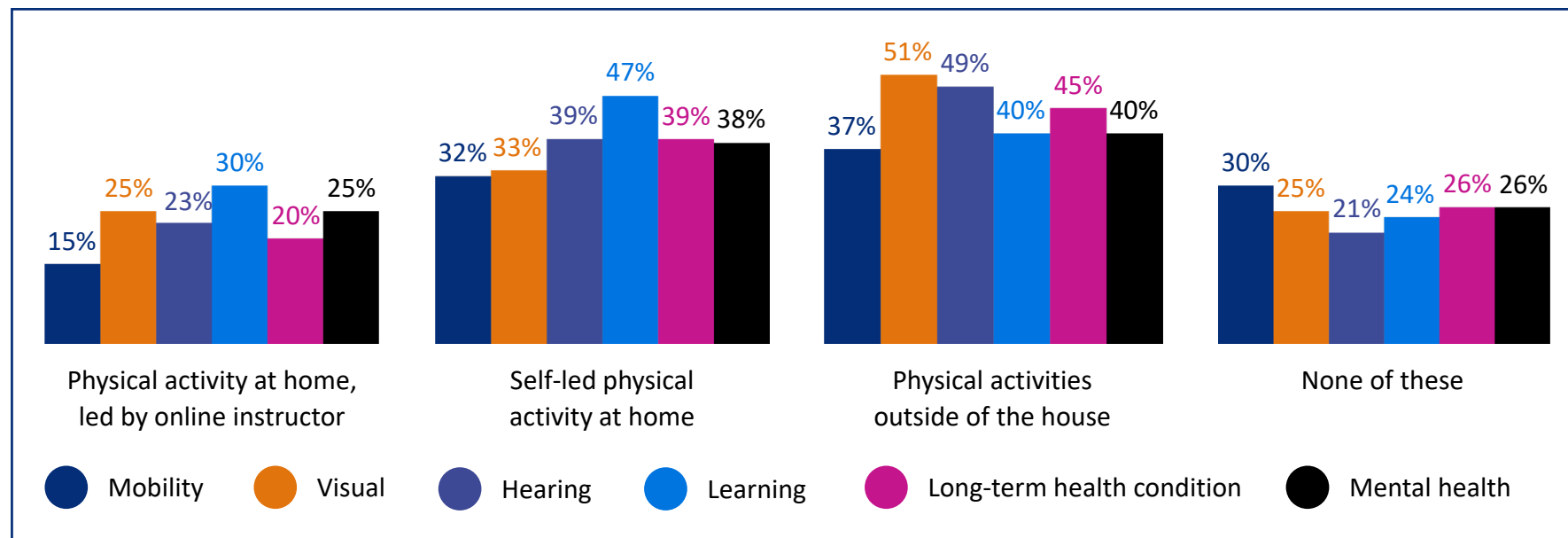


# Taking part in individual activities during COVID-19

Disabled people are less likely to take part in all types of activity compared to non-disabled people, except for self-led activity at home. People with learning impairments are more active at home, and people with hearing and visual impairments are more likely to be active outside of the house. People with mobility impairments are more likely to be doing 'none' of these types of activity during the pandemic.

**Figure 9a**

Types of physical activity disabled people take part in by themselves.



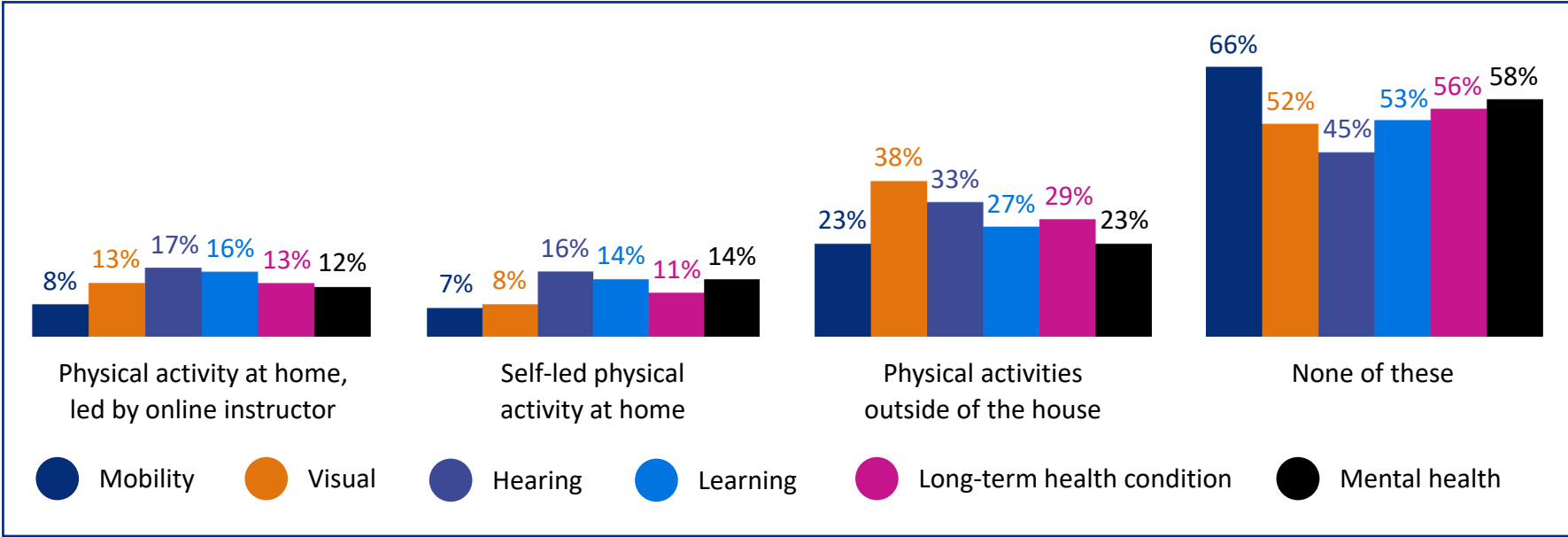
Q: Which of the following describe how you take part in sport, exercise or other physical activity during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? BY MYSELF Base: All disabled people who currently take part in physical activity.

# Taking part in activities with others during COVID-19

Similar patterns were seen when looking at how disabled people take part with others. Again, disabled people were less likely to take part in online or outdoor activities with others.

**Figure 9b**

Types of physical activity disabled and non-disabled people take part in with others.



Q: Which of the following describe how you take part in sport, exercise or other physical activity during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak? WITH OTHERS Base: All disabled people who currently take part in physical activity.

# Taking part in activities during COVID-19 – commentary

Group activities were generally less common than individual activities among active disabled people. People taking part in group activities were more commonly doing so outdoors rather than at home.

For most disabled people, individual physical activity outside of the house was the most common activity type. However, for people with learning impairments, self-led physical activity at home was most common. In fact, this group was more likely than the average disabled person to take part in individual activities at home, both self-led and instructor-led.

This would seem to contradict earlier findings that people with learning impairments were most likely to cite a lack of space at home as a barrier to being more active. However, it may reflect that people with learning impairments are most likely to have tried doing this form of exercise, and has therefore experienced the physical space at home as an obstacle.

People with mobility impairments were the least likely to be taking part in physical activity outside the home. This perhaps reflects that people with mobility impairments were less likely to feel they had the opportunity to be active this year.

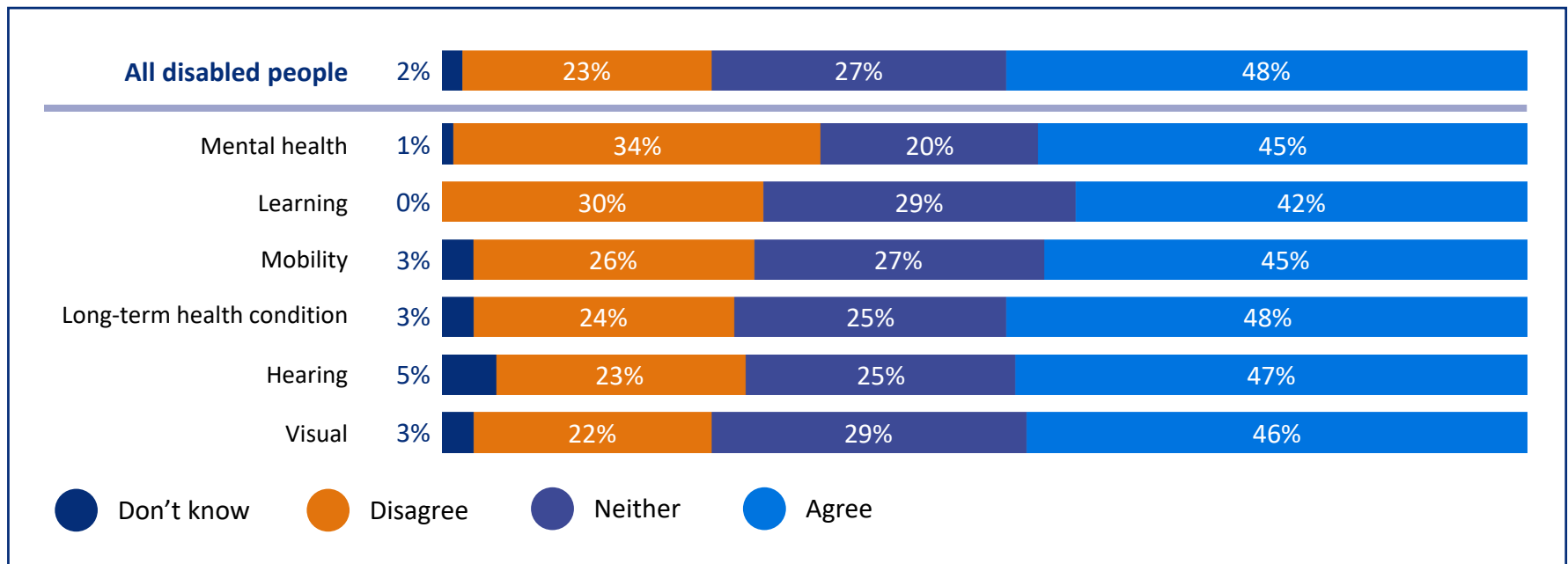
People with mobility impairments were generally less likely to take part in all types of group activities. People with sensory impairments were more likely to be doing activity outdoors.

# Information about staying active during the pandemic

Disabled people were twice as likely as non-disabled people to say they haven't had enough information on how to be active at this time. This was more common among people with mental health conditions and learning impairments.

**Figure 10**

Agreement with the following, by impairment type: 'I have received enough information and advice on how to be active during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak'.



Q: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: 'I have received enough information and advice on how to be active during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak'? Base: All disabled people.

# Information about staying active during the pandemic

## – commentary

Positively, people with a long-term health condition were more likely to feel they had enough information, indicating there was useful guidance on safety for people with long-term health conditions who might have been worried about health risks.

Individuals with hearing impairments were fairly positive about the extent to which they had received enough information about staying active during the pandemic, with nearly half (47%) agreeing with this statement and 23% disagreeing. This suggests that D/deaf people have received accessible information about being active. This is positive there were concerns about barriers to communication for D/deaf people, such as a lack of translation into British Sign Language, inaccessible video/online communication, and masks hiding facial expression and lip patterns.

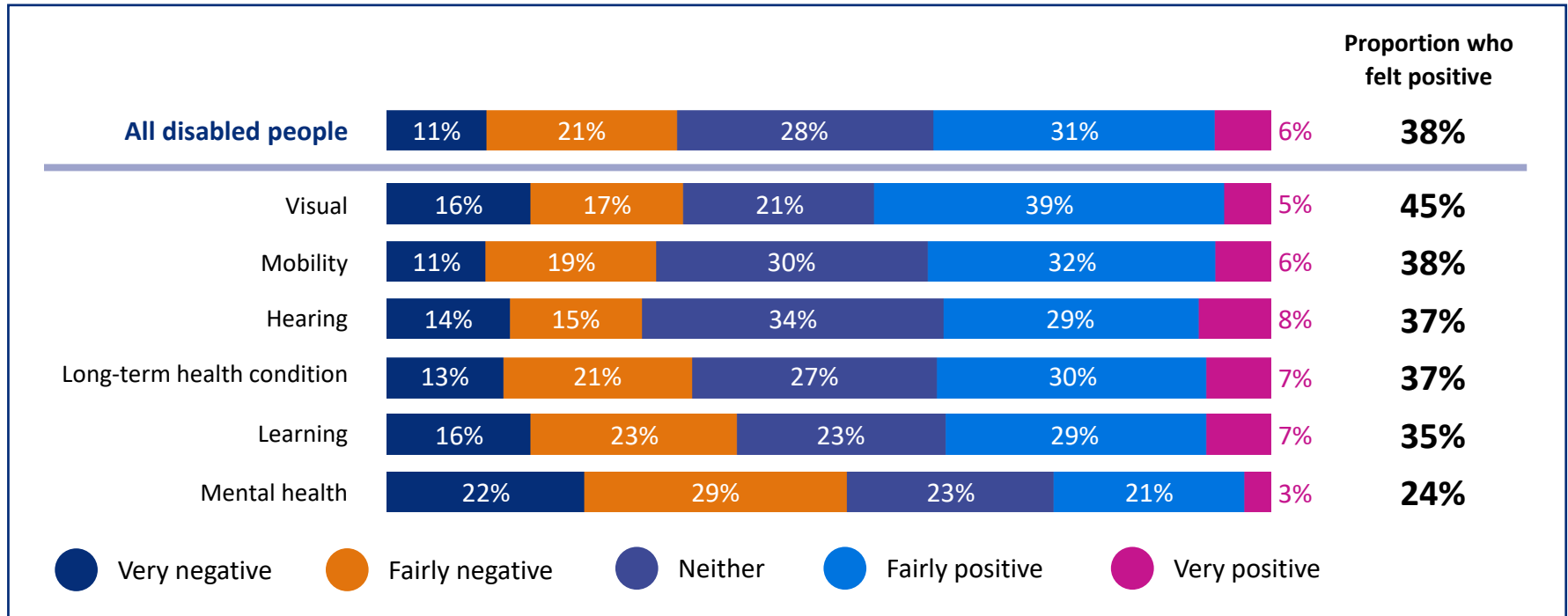
People with learning impairments were more split in terms of if they felt they had had enough information on how to be active during the pandemic. Two-fifths (42%) felt they had, but three in ten (30%) felt they had not. This is more than the average for disabled people (23%), suggesting that there is still a need for communications to be more accessible and inclusive, and to perhaps address people with complex needs and multiple impairments. Disabled people with mental health conditions were less likely to feel they have received enough information (34% disagreed with the statement). This could be for a variety of reasons, such as information not being suitable, appealing, or useful for disabled people with a mental health condition.

# Feelings about the future

Disabled people with mental health conditions and learning impairments were least likely to feel positive about the future.

**Figure 11**

How positive or negative people feel about the future.



Q: Which of the following best describes how you feel about the future? Base: All disabled people.

# Feelings about the future – commentary

Only 38% of disabled people felt positive about the future, with 32% feeling negatively. Disabled people with mental health conditions were least likely to feel positive about the future (24%). People with learning impairments were more split in terms of how they felt about the future (35% felt positively, but 39% felt negatively). People with visual impairments were more likely to feel positive about the future (45%).

“I worry that things won't ever return to normal and I'll continue in a downwards spiral for a long time.”

**Person with a learning impairment**

“I'm worried about getting COVID-19 and having complications and life never returning to normal. There being another wave and having to go back into isolation.

**Person with multiple impairments**

“I worry about my ability to access local support to help me be in society and overcome my mental health issues and my ability to continue my education to enable me to build a satisfying paid career.”

**Person with a mental health condition and mobility impairment**

“I think we are always going to be wary about being in crowded places. Life will possibly never be what it used to be.”

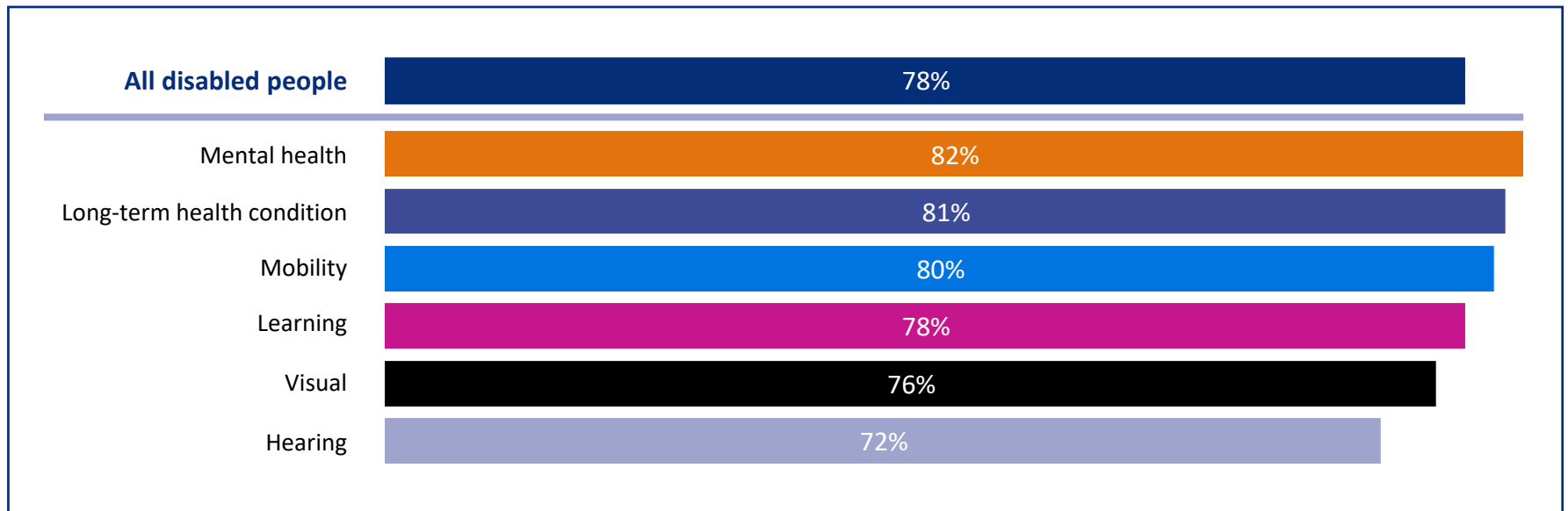
**Person with a long-term health condition and mobility impairment**

# Wanting to be more active

Most disabled people, especially individuals with mental health, long-term health conditions, and mobility impairments, want to be more active. There were no significant differences between this year and last year for happiness with activity level.

## Figure 12

Proportion of disabled people who would like to do more activity than they are currently doing in 2020 (during the pandemic).



Question: C3. How do you feel about the amount of physical activity you do now? Base: All disabled people.



# Wanting to be more active - commentary

Most disabled people with different impairment types reported they would like to be more active (between seven and eight in 10 disabled people reported this in both years of the survey).

There were no significant differences compared to 2019. This is surprising, as we know that many disabled people's activity levels had been affected by COVID-19. It may be that the disabled people who are most affected would have said they would like to do more, or that individuals are more accepting of how much activity they are doing in the current circumstances. Individuals who are least active (with mobility impairments and long-term health conditions) were more likely to want to be more active than most impairment groups, showing there is an unmet need.

Between impairment types, key differences were:

- This year, people with mobility impairments were more likely to report they would like to be active than people with hearing impairments (including D/deaf people) (80%, compared with 72%).
- This year, people with hearing impairments (including D/deaf people) were slightly more likely to be happy with the amount of activity they do (22%, compared with 15% of people with Long-term health and mobility impairments).

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# Summary of impairment type findings

# Summary of findings (1)

- This research shows us that before the pandemic, disabled people were less inactive and felt they had more opportunity to be active. Motivations and perceptions were changing.
  - People with learning and visual impairments were especially less likely to be inactive.
  - People with sensory impairments saw a big improvement in feeling they had the opportunity to be active. People with learning impairments and mental health conditions felt they had less of an opportunity to be active than other groups.
  - People with mobility impairments and long-term health conditions were more likely to be inactive, and to feel their condition or impairment affects them being active.
  - People with all impairments, especially individuals with learning and visual impairments, and mental health conditions, were more likely to feel sport and physical activity were for them this year. There was less change for people with mobility impairments and long-term health conditions.
- The pandemic has had a big impact on disabled people's health and impairments, with 74% saying it has affected them to some or a great extent. This increases to 84% for individuals with mental health conditions and 80% for people with learning impairments.
- Disabled people with mental health conditions and learning impairments are also more likely to feel negatively about the future, and less likely to feel they've had enough information on how to stay active at this time.

## Summary of findings (2)

- Disabled people are experiencing new barriers to being active due to the pandemic. These differ by impairment type:
  - People with learning impairments face a larger number of new barriers, relating to exercising at home: almost half say a lack of space stops them, a third say they don't know how to exercise at home and that they have less support from family, friends, and carers. They also feel the impact on their health, and being unable to socially distance, stops them being active.
  - People with visual impairments were more likely to be affected by a lack of support from family, friends, and carers.
  - People with mental health conditions were more affected by the impact of the pandemic on their health, as well as barriers to being active at home.
  - People with chronic health conditions and mobility impairments were more likely to be self-isolating, but interestingly were not more likely to have barriers to exercising at home.
  - People with hearing impairments (including d/Deaf people) were less likely to say they were affected by any of these barriers.
- Despite the barriers, most disabled people want to be more active. This is especially true of people with mobility impairments and long-term health conditions.

# Recommendations

Activity Alliance have identified five recommendations with action points to minimise the long-term impact of COVID-19 on disabled people's activity levels. These will help to continue the positive progress that was being made toward reducing the fairness gap between disabled and non-disabled people's activity levels. [Please see the summary report for more information on these recommendations.](#)

- 1. Provide clear and consistent information about being active**
- 2. Embed inclusive practice into opportunities as they recover**
- 3. Work collaboratively to address new challenges arising from COVID-19**
- 4. Offer a variety of ways to be active**
- 5. Change attitudes towards disabled people in sport and activity**

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