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S06-2: Beyond the Pitch: Community Support for Football Clubs Engaging in Health Promotion Work

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Purpose: Sports clubs have the ability to extend beyond what is viewed as traditional sport affiliated populations and reach a large audience within the community across socioeconomic levels and stages of the life course. The Football Association of Ireland's 'More than a Club' (MTC) initiative is a multi-component health promotion project in five Irish football clubs aimed at enhancing the health, wellbeing, and social connectedness of vulnerable subpopulations within the community. While sports clubs have significant potential to enhance wellbeing, meaningful and sustained change requires a whole-system, setting-based approach that considers multiple determinants that influence implementation success. Understanding the extent of community support and goodwill towards football clubs engaging in health promotion work is critical to the scalability and sustainability of the initiative.

Methods: A community stakeholder survey was disseminated in five professional football clubs in Ireland from March to April 2025. It was disseminated via a combination of social media channels, emails to the club's community and business networks, and via QR code cards to fans on match days. The questionnaire contained sections on respondent attitudes to health promotion work in their football club, the perceived impact of the work, and whether the work is likely to influence respondent propensity to attend matches, volunteer, or donate to fundraising efforts.

Results: Anticipated findings will be that fans and the wider community believe that football clubs are in a unique position to connect with vulnerable subpopulations and have a responsibility to deliver community-based health promotion programmes. It is also anticipated that respondents will cite wide ranging positive impacts, including supporting social inclusion for marginalised groups, supporting youth education and educational attainment, and increasing community pride.

Conclusion: This study will be essential for the scalability assessment of the MTC initiative and the methods are replicable for other organisations seeking to scale up effective programmes.

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