

ACTION AREA 6 – Sport and active recreation

Increase physical activity levels through sport and active recreation



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Sport has been calculated to be of great value to the Australian economy. It provides an estimated \$83 billion in combined economic, health and educational benefits each year, with a return on investment of \$7 for every dollar spent.



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Sport and active recreation play an important role in increasing the physical activity levels of Australians.⁽¹⁾ Sport has been defined as 'a human activity involving physical exertion and skill as the primary focus of the activity, with elements of competition where rules and patterns of behaviour governing the activity exist formally through organisations, and is generally recognised as a sport'.⁽²⁾ Active recreation has been defined as those activities 'engaged in for the purpose of relaxation, health and wellbeing or enjoyment with the primary activity requiring physical exertion, and the primary focus on human activity'.⁽²⁾ Participation in these activities is linked positively to physical, social and cognitive health.

Furthermore,

- sport and active recreation contribute positively to the development of confidence and social skills, social inclusion, community development, health and wellbeing, diversion from antisocial behaviour and improved self-esteem and health-related quality of life in children and youth.^(3, 4) Additional benefits for children include improved fundamental movement skills and physical fitness⁽⁵⁾
- a 'sport for all' approach that encourages enjoyable participation in sport and active recreation across the life span is recommended in the Global Advocacy for Physical Activity⁽⁶⁾ list of seven best investments for physical activity to make a difference to the health of nations
- adults who participate in sport are 20–40% less likely to die prematurely from all causes compared with non-participants.⁽⁷⁾ Sport participation is also associated with improved wellbeing, and reduced stress and distress⁽⁴⁾
- the value of sport has been calculated to be of great value to the Australian economy. It provides an estimated \$83 billion in combined economic, health and educational benefits each year, with a return on investment of \$7 for every dollar spent⁽⁸⁾

In 2017, it was estimated that sport creates \$29 billion of net health benefits each year.⁽⁸⁾ The latest sports and physical recreation participation data for Australia⁽⁹⁾ shows that:

- › 45% of children aged 0-14 engage in after school physical activity or organised sport at least once per week

- › in 2016, the top ten physical activities for adults were walking (42.6%), fitness and gym (32.1%), athletics, track and field (15.8%), swimming (14.5%), cycling (11.7%), football (5.8%), bush walking (5.4%), golf (5.2%), tennis (4.8%), and yoga (4.4%)
- › in 2016, the top ten physical activities for children were swimming (30%), football (14.7%), Australian football (8%), gymnastics (7.4%), netball (7.2%), recreational dancing (7.2%), basketball (6.5%), tennis (6.1%), cricket (5.6%) and athletics, track and field (4.4%)
- › physical activity participation is increasingly supported by technology, with 39% of Australian adults utilising a form of activity tracker or wearable device. They are most common among the female young adult population, 52% of which use them to keep active.⁽⁹⁾
- However, there is a need to increase levels of participation in sport and active recreation, as:
 - › 81 per cent of Australian children are not meeting the recommended Australian guidelines⁽⁹⁾
 - › nearly 70 per cent of adults are either sedentary or have low levels of physical activity⁽¹⁰⁾
 - › two-thirds of adults and one-quarter of children are overweight or obese.⁽¹¹⁾





WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Investment by governments, organisations and clubs involved in delivering sport and active recreation activities will be essential to promote and increase participation in sport and active recreation. The following interventions are recommended.

Implement policies to promote sport and active recreation:

- continue funding local government to maintain, improve and expand local sporting and recreation facilities
- develop public open-space policies and strategies to ensure residents have access to a diverse range of adequate quality functional open spaces for both sport and active recreation
- protect existing public open space and sports grounds to ensure facilities are available for all. Protection of existing spaces and sports facilities is particularly important in the context of development pressures for urban renewal densification sites and greenfield growth precincts. Where open spaces and sports grounds are identified for redevelopment, alternative provision should be made⁽¹²⁾
- existing provision should be protected unless an assessment has demonstrated there is an excess of the provision and the specific buildings or land are surplus to requirements, or equivalent or better provision will be provided as replacement⁽¹²⁾
- public open space and sports facilities should be designed within the context of a strategy for 'multifunctional open space'. A network of multifunctional open space created across all communities can support a range of activities including sport, recreation and play plus other landscape features including Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), woodland, wildlife habitat and productive landscapes (such as community gardens)⁽¹³⁾
- as noted in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals⁽¹⁴⁾, provide access to public green spaces that not only address challenges associated with urbanisation and densification within cities, but also support engagement in physical activity and recreation⁽¹⁵⁾
- continue to develop and implement sports injury prevention policies and guidance for use by organising bodies, clubs and community groups, such as those by Sports Medicine Australia⁽¹⁶⁾
- facilitate cooperative planning, funding development and management partnerships between government departments responsible for education curricula and sport and active recreation. These partnerships can assist in promoting the sharing of facilities and links between schools and external sporting clubs
- schools, recreation facilities, community groups and local governments can enter into joint use agreements to overcome resource constraints and ensure equitable access for community members of all ages. They should address issues such as liability, maintenance, vandalism, crime and other safety issues and scheduling and conditions of use⁽¹⁷⁻¹⁹⁾

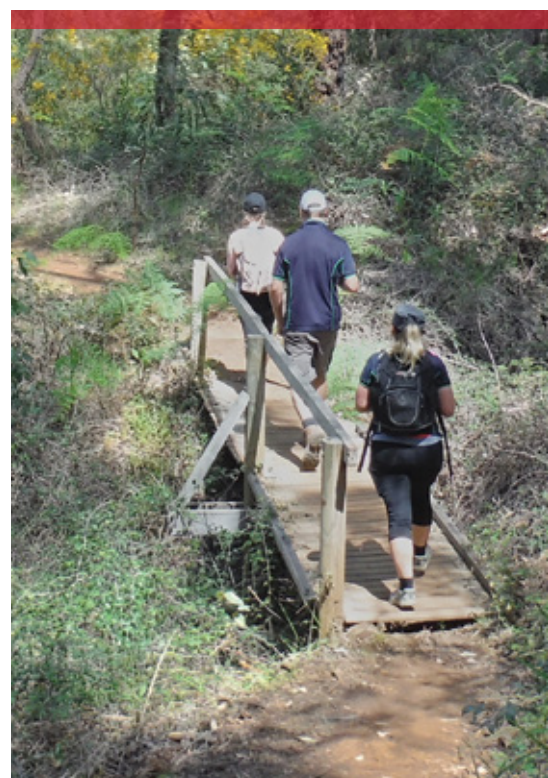
- strengthen the corporate and governance structures of sports and recreation organisations to allow for subsidised access to club membership, participation and equipment. Priority should be placed on clubs operating in socioeconomically disadvantaged and rural areas, to support health outcomes for those at risk
- sports facilities require suitable maintenance arrangements with funding, resources and programmes to ensure longevity of spaces and buildings through effective management and upkeep
- all-weather sports pitches such as artificial playing surfaces (e.g. 3G or 4G surfaces) provide an alternative to grass pitches with potential to lengthen the season of usage. Although all-weather pitches cost more than grass pitches, they can provide an alternative option, for instance where land is scarce (e.g. on constrained development sites) and there is the need to provide pitches that will be intensively used by the community.

Improve sport and recreational facilities:

- improve the quality and functions of public open spaces (e.g. aesthetics, facilities, amenities) to attract more user groups to sport and active recreation.⁽¹⁵⁾ Evidence suggests the provision of features such as grassed areas, trees, off-leash areas for dogs as well as gardens, walking paths, water features, and wildlife support active engagement⁽²⁰⁾
- sports buildings for indoor activity including pavilions, club-houses, changing rooms associated with outdoor public open space and pitches should be valued and maintained as important community infrastructure. The design of new sports buildings should follow design guidance for 'Buildings' in Healthy Active by Design⁽²¹⁾
- playgrounds typically cater to younger children, while adolescents often seek out recreational facilities (such as skate parks and basketball courts) where they can socialise outdoors with their peers in their neighbourhood.⁽²²⁾ These unique and changing needs must be addressed when planning and implementing recreational facilities
- sports building design should also consider inclusion of ancillary facilities that help enable people to participate in activity, such facilities include water fountains, toilets, secure cycle parking, links to walking and cycling networks
- identify opportunities to integrate sports activities and equipment with other uses, for instance integrating multi-use games areas (MUGA) with playgrounds, providing facilities for a wider age range; integrating fitness trails and outdoor gym equipment into parks and public open spaces.

Promote participation in sport and active recreation among at-risk groups and across the lifespan:

- programs to promote and maintain participation during key life transitions and events such as leaving secondary school, changes in employment and changes in family structure; retirement presents a significant opportunity to promote engagement in sport and active recreation with increased available leisure time⁽²³⁾
- provide training and education of high-quality coaches at all levels of sport⁽²⁴⁾





- provide sports and active recreation opportunities for people of all abilities, gender, ethnicity and religion, recognising that some cultures and religions require specific considerations to enable participation. Consultation with community is important to take account of the needs of people from culturally diverse groups
- encourage children to participate in developmentally appropriate sports at an early age and maintain this for as long as possible
- provide separate opportunities for sport and recreation by sex (e.g. ensure girls from culturally diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to use public swimming pools; provide separate classes for girls and boys)
- as sporting facilities have historically been designed for male participants, consider extent, variety and accessibility when designing and managing, or upgrading sporting facilities, to attract and support female participation⁽²⁵⁾
- implement programs specifically for women and adolescent girls and for people from disadvantaged backgrounds or communities⁽²⁶⁻²⁸⁾
- use sport as a tool to create positive social change and tackle social issues, including health, unemployment, conflict resolution, violence and education
- provide subsidies for sporting club membership and active recreational services for individuals and families that experience socioeconomic disadvantage
- recognise the growing importance of technology to improve access to sports, groups and facilities, e.g. using social media and/or apps to raise awareness of local sports groups, recreational events, locations and activities⁽⁹⁾
- multi-platform media campaigns have been shown to have great impact in increasing participation, particularly if tailored to target the needs of specific groups, for instance the 'This Girl Can' campaign initiative, pioneered by Sport England has informed *This Girl Can Victoria* in the Australian state.⁽²⁹⁾

See also Action area 1 – Built environments; Action area 7 – Disadvantaged populations; Action area 9 – Children and adolescents



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