



Submission to the

*Department of Health & Ageing
Independent Sport Panel*

from **VicSport**

October 2008

Executive Summary

VicSport welcomes the Department of Health and Ageing's Independent Sports Panel Review as an initiative with the potential to make changes that will significantly increase the capacity of the community sport and active recreation sector.

As the peak body for sport and active recreation, VicSport represents the collective interests of Victoria's single largest community sector. With over 170 member groups, 20,000 clubs and associations, and 1.8 million participants, workers and volunteers, the community sport and active recreation sector makes a significant contribution to the social, physical, mental and economic wellbeing of our communities.

While the primary role of community sport and active recreation organisations is to either directly provide, or facilitate the provision of, low-cost participation opportunities for members, the benefits accrued to both individuals and communities of this involvement reach far beyond the simple pleasure of being actively involved.

Community sport and active recreation is at the forefront of the fight against lifestyle related diseases. The World Health Organisation estimates throughout the world there are at least 1.9 million deaths among people aged 15 years and over which are directly attributable to physical inactivity. In 1991, Australia's first burden of disease study attributed 13,000 deaths per year to physical inactivity. In addition, physical inactivity was estimated to be responsible for 6.6% of the total burden of disease and injury in Australia in 2003.

In financial terms, the total costs attributable to the burden of lifestyle diseases in Australia are estimated to be \$3.7 billion annually; high costs for what are in many cases 'preventable' diseases.

In Australia we have an extensive community sport and active recreation network. Over 11 million people aged over 15 participate at least once per week in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport. In Victoria, we have a total of 1.1 million participants over the age of 15, and 1.77 million participants aged 5-14 years engaged in sport and active recreation pursuits.

Realistically, the community sport and active recreation network is the only network capable of reaching every member of the community and providing physical activity opportunities at all levels. Conservative estimates indicate Australia would save \$8 million annually for every 1% increase in the proportion of Australians achieving a sufficient level of physical activity for health. However more needs to be done to support our vital grass-roots sports clubs and organisations if we are to make significant improvements to the health of all Australians.

For the most part the community sport and active recreation sector is made up of small, volunteer run, grass-roots clubs who struggle to make ends meet as daily running costs continue to increase.

There is no doubt without the incredible volunteer support given freely to our sector, there would be very little in the way of affordable community accessible participation opportunities provided within communities. There is also no doubt the significant time contribution our volunteers willingly give attests to the high esteem with which community sport and active recreation is held.

Despite the significant contribution the sector makes to community development there has traditionally been little support provided directly to grass-roots community-based organisations in comparison to the professional and elite sub-elements of the sector. This lack of direct support means there are significant challenges facing the community sport sector, including:

- Lack of essential infrastructure support in the form of paid and qualified support staff located directly at the grass-roots level, which is required to continue to grow and develop the capacity of the sector.
- Access to facilities and long-term facility development planning. Facility access is the single biggest issue limiting the creation of more participation opportunities. Federal, State and Local Governments must work with the sector to urgently address facility issues if we are going to achieve our ultimate aim of providing access opportunities for all.
- Volunteer support. For more than 100 years sport has reaped the rewards of a relatively low cost user pays community sport system thanks to volunteer support. Unfortunately, due to many factors beyond the direct control of volunteers, the number of hours people have available to volunteer is declining. Without some significant support for volunteers at the grass-roots level in the form of rationalising an overly burdensome administrative workload for example, our volunteer resources will continue to dwindle. As a result, community sport will either be forced to carry the cost of paid staff through increased participation fees, or Government will be required to fund paid staff at the grass-roots level to continue to provide affordable participation opportunities for all Australians.

Government must work with the sector to support important infrastructure initiatives to rationalise appropriate administrative tasks and develop compliance regulations more appropriate to the business of the sector. These and many other issues are discussed in the following document.

On behalf of the community sport and active recreation sector, VicSport presents this report to the Independent Sports Panel and looks forward to the ongoing opportunity to contribute to this important project.

Kate Roffey

CEO

VICSPORT

VicSport is the peak body representing Victoria's sport and active recreation sector. Our Mission is to lead the sport, active recreation and associated health agendas into the future.

As an independent member based organisation, VicSport represents the needs and concerns of over 170 member groups including State Sporting Associations (SSA), Regional Sport Assemblies (RSA), Local Government Authorities (LGA), active recreation organisations, University, TAFE and school sport groups, as well as organisations representing specific sub-groups of the sector such as the Victorian Council on the Ageing, ACHPER Victoria, Disability Sports Victoria, and the Australian Drug Foundation.

Through our extensive network VicSport supports over 20,000 clubs and associations, and over 1.8 million participants, workers and volunteers in the sport and active recreation sector across Victoria. The activities these organisations offer play a vital role in promoting better physical and mental health outcomes for Victorians, as well as creating vital capacity within metropolitan and regional communities.

As Victoria's Peak-Body for sport and active recreation our key roles are to:

- *Advocate*: as the "Voice for Sport", VicSport represents the interests and concerns of the sector to government, to statutory authorities and to the broader industry.
- *Inform policy development*: VicSport listens to members and uses this feedback to provide visionary strategic advice to key policy and decision makers.
- *Facilitate program delivery*: VicSport works with government, statutory authorities and key external stakeholders to develop strategies and provide support required to assist members deliver participation opportunities for all Victorians.
- *Build Members' Capacity*: VicSport supports and educates members through the provision of quality advice and consultation services and delivery of professional development opportunities.
- *Research*: through industry research and development, VicSport analyses issues, identifies trends and develops innovative strategies that play a vital role in planning for the future.

INTRODUCTION

Sport and recreation are key leisure activities in Australia and integral components of our national culture, identity and social life. In 2005, over 69% of Australians aged 15 years and over, or 11.1 million people, participated at least once per week in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport. In addition, an estimated 7.1 million Australians (42%) aged over 15 participated 3 times per week or more, the minimum recommended for maintenance of physical health benefits. (ERASS, 2006)

Through the multi-faceted role community sport and active recreation plays in promoting better health, social inclusion and community capacity building, our sector makes a significant contribution to the economic, social and community well being of all Australians.

While elite sportspeople and major television or spectator events are usually at the forefront of most people's consciousness regarding sport and active recreation, millions of Australians and most Victorians are actively involved at a community level in participating, helping or supporting friends and family engage in the wide range of community sporting and active recreational pursuits that our society embraces.

The primary role of community sport and active recreation organisations is to either directly provide, or facilitate the provision of, low-cost participation opportunities for members. Recent research conducted by VicSport suggests there are at least 840,000 SSA registered sport and active recreation organisation members across Victoria, and a total of 1.1 million participants over the age of 15, and 1.77 million participants aged 5-14 years. In total, 2.87 million Victorians participate in sport and active recreation pursuits. The activities Victoria's sport and active recreation organisations offer not only play a vital role in promoting better physical and mental health outcomes for individuals, they also play a key role in building communities via the integral social capital and infrastructure they generate.

In terms of size, the majority of Victoria's sport and active recreation organisations are small community-focused organisations. In Victoria, every community sport and active recreation organisation is a Not for Profit (NFP) organisation. Funded primarily via income from membership fees with additional support coming from government grants, fundraising and sponsorship, any profits made by these groups are invested back into the organisation for further capacity building rather than distributed to members.

Our Sport & Active Recreation Volunteers

In addition to being not-for-profit, community sport and active recreation organisations are for the most part small volunteer run organisations. The *Community Sport Counts* report published by Sport and Recreation Victoria indicated 75% of Victoria's sport and recreation organisations are entirely voluntary in nature. (Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2004). It is estimated within the sport and active recreation sector, around 80 to 90% of all activity is undertaken by volunteers. ABS statistics released in August 2006 showed 62% of the total number of people who held recognised roles within sport and physical recreation organisations volunteered their time. (ABS, 2006a)

The Benefits of Involvement

The role the sport and active recreation sector plays in promoting better health, social inclusion and community capacity building makes it a vitally important part of Australia's broader community.

The benefits of this involvement are now tangible. International research supports the social, economic and health outcomes associated with sport and recreational activity.

In its *Discussion Paper 2005-2010* (Department for Victorian Communities, 2004) the Government articulates the contribution sport and recreation makes to Victoria's health, social and economic wellbeing by making important contributions to community, the economy, creating jobs and providing opportunities for physical activity for all Victorians.

Compelling scientific evidence shows increased levels of physical activity can bring wide-ranging health benefits. These benefits extend beyond the obvious physical health outcomes and include other positive impacts relating to mental health and personal development. The sport and recreation sector is viewed as a priority area for increasing rates of physical activity in order to extract these benefits. (Jackson, Howes, Gupta, Doyle, & Waters, 2005).

The contribution sport makes to the community is recognised internationally. Last year the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan addressed the world in Davos, Switzerland and articulated the multi faceted influence sport can have. He spoke of its universal values and ability to bridge social, cultural and religious divides. He went on to describe the contribution to personal development and growth and its value to the wellbeing of whole communities and countries. (United Nations, 2006)

Of particular importance is the fact organised sport is a feature of the lives of many thousands of young people growing up in Australia. Involvement in sport and active recreation offers young people opportunities to form lasting friendships and learn social values and organisational skills that will serve them well in other areas of their lives. (VicHealth, 1999)

PARTICIPATION

In Australia, we have an extensive community sport and active recreation network providing physical activity opportunities for most members of the community at varying entry levels.

The Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey (ERASS) is a joint initiative of the Australian Sports Commission and the state and territory government agencies responsible for sport and recreation, and was first conducted in 2001. The most recent survey in 2005 has detailed the following results:

- In the 12 months prior to interview 11.1 million Australians aged 15 years and over participated at least once per week in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport. This is a national participation rate of 69.2%.
- An estimated 4.5 million persons participated at least once per week in a physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport that was organised by a club, association, fitness centre or other type of organisation.

This represents a participation rate of 28.4%.

- Persons living in capital cities participated slightly more in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport three times per week or more than those living in the rest of the state (45.4% and 42.1% respectively).
- The level of participation at three times per week or more was higher for females than for males.
- Overall participation in exercise, recreation and sport three times per week or more has increased from 37.2% of the population in 2001 to 44.2% of the population in 2005.
- This represents a rise of 18.8% after taking into account natural increases in the size of the Australian population. (ERASS, 2006)

Furthermore, in the 12 months to April 2006 an estimated 1 691 100 Australian children (63% of total) played a sport outside of school hours which had been organised by a school, club or association. Just under one-third (31% or 824 900) of children played two or more organised sports during the 12 month period - 37% (500 600) for boys and 25% (324 300) for girls. The participation rate has increased slightly from 59% in 2000 and increased in both males and females. (ABS, 2006b)

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY SPORT AND ACTIVE RECREATION

The benefits of physical activity are universally accepted and a vast amount of research has accumulated on a wide range of outcomes. The benefits accrue for all segments of our population and do not discriminate between race, gender, age, disability or health.

LIFESTYLE RELATED BENEFITS

The health benefits of physical activity are universally accepted. The challenge remains to increase participation on a regular basis in order to extract the maximum benefits for individuals and for the community.

The World Health Organisation's Health Report 2002 estimated that throughout the world in 2002 there were 1.9 million deaths among people aged 15 years and over which were directly attributable to physical inactivity, and that physical inactivity contributed to 10–16% of global cases of breast, colon and rectal cancers and diabetes mellitus, and about 22% of ischemic heart disease. (World Health Organisation, 2007a)

In Australia, we are fully aware of the threat our rapidly increasing incidence rates of lifestyle related diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, overweight and obesity pose to the health of our nation.

Australia's first burden of disease study attributed 13 000 deaths per year to physical inactivity. (Mathers, Vos, & Stevenson, 1991) That is 36 deaths per day, or 1.5 per hour. Too many Australians are dying from conditions linked to excess weight, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, osteoarthritis and breast, bowel and endometrial cancer.

The scope of the issue can be seen in all ages in our community. Between 1985 and 1995 the number of overweight 7–15 year olds almost doubled. The numbers of obese children has more than tripled. At the current rate, it is predicted that 65 per cent of young Australians will be overweight or obese by 2020. (Go for Your Life, 2007)

Older Australians are also being caught up in the national obesity epidemic. The number of obese older Australians is now more than one in five of our senior people. This number is rapidly approaching one million. Their number has trebled over the past 20 years. (AIHW, 2004)

Being physically active can also improve mental wellbeing. Physical activity has been reported to help reduce anxiety; active people also report feeling less stressed or nervous. Physical exercise helps to counteract the withdrawal, inactivity and feelings of hopelessness that are a feature of depression as well as the duration and intensity of depressive episodes. Moods such as tension, fatigue and anger are all positively affected by exercise and exercising can improve the way people perceive their physical condition, athletic abilities and body image. (MHCA, 2005) (VicHealth, 2007)

In financial terms, total costs attributable to the burden of lifestyle diseases are estimated to be \$3.77 billion annually. (Stephenson, Bauman, Armstrong, & Smith, 2004) The costs for each of the diseases or conditions in the study were estimated to be \$161 m for coronary heart disease (CHD), \$28 m for non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM), \$16 m for colon cancer, \$101 m for stroke, \$16 m for breast cancer, and up to \$56 m for depressive disorders.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reports that in 2003, more than 2.63 million years of 'healthy' life was lost due to the burden of disease and injury in Australia. They calculated that physical inactivity was responsible for 6.6% of the total burden of disease and injury in Australia in 2003 and 23.7% for the burden of cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Overall, the burden from physical inactivity was shared equally between the sexes and with the exception of diabetes; most of the conditions attributable to physical inactivity were associated with high mortality. (Begg, Vos, Barker, Stevenson, Stanley, & Lopez, 2007)

Of these direct financial costs, the Federal Government is estimated to bear some \$1.4 billion. (Access Economics, 2006) It remains a dilemma for health practitioners why such a high financial and personal cost is tolerated in our community and by our governments when these illnesses and disease are clearly preventable. Funding and support of strategies aimed at improving lifestyle and reducing risk factors is clearly an eminent approach and the community based sport and recreation organisations are key players in delivering these programs. All governments will need to take a longer-term, strategic approach to preventative health strategies and incorporating sound programs at the community level is an excellent starting point.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

In a report on Social Capital and Social Wellbeing, the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicated participation in community sport and active recreation helps to develop the community networks and bonds important for social cohesion. Participation in culture and leisure activities also provides individuals with a sense of belonging, support and social interaction. Some studies suggest a potential link between participation in sport and recreation and a reduction in crime and other anti-social

activities. In addition, in both suburban and rural areas, sport, recreation and cultural activities provide a strong community focal point. (ABS, 2002)

Sport and recreation activities are well recognised as being vital elements of rural community structure. For many regional communities, local sporting events provide a rare opportunity for locals to gather, or in the case of larger events against regional rivals, for neighbouring townships to interact. These gatherings are about people and communities coming together; to play, to talk and to share stories. (Driscoll & Wood, 1999)

We are often reminded of the role that sport played in building the strong social cohesion in urban working class communities. It was this social cohesion that sustained social capital and helped communities cope with the Depression of the 1930's. (Scott, 2000)

DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES

Community-based sporting organisations provide the structures for addressing many of the social issues facing Australia. Issues such as racial vilification, equity, diversity, access for people with a disability, Indigenous Australians, new arrivals, cultural and linguistically diverse populations, older aged participants and young people for example are all being addressed by community clubs, organisations and associations in a positive manner.

Community sport and active recreation provides many opportunities for members of our society to meet, interact, develop and grow. Young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and indigenous Australians face additional challenges in their developmental pathway that makes them vulnerable to social and structural disconnection. In these cases sport and recreation can provide an increased range of opportunities to connect with the community. (Department for Victorian Communities, 2004)

These issues are explored in more detail below.

Indigenous Australians

Although the overall participation rate in physical activity among our indigenous population is less than half that of the non-indigenous population (National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics, 2004), sport and recreation has been described as an integral part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life and serves as an opportunity for cultural survival and revival. (ATSIC, 1995)

The ATSIC report to Government outlines the range of benefits sport and recreation programs offer indigenous communities. These include; a very significant and positive-contribution to long-term health; a cost effective method to help combat substance abuse, cardiac disease, diabetes and obesity; a considerable impact on mental health disorders; and an effective element in diversionary schemes for youth. ATSIC also point out sport often provides the first opportunity for shared experiences between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians and for recognition of indigenous achievement.

Women

According to the 2006 Senate enquiry into Women in Sport (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006), recent epidemiological research published between 2000 and 2003 indicates a strengthening evidence base supporting the protective benefits of physical activity on the general health of women, older adults and special populations. For women's health in particular, there is a growing body of evidence linking the positive effects of exercise with breast cancer prevention, while new evidence is emerging to support the role of physical activity in promoting mental health and preventing falls. The report to the Senate enquiry concluded participation in recreational and sporting activities is a practical and efficient way to increase physical activity levels, thereby maximising the health and social dividends to the community.

Anecdotal evidence provided by VicSport members indicates in addition to the benefits of simply being physically fit, major motivators for women's participation in sport were the social interaction and human contact these participation opportunities provided. In many cases feedback indicated the mental health benefits derived from this interaction were at least as important, if not more important than the physical benefits themselves.

The Victorian Ladies Bowl's Association (VLBA), for example, indicated social interaction was the primary reason women participated in their sport. In fact the social interaction these ladies were exposed to via their sport was for many, particularly those in older age groups, the only social interaction they experienced on an ongoing basis. For these ladies the networks of contacts and the opportunity to be involved with others was an experience considered vital to their general wellbeing.

Much is being done at the club, association, local government, national and international level to address physical activity participation rates among women. A number of strategies to combat the problem of equity of access for females have been successfully implemented. As an example, one Victorian local government, as part of their policy to provide facilities appropriate for female use, developed a facility exclusively for women's sport in their locality to cater for a range of sports such as soccer, cricket, football and touch football. This facility was known for its superior quality of the fields with many men's clubs wanting to make use of the facility.

New Australians

The Australian community is one of the most diverse in the world. With continued growth it has been acknowledged in order for migration to be successful in both policy and practice, the settlement policy for migrants need to provide opportunities to not only adjust to Australian life but for migrants to become active and vital participants in the community. Opportunities for newly arrived young people to participate in social and recreational activities with their peers are therefore critically important. (Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2005)

Sporting activities have been recognised as a vehicle through which migrant and refugee young people can rebuild supportive relationships and a sense of identity in their new country. (VicHealth, 1999)

Despite the proven benefits however, migrants are still underrepresented in measures of participation in sport and recreational activities. The ABS report variation in participation rates among different migrant groups, ranging from 67.4% in people born in North-West Europe to just 31.2% in those who listed their country of birth as North Africa and the Middle East. Females from those countries had a participation rate of less than 20%. (ABS, 2006c) The ABS does report however these rates are reflected in nearly all other measures of social and community activities.

Young Australians

Clubs and sporting groups, along with religious communities help to support school and family relationships and are a positive influence on young people. It is in these environments where our youth meet and associate with the most important people in their lives: parents, siblings, friends, coaches, teachers, and mentors. It is suggested it is in these places young people learn what is expected of them and what to expect from others, especially adults. In short, this is where young people learn powerful lessons, both good and bad, about the role of the individual in society. (Saguaro Seminar, 2001)

By enabling young people to be part of a team and to participate in activities that are key parts of the Australian culture and ethos, sport can help young people to feel a sense of belonging. Sporting activities can also contribute to mental health and wellbeing by enhancing young people's physical health and skills, thereby building their sense of self esteem and control.

A review of the role sport and physical activity plays in crime prevention concluded sport and physical activity can combine with other interventions to reduce crime in particular groups and communities. It appears sport and physical activity can reduce crime by providing accessible, appropriate activities in a supportive social context. (Cameron & MacDougall, 2000)

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS

Further analysis of Australian data has shown it is possible to define a number of socio-demographic characteristics of non-participants in sport and recreation. This could help form the basis for defining target groups to assist the development of targeted policies and programs aimed at increasing participation in sport and physical recreation.

As pressures mount on our rural areas, especially those associated with climate change, sport and active recreation will continue to make significant social, economic, cultural and environmental contributions to the life of rural communities. Driscoll and Wood noted the following key contributions sport and active recreation makes to rural communities:

- Social capital development
- Creation of community hubs
- Health improvement and promotion
- Cultural values
- Economic development and town survival
- Community safety

- Creating role models
- Community control and investment
- Junior sports development
- Local innovation
- Community identity and local pride
- Environmental and physical development

(Driscoll & Wood, 1999)

Sport and active recreation activities create hubs for social gathering, communication and interaction in a predominately creative and supportive environment. This is particularly important for regional and remote communities. (Driscoll & Wood, 1999)

VOLUNTEERS

Sport and active recreational pursuits encourage involvement through the entire life cycle in a range of ways, be it active participation, passive involvement through spectating, or involvement through formal and informal volunteer networks. Volunteering may be seen as an expression of reciprocity or potentially as a direct outcome of social capital. The act of volunteering demonstrates a balance between an individual's self interest and the public interest. (ABS, 2002)

Of all people who volunteer in all sectors across Australia, more volunteer in the sport and recreation sector than in any other sector. A report on Australia's Sports Volunteers indicates that 1.14 million people volunteer in the sport and recreation sector on a regular basis. This figure is greater than the combined education, training and youth sector (1.02 million), community and welfare sector (970 000) or the health sector (297 000). (National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics, 2005).

It is important to note this figure does not include volunteers for one off events such as Olympics, Paralympics and Commonwealth Games which attract large numbers of volunteers in their own right. By way of example, the Sydney Olympic Games attracted 74,000 volunteers for this one off event. Consultation with our members showed a large number of the volunteers in Sydney and of the 13 500 volunteers for the recent Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games came from the sport and recreation sector, especially the thousands of technical officials.

Sport and recreation also offers an opportunity for members of the community, and especially family members to make important social contributions by volunteering their time, expertise and labour to assist with organised sport and recreation activities.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The sport, activity and recreation sector is an expanding field contributing to the Victorian community in many social and economic ways. The key ABS report on Sports and Physical Recreation Services (ABS, 2006a) showed at the end of June 2005, there were 9 256 businesses/organisations operating in Australia whose main activity was the provision of sports and physical recreation services. Twenty seven percent of those organisations were operating in Victoria.

The income generated by these organisations in 2004-05 was \$8 820.5m. They incurred expenses of \$8 416.5m. Their single greatest expenditure was on labour costs which accounted for \$2 464.5m, or just over 29%. The total industry value added by sports and physical recreation services was \$2 349.6m, which is the equivalent of 0.3% of Australia's gross domestic product for 2004-05.

At the end of June 2005, total employment in sports and physical recreation services in Victoria was approximately 27 558 which was 27% of the national total of 111 519 persons. In addition, there were 181 832 volunteers in Australia during the month of June 2005.

The report showed between 2000-01 and 2004-05, the sectors income increased by 11.7% per annum (from \$5 490.9m to \$8 552.3m) while expenditure grew at the slightly lower rate of 9.9% per annum (from \$5 632.8m to \$8 206.6m).

Employment increased by 3.1% per annum, from 98 267 persons at the end of June 2001 to 111 201 persons at the end of June 2005.

The report highlighted an emerging issue which the sector has been concerned about for some time. Expenses related to the rent, leasing and hiring of sports venues, facilities and equipment recorded the highest growth rate of all selected expenses, rising by 16.2% per annum (from \$159.6m to \$290.9m). (ABS, 2006a)

ISSUES FOR CONCERN TO THE COMMUNITY SPORT & ACTIVE RECREATION SECTOR

- **Recognition** - The vital role the sport and active recreation sector plays in promoting healthy and vibrant communities needs to be better understood and more widely recognised by governments. As has been demonstrated in this submission, sport and active recreation plays a much broader role than just providing physical activity opportunities. It weaves the social fabric on which our communities are built, promotes health and wellbeing, reduces the economic impact of lifestyle related diseases (which alone demand significant proportions of the State and Federal health budgets), provides employment opportunities, and is a vehicle by which major events can be delivered. The vast majority of benefits are derived from community-based sport and recreation; however this part of the sector receives the least amount of funding. Community sport and active recreation requires greater recognition and support from all levels of government.
- **Infrastructure** – Despite the significant benefits the community sport and active recreation sector gives to individuals and the community, there is relatively little basic ‘infrastructure’ assistance and support provided by government to grass-roots organisations to assist with the provision of services. Community sport and active recreation organisations are being asked to provide many outcomes in addition to traditional physical activity opportunities. These include programs, policies and training in areas such as racial vilification, obesity, drug use, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) populations, new arrivals, and indigenous issues. The sector is one of the few that can provide widespread access to target groups and deliver long-term benefits on a broad scale and with successful outcomes. To achieve these outcomes however, the sector requires essential infrastructure in a range of areas including:
 - Governance education and innovation
 - Strategic planning support
 - Grant application and acquittal support services
 - Volunteer education

- Rationalisation of 'back-end' administrative tasks
 - Streamlining of regulatory requirements
- **Volunteers** –Volunteer recruitment and retention is still one of the major issues affecting growth at the community level. The sport and active recreation sector is the largest user of volunteers of any sector in Australia. Research indicates 80 –90% of all work undertaken in the sport and active recreation sector is done by volunteer labour. Volunteers are without doubt a vital element in the ongoing delivery of physical activity opportunities. If we are to maintain our volunteer base, we must provide the education, training, and workplace support these people require and, more importantly, deserve.

In recent times, as the legal and business requirements being placed on organisations has increased, the roles and responsibilities of volunteers have changed significantly. For a range of reasons however, there has been little or no formalised education of our volunteers to assist them to deal specifically with these increased demands. As a result, and through no fault of the volunteer or the organisation itself, we are now seeing many clubs facing extreme difficulties in meeting the challenges these new requirements present.

Right across the sector, groups have indicated their volunteers need to be given more educational support to help them cope with increasing governance and administrative demands. Ongoing pressure to retain and attract adequate numbers of volunteers is having an impact on the ability of the sector to deliver desired outcomes.

Community sport and active recreation organisations rely heavily on volunteers. Any reduction in volunteer contribution will have a significant impact as the services and benefits provided by them are lost to the community. This will place increased financial pressures on community organisations which will be reflected in access fees. Inevitably, if we do not provide the educational and motivational support our volunteers require to become, and stay involved, we will be left with one of two options; organisations will be forced to fold, or the government will be required to fund the shortfall through the introduction of paid staff positions.

- **Facilities** - Access to appropriate facilities for participants is already an issue, and, as participation rates continue to grow, will be increasingly problematic in the next 10 years. The general lack of community facilities available and the declining condition of many existing community facilities is making it difficult for groups to genuinely increase participation opportunities. Additionally many Local Governments now state that sporting facilities are being 100% utilised, resulting in sporting groups being turned away or limits being placed on the number of teams within a club. This, combined with the lack of open space in urban and sub-urban areas for new facilities, are working against the push to promote health through more active participation.

The benefits of physical activity, as described in this submission, can only be delivered through active participation. If the genuine desire is to get more Victorians active, we must have adequate numbers of appropriate facilities available for community use.

- **Costs** - Increasing expenses associated with lease and hire fees, insurance, travel costs, administration, compliance and registration for example, has many impacts on access to appropriate sport and recreation services. The reality is the costs of providing safe physical activities are increasing; and they are being driven upward by a range of factors beyond the control of the community clubs themselves.

Community sport and active recreation clubs are primarily small not-for-profit volunteer run organisations. These clubs do not set high fees to cover player payments or engage in large-scale promotional campaigns. Community clubs simply set their participation fees at a minimum required to cover basic operating overheads, equipment needs and associated administration costs such as hire fees and insurance premiums. The bottom line is community clubs and associations simply cannot cut costs of delivery without compromising service quality.

If we are to maintain, or preferably increase current participation levels by offering more opportunities to those people not currently engaged, without compromising standards, more must be done to help alleviate costs to ensure additional barriers to participation are not being created, especially for those from lower socio-economic groups or families with less disposable income.

THE IMPACT OF FAILING TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES

- **Reduced participation** - If the issues outlined above are not appropriately addressed in a systematic and coordinated way, there will be an ongoing erosion of the already limited core infrastructure supporting the community sport and active recreation sector. Further pressure on the sector will put the operational viability of many small grass-roots organisations at risk, as well as increasing the barriers already prohibiting entry for new community based organisations.

Ultimately, the cumulative impact of failing to address these issues will be decreased access to sport and active recreation opportunities. This in turn will reduce the positive outcomes of physical activity on Victorians, and Victorian communities.

- **Capacity** – Access to facilities is the key to increasing participation rates. If we are not prepared to take a strategic approach to facility development and maintenance we cannot hope to achieve the ultimate goal of seeing every Victorian engaged in minimum levels of physical activity required to promote better health outcomes. A commitment from government agencies, both at the state and local government level to work with the sport and active recreation sector to develop appropriate facility development plans is essential to ensure the sector can contribute its maximal potential in creating healthier individuals and communities.

- **Volunteers** – Across the NFP sector we urgently require assistance to provide our volunteers with the educational support they need to meet the ever increasing demands being placed on them. As noted previously, the vast majority of work done to provide participation access opportunities across Victoria is done by volunteers. The reality is that we will continue to see high attrition rates due to the unrealistic time and administrative demands being placed on our volunteers, as a result we will lose many of the small organisations contributing so significantly to community development. In the absence of volunteer support alternative options for provision of participation opportunities will need to be found, options that will without doubt come at a cost to the consumer.
- **Resources** –Currently funding agencies are placing an increased pressure on the community sport and active recreation sector to deliver a broader range of community outcomes, such as health promotion and inclusion programs for targeted populations. While the community sport and active recreation sector is the only sector capable of providing these outcomes at any broad base level, it is not possible to effectively achieve delivery without the provision of the necessary resources and infrastructure support required.
- **Coordination** – Successfully meeting changing consumer demands will require better strategic planning at all levels and more coordination and liaison between State and Local Government, peak bodies and the community sport and recreation organisations themselves. Via a higher level coordinated strategic approach, synergies and areas where resources can be shared, such as training and education, can be identified and taken advantage of. Undertaking a coordinated strategic approach will also allow for the development of relevant new relationships with government agencies and organisations within the business sector-who should be involved in the support of community development.

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

Government

- Work with the community sector via the peak bodies at the State level to address issues associated with facility availability, development, maintenance and access. Reliance on private providers will limit access for community groups who are unable to afford high access fees charged by private providers.
- Work with the sector via the peak bodies at the State level to provide the vital infrastructure required to support the ongoing development of the community sport and active recreation sector. Governance support, strategic and operational planning, financial management, education services, information technology and training support for volunteers are key areas where government supported infrastructure innovation is required.
- Government should adequately support relevant member-focused State level peak bodies who act as the information and feedback conduit between the sector and government. Peak organisations are in the prime position to enable sector development and these organisations should be financially and actively supported to ensure the ongoing growth and development of the sector as a whole.

- Government should work with State level peak bodies and the sector to encourage the rationalisation and/or realignment of services and/or agencies in areas where duplication prevents effective service delivery and representation.
- Government must review the regulatory burden on small community organisations and make appropriate legislative and structural changes in cases where regulatory requirements are overly onerous. Government must also be cognisant of the impact seemingly unrelated pieces of legislation have on a sector as far reaching as that of the community sport and active recreation sector. Government should make efforts to engage peak representative bodies at the outset of legislative review and development.
- Government has a key role to play in supporting innovation, research and evaluation. Governments will need to be prepared to work with the sector to encourage the creation of innovative ideas and research that aims to increase participation rates at all levels including targeted markets. In addition, government must be prepared to invest in these initiatives to ensure they meet with success.
- Invest in preventative health programs. Participation in physical activities is a key for the prevention of the majority of lifestyle related illnesses and diseases in our community. It has been suggested we would save \$8 million annually for every 1% increase in the proportion of Australians achieving a sufficient level of physical activity for health.
- **DGR status for philanthropic support** - Despite the vital role these organisations play in supporting and developing communities, under current tax ruling, community sport and active recreation organisations are not eligible to apply for tax deductibility status. This ineligibility has significant negative impact on NFP sport and active recreation organisations in a range of ways.

Obviously, the primary impact lies in the inability of community sport and active recreation organisations to directly attract valuable philanthropic dollars which could provide significant assistance to NFP organisations. In addition however, there are a number of other less obvious impacts. By way of example, like any other organisation, NFP sport and active recreation clubs and associations require legal, financial and governance assistance on a range of matters. Like other NFP groups, these organisations have very limited financial resources and as such do not have funding available to pay for the professional assistance required.

In recognition of the support NFP groups require some excellent pro-bono programs, such as *Good Company*, have been developed to provide much needed support for NFP groups. Unfortunately, most of these programs require the organisation to have charitable status to receive support, thereby excluding access for NFP sport and active recreation organisations. It is speculated this is a result of a misconception groups who are not eligible for charitable status are for-profit groups, rather than any direct desire to specifically exclude sport and active recreation groups. Notwithstanding this, it still remains the current tax system does not encourage philanthropic dollars to be raised for community sport and active recreation.

The recommendation to amend the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 to either allow bona-fide NFP community sport and recreation organisations to apply for tax deductible status or alternatively to allow for community sport and recreation club membership fees to be tax

deductible would make a significant contribution to supporting this sector and the vital role it plays in community development.

In 2002 the UK Government changed legislation to allow tax-deductible status to 'community amateur sports clubs' and clubs that promote 'healthy sport'. Feedback indicates this change has had a genuinely positive effect on increasing support given to these organisations by both the philanthropic sector as well as individuals.

If we are to see a genuine increase in access to philanthropic dollars by community sport and recreation organisations, which is supported by the Victorian Government's 'A Fairer Victoria' policy platform (Victorian Government, June 2006), as a first step it is vital the current tax legislation is amended.

- **Facility audits** – Across States, including a review of the current state of repair and future maintenance requirements is urgently required to make a realistic assessment of what facilities are available now and are going to be required in the future. A strategic plan for future development, which may include rationalisation of existing facilities as well as development of new ones, is required to ensure the needs of all members of the community are met.
- **Facility Planning** – In order to continue to deliver positive outcomes at the community level, we require a sector wide approach to facility planning. Government at the Federal, State and Local level needs to work together with the sector to take a 'big picture' approach to facility development and planning that is based on the collective needs of the community, rather than on the ad-hoc individual project development approach currently undertaken. This will assist in promoting equitable allocation across the sector and ensure facility development is not focused on those groups that have stronger voices or more resources.
- **Creation of multi use facilities** - Promoting the joint use of resources and sharing of overhead costs are vital to the development of social infrastructure. In regional areas in particular, consideration must be given to the development of community hubs that offer a range of resources and encourage people to come together and meet.
- **Strong and vibrant state level peak representative bodies** – Strong peak organisations at the State level are the key to effective liaison between government, other funding agencies and the sector. To fully realise their potential, the vital role effective peaks play must be recognised by government and related funding agencies at all levels. Peak agencies should be appropriately funded to ensure they have the resources required to effectively fill their primary purpose of creating stronger more vibrant community sectors.

SUMMARY

As the peak body for sport and active recreation, VicSport represents thousands of dedicated organisations and individuals who work tirelessly to provide opportunities for Victorians to be active through organised sport and active recreation programs.

As clearly demonstrated in this submission, the benefits of participation in sport and active recreation activities go well beyond the promotion of better physical health outcomes for the individual. Sport and active recreation participation plays a key role in developing community infrastructure, building stronger communities and promoting economic wellbeing in communities. For the individual the physical, mental and social health benefits of being actively engaged and socially connected are invaluable.

The extensive number of grass-roots organisations providing services and the vast numbers of individuals involved in a participatory or assistance role makes the community sport and active recreation sector the single largest collective group within the not-for-profit sector. Through our networks the sport and active recreation sector contacts all segments of our population. As such, community sport and active recreation organisations are uniquely placed to strengthen communities.

Despite the significant role they play in developing and strengthening communities, the organisations that make up the community sport and active recreation sector are required to operate on shoestring budgets and rely on volunteer labour to provide vital participation opportunities. While the volunteers who run these small not-for-profit organisations give their time freely and willingly for the greater good, in today's rapidly changing climate, where compliance pressures and costs are continually increasing in a 'time poor' environment, reliance on this model of service delivery is not sustainable in the long term.

There is no doubt much more can be done at all levels of government to better and more directly support the community sport and active recreation sector. By working together with a strategic vision for the future, governments, funding agencies, peak bodies and the grass-roots organisations that make up the sector can deliver more effective and efficient outcomes in the years ahead.

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