

Senior Participation

Participation in sport and physical activity is important for the health and wellbeing of seniors. Benefits for seniors include improved physical and mental health, reduced risk of disease, social interaction, increased self-esteem, lifelong independence and overall wellbeing. Research has shown that up to fifty percent of the physical decline commonly associated with ageing may be due to a lack of physical activity.^{1,2}

Australia has an increasingly ageing population.³ This has a range of implications for sport and recreation such as planning, developing and expanding the opportunities available for senior participation in sport and physical activity.

How active are Western Australian seniors?

Almost half of Western Australians (48.5 per cent) aged 60 years or more participated in levels of physical activity sufficient for health benefits. This compares with 54.6 per cent of those aged 18 years and over and is the lowest of all of the age groups.⁴

Note: The data was taken from the Western Australian Adult Physical Activity Survey 2002, which provides information by the age category 60 years and over.

Physical activity levels of Western Australians aged 60 years and over in 2002⁵

Level of activity	Proportion (%)
Sufficiently Active	48.5
Insufficiently Active	34.1
Inactive	17.3

Participation in sport and physical activity by persons aged 65 years and over⁶

In 2004, 77.6 per cent of Western Australians and 71.6 per cent of Australians aged 65 years and over participated in a sport or physical activity. In Western Australia, females were more likely than males to participate in a sport or physical activity.

Note: The data was taken from the Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey 2004, which provides information by the age category 65 years and over.

Participation rates of persons aged 65 years and over in sport and physical activity by gender in 2004⁷

Gender	Western Australia (%)	Australia (%)
Males	74.4	72.5
Females	80.3	70.8
Total	77.6	71.6



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Most popular physical activities for Australians aged 65 years and over⁸

In 2004, walking was by far the most popular physical activity not related to work or household chores undertaken by Australians aged 65 years and over.

Most popular physical activities for Australians aged 65 years and over in 2004 not related to work or household chores⁹

Activity	Participation rate (%)
Walking (excluding bushwalking)	47.6
Aerobics/fitness	12.1
Golf	8.6
Lawn bowls	7.8
Swimming	6.1
Tennis	4.1
Cycling	3.2
Bushwalking	2.9
Dancing	2.5
Fishing	2.3

- Western Australians aged 65 years and over were more likely than Australians aged 65 years and over to participate in an organised sport or physical activity that was conducted in full or part by a club, community club, recreation or fitness centre (36.2 per cent compared with 30.7 per cent).¹⁰
- In Western Australia, participation rates of males and females were similar (36.3 per cent for males compared with 36.1 per cent for females).¹¹
- In 2004, 30.7 per cent of Australians aged 65 years and over participated in an organised sport or physical activity. This compares to 58.8 per cent who participated in a non-organised sport or physical activity.¹²
- In 2004, 22.1 per cent of Australians aged 65 and over participated in an organised physical activity at a sport or recreation club or association; and 11 per cent participated at a fitness, leisure or indoor sport centre.¹³

Facilities used for physical activity by Western Australians aged 60 years and over

The most popular facilities used by Western Australians aged 60 years and over for physical activity were streets/footpaths and the home. Western Australians aged 60 years and over were more likely than the other age groups to use the home for physical activity (56.1 per cent compared with 50 per cent of all Western Australians aged 18 years and over).^{14,15}

Facilities used for physical activity by Western Australians aged 60 years and over in 2002¹⁶

Facility	Proportion (%)
Streets/footpath	56.6
Home	56.1
Public park/oval	16
Cycle/walk path	13.7
Gym/health club	8.6

Note that survey respondents could report for more than one type of facility.

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Motivators and barriers to senior participation in sport and physical activity

Motivators

The most common reason given by Western Australians aged 60 years and over for undertaking physical activity was to improve fitness.¹⁷

Main reasons for being physically active for Western Australians aged 60 years and over in 2002¹⁸

Main reason	Proportion (%)
To improve fitness	29.9
For enjoyment	19.3
For weight control	6.6
For reduction in risk of disease	3.8
To feel better about self	3
To improve appearance	0.2

Other motivators for seniors to participate in sport and physical activity include:

- Having fun and companionship;
- Having enhanced control over one's life;
- Achieving lifelong activity levels;
- Improving health and well-being;
- Increasing self-esteem; and
- Having access to tailored programs.¹⁹

Barriers

Poor health was the most common reason for not being more active reported by Western Australians aged 60 years and over.²⁰

Most common reasons for not being more active for Western Australians aged 60 years and over in 2002²¹

Main barrier	Proportion (%)
Poor health	24.4
Already active enough	23.4
Lack of time	18.9
Too old	13
No motivation	11.3
Children to look after	0.3

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Other barriers to physical activity among seniors are:

- Limited or inappropriate sporting opportunities;
- Stereotypical images of ageing, lack of information, knowledge and negative attitudes towards sport and exercise;
- Poor health and medical conditions not catered for;
- Lack of confidence;
- Lack of time;
- Low social support, inappropriate social and cultural settings; and failure of many organisations to provide opportunities for older participants;
- Lack of transport and access to programs; and
- Cost.²²

Benefits of senior participation in sport and physical activity^{23,24}

Participation in physical activity provides a range of physical, mental and social benefits for seniors. These include:

- Improved physical health and longer life;
- Improved mobility, flexibility and functional ability;
- Reduced risk of disease;
- Weight control;
- Reduced risk of depression, improved mental health and psychological wellbeing;
- Increased social contact; and
- Independence.

Footnotes

¹ State Government of Victoria, Australia. (19/08/2005: date of retrieval). Better Health Channel. Fitness for the over 50's. <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au>

² Government of South Australia. (22/08/2005: date of retrieval). Seniors Information Service. Health and well being: physical activity. <http://www.seniors.asn.au>

³ Australian Sports Commission and Department of Veterans' Affairs. (2001). Older, smarter, fitter: a guide for providers of sport and physical activity programs for older Australians. Canberra, Australian Capital Territory: Australian Sports Commission and Department of Veterans' Affairs. p3.

⁴ McCormack, G., Milligan, R., Giles-Corti, B. and Clarkson, J.P. (2003). Physical activity levels of Western Australian adults 2002: results from the adult physical activity survey and pedometer study. Perth, Western Australia: Western Australian government. p25.

⁵ Ibid. p25.

⁶ Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport. (2004). Participation in exercise, recreation and sport: annual report 2003. Canberra, Australian Capital Territory: Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport. P11.

⁷ Ibid. p11.

⁸ Ibid. p27.

⁹ Ibid. p27.

¹⁰ Ibid. p33.

¹¹ Ibid. p33.

¹² Ibid. p29.

¹³ Ibid. p34.

¹⁴ McCormack, G. et al op. cit. p36.

¹⁵ Ibid. p9.

¹⁶ Ibid. p36.

¹⁷ Ibid. p54.

¹⁸ Ibid. p54.

¹⁹ Australian Sports Commission and Department of Veterans' Affairs. op. cit. p12.

²⁰ McCormack, G. et al op. cit. p55.

²¹ Ibid. p55.

²² Australian Sports Commission and Department of Veterans' Affairs. op. cit. pp12-14.

²³ Government of South Australia. op. cit.

²⁴ Australian Sports Commission and Department of Veterans' Affairs. op. cit. p14.