



Submission to Sport and Recreation Victoria A framework for the future

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Disability Sport & Recreation submission to Sport and Recreation Victoria Valuing Sport and Recreation – A Framework for the Future Discussion Paper

Part 1: Response Context

As the peak body for the disability sport and recreation sector, this submission to the Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) discussion paper will come from the perspective of that portion of the Victorian community we represent – people with disability. There will be other organisations that will contribute to the discussion through a different lens, however this cohort of Victorians is an important consideration for which a dedicated response deserves to be heard.

This response is limited to those specific questions raised in the discussion paper that have a potentially significant impact on the lives of people with disability and will focus exclusively on that cohort.

Evidence shows that people with a disability have consistently lower levels of participation in sport and recreation, and are consequently at a greater risk of chronic disease, poor health, social isolation, and a lack of opportunity to simply lead an ordinary life which is the right of all Victorians.

Participation data from various sources differ in their degree of describing the significant gap in this participation however the recent release of the first Ausplay data¹ provides an excellent reference point, particularly as such data will now be updated each 6 months. Key outcomes related to participation in sport and non-sport activities combined are as follows:

- The participation rates for people with a disability is greater in Victoria compared to the other states, particularly at the “at least 3 x per week” level which is recommended for positive health outcomes.
- The gap in Victoria between people with a disability compared to able bodied Victorians in the “at least 3 x per week” category is 52.6% v 60.7%.
- For all states in Australia, the participation difference between people with a disability and the general population is significant. Importantly, this difference is far greater than that found between males and females and when the data considers participation in sport and non-sport combined, females actually currently participate greater than males. Therefore, a case could be made for a similar investment and focus on disability sport and recreation from the State Government as has occurred recently for female sport and recreation as there is a much clearer disadvantage in this area for people with a disability.
- For the participation rate of “at least once per year”, a recent DSR member survey identified participation rates of 87% which is higher than the Victorian average for people with a disability of 78.2% and also indicated that DSR members with support can approach the participation rates of the able bodied population (who achieved 86.9% in this category).

¹ AusPlay data, <https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/research/smi/ausplay/results/state>

There are already programs in place to raise participation rates in discrete population segments, including VicHealth's *Changing our Game – Advancing gender equality in sport for women and girls*, and SRV's AAA program. However, there is some risk that funds supporting people with a disability are now being 'lost' in the recent Sport and Recreation Victoria AAA funding stream in which we understand that disability is included within a broader 'inclusion' spectrum that also includes gender, CALD and LGBTI communities. While there are similarities with other inclusion issues, there is still a need for a direct targeted focus and data collection around specific disability sport and recreation.

It makes good economic sense to support people with disability to become active and engage in sport and recreation activities. There is an abundance of evidence that demonstrates increased rates of participation in physical activity leads to improved health outcomes (physical and mental) while also improving social connections and building stronger communities.

Approximately 1.1 million Victorians have disability². A priority of the NDIS is to resource people with disability so they have the capacity to live an "ordinary" life and where possible, decrease their reliance on the medical system. The vision for the Victorian state disability plan 2017-2020 is an inclusive Victoria, which supports people with a disability to live satisfying everyday lives³.

SRV is well-placed to be a key enabler if a greater emphasis is placed on creating sporting and recreation opportunities specifically for people with disability, developing and implementing systems that will enable participation, and ensuring that when measuring the outcomes of SRV programs, people with disability are captured.

Incidentally, having a focus on sport and recreation for people with a disability could also help address the low participation rates in the ATSI community, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 1.7 times as likely as non-Indigenous people to be living with disability⁴ and therefore in need of programs and activities that are modified to ensure inclusion.

²Companion document to the Discussion Paper of the Victorian state disability plan 2017-2020 p.1

³ Victorian state disability plan 2017–2020 p.2

⁴*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with a Disability, 2012*. Australian Bureau of Statistics <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats%5Cabs@.nsf/0/176B7899CCE3B173CA257D9E00112463?Opendocument>

Part 2: DSR response to SRV's key questions.

1. How can the sport and active recreation system meet future increased demand?

From a disability perspective, the single most important thing sport and recreation infrastructure needs to be, is accessible. Whether it be re-modelling or retro-fitting existing infrastructure, or new-construction, adhering to the principles of universal design will ensure accessibility to people with disability as well as Victoria's growing aging population whose mobility may be restricted. Universal design is the first of the five key approaches the Victorian Government will take as outlined in the Victorian state disability plan 2017-2020⁵.

SRV has an obligation to do its part to ensure the Victorian Government can deliver on its commitment to accessibility via its grant programs that support the development of infrastructure. It is in a position to reward developers of sporting venues, public recreation spaces and other facilities who embrace universal design principles and make their facilities truly accessible, and make this a requirement for all government funded projects.

Other initiatives such as making it mandatory to have representatives with disability on infrastructure planning committees, would help mitigate the risk of costly design errors or oversights that render public spaces inaccessible.

Another critical factor that supports participation is community awareness and attitudes. Schools provide an excellent opportunity for lifelong behaviours to be established and various programs within schools (such as DSR's Wheeltalk program) provide an opportunity to drive increased awareness around the benefits of physical activity together with the issues faced and possibilities for people with a disability. Opportunities for awareness change will be expanded on in the next section.

2. What are the key levers and methods needed to drive broader and more inclusive participation in sport and active recreation?

In a survey of more than 1,900 people with disability, the Australian Sports Commission identified the following most constraining factors related to participation in sport and active recreation⁶:

1. Lack of government support
2. Pricing
3. Lack of trained staff to support my participation
4. No integrated sport and recreation programs available
5. Lack of money
6. No friends to participate with
7. Lack of personal income
8. Scarcity of places
9. No assessment of people with disabilities' needs
10. No access to facilities close to home / work

⁵ Victorian state disability plan 2017-2020 p.18

⁶ *Participation and non-participation of people with disability in sport and active recreation*, Australian Sports Commission research project in collaboration with University of Technology, Sydney 2010

Research from La Trobe University into the barriers and facilitators to physical activity in children with disability revealed that negative attitudes towards the child with disability are a significant barrier to participation.⁷ Sadly, this barrier is not removed as the child ages, continuing to be a contributing factor to the increased rates of sedentary behaviour in adults with disability.

While SRV cannot change an individual's financial circumstances to enable them to participate, with the implementation of the NDIS, it can be reasonably expected that a growing number of people with disability will have the necessary resources at their disposal to participate in the physical activity of their choice, leaving community attitudes the barrier over which SRV can have the most impact.

SRV is in a position to work with partners in the sector such as DSR and others to be a champion for creating cultures that are inclusive, welcoming and safe through a person-centred approach. Community and industry campaigns such as the Change the Game program addressing gender inequality could be refocused on assisting people with a disability in response to the significant gaps in participation and the large number of Victorians (est 1.1 million) who would potentially benefit.

The desire exists within the community of people with a disability to become more active. They want to live an ordinary life which for many Victorians involves participation in sport and leisure activities. The Australian Sports Commission research in 2010 identified that 75% of those with a disability who are currently active **want to do more**. In addition, 83% of those with a disability who are currently inactive **want to be active**.

There is also a demonstrated need for industry-wide, grassroots inclusion training, so the coaches, volunteers and club members across Victoria have the knowledge and skills to welcome people with disability. Some state sporting associations already have inclusion training in place, but it is not compulsory, nor is there any formal approach to the documenting of training. SRV could make it conditional to funding, and draw on the expertise of organisations like DSR to deliver, monitor and accredit on a statewide level.

DSR is already working in this space through its disability awareness program, WheelTalk, that in 2015/16 financial year was delivered to nearly 20,000 students in 445 schools across Victoria⁸ and now has a workplace module for adults to be delivered in a range of settings including workplaces and sport / leisure facilities. We are also developing partnerships with recreation providers to deliver inclusion training that will give their staff an understanding of a person-centred approach and the tools they need to ensure that people with disability using those facilities can do so without fear of discrimination, and are developing a schoolteachers' professional development program to align with The Victorian Institute of Teaching accreditation requirements.

With the significant opportunity for participation within the leisure centre environment, there are also opportunities to revisit the Inclusive Leisure Initiative which aimed to improve leisure centre access for people with a disability in Victoria. DSR would be very interested to work with the Victorian Government and other partners to reinvigorate this scheme to develop an accreditation system for leisure centres in Victoria, similar to the English Federation of Disability Sport's Inclusive Fitness Initiative *Mark* program⁹.

⁷*Perceived barriers and facilitators to physical activity for children with disability: a systematic review*, Shields N, Synnot AJ, Barr M. *Br J Sports Med* (2011). doi:10.1136/bjsports-2011-090236

⁸DSR Annual Report 2015-16, p8

⁹ <http://www.efds.co.uk/get-active/inclusive-gyms>

3. How can the sport and active recreation system support the increasing demand for participation in individual and unorganised recreation activities?

For people with disability, knowing what sport and recreation opportunities are available to them is a challenge. The SRV-funded AAA Play program and website goes part way to solving the issue of finding appropriate activity that meets an individual's interests and abilities. Its single biggest weakness, however, is that AAA Play is limited to essentially sport activities in metropolitan Melbourne – ignoring the needs of those people with disability living in rural and regional Victoria and the huge opportunities that non sporting leisure and recreation provide.

To give Victorians regardless of where they live, equitable access to the information about what is available to them to become active, and the organisations offering those sports or activities a forum on which to promote, DSR's Score! platform provides an opportunity to complement the AAA Play platform to encompass all of Victoria and a greater range of activities. Score! also provides an opportunity to rate activities, driving quality and consumer feedback to inform potential participants.

There also needs to be greater research and analysis of key issues such as the key barriers and how to address them. Many years into its delivery, it is difficult to understand the real outcomes from the Victorian Government's investment in AAA programs and activities. DSR is willing and interested to work with the Victorian Government as a partner to address these issues, potentially in partnership with a University with a specialist interest in disability participation such as La Trobe University.

4. What are the biggest challenges and opportunities to the sustainability of the sector? What are the links and co-dependencies?

It is entirely reasonable to project an increase in the demand of sports and recreational activities from people with disability, as the roll-out of the NDIS potentially gives more people the means to take positive actions to improved health through participation in sport and physical recreation. SRV needs to ensure supply and demand are matched, and that sports and leisure providers are equipped with the tools they need to meet that demand.

However, it should be noted that while the NDIS presents the opportunity for a seismic change for people with a disability, there are risks. Because it is largely treatment focused, sport and recreation needs to stand on its own and manage/drive participation itself without expecting the NDIS to necessarily feed new clients. It is unclear whether treatment plans for NDIS clients will help participation rates or stigmas or community attitudes without significant support from the sector outside of the NDIS.

Sport and recreation as a sector needs to 'step up' given that as a result of the massive funding diversion to feed the NDIS, the disability sector may not be willing or able to increase their efforts in this area. In this sense, there is a real risk that the NDIS rollout may make participation in sport and recreation worse where anything other than basic day-to-day and treatment is at risk of being ignored.

As an organisation that spans disability, health, recreation and sport, DSR is in an ideal position to work with the Victorian Government to facilitate a process whereby key disability and sport stakeholders map the changing landscape and develop resources that will support individual sporting and recreational organisations to maximise participation by people with disability, creating value and real outcomes for NDIS expenditure.

Research is another critical element to ensuring sustainability. DSR has partnered with La Trobe University to facilitate research into disability and leisure participation in the fitness centre environment, as well as working with the University of Melbourne in the area of Physiotherapy professionals understanding of disability issues and others.

By making sure disability is captured in health research, policy makers have a clearer picture of that segment of the community (more than 1.1 million people) and can make better-informed decisions that will include, not marginalise.

Technology can also present opportunities for the sector. Wearables such as Fitbit and various apps to track participation have been proven to drive greater participation. DSR is developing an online game/app called *Passport 2 Play* (or P2P) that will allow children with a disability to track their progress to better health through physical activity, in partnership with a support team of coaches, carers and parents.

P2P is supported by program ambassador Dylan Alcott OAM (who features within the game). Dylan commenced his journey to an active life through DSR's summer camps and is now a well recognised 3 time Paralympic gold medallist in the sports of wheelchair basketball (London) and wheelchair tennis (Rio) for which he was awarded Paralympian of the Year and the prestigious Newcombe medal for achievements in tennis in 2016.

There may be opportunities to link the P2P app with Victorian Government participation campaigns such as Active April, which could be expanded to have more of a focus on people with a disability as a cohort that urgently needs to increase its participation levels.

Another area of critical importance is that of volunteers. At all levels of the sport and recreation pathway, volunteers are required to play a crucial role. This is particularly important for people with a disability as a greater level of support may be required to ensure and provide for equal participation opportunities. It is important to understand and support where volunteers fit in, how they are managed and how they are trained.

Volunteers are the backbone of sports for people with a disability but they need help to do what they do and allow them to do it better.

DSR would support working with the Victorian Government to enhance the support of volunteers to do their important work.

5. How can the community benefits of investing in events and high performance sport be maximised?

Quite simply, whenever there is a major sporting event that takes place in Victoria, be sure to include its disability counterpart as part of the mainstream offering. At the 2017 Australian Open, Dylan Alcott's wheelchair tennis final was moved to centre-court due to interest in the match, relegating the juniors' final to another court¹⁰. Having elite athletes with disability in the limelight should be the norm, not the exception. It's been shown to be popular – there is growing community interest in watching athletes with disability compete at the pinnacle of their chosen disciplines – SRV needs to maintain pressure at a policy and planning level to ensure the opportunity for athletes with a disability to shine alongside their able-bodied counterparts continues.

It will help shift community attitudes, promote those sports at a local, grassroots level, and provide greater economic benefit to Victoria.

Regarding the Paralympics and high performance sport, the pathway to participation at the elite level needs to be more clearly identified highlighting the key roles and collaboration required for various organisations such as DSR (grassroots participation), Victorian Institute of Sport (elite athlete development) and the Australian Paralympic Committee (representative team support).

There is a very real risk that Australia's outstanding heritage and achievements in the area of high performance sport for people with a disability may decline in the future. The low numbers of participants at the grass roots level may mean that there will simply be fewer elite performers in the future to be discovered and supported.

A taskforce driving a greater number of grass roots participants enjoying sport is a critical step in the process of eventually delivering the next round of Australian Paralympians who not only achieve great personal success but also provide wonderful motivation for the whole of the community.

Recent communication from the APC to DSR has supported the undertaking of such a body of work to ensure that all aspects of the pathway are working collaboratively and efficiently.

¹⁰ <http://www.smh.com.au/sport/tennis/dylan-alcott-wins-third-straight-australian-open-quad-wheelchair-title-20170128-gu0mz1.html> <http://www.tennis.com.au/news/2017/01/28/dylan-alcott-hails-ao-triple-triumph>

Part 3: About Disability Sport & Recreation

Founded in 1962 as the ParaVics Sports Club, we were the birthplace for the Australian Paralympic movement in Victoria. Recognising the importance of active recreation and unorganised sporting activities to the health and wellbeing of our members, in 2010 we changed our focus from elite sport and athlete grants to having a greater grassroots and leisure focus; a strategic change reflected in our name, Disability Sport & Recreation.

We are now the peak body for disability sport and recreation in Victoria with nearly 3,000 members, more than half who are Victorians who identify as either having a disability, their parents or carers, together with over 200 organisation members that support them in their sport and recreation pursuits.

DSR is uniquely multi-faceted: a Victorian state government recognised state sporting association (responsible for the sport of wheelchair rugby), a registered disability sporting organisation and a registered disability service provider. We are registered with the TAC as a community group program provider and community access planner, and are a registered service provider with the National Disability Insurance Agency.

Our mandate is to deliver better health outcomes for Victorians with disability through promotion and participation in sport and recreation, which we do through strategic partnerships, advocacy, program delivery and education.

Conclusion

The Victorian Government should be congratulated for its work supporting the sport and recreation sector however the new framework for the future provides an opportunity to redirect efforts and resources to those areas of inequality and of most urgent need.

It's time to seriously "Close the Gap" for participation in sport and recreation for people with a disability which will provide real and significant outcomes not only for the participants, but also savings to the Victorian health budget with decreased health care costs as this cohort of the Victorian community becomes healthier and less reliant on government funded care.

Disability Sport and Recreation presents itself as a willing partner with the Victorian Government to address these issues in a collaborative manner to support a number of government initiatives in the area of disability, health, education, sport and recreation.