

A new agenda for disability sport and recreation in Victoria

Disability Sport & Recreation (DSR), the peak body for disability sport in Victoria, has supported people with disability to lead their best life possible through sport for over 55 years. DSR leads the Victorian Disability Sport & Recreation Organisations Committee (VDSROC) to foster collaboration amongst like-minded organisations to achieve the common goal of more people with disability participating in sport and recreation.

The following organisations from VDSROC support an improved agenda for disability sport in Victoria, providing practical and timely actions to improve the quality of life for all Victorians with disability through greater participation in physical activity.

- Disability Sport & Recreation
- Special Olympics Australia
- Sport Inclusion Australia
- Blind Sports Victoria
- Victorian Electric Wheelchair Sports Association
- Disabled Wintersports Australia
- Maccabi All Abilities Sports
- Riding Develops Abilities
- Deaf Sports and Recreation Victoria
- Australian Paralympic Committee
- Sailability
- Australian Wheelchair Handball
- Disabled Waterski Victoria
- Scope
- Boccia Victoria

DSR and VDSROC have developed an action plan framework for the next Victorian Government to address this goal informed by forums, experiences of the various members of these organisations, benchmarked best practice and collated findings from other organisations and governments in Australia and throughout the world.

We support greater exposure of disability sports at both an elite and local grassroots level via a range of communication channels. Such exposure can influence individuals with disability to be active, help develop new role models and break down stereotypes and community attitudes that have proven to be barriers to participation as **you cannot be what you cannot see!**

Victoria already has a reputation as a world leader in both sporting events and the development of sport, particularly for women.

To further enhance our reputation as a leader in inclusion, particularly through provision of opportunities for those with disability to be physically active, we encourage the Victorian Government to implement the measures described in this document.

Victoria has an opportunity to not only become the leading state but also a **world leader in disability sport**, helping all of our community to live their best lives possible through participation in sport and recreation.

Such an initiative would complement many existing government priorities and plans including:

- Absolutely Everyone – State Disability Plan 2017-2020
- Active Victoria – A strategic framework for sport and recreation in Victoria 2017-2021

What is required?

The Victorian Government has the opportunity to work in partnership with key stakeholders to develop policies and programs that will transform the lives of Victorians with disability to become more active, significantly contributing to improved outcomes for our community and economy to deliver a fairer Victoria.

The increasing number of people with disability gaining greater confidence and capability through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) rollout means that significant new markets are being created in many areas including sport and recreation. While this new demand is to be welcomed, it also presents new challenges and opportunities for the sector who may not be fully prepared or capable of handling the various unique issues to support the participation of people with disability.

Reframing and changing the attitudes of the wider community through more ambassadors, role models and education programs in addition to comprehensive training for the many sport sector staff and volunteers is also required.

The following initiatives are suggested to assist in delivering greater opportunities for people with disability to engage in sport and recreation, to enable them to live their best life possible, reducing the significant gap in participation that currently exists.

They are vital, timely and necessary.

Key actions summary

People with disability should have equal opportunity to participate in either 'mainstream' or 'specialised' sport and physical activity programs, depending on the individual's circumstances and desires in a 'person centred' approach.

The following actions would make a significant improvement to the lives of people with disability in Victoria as they would lead to greater participation in sport and recreation.

1. Create an office for disability sport and recreation.
2. Continue to support the delivery of accessible facilities and venues.
3. Develop an 'accessibility accreditation scheme' for leisure centres.
4. Host a variety of disability sport and recreation forums to determine the key issues and priorities of people with disability.
5. Make a focus of enhancing the employment and leadership outcomes for people with disability in sport.
6. Enhance the collection and analysis of participation data to provide up to date statistics on disability sport participation in Victoria to monitor progress and identify areas of priority.
7. Develop and promote an NDIS sport guide providing support to NDIS planners and participants with relevant information for how people with disability can increase participation in sport using NDIS funding.
8. Conduct a review of the All Abilities Access (AAA) program to ensure resources are delivered to programs demonstrating strong outcomes and celebrating success stories for others to learn from.
9. Develop a comprehensive disability sport training program to assist the sector to adequately serve the emerging interest from people with disability and the various service providers and volunteers.
10. Provide a participation incentive/voucher scheme to individuals providing subsidised access to equipment, membership fees, transport allowances, carers etc. to complement NDIS funding which may not be available for these purposes.
11. Enhance the exposure of disability sport in Victoria noting that **you cannot be what you cannot see!**
12. Assist the development of real partnerships between organisations to enable them to work together to achieve the shared goals of enhancing physical activity of people with disability.

13. Support transport initiatives to allow people with disability to get to sporting and leisure activities.
14. Support the development and implementation of Disability Sport Hubs across Victoria in partnership with DSR, local government and local sport and recreation providers.
15. Expansion and focus on Schools Disability Sport Awareness Programs.
16. Expand opportunities for disability sport training and education via partnerships with universities, conferences, events etc.
17. Celebrate excellence in the disability sport sector with awards and scholarship programs.
18. Promote what's possible for people with disability through community festivals, events and the AAA Play first point of call referral service.
19. Enhance the promotion of disability sport through a greater focus in the Premier's Active April initiative and other government health promotion programs.

While some of these initiatives are currently in place, a coordinated expansion of resources and focus is now urgently required which DSR and our partner organisations are keen to work in collaboration with the Victorian Government to deliver over coming years.

Context

Sport Australia Corporate Plan 2018-2022

More than 90 per cent of Australian adults have an interest in sport, yet less than half of the population are participating. This is our great opportunity.

Sport Australia aims to convert interested bystanders into active participants and become the world's most active nation. This has the potential to be Australia's most important sporting result, because success will mean healthier, happier and more productive communities.

At Sport Australia we want to encourage and help Australians of all backgrounds, ages and **abilities** to get involved in sport and physical activity and to realise the many benefits.

It should be noted that the participation levels of people with a disability are significantly below any other cohort in our society so while it's important to focus on the broader community, a unique focus is required for people with a disability, much like the Office for Women in Sport focuses on gender issues and presents the Victorian Government as world leaders in this issue.

The potential is there and the time is now right for the Victorian Government to also become world leaders in disability sport, assisting the 1.1million Victorians with disability to live their best life possible, to not get left behind the rest of society.

The comments by Kurt Fearnley in his recent acceptance speech as the first Paralympian to win the prestigious Don Award at the Australian Sport Hall of Fame are now particularly relevant as the Victorian Government determines its future work and priorities in this area.

“Tonight I am the first within our Paralympic movement to hold up this prestigious award, but I have no intention of self-congratulation, I have to point back behind me to the generations of proud men and women with disabilities who allowed me to become the person and athlete that you see fit to receive this award.

An athlete whose sport has been born out of the back fields of rehabilitation hospitals. That was created by men and women who had the desire to see not only what was physically possible but what was humanly possible.

I've heard the stories of Paralympic forebears who speak about losing friends, who felt too much shame in their experience with disability - and that is within our own community. There was too much shame and there wasn't enough hope. So our sport was born out of that hope. Hope that somebody can be judged by substance and not image. That the difference that we each hold can be celebrated and not used to be segregated.

Through the medium of sport that's what our movement represents...hope.

Hope, that if sport can adjust to include those with disabilities, maybe the community can follow.

And when our community is shifting to this idea of perfection where life, within even a picture, is filtered within an inch of humanity. Our movement has greater importance than ever because the image of perfection isn't real, it's not sustainable and it's not healthy. And our ability to share beauty and strength in this perceived imperfection, it just cannot be matched.

I fundamentally believe that sport can lead this country and I believe the Paralympic movement is a jewel within the sporting crown.

But we need every person within this room to embrace our community of people with disabilities, not only on the sporting field but within administration, in executive and within board and in governance roles.

Let's lead the way. We won't regret it."

In addition, the new Sport Australia infrastructure program states that it will prioritise proposals that promote the inclusiveness of sport and build community hubs which works well with recent work DSR is undertaking in partnership with VicHealth to develop a plan for Victoria's first disability sport hub!

Why DSR?

One in five Australians are living with disability. There are approximately 1.1 million Victorians with disability. All data shows that people with disability are significantly less active than any other section of our society, despite having the most to gain physically and mentally from being active.

Sport and recreation therefore has the potential to contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing of all people with disability while helping to break down the barriers that once stopped people with disability from participating in not only sport but all aspects of life. The full and rich life that is the right of all Victorians.

The unique ability of sports to transcend linguistic, cultural and social barriers makes it an excellent platform for strategies of inclusion and adaptation. Furthermore, the universal popularity of sport and its physical, social and economic development benefits make it an ideal tool for fostering the inclusion and well-being of persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities often face societal barriers and disability evokes negative perceptions and discrimination in many societies. As a result of the stigma associated with disability, people with disabilities are generally excluded from education, employment and community life which deprives them of opportunities essential to their social development, health and well-being. In some societies persons with disabilities are considered dependent and seen as incapable, thus fostering inactivity which often causes individuals with physical disabilities to experience restricted mobility beyond the cause of their disability.

Sport and physical activity can help reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with disability because it can transform community attitudes about persons with disabilities by highlighting their skills and reducing the tendency to see the disability instead of the person. Through sport, persons without disabilities interact with persons with disabilities in a positive context forcing them to reshape assumptions about what persons with disabilities can and cannot do.

Physical activity changes the person with disability in an equally profound way by empowering persons with disabilities to realize their full potential and advocate for changes in society. Through sport, persons with disabilities acquire vital social skills, develop independence, and become empowered to act as agents of change. Sport teaches individuals how to communicate effectively as well as the significance of teamwork and cooperation and respect for others.

Sport is also well-suited to reducing dependence and developing greater independence by helping persons with disabilities to become physically and mentally stronger. These skills can be transferred into other new arenas including employment and advocacy work further helping to build self-sufficiency.

The power of sport as a transformative tool is of particular importance for women as women with disabilities often experience double discrimination on the basis of their gender and disability. By providing women with disabilities the opportunity to compete and demonstrate their physical ability, sport can help to reduce gender stereotypes and negative perceptions associated with women with disabilities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the first legally binding international instrument to address the rights of persons with disabilities and sport. Article 30 of the Convention addresses both mainstream and disability-specific sport and stipulates that “States Parties shall take appropriate measures to encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels”.

It also calls upon Governments, States party to the Convention, to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sport and recreational venues — as spectators and as active participants.

This also requires that children with disabilities be included in physical education within the school system “to the fullest extent possible” and enjoy equal access to “play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities”.

Australian context

Previous research undertaken by the Australian Sports Commission has identified that people with disability are 15% less likely to participate in sport and active recreation. In addition, 83% of those with a disability who aren't active want to become active and 75% of those with disability are already active want to do more.

Recently VicHealth have found that Victorians with disability are significantly less physically active (40%) than Victorians without disability and are half as likely to feel safe walking around their neighbourhood during the day and experienced significantly lower levels of life satisfaction and self-reported mental wellbeing.

The potential demand and opportunities for lives to be transformed through physical activity for people with disability is enormous.

Proposed initiatives

Office for disability sport and recreation

In response to the gap in participation in sport and recreation for females, the Office for Women in Sport & Recreation has been established by the Victorian Government.

It is proposed that a similar office be established in partnership with Disability Sport & Recreation and other stakeholders focusing specifically on disability sport and recreation (to address what is a much more significant gap in participation than that for females) in a well-resourced, coordinated and structured manner.

Accessible facilities and venues

Funding should continue to be provided to local government and sporting clubs at a grassroots level to enhance designs of community sport facilities to make them more attractive, welcoming and accessible for people with a disability.

Sporting clubs and venues should also be directed to make sure accessible toilets are not to be used as storage and are always open and available.

Accessibility accreditation

One of the biggest barriers to participation in sports and physical activity is consistent standards of infrastructure and program delivery.

In the UK, the English Federation of Disability Sport conducts a 'MARK' program which provides an audit and accreditation system for leisure centres. Once accredited, the individual with a disability can be confident that they can attend the particular centre and experience appropriate access, staff training and programs.

The Victorian Government could initiate such a program in partnership with DSR and other stakeholders in which leisure facilities, local sporting clubs and parks are 'marked' as accessible and given approval to display that they are a disability accessible facility.

This program would be based on categories of accessibility, communication, staff training and culture, disability types and quality of facilities.

Disability sports and recreation forums

Every year, Sport and Recreation Western Australia hosts a series of interactive disability sports and recreation forums. These forums have been designed to build connections for people with disabilities. The forums are also designed to get people with disabilities involved by creating and developing relationships between sports and recreation bodies and disability service providers.

The forums are held on a quarterly-basis. Disability service providers, State Sporting Associations, local governments and other relevant organisations are invited to attend and/or present at the forums to share and promote their inclusive programs and stories.

These forums should be introduced in Victoria to assist in identifying local issues and solutions to enhance coordination and lead to participation for people with a disability.

Disability employment and leadership in sport

The Victorian Government could offer financial incentives for a sports organisation to employ people with a disability or engage them into leadership positions by paying for building modifications and reasonable adjustments to accommodate the employee's disability. For example, wheelchair accessible ramps, large print, braille and Easy Read employment forms and employee information.

Employment within Sport and Recreation Victoria could be geared towards employing more individuals with disabilities.

Data collection

The Victorian Government could fund a research project that expands on the current SportRec Spatial program that would capture accurate disability participation statistics that would be compiled and used to shape programs, provide feedback, and justify priorities, outcomes and funding.

NDIS easy access guide to disability sports

One of the greatest barriers to individuals with a disability playing sports is understanding what funding may be available for them to assist in their goals.

At present the rollout of the NDIS has been inconsistent, resulting in many individuals being unable to secure required funding to allow them to play sport because they and their planners do not value sport as a necessity.

It would be beneficial to have a guide or website available that provides information for people with a disability, carers, Local Area Coordinators (LAC) and NDIS planners to clearly understand how they can access funding so the individual can participate in sports.

A clear definition and direction for NDIS needs to be created to outline the process and outcomes of what funding should lead to. Justification for rejection should be outlined in writing, including the appeals process. Any appeals costs should be written off and not charged to the participant.

There is currently research and draft work being completed by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) on this project while a website supporting these objectives is near completion by DSR but needs further support to refine and promote.

All abilities access program

There is feedback that the AAA program appears to lack consolidated reviews and reporting of outcomes with too much of a focus on funding of State Sporting Associations.

A thorough review is required of the AAA program that would consider effectiveness and outcomes of funded projects in addition to considering the funding of a broader spread of bodies such as local government and the leisure industry to achieve the goals of increased physical activity for people with disability.

Specific disability training

One of the key barriers to participation is the skills of volunteers and staff who are often dealing with a person with disability for the first time. Evidence suggests that these people mostly have excellent intentions to assist people with disability but lack the skills required to follow through appropriately and with confidence to provide a positive experience that enhances subsequent participation.

The default position with a lack of training is often to do nothing or deliver an unsatisfactory experience.

Training programs and guides should be developed for staff and volunteers who will be working with people with disabilities, delivered online but also in person by relevant organisations such as DSR and other stakeholders.

With increased capacity and confidence for people with disability via the NDIS rollout, there will be much greater demand to enter the sport and recreation sector so it's vital to commence workforce planning now to address this demand appropriately.

Participation initiatives

As an incentive to encourage individuals to get involved in sports and physical activity, the Victorian Government could provide vouchers to people with disabilities that can be used for a number of services including carers, transport to the sporting event or for adaptive equipment that may not be currently funded in the NDIS.

Public exposure for disability sport

To promote disability participation in sport and physical activity, public campaigns via social media, mainstream media programs and printed press could be funded by the Victorian Government, much like the successful 'This Girl Can' campaign to address female participation.

Disability sport tournaments should be scheduled and run alongside mainstream sporting tournaments rather than as a separate event. An ambassador program should be introduced to provide positive role models in the community. Campaigns that already exist such as the Premier's Active April would be a great opportunity to focus and highlight people with disabilities becoming involved in sport and physical activities.

Funding should be provided to sporting organisations to assist in the broadcasting of disability sport events and activities.

Resources and partnerships

Funding could be provided to encourage disability sport organisations to work and partner with State Sporting Associations to develop shared resources. Resources could be shared across all industries and include equipment, documents, training protocols and programs.

Transport allowance

The Victorian Government could allocate funding to disability organisations to assist in transferring participants to a venue to participate in sport. This can be in the form of specially marked funding or community buses. These community buses could come from local councils, specialist schools and other organisations. This is similar to programs developed for older Australians.

Disability Sport Hub

There are opportunities for a dedicated 'Disability Sport Hub' to be established in a number of communities across the state, providing a consolidated and dedicated focus on local delivery of programs and services in a coordinated manner.

This concept is currently being investigated in a planning study lead by DSR and funded by Vic Health in the City of Casey and could be replicated across the state.

School disability sport awareness program expansion

DSR has been already running a disability sport awareness program through its 'WheelTalk' program that reaches 20,000 school children per year. WheelTalk is an interactive program that encourages students to think about diversity, acceptance and disability while gaining an understanding of what it is like to live with disability.

Presented by Victorians with disability who are actively involved in sport and recreation, WheelTalk combines unique stories of lived disability with the opportunity to play up to an hour of AFL Wheelchair or wheelchair basketball. This program, with the necessary resources, could be expanded significantly across the state.

In NSW, Wheelchair Sports NSW delivers a 'roadshow' program which visits over 250 schools each year, educating on the importance of road safety, disability and a variety of other topics.

The DSR Wheeltalk program could be expanded to partner with Victorian Government organisations such as the Transport Accident Commission and Worksafe to deliver government related programs and messages by people with disability who have a relevant personal experience in relation to these programs.

Part of the proposed office for disability sport and recreation role could be to coordinate and consolidate this program and expand it to new schools and markets.

Disability sport inclusion training

A key focus of any disability sport strategy should be to enhance the delivery of inclusion training offered to sporting organisations, community clubs, local government associations and leisure centers.

The English Federation of Disability Sport (now known as [Activity Alliance](#)) offers a variety of inclusive training programs including practical workshops, PE training for teachers to teach an understanding of best practice inclusion.

A similar program is already being developed by DSR which could be expanded and run in partnership with Vicsport, Sport and Recreation Victoria and other State Sporting Organisations.

This training could be delivered face to face, online through webinars, and focus on all forms of disability, tailoring content to the audience being delivered to.

Celebrate excellence in the disability sport sector with awards and scholarship programs

By celebrating excellence, awards and scholarships will encourage the sector to strive for continuous improvement and ultimately deliver more relevant and high quality services and programs for people with disability.

Promote what's possible for people with disability

People with disability need to identify what is possible and available for them to become more active. This has been identified in Australian Sports Commission research as a key barrier and can be addressed via events such as the Victorian Disability Sport and Recreation Festival and the AAA Play first point of call referral service.

Enhance the promotion of disability sport through a greater focus on the Premier's Active April initiative

Each Victorian Government initiative supporting greater physical activity (such as the Premier's Active April Challenge) should consider how it can also promote greater participation for people with disability.

Potential outcomes

The outcomes of a greater investment in disability sport and recreation by the Victorian Government will be a healthier and happier, more active lifestyle for those with disabilities within Victoria.

Victorians with disability will improve their health and wellbeing through:

- A more positive outlook on life and a higher life satisfaction through increased physical activity.
- A population of people who will be better able to recover from illness or injury, reducing the potential risk of chronic disease and mental health problems.
- A more consolidated approach to disability sport, with organizations working in partnership to deliver key outcomes.

Victoria's economy will benefit through:

- Savings to the health budget because Victorians with disability are healthier
- Maintaining Victoria and Australia's competitive advantage as a Sporting Nation through improved sports infrastructure.
- Increased productivity and access to the NDIS service in Victoria.

Key issues and questions

- Gender focus has received an ‘activation’ campaign to address participation gaps - why not a focus on disability sport as participation rates are significantly lower?
- Potential participants are significant with one in five reporting to have a disability and current participation rates are low.
- Funding application requirements for disability sports organisations are high for the returns provided and should be streamlined.
- Expectations from organisations funded are for growth which is difficult to achieve with limited resources and funding.
- Disability may be ‘left out’ in the broader ‘inclusion’ funding to sport – focus is easier for a sporting body to focus on gender or CALCD communities.
- It’s difficult for people with disabilities to join local sports clubs or attend leisure centres if these environments have limited trained staff, access issues and a lack of support resources.
- The NDIS is unclear in how it can assist to deliver sport and recreation participation but is a significant opportunity. NDIS funding will not support all individuals with a disability or all disability organisations so ongoing specific sport and recreation funding outside of the NDIS will still be required.

Next steps

DSR is very interested to work with the Victorian Government to refine these initiatives to provide benefits to all Victorians in a collaborative and partnership approach and looks forward to further dialogue over coming weeks.