

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth)

Submission to
Valuing Sport and Recreation: A Framework for the Future

February 2017



20 February 2017

Strategic Framework
Sport and Recreation Victoria
Department of Health and Human Services
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To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Valuing Sport and Recreation

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) is pleased to respond to [Valuing Sport and Recreation](#), the Victorian Government's strategic framework for sport and recreation. The development of a new Framework is an important opportunity for the Government and its partners to articulate the role of sport and recreation in Victoria and to identify the complementary elements of a strong Victorian sector.

As the *Valuing Sport and Recreation* discussion paper notes, "sport and recreation is an integral part of Victoria's social and economic life". It improves liveability, creates employment, builds community cohesion, and is a key driver of better health and wellbeing.

VicHealth's clear mandate is to improve health and wellbeing. We work as part of Victoria's sport and recreation sector to achieve this aim and recommend that *Valuing Sport and Recreation* include a description of the unique and different contribution that VicHealth makes in sport and recreation. This should include how VicHealth complements and adds significant value to the Victorian Government's broader investments in sport and recreation. Under the *Tobacco Act 1987*, we are required to provide 30% of our annual appropriation to sporting bodies, which means sport and recreation is a key partner with VicHealth to improve health outcomes.

As part of VicHealth's unique approach to health promotion, we apply an innovation lens across our work. Innovation for VicHealth is about discovering how to accelerate health outcomes for Victorians. We do this by trialling new ideas to see if they work, collecting and disseminating the evidence, and then integrating new approaches to health promotion through policy and system change. Examples of our approach to [innovation in sport](#) are provided in our submission.

VicHealth has a long and positive track record of working with the sport and recreation sector to improve health and wellbeing across the Victorian community. Our experience shows that sport and

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recreation are key partners for change, working with VicHealth to improve health, to address barriers to participation for disadvantaged and marginalised groups, and to be at the forefront of public campaigns and policy change for gender equality and healthier choices.

Included with this letter is VicHealth's response to the *Valuing Sport and Recreation* discussion paper. We are keen to work collaboratively with Sport and Recreation Victoria as it develops the final Framework. This includes participating in future forums, sharing our insights and investment evaluations, and providing case studies that highlight best practice and new and innovative approaches to health and wellbeing through sport and recreation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jerril Rechter', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jerril Rechter
Chief Executive Officer

Introduction

VicHealth's unique role in promoting health and wellbeing through sport and recreation

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) was formed 30 years ago with the mandate to promote good health in Victoria. Under the *Tobacco Act 1987* we are required to provide 30% of our annual appropriations to sporting bodies. Because health and wellbeing is our focus, VicHealth's investments and partnerships are directed to achieve this aim – that is, to improve health and wellbeing through sport and recreation.

VicHealth's [Action Agenda for Health Promotion 2013-2023](#) has an ambition that one million more Victorians will have better health and wellbeing by 2023. We have a mix of investments in sport and recreation to help us achieve targets in five areas of focus: regular physical activity (including walking and active recreation), healthy eating, preventing tobacco use, preventing harm from alcohol, and improving mental wellbeing. We work with small and large organisations that deliver organised and non-organised sport and recreation and we partner with those who are committed to better health.

VicHealth also works with sport and recreation to reduce barriers experienced by disadvantaged and marginalised groups, to enable greater participation by women and girls, and to advance gender equality. These are important determinants of health and wellbeing. Through this approach, we help drive change to achieve better health for individuals, communities, and the broader Victorian population.

Challenges and opportunities

[Valuing Sport and Recreation's](#) background and discussion papers provide a clear overview of the challenges and opportunities in sport and recreation. This includes challenges associated with rapid population growth, people's growing preference to participate in non-organised sport and recreation, and the need to engage with people whose participation is lower than the state average. By overcoming these challenges, sport and recreation can play an important leadership role to improve health and wellbeing and to connect with population groups that currently miss out.

VicHealth's submission

In addition to our introductory comments that highlight the need for the final Framework to provide a comprehensive picture of the Victorian sport and recreation system and to describe VicHealth's unique role, our submission provides examples where we have worked in partnership with sport and recreation to promote health and wellbeing. This includes examples where VicHealth has:

- Formed partnerships with groups and local communities to transform public spaces into active places that are vibrant, welcoming and safe.
- Collaborated with sport and recreation facilities and venues to promote better health, including introducing healthy food and drink policies.
- Developed campaigns to encourage participation by women and girls.
- Introduced new funding guidelines to promote gender equality in sport for women and girls.
- Supported innovative approaches in sport and recreation to meet growing demand for more fun, social and flexible sport.
- Led and disseminated research findings to identify changing trends in participation.

VicHealth's response to the Valuing Sport and Recreation's five key questions

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

- As well as managing demand from population growth, Victoria's sport and recreation sector will need to manage demand associated with the changing needs and expectations of Victoria's growing and ageing population.
- Urban environments can be transformed to become safe, welcoming and vibrant places that encourage more people to participate in physical activity.
- There is a strong business case for sport and recreation facilities to offer healthier food and beverage choices.

As the *Valuing Sport and Recreation* background paper notes, Victoria's population is expected to double in the next four decades. Not only will this increase participation rates in organised and non-organised sport and recreation, but it will see more Victorians attending events as spectators and fans. Managing this growth is a key challenge for sport and recreation.

Victoria's sport and recreation sector will also need to manage demand associated with the changing needs and expectations of Victoria's growing and ageing population. This includes helping to promote health and wellbeing, removing barriers to participation faced by marginalised groups, and adapting to broader changes in society by providing opportunities for people to participate in less structured sport and recreation activities.

Earlier this year, the Victorian Government published [Health 2040: Advancing health, access and care](#), which highlighted the need for a greater focus on prevention. While *Health 2040* was largely concerned with the role of the health system, it identified the importance of creating healthy built environments, arguing:¹

"Where people live and spend time affects their health and wellbeing. The built environment, access to products and services, and having green and recreational space in neighbourhoods can make it easier to lead a healthy lifestyle."

This commitment is consistent with the Government's 2014 election policy, [Keeping it Liveable: Labor's Plan for Your Community](#), which highlighted the link between planning and health:²

"Labor will also make health a consideration in urban design. New design principles will encourage physical activity through walking, cycling and public transport use, helping people live healthy lifestyles".

VicHealth believes that sport and recreation and their partners can collaborate to support more people to participate in physical activity and to increase the availability of healthier food and beverage choices at venues and facilities where people participate and spectate. Two examples of our work to progress this are summarised below:

1. In 2015-2016 VicHealth worked with five Victorian councils – some which experience high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage – to transform unused or underutilised public spaces into places that were vibrant, welcoming and safe to provide opportunities for physical activity and social connection. This approach recognises that limited access to local places and spaces that are safe, accessible and inclusive is a barrier to physical activity.³ Through VicHealth’s [Community Activation Program](#), councils worked with local communities to transform spaces by providing a range of participation opportunities – including sport, art and active recreation – that attracted people to become more active. An evaluation found that members of the community felt these newly activated public spaces made it easier for them to be more physically active and socially connected. The evaluation highlighted the importance of gaining the support of senior council staff and key decision-makers at the beginning of the project, as well as allowing enough time in the planning phase, to ensure projects were developed and scoped with the right level of resources to bring them to fruition.⁴
2. VicHealth recognises that sport and recreation facilities and venues are important community places to promote better health. We have developed a [suite of resources](#) for sport and recreation groups and facilities, local governments, and health services that builds the case for the economic and public health benefits of implementing healthy food and drink policies. As well as the benefits to health, this recognises that it makes good business sense to cater for a growing segment of the population who care about their health.⁵ Alfred Health, the City of Melbourne, and YMCA Melbourne have been at the forefront of this work, demonstrating the positive business opportunities when retailers increase the availability and visibility of healthier options, such as water rather than soft drinks.

Consistent with this approach, VicHealth has worked with [Etihad Stadium](#) and [local governments](#)⁶ to install water fountains to promote and increase access to free drinking water. The [VicHealth Water Initiative](#) promotes water as the beverage of choice in sport stadiums and public spaces, including sports and recreation centres, sporting clubs, walking trails and open spaces. VicHealth is expanding this to community sport and club facilities through our [Water Initiative](#) grants to State Sporting Associations and local councils. This complements the Victorian Government’s work to promote healthy choices, including [Healthy choices: policy guidelines for sport and recreation centres](#) to improve the availability and promotion of healthier foods and drinks.

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

- There are a range of barriers that exclude people from participating in sport and recreation, particularly people from disadvantaged communities.
- Despite these barriers, there is a strong appetite for change with a particular focus on promoting greater participation by women and girls and gender equality through sport and recreation.
- Change can be supported and accelerated through policy and funding guidelines that set targets to drive broader and inclusive participation.

Despite all the evidence for physical activity, too many people miss out. Less than a third of Australians get enough physical activity for a health benefit and around a half of Australian adults, and four-out-of-five children, are insufficiently active or inactive. VicHealth research shows that barriers to participation in sport and recreation impact on people across [different life stages](#).⁷ These can be exacerbated when sporting organisations and groups are not welcoming or inclusive, and when environmental factors, including the built environment, act as a barrier to participation, including to walking and cycling.⁸

A VicHealth evidence review found that physical activity and sedentary behaviours (and their associated health outcomes) are socially distributed. Australians who are socially advantaged are more likely to be physically active and have fewer adverse health outcomes compared to those who are less socially advantaged.⁹ As *Valuing Sport and Recreation* notes, there are a range of groups, including women and girls, Aboriginal people, low income households, and people living with disabilities who are less likely to engage in sport and active recreation than the state average. Barriers to participation include discrimination, bullying, financial and transport costs, inaccessibility facilities, and family circumstance.¹⁰

On top of these barriers to participation, women and girls are less likely to participate in organised sport than men and boys (although women's participation in activities that are not competitive – such as walking – is higher than men).¹⁰ The 2015 [Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation](#) noted that “participation and leadership in the sport and active recreation sector is still culturally dominated by men and boys ... [which are] the result of deeply entrenched practices, cultural norms and stereotypes that are perpetuated and reinforced in our broader society”.¹¹

Despite a range of barriers to equal participation in sport and recreation, there is strong appetite for change. The *Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation* developed a vision where “women and girls in all roles in sport and active recreation are the norm and where females and males have the same choices and opportunities to lead and participate”.¹² Victoria's recently released [Gender Equality Strategy](#) notes that sport and recreation are not only critical to female empowerment and good health, but is also an important vehicle for change.¹³

VicHealth has had a strong focus on inclusive participation in sport. From 2011 to 2015, we partnered with 31 State Sporting Associations to enable organisational and cultural change at a state level to make sport more welcoming and inclusive. Under our [State Sporting Association Participation Program](#), organisations created safe, accessible, inclusive and equitable sporting

environments to increase participation among target groups, including women and girls, Aboriginal Victorians, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people with a disability. VicHealth's [Everyone Wins](#) framework underpinned this program.

From 2012 to 2015, VicHealth partnered with nine Regional Sports Assemblies to support the development of sustainable policies in rural and regional sporting clubs. Under the [Healthy Sporting Environments](#) Program, 250 clubs in regional and rural areas received support to improve club environments with a focus on: the responsible use of alcohol; healthy eating; reduced tobacco use; inclusion, safety and support; injury prevention and management; and UV protection. This pioneering program has given VicHealth an understanding of how health promotion can be weaved through grassroots sports clubs.

As a legacy from these two major investments, VicHealth has partnered with Vicsport to translate key learnings. Will also provide practical tools and resources for sporting clubs and organisations to help them replicate this work so they are more welcoming, inclusive and healthier environments.

VicHealth's [Changing The Game: Increasing Female Participation in Sport Initiative](#) has involved partnerships with six sports to create new ways to get thousands of Victorian females who are inactive and somewhat active to become more active through sport, as well as raising the profile of women's sport. These new opportunities were informed by the [evidence](#) for female participation in sport and physical activity.

Building on this work, VicHealth's recently announced [Changing Our Game – Advancing Gender Equality in Sport for Women and Girls Program 2017-2020](#) which will create new opportunities for female participation in sport. It will increase the profile of females in sport, and improve leadership so sports policy and practice is reformed to create inclusive environments for females. VicHealth has adopted a policy position that to be eligible for funding, State Sporting Associations, Regional Sporting Assemblies, and national and elite sporting organisations will be required to have a minimum of 40% female Board representation by July 2019.

While VicHealth has set guidelines and targets for gender equality, the sport and recreation sector has shown it can lead change to provide welcoming and inclusive environments. Last year's [AFL Pride Game](#), launched by the St Kilda Football Club and supported by VicHealth, demonstrated that sporting clubs can take a public stand to raise awareness and educate the community about the importance and benefits of being more inclusive for LGBTIQ supporters, players and officials.¹⁴

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

- Australians are increasingly choosing to participate in non-organised sport and recreation.
- Changing preferences present new opportunities for the sport and recreation sector.
- VicHealth and the sport and recreation sector collaborate to share insights on new ways to build sector capacity to address changing preferences.

The way Australians engage in sport and physical activity is changing. People are increasingly participating in non-organised sport and physical activity, including walking and cycling, while rates of participation in organised and team sports (with the exception of soccer) remain steady or are falling. These trends are driven by broader societal changes. Australians are working longer hours and their discretionary time for sport and leisure is fragmenting. People's awareness and concern for their health is rising and their response is to choose sport and recreation options that fit into their busy schedule. Participating in structured and organised sport (at a set time of the day, at a set day of the week) does not always meet people's needs. Hence, non-organised sport and physical activity is increasingly attractive.⁵

In line with these trends, VicHealth's investment in sport and physical activity is adapting to support the sector to meet growing demand for more fun, social and flexible sport. Our emphasis is on engaging Victorians who are inactive or somewhat active to become more active. As far as we are aware, VicHealth is the largest investor in social sport offerings in Victoria (and perhaps nationally). Our key investments include:

- [Innovation Challenge: Sport](#) – this program helps sporting organisations, in partnership with change-makers and innovators, to test new ideas and concepts to overcome barriers to participation in sport. The Challenge focuses on offering new options that are flexible and fun, with more places for more participants.
- [Changing The Game: Increasing Female Participation in Sport](#) – this initiative has been delivered in partnership with six sporting codes: AFL, tennis, netball, cycling, gymnastics and surfing. It aims to create tailored programs for woman and girls who do not normally participate in organised sport and to raise the profile of women's sport.
- [State Sport Program](#) – VicHealth has formed partnerships with 23 State Sporting Associations to break down some of the common barriers to participation in traditional sporting activities. The majority of sports are delivering new programs that are tailored to suit people who are less active to become more physically active. Five sports are working on projects to make healthier choices in sporting environments.
- [Regional Sport Program](#) – VicHealth works with the nine Regional Sports Assemblies to deliver new participation opportunities to encourage more people to become more active through sport. The program also works with clubs, leagues, sporting venues and local government to strengthen policy and practices to encourage communities to choose water as their beverage of choice.
- [Active Club Grants](#) – VicHealth provides funding to increase opportunities for Victorians to participate through community sport clubs. The current focus is on boosting female

participation and overall participation in social and modified forms of sport. Clubs can address these focus areas by creating new sports opportunities or by implementing an existing program created by a state or national sporting organisation.

Through this suite of investments VicHealth has partnered with sporting groups to develop 30 new social sport programs. These include: Rock Up Netball (Netball Victoria), Fit Football (Football Federation Victoria), Get into Cardio Tennis (Tennis Victoria) and Social Spin (Cycling Victoria). By investing in social sport offerings, we have identified several challenges and opportunities for sporting organisations. Sporting organisations are largely set up to offer traditional programs and competitions. The changing nature of participation means that for sporting organisations to be sustainable over the long term, they will need to develop new business models and products to attract new participants. If successful, this will attract new players, diversify revenue streams, and create new participation pathways.

To support the sector to address changing trends in the nature of participation in social sport, VicHealth and Vicsport have delivered the [Forward Thinking series](#) to help build the capacity of the sport and active recreation sector to address new participation trends and to respond to the changing business of community sport. We have developed a sound evaluation for all of our investments and publish and disseminate these results to support sport and recreation. Most recently, we recently [published learnings](#) from the initial round of the [Innovation Challenge: Sport](#) to support improved practice in innovation in participation in sport.

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

- Adapting to changing preferences for less formal and non-organised sport and recreation is key to the sector's long-term sustainability.
- VicHealth works collaboratively with sport and recreation to identify participation trends in sport and recreation.
- VicHealth also works with sport and recreation to share evidence and to develop new business models for participation which deliver health benefits to those who most need them.

As our response to Question 3 showed, Australian society is changing and with this has come the demand for less formal and non-organised sport and recreation. The capacity of Victoria's sport and recreation sector to respond to these changes is key to their sustainability.

VicHealth works closely with the sport and recreation sector to identify and address trends in sport and recreation. We work collaboratively with the sector to share information and research to ensure decision-making and planning is evidence based and takes into account threats and new opportunities. As well as sharing evidence, VicHealth has provided funding to the sport and recreation sector to introduce new approaches to participation. Again, our focus is to engage with people who are less physically active to improve their health and wellbeing.

VicHealth leads a range of important research projects to provide evidence to inform decision-making to grow participation in sport, recreation and physical activity. Recent examples of this research include:

- [VicHealth Indicators Survey](#) – this examines physical activity levels among Victorian adults, including different population and geographical groups.
- [Sport Participation Research Project](#) – a research partnership between VicHealth, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Victoria University and Federation University. The research measures sports participation across 11 sports, including trends over time, to provide an insight into participation levels and to help inform decision-making and investments.
- [Victorians' physical activity across life stages](#) – this research provided a market segmentation of Victorians aged 12 years and older to provide insights into key life-stages in relation to attitudes and opportunities to engage in physical activity.

As well as developing and sharing research and evidence, VicHealth supports the sustainability of sport and recreation by investing in new approaches to engage more Victorians to participate in sport and recreation. This includes new ways to play sport, opportunities to attract new players, and new ideas to diversify revenue streams. Examples of this work include:

- Providing start-up funding to pilot new and innovative approaches to participation that may not have otherwise occurred. This is achieved through our [Innovation Challenge: Sport](#) investment.
- Building the capacity of the sector through the [Forward Thinking series](#), which has a focus on the changing business of community sport.

- Supporting the design and delivery of new participation products, and new delivery and business models through our investments in the [State Sport Program](#).

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

- Elite sporting teams can promote health and wellbeing and influence positive social change by engaging with their supporters, members, sponsors and media networks.
- Elite sporting teams can take a leadership role to promote gender equality.
- Stadiums and facilities that host elite sporting competitions are important settings for health promotion, including non-smoking and healthier food and beverage options.

Elite sporting organisations and teams can play an important role to promote health wellbeing, through their wide network of supporters, members, sponsors and strong media presence. Realising this potential, VicHealth has partnered with a number of elite sporting teams to help expand the reach and resonance of our work, including promoting gender equality, and promoting water as the beverage of choice.

In 2015, we worked with a number of partners to help promote our H30 Challenge, an initiative where we ask Victorians to replace sugary drinks with water for 30 days. Partners included the [Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race](#), the Melbourne Stars and Melbourne Renegades as part of the [Big Bash League Season](#), and with AFL Victoria for the [2015 Peter Jackson VFL season](#).

Earlier this year, VicHealth [partnered with teams](#) from the AFLW, Women's Big Bash League and Women's National Basketball League to raise the profile of women's sport. Athletes from these sports pledged their support to VicHealth's [#ChangeOur Game](#) campaign, which aims to promote gender equality in sport. This is enhanced through VicHealth's future [Changing Our Game – Advancing Gender Equality in Sport for Women and Girls Program 2017-2020](#), which will increase the profile of women's sport, improve attitudes towards gender equality in sport, and promote new participation opportunities for women and girls.

Since 2014, [VicHealth](#) has supported the Western Bulldogs to help it deliver [Sons of the West](#), a community health initiative to support men living and working in Melbourne's west to lead healthier lives. By partnering with an elite sporting club (Western Bulldogs), the program is able to use the power and passion of football to reach and connect with men living in Melbourne's west.

As well as working with elite sporting organisations to help deliver health messages, VicHealth believes that sporting stadiums that host elite sport events and competitions are important settings to promote health and wellbeing. As highlighted previously in this submission, we have partnered with [Etihad Stadium](#) (and Yarra Valley Water) to promote water as the beverage of choice. Last year, this work was supported by promotion through a number of AFL teams that played at Etihad, including Essendon, St Kilda, Kangaroos and the Western Bulldogs.

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