



The contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring. A Swimming Australia perspective.

This brief submission is provided in good faith. Further information and detail will happily be provided upon request. While Swimming doesn't have the resources or reach of other National Sporting Organisations as far as numbers of elite athletes and indigenous pathway opportunities, we are certainly contributing to wellbeing in Indigenous communities.

What Swimming Australia Provides

Swimming Australia employs staff and contractors for the delivery of swimming to indigenous Australians. The programs focus on the NT central desert and QLD gulf areas. Regional swimming programs are delivered over a number of days and reach at least 15 remote communities per year.

All programs aim to increase the active swimming participation of able and disabled Indigenous Australians through in community delivery and training and a number of the target communities have been identified by COAG as remote service delivery communities.

Programs aim to create sustainable swimming programs within communities to ensure that swimming will have a strong ongoing presence. The Indigenous swimming programs include the provision of education and training in pool facility management; learn to swim teaching and coaching. This enables independence and ongoing support to meet the needs of community and encourage ongoing community engagement.

Up skilling individuals and communities in the development and delivery of swimming programs enables ongoing sustainable swimming programs to be conducted on a regular basis. Community members to not only participate in, they are also involved in the organising, and promoting of swimming as a physical recreation activity

Contribution to Wellbeing

There are several benefits of a targeted swimming program for Indigenous Australians:

A Skill for Life

In addition to providing an opportunity for physical exertion that promotes the health, wellbeing and fitness of participants, swimming is a life skill that can assist in reducing drowning. In Australia, drowning occurs at a higher rate in Indigenous populations than non-Indigenous populations. Swimming programs provide education on safety in and around water as well as teaching swimming skills and allowing these programs to continue long after contact has

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finished. Learning to swim is an activity that indigenous children enjoy immensely. Swimming is often used as a reward for education or other behavioural outcomes. Contact and instruction with teachers and instructors in an aquatic environment is very positive and barriers are broken down between white and indigenous society. When indigenous students achieving swimming skills self-esteem and motivation is greatly improved.

Assisting Closing the Gap Target – 1. To halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade

Health and Wellbeing

In-pool activities have been shown to reduce illness and hearing related health issues. Indigenous children have very high rates of skin lesions and glue ear. In some communities as many as 70 per cent of children have been found to have skin sores, at any one time*. Impaired hearing, a symptom of glue ear, can seriously affect performance at school, and social circumstances. Between 14 and 67 per cent has some degree of hearing loss*.

Swimming pool use in remote communities has been shown to reduce the prevalence of hearing loss and skin sores and other infections, which can result in long-term benefits through reduction in chronic disease burden as well as improved educational and social outcomes.

* Indigenous Environmental Health Report - Impact of Swimming Pools on Health of Aboriginal Children: <http://www.health.gov.au>

Swimming and partaking in fun and games in an aquatic environment is a great physical activity. Increasing the heart rate and activating motor skills and breathing control has long term health benefits for all participants.

Assisting Closing the Gap targets –

2. To ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities within five years.

3. To halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade

Swimming is for all

Swimming is considered a unique activity due to its ability to reach almost all Australians. The programs have the ability to cater for entire communities including people of all ages, both genders and can be enjoyed by people of all levels and abilities and people with disabilities are included. The programs also leave a legacy of swimming skills and the ability to continue the delivery of these important aquatic skills and activities.

Swimming Activities provide pathway opportunities including employment within Indigenous communities. Examples include Learn to Swim Instructors, Lifeguards, Pool Operators, Cashiers and Swimming Coaches. In turn, indigenous people who are employed at swimming pools become role models and mentors for the community.

Assisting Closing the Gap target - 5. To halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade

The instruction and delivery of programs in a structured environment provides structure for kids who live a mainly unstructured life. This structure assists with concentration, cooperation and has many other social benefits.

Young indigenous Australians are natural athletes. Sport provides a great outlet for their competitive nature, and given the right opportunities they will eventually succeed in the pool.

Sport, and in particular delivered swimming activities with all the additional swimming specific benefits greatly assist in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage and closing the gap. Swimming Australia is providing sustained commitment to assist in improving the lives of indigenous Australians through swimming education, training and delivery.

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