

Inquiry into Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia – Australian Government Office for Women

General statement

1. This submission covers Australian Government support for the increased participation of women in sport and recreation through the activities of the Office for Women (OfW). OfW is situated within the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and provides policy advice to the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues, on issues that affect women in Australia.
2. This submission is in addition to the comprehensive submission by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) that coordinates the Government's commitment and contribution to sport. The ASC provides national leadership in all facets of sport from the elite level through to the wider sporting community. The Women and Sport program of the ASC involves the research, identification and development of innovative policies, program and practises that address gender and equality issues in sport.
3. This submission includes research and programs funded through OfW to fulfil the Australian Government's commitment to strengthen and improve health outcomes for Australian women through greater involvement in physical activity and all aspects of sport, both as participants and administrators.
4. In order to effectively engage women in participation in physical activity, the gender differences in women's decisions as to what type of physical activity to engage in and why, as well as barriers to participation, must be acknowledged. It should be recognised that even a small increase in the level of physical activity can have major health benefits for women, particularly for mid-aged and older women.
5. The United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the major human rights treaty for women and was ratified by Australia in 1983. Article 13 of CEDAW expressly requires that women have the same rights as men "to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life" and Australia facilitates this by promoting non-discriminatory practices. OfW has responsibility for monitoring Australia's obligations under CEDAW. This includes preparation of Australia's report under the Convention and providing advice on new developments relating to CEDAW.

The Health Benefits of Women Participating in Sport and Recreation in Australia

6. There is excellent evidence that physical activity and physical fitness are associated with good health for both men and women. Physical activity reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, particularly coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, can help protect against some forms of cancer, strengthens the musculoskeletal system and can improve mental wellbeing¹. For women, increased physical activity can also assist with menstrual-problems, tiredness

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004, *Australia's Health 2004*, AIHW Cat.No.AUS44, p145.

and decrease the risk of osteoporosis². However, according to the Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) National Health Survey, 67% of males and 74% of females have an exercise level of sedentary or low³.

7. People who do lower-than-recommended levels of physical activity have an increased risk of mortality and morbidity from a range of diseases and conditions. Low levels of physical activity have been ranked second only to tobacco smoking, in terms of the burden of disease and injury from risk factors in Australia⁴.
8. Research shows, however, that even low to moderate levels of physical activity are associated with significantly better health outcomes than no activity at all. It suggests that encouraging women to take at least some exercise, as little as two moderate half-hour walks per week, is likely to improve well-being and reduce a range of symptoms. This is true not only for young and mid-age women, but for older women as well⁵.
9. Factors such as physical activity, not smoking and a healthy body weight are not only important in preventing major chronic physical diseases but also predict improvements in mental health. This is an additional reason for the continued promotion of a healthy lifestyle⁶.
10. The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH) found that depression among younger and mid-aged women is common among those who have low levels of physical activity and that depression often occurs with social disadvantage, unhealthy lifestyles, and social isolation⁷.

Study into the Impact of Physical Activity on Outcomes for Older Women

11. There is a growing body of literature that is exploring the impact of physical exercise on older women⁸. The research is indicating that physical exercise by older women has far greater impact than just the obvious physical outcomes and that there are also significant social and mental health benefits.
12. The Australian Government, through OfW, is currently funding research into the impact of physical activity on outcomes for older women using data from the ALSWH. This study will consider the impact and implications of physical activity, and lack of physical activity, on health and other outcomes for mid-age and older Australian women. It will provide a contemporary Australian context

² Brown, W.J., Mishra, G, Lee, C., and Bauman, A., 2000, "Leisure time physical activity in Australian women: Relationships with well being and symptoms", *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 71, pp206-216

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *National Health Survey: Summary of Results, 2004-05*, Cat.No.4364.0, p47.

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004, *Australia's Health 2004*, AIHW Cat.No.AUS44, p144.

⁵ Eg Brown, W.J., Mishra, G, Lee, C., and Bauman, A., 2000, "Leisure time physical activity in Australian women: Relationships with well being and symptoms", *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 71, pp206-216.

⁶ Women's Health Australia, 2005, Australian Longitudinal Study of Women's Health, *Achievement Reports 2005*, "Mental Health" fact sheet 0509.

⁷ Women's Health Australia, 2005, Australian Longitudinal Study of Women's Health, *Achievement Reports 2005*, "Mental Health" fact sheet 0509.

⁸ See for example Lee C & Russell A., 2003, "Effects of physical activity on emotional well-being among older Australian women: cross sectional and longitudinal analyses", *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 54(2), pp155-160. NSW Health, 1999, "Healthy Ageing and Physical Activity" State Health Publication No: (HP) 980195.

to the growing evidence linking older women's mental and physical health to exercise and explore the relationships between physical activity and social and economic participation.

13. Using the unique longitudinal nature of the ALSWH, the project will provide an analysis of women over 50 years old, their physical activities and how this relates to other aspects of their lives and health outcomes. The research will explore in greater depth mid-age and older women's physical activity and the difference it has made to those women's lives. It will also link with the Women's Activity Living Kits (WALK) pilot program (see below) that OfW is expecting to pilot in 2006.
14. A final report on the Impact of Physical Activity on Outcomes for Older Women is expected to be released in May 2007.

The Accessibility of Sport, Fitness and Recreation Activities for Women

15. The Australian Government recognises that women and girls are not a homogenous group, and can face many barriers to sport and physical activity depending on their social and cultural backgrounds and at different stages in their lives.
16. Studies also show that women are less likely than men to exercise and often cite time constraints as a major restricting factor⁹.
17. A nation wide time use survey conducted by the ABS¹⁰, found that males and females spent similar proportions of their day on free time activities¹¹, such as watching television, reading, sport and outdoor activity but there were differences in how their free time was spent. Males spent an extra 29 minutes per day on recreation and leisure activities (286 minutes per day) compared to females (257 minutes per day) and an extra 13 minutes per day on sport and outdoor activities (33 minutes per day) compared to females (20 minutes per day).
18. Most free time (85.5%) was spent on recreation and leisure. The most popular recreation and leisure activity was watching television and listening to music. Australians spend an average of 2 hours and 11 minutes per day on these activities. Just under half an hour (27 minutes per day) was spent on sport and outdoor activities.
19. Women are also more inclined to participate in non-organised sporting activities than organised sporting activities. For example the ABS survey of Participation in Sport and Physical Activities found 28.5% of women participated in an organised physical activity and 48.7% of women participated in a non-organised physical activity¹².

⁹ Brown, W.J., Mishra, G, Lee, C., and Bauman, A., 2000, "Leisure time physical activity in Australian women: Relationships with well being and symptoms", *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 71, pp206-216.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998, *How Australian's Use Their Time, 1997*, Cat.No.4153.0.

¹¹ These figures are based on main activities only which is defined by the ABS as the primary activity listed in the respondents Time Use Diary.

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, *Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, 2002*, Cat.No.4177.0, p13

20. The most popular non-organised physical activity for women was walking. The ABS found that nearly twice as many females (2.4 million) as males (1.3 million) walk for exercise. This represents a participation rate for females of 32.9% compared with 17.5% for males¹³.

Women's Active Living Kits (WALK) Programme

21. In the 2005-06 Budget, the Australia Government made a commitment to support and promote women's fitness through the establishment of a pilot walking program and the distribution of Women's Active Living Kits (WALK).
22. The WALK program recognises the diversity of women and their life experience. The program targets young and old women, mid-age women, women who are busy with careers and families, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) and Indigenous women. The program will be piloted in rural, metropolitan, remote and large regional centres.
23. Under the WALK program local community groups can apply for funding grants of \$1,500 to establish a walking program where their members aim to complete 10,000 steps every day. The groups will be provided with information about establishing a walking program, the importance of exercise for long-term health, and healthy eating, as well as pedometers to enable participants to monitor their progress.
24. The pilot of the WALK program includes an evaluation to provide insights into the most appropriate model for the further development of the WALK program. The evaluation will be informed by community based research, exploring and listening to what community providers and women's participant groups around Australia have to say about what works, and where, and the potential benefits to individuals and the broader community in adopting the WALK program. The WALK kit is a primary focus and will be a resource for people to use to help disseminate information about the program. The pilot program is expected to begin in the second half of 2006.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Women and Sport

25. People from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD) are under-represented in the numbers of people participating in sport and recreation, particularly in the case of CALD women. The ABS has found that women born in non-English speaking countries have significantly lower participation rates in sports and physical recreational activities (46.3%) than women born in Australia (63.6%) or born in main English-speaking countries (66.5%)¹⁴. Men born in non-English speaking countries had a participation rate in sport and physical activity of 56.0%¹⁵.
26. The Australian Government, through OfW, is undertaking research to examine how CALD women participate in sport activities such as coaching, playing, refereeing or administration. The project will also examine the characteristics of those CALD women who participate in sport and recreational activities (for example age, labour force status, education, number of years in Australia and

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, *Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, 2002*, Cat.No.4177.0, p15.

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, *General Social Survey: Summary Results, 2002*, Cat.No.4159.0, p54.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, *General Social Survey: Summary Results, 2002*, Cat.No.4159.0, p54.

language spoken at home) and the factors that may encourage or inhibit CALD women from participating in sporting or recreational activities.

27. This research will also feed into and advise policy designed to support and encourage CALD women to participate in sport and recreational activities, and better inform the Australian Government on how it can target CALD women to apply for sports leadership grants and to participate in sporting activities.

The Portrayal of Women's Sport in the Media

28. Despite some recent advances (eg media coverage of netball) women's sport remains under-reported in comparison to men's sport¹⁶. When women are reported they are often portrayed in ways that emphasise their physical attractiveness and sexuality.
29. The ASC point out that this is not limited to women, however the issue seems to be less contentious for men's sport¹⁷. This is an important issue when we consider the need for young girls to have positive role models and leaders in women's sport.

Women in Leadership Roles in Sport

30. Women are significantly under-represented in leadership and decision-making roles in the sports industry.
31. The Australian Government is committed to encouraging and supporting the involvement of women and girls in all aspects of sport. This includes as participants, administrators and in leadership roles. Sports organisations and clubs also need to be engaged in this important issue in order to encourage women to aspire and achieve leadership and decision-making positions within the industry.

Sports Leadership Grants for Women Programme

32. Since 2003, OfW, in partnership with the Australian Sports Commission, has jointly funded a grant program as part of the Australian Government's commitment to encourage females to undertake leadership opportunities in sport.
33. The Sports Leadership Grants for Women Programme, now in its third year of delivery, encourages women to further their professional development and to enter leadership and decision-making roles in administration, coaching or officiating.
34. With additional funding in the 2005-06 Budget, the Programme was expanded to focus on the following five categories:
- High Performance Coaching and Officiating;
 - Indigenous Women in Rural and Remote Communities;
 - Women in Disability Sport;

¹⁶ Australian Sports Commission, 2004, Women in Sport – Issues “*Media coverage of women in sport*”
<http://www.ausport.gov.au/women/fsmedia.asp>

¹⁷ Australian Sports Commission, 2004, Women in Sport – Issues “*Sexpoltation*”
<http://www.ausport.gov.au/women/fssex.asp>

- Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds; and
- General Sport Leadership.

35. Key objectives of the grants scheme are to:

- create opportunities for women in sport for the development of sport-specific leadership skills and knowledge acquisition;
- create opportunities for women, including women in disability sport, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and specifically Indigenous women for 2005, to undertake accredited sport leadership training in coaching, officiating, sport administration, sport governance and management;
- create opportunities for women's leadership development in rural and remote communities; and
- assist more women to participate in high performance coaching and officiating education and development opportunities.

36. The program provides successful applicants with a one-off grant of up to \$5,000 for individuals (applications must be endorsed by an incorporated organisation) and up to \$10,000 for incorporated organisations.

37. In 2005, the Sports Leadership Grants for Women Programme underwent an evaluation to assess the outcomes and benefits of the grant program in relation to women's leadership development. The Evaluation found that the 2005 Sport Leadership Grants for Women Programme successfully achieved its objective to provide opportunities for women in Australia to develop their leadership by acquiring accredited sport leadership training. The evaluation also found that the acquisition of new knowledge and skills has increased women's capacity to lead within their sport and has given them the confidence to further develop their leadership.

38. The 2005 Sports Leadership Grants funded 192 projects totalling \$400,000. Based on the grant recipients' applications, 4,596 women benefited directly from the grants (247 women from individual grants and 4,349 women from organisation grants).

39. For more information on the Sports Leadership Grants for Women Program see <http://www.ausport.gov.au/women/grants.asp>.

Women's Leadership and Development Programme Project and Capacity Building Grants

40. The Australian Government, through OfW also administers the Women's Leadership and Development Programme Project and Capacity Building Grants that aim to provide funding to non-government women's groups to strengthen the voice of women, improve the status of women and contribute to policy areas that affect women in Australia.

41. Funding components are available to significant projects and research relevant to current women's issues and to the Government's strategic goals for women, as well as funding for smaller capacity building projects that strengthen an organisation's effectiveness and increase its capacity to contribute to the development of public policy.

42. Examples of grants that have been provided from 2000-2006 to national organisations relating to women's sport are as follows:
- National Foundation for Australian Women - \$35,840 for Australian Women and Sport within the Australian Women's Archives Project;
 - Australian Womensport and Recreation Association - \$25,000 for Organisational Strategic Planning;
 - Australian Netball Association Ltd - \$25,000 for capacity building;
 - Australian Women's Motorsport Network – \$25,000 for mentoring women in the motorsport and automotive industry; and
 - Womensport Australia - \$6,000 for a national database to advance women in sport leadership. It will assist in promoting suitably qualified women into sports leadership and senior management positions.

Summary

43. The Australian Government recognises the benefit that sport and physical activity has to women's health, both physically and mentally and particularly to older women. The government also recognises the benefits to women by participating in all aspects of sport and physical activity.
44. The Australian Government provides funding for programs and research specifically focussed on encouraging more women to participate in all aspects of sport and physical activity and promotes leadership opportunities.
45. Women's preferences in the type of sport or physical activity they participate in must be considered as well as acknowledging time constraints associated with their paid and unpaid work responsibilities/household situations.