

Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia

Submission from Department of Sport and Recreation WA and the
Premier's Physical Activity Taskforce

Terms of Reference

a. the health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation activities

The importance of physical activity¹ is critical for all members of the community and because women's participation levels are lower than those of men, addressing inactivity through women's participation in sport and recreation is essential.

b. the accessibility for women of all ages to participate in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities, with additional reference to state and federal programs, including

There are many well-documented studies² of the barriers to physical activity; the most common listed being:

1. Lack of time
2. No motivation
3. Poor health
4. Too old
5. Active enough
6. Childcare commitments

More women than men report lack of time and childcare as barriers.

¹ McCormack, G., Milligan, R., Giles-Corti B., and Clarkson, J.P. (2003) Physical Activity Levels of Western Australians 2002: Results from the adult physical activity survey and pedometer study Perth, Western Australia: Western Australian Government p13
Electronic copy of report attached to email

² Booth, M.L., Bauman, A., & Owen, N. (2002). Perceived barriers to Physical Activity Among Older Australians. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, 2002(10), 271-280.

Amongst older adults (55+) the most top five reported barriers after “already sufficiently physically active” are:

1. have an injury or disability (men 38% vs women 27%);
2. poor health (23% vs 14%);
3. too old (19% vs 24%);
4. don't have enough time (18% vs 15%); and
5. I'm not the sporty type (14% vs 25%).

Women were found to be more likely than men to report being too old and not being the sporty type; women's barriers appeared to reflect their self-image whilst men's barriers appeared to reflect their health.

i. [the number of women actively participating in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities](#)

Figures from the Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey 2004³ indicate that adult participation in organised activities has remained stable both in WA and nationally for the period 2001-2004. In WA adult female participation rates are very slightly higher in 2004 (43% for women compared to 42.4% for men). However, 57% of women are not participating in organised activities. Participation rates for adolescent girls are of particular concern. Women do often participate in alternative forms of physical activity such as dance; many teenage girls are not interested in competitive sport.

ii. [characteristics of women not participating in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities \(including , for example, socio-economic strata, age, women with a disability, Indigenous or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse \(CALD\) women\)](#)

The WA study, (McCormack et al 2003)⁴ demonstrates links between marital status, education, employment and location (metropolitan/regional); those of lower socio-economic stats being less likely to be sufficiently active. Those with home duties were amongst the least likely to be physically active.

In 2004 the Department of Sport and Recreation WA (DSR) undertook a Women in Sport Regional Needs Analysis which found that there were a number of barriers to participation including:

- cost of activities;
- the quality of cycle paths;
- inadequate shower/change facilities; and
- difficulty in getting motivated to participate.

³ Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport 2004: annual report 2004. (2005) Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport p48

⁴ McCormack et al, op.cit., p24-25

Enablers to participation included:

- having a wide range of activities to choose from and a variety of skill levels
- feelings of safety while participating
- the availability of secure and comfortable venues

iii. [constraints, including strategies to overcome the constraints that may prevent these women from participating](#)

Constraints of cost, access to facilities, childcare (at facilities), and time of day activities are offered all influence the participation levels of women.

iv. [the effectiveness of current state and federal grant programs that encourage women to participate](#)

These are perceived to be inadequate and ineffective as there has been no visible change in women's participation in physical activity; numbers are not increasing and frequency is dropping. There has been a lack of commitment and funding. A systemic approach to attracting women to participate in physical activity is required with a clear purpose to increase grass roots participation.

DSR's sport and recreation community grants scheme recently provided two grants for programs primarily targeting women. The effectiveness of these programs will be measured on completion.

The programs are:

A grant provided to the Town of Vincent to implement the Walking Talking Women Program that will enable currently inactive women to participate in a range of enjoyable exercise activities for a school term. Activities include gym circuits, weights programs and water-based activities.

A small grant provided to the Fremantle Women's Health Centre for the Exercise Program for Older Women, Women from CALD backgrounds and Women with Young Children.

An evaluation of DSR's Women's Participation Program 2004/05 (supported by Healthway) found that the programs appeared to have a beneficial effect on the participants' level of motivation and self-confidence to participate in their chosen activity. Participants' body image also appeared to shift in a positive direction following the program.

DSR is currently exploring further initiatives to address participation levels of CALD women.

Higher levels of funding would allow such programs to be offered more widely.

v. [the retention and attrition trends of grass roots participation, including comparisons with male athletes at a similar level](#)

Resources are required to collect retention data which is not currently available.

- vi. the remuneration, recruitment, retention and attrition of elite female athletes, including comparisons with elite male athletes

Between the genders, this is no comparison in terms of media exposure and sponsorship support; resources for women are significantly fewer. Although training requirements are the same for male and female athletes and all have to travel to compete in high level competition, the remuneration is significantly less for women with the possible exception of tennis and golf.

- vii. retention of athletes competing in senior and open age state and national sporting competitions, with possible strategies to retain female competitors in elite and sub-elite competition

Team retention rates have improved across sports. More strategies are required to maintain women's participation at sub-elite levels given there is a ceiling on numbers in elite levels.

- viii. opportunities and barriers for national team members and competitors in international competition

The barriers include work, career, family and time away. There is reasonable access to competition opportunities but whether women take up the opportunities depends on the extent to which barriers are addressed.

- ix. the financial status, success and viability of women's national league competitions, including strategies to improve these factors

National leagues are not viable. More funding is needed for the regionally isolated participants, e.g. fare equalisation policies. Whilst few WA-based national league teams are independently financially viable, there is also a wide gap in sponsorship opportunities between male and female sports.

c. the portrayal of women's sport in the media, including:

- i. the role of the government to regulate and review the coverage of women's sport in the media (print, radio and electronic)

This is a serious issue for government; self-regulation and market forces are not delivering coverage of women's sport.

- ii. the influence of pay television on the coverage of women in sport

This is potentially a positive; as men's sport moves increasingly to pay TV there may be more time for women's sport on free-to-air programming.

- iii. the promotion and publicity of women's National League competitions
- iv. the financial status and success of women's national leagues.

Coverage of sports should be merit-based. Lack of media exposure time limits women's sports access to sponsorship support.

In WA the alliance of WA Netball and the Westcoast Eagles is a strategic positioning, using the system to help promote the women's team.

- v. strategies to improve the amount and quality of media coverage for women's sport

Women are now more visible/numerous as reporters but women sports editors are needed to help balance coverage.

d. women in leadership roles in sport, including;

- i. the number and proportion of women in coaching, administrative and officiating roles

In 2003, there were 15 204 coaches in Western Australian State sporting Associations, of whom 25% were female. Similarly of the 14 222 officials in 30% per cent were female.⁵ A breakdown by sports to show the number of female coaches in women's sports etc. would be revealing but this data is not currently available.

Research is needed to determine why women do not take up coaching and officiating roles.

- ii. the issues associated with women in leadership roles in both elite and grass-roots activities

The same barriers exist here as those for participation. There is a lack of flexibility in arrangements to accommodate career breaks. There needs to be more recognition of non-workplace acquired skills; job sharing; merit selection; and training.

⁵ Department of Sport and Recreation (2004) State Sporting Associations in Western Australia in 2003: an indicative snapshot

iii. trends and issues for women in organisational leadership roles

Access to ongoing training and professional development for women is required. Women should be seen to be supporting women as educators and mentors. There needs to be more training directed to women about roles, responsibilities and rights.

iv. strategies to improve the numbers of women in coaching, administration and technical roles.

More flexible access and training would encourage more women into these roles.

As part of DSR's Women's Participation Program (supported by Healthway) regional women's coaching workshops are implemented to provide professional development support to regional female coaches. Topics covered in the workshops include assertive communication and time management.

DSR is currently developing a leadership program as part of its overall industry training and development program.

Funding to sports should be on the basis of meeting policy position requirements, e.g. if the composition of boards is not gender-balanced, government funding should be withheld.

At every level there is a need to reinforce requirements with accountability and funding tied to strategies to increase women's participation.

ATTACHMENTS

Document attached to email:

McCormack, G., Milligan, R., Giles-Corti B., and Clarkson, J.P. (2003) *Physical Activity Levels of Western Australians 2002: Results from the adult physical activity survey and pedometer study* Western Australian Government, Perth, WA

Hands, B., Parker, H., Glasson, C., Brinkman, S. & Read, H. (2004) *Physical activity and Nutrition Levels in Western Australian Children and Adolescents: Report*. Western Australian Government, Perth, WA (and [summary report](#))

McCormack, G., & Watt, S. (2003) Results from the 2002 Western Australian Adult Physical Activity Survey: Key Findings for Gender (Fact Sheet No. 28). Western Australian Government, Perth, WA

Department of Sport and Recreation (2006) *FactsandStats: Active Women* Western Australian Government, Perth, WA

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