



Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries

Submission to the Sustainable Health Review – Sport and Recreation (WA)

Western Australia has a strong health system but it does not operate in isolation. It must constantly evolve and adapt in a marketplace that is rapidly changing. Greater leadership, policy development, advocacy and resourcing are urgently required to be applied to preventative health initiatives from the State Government.

The compilation and roll out of Preventative Health initiatives needs to:

- Ensure stronger advocacy, leadership and importance to preventative health;
- Enable a stronger health sector commitment to be collaborative, to co-invest and partner with other Government portfolios to promote an active lifestyle;
- Place ‘active lifestyles’ as a critical part of Western Australia’s preventative health strategy; and
- Lead an integrated statewide plan, sitting across multiple sectors such as health, education, planning, transport, and sport.

Prevention through Physical Activity

Sport continues to make a significant contribution to the physical activity levels of Australians. However, sport is a subset at one end of the physical activity continuum. Also on that physical activity continuum is a range of other subsets:

- Physical activity in the home setting.
- Physical activity in the workplace setting.
- Physical activity in the school setting.
- Physical activity in commuting.
- Physical activity in a range of recreational settings.

From a strategic perspective, organised sport has relatively high market penetration in children, youth and young adults and naturally tapers in life stage. Whilst there remains some scope for increasing participation rates in sport, there remains considerable upside growth and interest in the fitness, outdoor recreation and community recreation sectors.

Promoting physical activity is not just a ‘health thing’ even though there are health benefits. Western Australia needs an approach that would involve the community as well as those who make decisions about urban planning, transport, environment and sustainability and education.

To limit promotion of sport and recreation to improved physical health messages fails to recognise the added value it delivers to our community. Involvement in sport and recreation:

- Builds stronger networks and social capital in communities.
- Builds confidence and resilience in communities.
- Builds social inclusion through creating new relationships.
- Supports better physical and psychological wellbeing.
- Contributes to preventing at-risk behaviour.
- Improves mental health.

There is credible research literature supporting all the above claims. **Physical activity does matter in our society and it urgently needs a stronger advocacy case** that goes beyond the promotion of better physical health. All of the above benefits will have a positive effect on the general health of Western Australians, and therefore the sustainability of the health system.

The industry requires a stronger policy and advocacy intent to reinforce physical activity as a core element of the desired healthy active West Australian lifestyle (for the social, economic and health benefits derived).

Behaviour Change

A shift in paradigm regarding message recall (advertising) is required to increase physical activity levels. Behaviour change programs are gaining far better results and the old way of just telling people they need to be more active isn't working. For example, the Your Move project. Your Move is a joint initiative of the WA Departments of Transport and (former) Sport and Recreation and local councils which gets more people walking, riding bikes, using public transport and taking part in local sport and active recreation opportunities. The program provides personalised phone coaching, tools and support to motivate households to set goals and increase their daily activity through sport, recreation and active transport. Active people spend more time out in the community which not only creates a sense of connectedness but it also means our local sport and active recreation clubs benefit from increased participation levels.

Education

Fundamental movement skills (FMS) such as running, throwing and jumping are necessary for a variety of activities and exercises. FMS proficiency is associated with increased physical activity in young people, and has a positive association with aerobic fitness and lower body weight. This suggests that developing proficiency in movement skills may have important health implications for young people.

A large proportion of young people, however, do not attain proficiency in fundamental movement skills during their primary school years. This may make it difficult for them to participate in the full range of physical activities both in childhood and throughout their lives.

Whilst parents have the major role in ensuring their children get enough physical activity, schools are an important venue for physical activity, including organised sport. Research indicates that schools and early childhood centres can make a big difference to children's physical activity participation and fitness.

Even though the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia has a specific emphasis on play-based learning, and government authorities acknowledge its importance, in practice, the Early Childhood Australia has identified there is a significant trend away from the provision of child-directed play in early childhood education, particularly in the early years of schooling

Collaboration with the education sector is required to improve the physical literacy of children and ensure consistent physical activity in schools. This is a critical space for the Government in ensuring that physical literacy is a key component of our education system now and in the future.

Low Participation Groups

Targeted interventions are required to increase participation in groups with traditionally lower participation levels. These target populations include:

- Lower socio-economic
- Indigenous
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
- Remote and rural
- People with disability

A Preventative Health strategy should target those that are not physically active with additional resources, inadvertently contributing to the social policy agenda. Extra money would be required to achieve this, not diminution of current meagre preventative health funding. However, progress in England and other countries shows that the most effective way to increase the benefits associated with increased physical activity is to target those that are currently least active and change their behaviours.

Sport and Recreation Participation

The Australian volunteer based community sport and recreation delivery system was built from the ground up, not the top down. The delivery system provides the most cost-efficient model (and one envied internationally) on offer and delivers superior community development and social capital value-add. Communities do not develop from the 'top-down'; they build from the 'inside out' and our current community system feeds off and develops our community at the same time.

The best strategic approach going forward is to invest in backing the existing community-based sport and recreation system. There is no 'silver bullet' solution to this task. It requires scrutiny of the range of challenges and constraints on the current delivery system and methodical development of a long-term strategic plan to overcome and or adapt to these challenges.

Public Open Space

The equitable provision of quality active sporting and recreation public open spaces (POS) plays a vitally important role in the development of cohesive and resilient communities. POS also supports activity to maximise health and mental health and to improve law and order and education outcomes. The issue of equitable access to quality POS is equally of concern

to communities in the inner and middle urban residential areas and to the outer growth areas across the Perth and Peel regions.

A long-held concern expressed by local governments and peak industry sporting groups is that State government urban development policies including Liveable Neighbourhoods, Water Sensitive Urban Design and Bush Forever are failing to deliver sufficient usable quality POS. They also warn of enduring multi-generation consequences across the Perth and Peel regions, should decisive action not be taken now to address the POS shortage issue.

Sport and Recreation (WA) engaged the Curtin Centre for Sport and Recreation Research to research and test these views on the POS provision issue. The research concluded that there is a growing gap between the provision of quality public open space sporting and recreational pursuits that has become significantly more pronounced as an unintended consequence of State government urban development policies.

Population growth resulting from densification policy in the inner and middle areas will lead to increasing pressure on already limited spaces water supply options and facilities. Many residents are forced to travel to already over-utilised middle urban POS facilities as a consequence of an existing shortfall of POS in outer growth suburbs. The research also recommended that the most effective way to respond in the outer growth corridors is the development of regional open space.