

AUSTRALIAN CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION ALLIANCE



Consultation on the National Sports Plan

The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (ACDPA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and provide input to the development of a National Sports Plan.

ACDPA brings together Cancer Council Australia; Diabetes Australia; National Heart Foundation of Australia; Kidney Health Australia; and the Stroke Foundation. These leading non-government health organisations share a commitment to reduce the growing incidence of chronic disease in Australia attributable to modifiable risk factors.

ACDPA members work together in the primary prevention of chronic disease, with an emphasis on changes to the food and physical environments to improve nutrition, increase physical activity and decrease sedentary behaviour, and reduce unhealthy weight at a population level.

The burden of physical inactivity and benefits of physical activity

Despite the common perception that Australia is a sporting nation, almost half of Australian adults are not sufficiently active for health benefits and 80% of children and young people do not meet the national physical activity recommendations every day.¹ Recent research indicates that the prevalence of physical inactivity has remained high over two decades and health efforts to improve physical activity amongst Australian adults have been ineffective.²

On its own, physical inactivity contributes to 30% of endocrine diseases (including diabetes), 21% of cardiovascular disease, and 6.4% of cancers.³ Meanwhile, physical activity can prevent unhealthy weight gain and maintain or improve blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels.⁴ Physical activity also has a protective effect against certain cancers.⁵

Prevention through physical activity

ACDPA supports the inclusion of *Prevention through physical activity* as a key pillar of the National Sports Plan. However, physical activity encompasses much more than participation in organised sports and greater recognition is needed to integrate exercise and movement into Australians' lives for an active and healthy population.

ACDPA encourages the government to develop a funded National Physical Activity Plan in tandem with the National Sports Plan. Such a strategy is essential to harness cross-sectoral engagement and commitment to create environments conducive to physical activity and sport, through urban planning policies, opportunities to be active at work and in the community, support for active transport, and increasing participation by under-represented groups.

ACDPA is also concerned about the prevalence of unhealthy food, beverage and alcohol sponsorship of Australian sport governing bodies at the state/territory and national level, and its impact on children. Enabling elite and community sports to be independent of unhealthy

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food, beverage and alcohol sponsorship would better align sport delivery bodies and health promotion organisations, and protect children from the promotion of unhealthy products.

1. Participation

How do we make sport and physical activity part of everyone's daily routine?

ACDPA supports a greater emphasis on the important contribution of physical activity in increasing Australians' activity levels, beyond organised sports.

Cross-sectoral engagement and leadership at the federal, state/territory, and local levels are essential to create an environment conducive to sport and physical activity. The Heart Foundation's *Blueprint for an active Australia*⁶ acknowledges the federal government's role in developing a National Physical Activity Plan, providing sustainable funding, research, monitoring and evaluation, maintaining current physical activity guidelines, and facilitating cross-sector engagement.

At the state and territory level, engagement across departments (including health, education, planning, transport, and sport and recreation) is crucial to support changes to the physical environment and to integrate physical activity and sport into everyday life. This includes investment in walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure, urban planning policies, physical education and sport in schools, health promotion policies and programs, and sport and recreation programs and services.

Local government involvement and engagement focuses on service provision and maintaining infrastructure to support sport and physical activity, including walking and cycling paths, sport and recreation facilities, parks and open spaces.

How can sports better reach under-represented groups?

Low physical activity participation rates are associated with lower socioeconomic status, higher body mass, remoteness and Aboriginality. Inequities in participation arise from a range of factors, including limited access or poor-quality facilities, financial constraints, and lack of social support or social/cultural norms.⁷ Evidence suggests that an individual's physical environment can influence their physical activity levels. Environments that are 'walkable', characterised by higher residential density, street connectivity, availability of footpaths and perceptions that the environment is safe are associated with decreased obesity and higher levels of physical activity.^{8,9} Similarly, environments designed to facilitate active transport including cycling and public transport, are associated with increased physical activity.¹⁰ Therefore, it is critical that policies and planning regulations relating to housing and urban design and development, as well as transport infrastructure, ensure that physical environments encourage and support people to be more physically active.

What is the role of non-traditional sport providers in helping to increase participation in sport?

Non-traditional sports offer alternate avenues for participation for those would not have the required skill sets or interest in playing mainstream sports. They also make sports

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participation more equitable for a wider cross-section of the community, through engaging and involving cultural, social and geographical minority groups.

How do we increase sport participation in the schooling years to maximise physical literacy and establish good habits for life?

Four in five children and young people do not meet the physical activity recommendations on a daily basis.¹¹ The mandatory delivery of high-quality physical education lessons from K-12 (totalling between 120-180 minutes per week) focusing on life-long engagement in physical activity and sport, mastery of fundamental movement, sports skills and physical literacy is essential to increase participation in the schooling years.¹² An emphasis on the health benefits of physical activity rather than sporting proficiency is an important consideration to maximise the establishment of life-long habits for those children who are not considered 'sporty'.

In addition, increasing physical activity in children and young people requires funding to enhance community and school/preschool infrastructure (e.g. playgrounds and parks) and support for active transport to school and for recreation (e.g. improved walking and cycling facilities).¹³ A 2015 Australian survey reported that 70% of people support an increase in government funding to improve infrastructure for cycling, walking and public transport.¹⁴

2. Prevention through physical activity

How do we ensure that the key benefits of sport and physical activity such as physical and mental health, personal wellbeing and community cohesion are promoted by governments and the community?

ACDPA supports funding for a sustained mass media campaign to boost awareness of the benefits and encourage Australians to be physically active. Mass media is effective in increasing awareness and setting a community agenda around physical activity.¹⁵ It has the potential to inform, remind, motivate and support health-related changes, when based on sound theory and research and combined with community activities. A mass media campaign should be sensitive to the needs of different groups, and be adequately funded for sustained messaging and impact.

At a national level, maintaining up-to-date, evidence-based physical activity guidelines is important to inform health professionals and the community of the recommended levels of physical activity and associated health benefits. The World Health Organization recommends appropriate physical activity guidelines for adults and children, and dissemination and promotion in a simple, understandable and accessible manner.¹⁶

There is also opportunity for governments to lead by example in promoting physical activity in federal, state/territory and local workplaces. Interventions to support active workplaces include: policies encouraging and incentivising physical activity, facilities to support active transport and exercise, and education on the benefits of being active.¹⁷

How do we use the reach and influence of sport to get more people active – especially people with sedentary lifestyles?

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The media plays a key role in bringing sport to the Australian public and can be utilised to extend the reach and influence of sport to get people more active. Funded, sustained mass media campaigns encouraging physical activity, supported by community interventions, could be promoted through sports media to reach those with sedentary lifestyles.

How do we ensure sport delivery bodies and health promotion organisations work together as effectively as possible to improve population health?

A Ministerial or Prime Ministerial leadership group/advisory council on physical activity could be an option to advise on the development of a funded National Physical Activity Plan in parallel with the National Sports Plan, and facilitate high-level collaboration among sports bodies and health promotion organisations. Such a leadership group could include, as a minimum, sport, health, transport/infrastructure, education, academic and non-government (health and sport) representation.

ACDPA is concerned about the prevalence of unhealthy food, beverage and alcohol sponsorship of Australian sport governing bodies at the state/territory and national level, and its impact on children.¹⁸ Children are exposed to vast amounts of unhealthy food, beverage and alcohol marketing through elite and community sports sponsorship. Research indicates that children can match sports with food sponsors¹⁹ and recall sponsors of their favourite elite sports.²⁰ Many elite athletes believe they should not promote unhealthy foods, but are concerned that sponsorship restrictions could impact funding.²¹ In children's sports development programs, around 90% of food and beverage sponsors are classified as unhealthy (e.g. McDonald's, Schweppes, and Milo).²² While food and beverage companies contribute a relatively small proportion of total junior sports club funding (less than a quarter of overall income), food company support or sponsorship can encourage brand loyalty towards products from a young age.²³ Evidence shows that food marketing to children generates positive beliefs about the advertised products, and influences food preferences, purchasing requests and consumption, as well as dietary habits and health statuses.^{24,25,26}

Enabling elite and community sports to be independent of unhealthy food, beverage and alcohol sponsorship would better align sport delivery bodies and health promotion organisations. Regulatory guidelines should be established to protect children by limiting sports sponsorship by companies promoting unhealthy food, beverage and alcohol products.²⁷ A sports sponsorship replacement fund could be established through government or industry contributions to provide monetary incentives for sporting organisations to establish relationships and transition to other sponsors.²⁸

3. Performance

No comment.

4. Integrity

No comment.

5. Major Sporting Events

No comment.

6. Governance

No comment.

7. Sporting Infrastructure

No comment.

8. Sources of funding, including a national good causes lottery

Given governments have limited budgets how should they allocate funding across high performance and community sport?

Any National Sports Plan must address the imbalance of funding to high performance sports compared to high participation sports. The allocation of funding to high performance sport is 4-5 times that devoted to participation in sport. The Crawford Report highlighted the bias towards funding Olympic sports which makes little sense for Australia. It provided the example of more government funds allocated to archery than cricket, which has more than 100 times the number of participants.²⁹ The report also found that the focus has been on winning medals while participation or 'grass roots' sport has been comparatively under-funded. In order for sport to play a role in contributing towards better health outcomes through physical activity, participation must be a priority.

The majority of national sports organisations are well resourced and have the capacity to deliver services to the community. Recent research published looking at the effectiveness of UK Government investment in sport as a public health intervention found no evidence that sports participation can sustainably increase physical activity participation among the less and least active.³⁰ Government funds could be better utilised on proven evidence-based interventions for increasing physical activity in the population.

In recognition of limited budgets, ACDPA notes that there are opportunities for government to generate revenue and improve health through changes to the taxation of unhealthy products, including a health levy on sugar-sweetened beverages and volumetric taxation of all alcoholic beverages. A health levy on sugar-sweetened beverages is supported by the public and estimated to generate revenue of \$400-\$500 million each year while reducing consumption by 12-15%.^{31,32} There is strong public support (84%) for revenue from a health levy on sugar-sweetened beverages being used to fund initiatives encouraging children's sport.³³

Introducing a volumetric tax (i.e. based on alcohol volume) at the existing rate for spirits could increase revenue by more than \$3 billion and reduce consumption by 24%.³⁴ Alternatively, replacing the existing Wine Equalization Tax with a volumetric tax on wine could increase revenue by \$1.3 billion per year and reduce alcohol consumption by 1.3%.³⁵ Around 44% of public support increased alcohol taxation with revenue funding health, education and the cost of treating alcohol-related programs.³⁶

Conclusion

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In conclusion, ACDPA calls for greater emphasis on physical activity as part of the National Sports Plan and the development of a funded National Physical Activity Plan with multi-sectoral engagement at the federal, state/territory and local levels to create an environment conducive to physical activity and sport in everyday life.

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