



Submission to Victorian State Disability Plan 2017-2020

Disability Sport & Recreation Submission to Victorian State Disability Plan 2017-2020

Disability Sport & Recreation (DSR), the peak body for disability sport and recreation in Victoria, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to support the development of the Victorian State Disability Plan 2017-2020 (VSDP).

DSR congratulates the Victorian Government for continuing to invest in policies, programs and services that seek to improve the lives for all Victorians with a disability.

Our mission is to deliver improved health for all Victorians with a disability through participation in sport and recreation, making us well placed to contribute to fulfilling the Victorian Government's vision to ensure that people with a disability participate fully in everyday life creating a better Victoria for people with a disability.

People with a disability participate in sport and recreation at levels far lower than the general population. Insufficient physical activity consistently rates as a major contributing risk factor that increases risk of developing disease.¹

Consistent with this, people with a disability have significantly lower health outcomes, are over-represented in life-style type chronic diseases and suffer poorer mental health outcomes.² People with a disability experience higher rates of premature death from causes other than their disability³, again reflecting the disproportionate burden of disease on this cohort.

This is no coincidence.

Our submission highlights a number of areas of focus and opportunity that could ultimately assist both DSR and the Victorian Government to achieve their respective visions.

In order for the VSDP to meet its goals, DSR has the following key responses. Each of the responses and recommendations are further elaborated on in this paper.

1. Participation in everyday life must include participation in sport and active recreation
2. Sport and active recreation are protective factors for both physical and mental health
3. Greater understanding and evidence of participation of people with a disability in community and civic life is needed
4. Investment is required to reduce barriers to participation for people with a disability
5. Participation in sport and active recreation is empowering and leads to optimal health, a basic right for all Victorians, regardless of their ability

¹ See, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Risk factors to health' < <http://www.aihw.gov.au/risk-factors/>>

² See Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016. Health status and risk factors of Australians with disability 2007–08 and 2011–12. Cat. no. DIS 65. Canberra: AIHW

³ See, for e.g., Valarie L Forman-Hoffman, Kimberly Ault, Wayne L Anderson, Joshua M Weiner, Alissa Stevens, Vincent A Campbell, Brian S Armour, 'Disability Status, Mortality, and Leading Causes of Death in the United States Community Population' [2015] 53(4) *Medical Care*, 346–354.

About Disability Sport & Recreation

We are an organisation that has been around for 54 years, starting in 1962 as the ParaVics Sports Club, with eight founding members who met whilst in rehabilitation at the Austin Hospital. We were the birthplace for the Australian Paralympic movement in Victoria with our founding and life members, Bruno Moretti and Kevin Coombs, key members of the small Australian team that competed in the Rome Paralympics.

We are now the peak body for disability sport and recreation in Victoria with nearly 3,000 members, more than half who are Victorians who identify as either having a disability or parents/carers, together with 167 organisation members that support them in their sport and recreation pursuits.

We are a unique organisation. We are a Victorian state government recognised state sporting association (responsible for the sport of wheelchair rugby), a registered disability sporting organisation and a registered disability service provider. We are registered with the TAC as a community group program provider and community access planner. We are a registered service provider with the National Disability Insurance Agency. We are also a public benevolent institution and a registered charity with deductible gift recipient status.

All of our work is about better health outcomes for Victorians with disability through promotion and participation in sport and recreation. The way our organisation is structured is necessarily diverse to achieve our goals. It allows us to be flexible and effective in a diverse sector — one that is delivered in a range of settings and structures by a range of providers — as well as respond to the diverse participation needs of Victorians with disability. There are many good examples of inclusion, but there are also many opportunities for the future.

Community participation is a fundamental human need and is a determinant of health, which is our focus. This is all about being connected to a community that you are part of; one that you value, add value to, and are valued by. As humans we need acceptance and understanding from other humans where we work, live and play. Sport and recreation provides this platform for human interactions, connections and acceptance. It has a unifying effect, whether you are there as player, coach, observer, administrator or volunteer. It generates passion and motivates us to want to do and be better.

In sport this unity is communicated culturally, and through the media, to be all about the collective — the club, the team, the sport and the association. Health and socialising are good by-products and indeed often a motivating factor for participation, but it is not always the focus for sport. Sport has rules too — you either fit in or you do not — and the statistics support what we know anecdotally, and that is that people with disability participate in sport and active recreation at much lower rates than people without disability.

Sport and active recreation have demonstrable impacts on physical and mental health outcomes. Sport and active recreation are a means to engage people with a disability in health promoting and protecting activities. The socialising, community connection and exercise also contribute to improving mental health outcomes.

From this, sport and active recreation are powerful tools to reduce the burden of disease and thus avoid and defer the associated costs, both directly to the health system and indirectly via loss of economic participation.

Disability Sport & Recreation's Strategic Priorities and Initiatives

Our written submission provides information on some of our initiatives to promote and increase participation for people with disability in sport and active recreation.

Increasing awareness & understanding of the general population

DSR's *Wheel Talk* disability awareness program is presented by people with disability and reaches over 20,000 Victorian students each year. Feedback from teachers and students consistently point to the transformative effect that the program has. The program successfully empowers a new generation of young people to be more empathetic and aware of some of the challenges people with a disability face. In addition, through the experience of playing a game of wheelchair basketball, students also become aware that people with a disability are just like them and like to have fun with their friends playing sport. When used in this way, sport can be a powerful tool for social change.

The *Wheeltalk* program is currently being expanded to operate in the corporate environment (*IMPACT*) to increase awareness and understating of disability issues in workplaces, again using sport as a tool.

Importantly, these programs provide employment and skill development for people with disability. If expanded, this would provide a wonderful opportunity to address the current low levels of employment of people with disability in Victoria.

Our annual *Disability Sport and Recreation Festival* celebrates International Day of People with Disability, bringing sport and recreation service providers together in a showcase of what's available and what's possible for people with a disability. Held in a central prominent venue to increase exposure to the general public, the festival features exhibits from over 30 providers and a number of come and try activity zones and exhibition sports events. These activities provide the general community with often their first experience of sport, recreation and leisure for people with a disability. Estimates for annual attendances have been over 28,000 for each of the past three years providing a significant outcome in increased awareness and understanding for the general community.

Outreach programs

The *SportRec Access* program works one-on-one with individuals to connect them to the most appropriate sport or recreation opportunity that meets their interests and abilities. This person-centred program includes regular follow up calls to participants at one month, six months, and 12 months post referral. Our evaluation showed sport and recreation participation rates through SportRec Access are almost double the national participation rate.

We also run a *Rehabilitation to Recreation* Program, an outreach service to introduce sport and recreation to people with disability in Victorian rehabilitation centres, hospitals and community health centres. We invite volunteers from Disability Sport & Recreation who have been through rehabilitation and are active in sport to share their experiences. The program also educates health professionals on the benefits of participation to increase their sport and recreation referral skills and also to ask people with disability about sport.

The *DSR Kids* program is offered in partnership with the Victorian Paediatric Rehabilitation Service and supported by State Sporting Associations. It achieves the goals of introducing young people with disability to sport and recreation opportunities while they are in hospital at the Monash and Royal Children's hospitals. This is critical as many of the adult behaviours relating to participation are formed in childhood.

The key to this program is the link between the hospital and community environments –it brings together State Sporting Associations and therapists from the VPRS to provide kids in rehabilitation a safe opportunity to engage in appropriately graded and adaptive sport. The strength of the program lies in creating that link between trying a sport, and being supported with advice from DSR and your therapist to know that you can make an ongoing connection to your sport in the community.

Re-educating professionals

A key tactic of DSR is to influence support people and health professionals so they understand their role in supporting people with disability to take part in sport and active recreation. Our *Scoring the Equaliser* Mini Conference in 2013 was aimed at allied health professionals, tertiary students and disability support planners. The conference included the production of a webinar to increase the spread of information beyond those at the conference.

We have developed a partnership with the Australian Physiotherapy Association, Occupational Therapy Australia and Exercise and Sports Science Australia for continuing professional development points for professional membership of those organisations. In partnership with the Australian Physiotherapy Association, we delivered a webinar last year discussing the role of physiotherapists and what they need to know about disability sport so they can work more effectively with people with a disability to engage them in sport and recreation

This includes discussing recent trends in the disability sport and recreation literature that support physiotherapist engagement in starting the sport and rec conversation, and incorporating disability sport and rec into therapy plans through partnerships and advocating for greater community participation.

The webinar was Part One of a "Disability Sport and Recreation Toolkit" e-learning module, in conjunction with APA and Invacare, to be released Nov 1 covering the "Clinical skills for selection, configuration and adjustment of adaptive equipment in disability sport". Our latest webinar is set to go live on 1 October with a Paralympics theme.

Reducing barriers to access and participation

Cost of equipment has been identified by people with a disability as a key barrier to participation.⁷

Our *adaptive sports equipment library* allows people to try equipment for very little cost before they buy something. To play basketball from an able bodied point of view it is a matter of having a basketball, and obviously the venue to play, but if you want to play wheelchair basketball, an appropriate wheelchair basketball chair can cost in excess of \$5000.

⁷ See, Participation and non-participation of people with disability in sport and active recreation, Australian Sports Commission research project in collaboration with University of Technology, Sydney 2010

Due to this, our adaptive sports equipment library is a critical point for engagement and participation. This is one way we can reduce the economic barriers to participation. We offer equipment loans for a period of up to three months at just \$20 per month per item. Our library includes basketball wheelchairs, tennis wheelchairs, rugby wheelchairs, track chairs for athletics and handcycles.

As the uptake continues to grow for this service and it is only available from our Melbourne base, we are currently exploring expansion opportunities into regional areas in partnership with regional sports assemblies so that all Victorians can benefit.

We run summer and winter recreation camps for young people with a disability. Most campers have very high and complex needs, and they participate in a range of sport and recreation based activities over a weekend. Leadership camps are being introduced in late 2016 to provide opportunities for outstanding young people with disability to develop their leadership skills.

This September our first group of outstanding young people with disability will embark on our Future Leaders Program. The program involves a three day intensive leadership training camp, where each participant will be matched to a mentor who will guide them towards achieving their goals over the following 12 month period. These young people will become our ambassadors for the importance of sport and active recreation in promoting the health of people with disability.

At a systemic level we are creating change too. One example is new technology that we have created called *Score!* which is an online tool to find sport and recreation opportunities for people with a disability.

Score! uses technology to reduce social, physical, geographic and systemic barriers to sport and recreation participation for the purpose of better health outcomes. *Score!* connects Victorians with disability and carers to accessible, inclusive, sport and recreation activities. On this platform, users can identify, rate, search and share information about accessible and inclusive programs. Through data collected on *Score!*, DSR has access to a map of supply and demand of sport and recreation opportunities throughout Victoria.

Further investment in *Score!* will enable it to more comprehensively collect user feedback from people with a disability and also map supply and demand for sport and recreation services. This evidence based decision making will facilitate service delivery partnerships and assist government to allocate service funding based on need.

Another online tool currently in development is called *Passport 2 Play*, which will seek to provide incentives and a gaming environment to support young people with a disability along their journey of participation in sport and active recreation in collaboration with their parents, carers and other stakeholders.

Plugging into mainstream sports

We support many State Sporting Associations and Regional Sports Assemblies in their respective sport offerings for people with a disability funded through the Victorian Government's Access All Abilities program. We are working to build capacity of mainstream sport and recreation organisations, to better meet the participation needs of Victorians with disability. This is a sustainable way to support social inclusion.

We are the State Sporting Association for wheelchair rugby. We still believe that sport needs to manage sport, and an inclusive mainstream strategy is definitely something that we would pursue. We've already achieved this for a range of sports, including football, tennis and basketball. However, where there is no clear pathway from accessible to mainstream, we work to fill the gap / support that particular discipline.

Capacity building and empowering

We are also supporting the needs of specialist disability sporting organisations through the new Victorian Disability Sport & Recreation Organisations committee. With seed funding from Sport & Recreation Victoria, we are providing a number of capacity building programs to enhance the effectiveness of these organisations which include Blind Sports Victoria, Disabled Winterports Australia, Deafsports, Victorian Electric Wheelchair Sports Association and others. Presently, there are 15 organisations participating in the committee.

Each year we conduct *Cycle Power*, an international fundraising initiative in which people with and without disability raise funds to participate in a 500km cycling challenge in a south east Asian country. The initiative provides an opportunity to demonstrate what people with disability can achieve while also supporting local disability sport organisations in the countries visited.

Partnerships, Research and Knowledge

Recognising that there are significant gaps in the knowledge around sport and recreation for people with a disability, we have partnered with La Trobe University and YMCA Victoria on a research project to examine the effectiveness for people with a disability of a buddy system in the leisure centre environment.

We are also developing a partnership with Scope and YMCA Victoria to explore an accreditation system for the Leisure Centre environment based on the UK Federation for Disability Sport's *Mark* scheme.

DSR Response to Key Themes

Key Themes in State Disability Plan

The key themes identified within the discussion paper for the VSDP are as follows:

1. **Active citizenship** – because people with a disability should be able to participate in community and civic life
2. **Rights and equality** – protecting and promoting rights and equal access to opportunities
3. **Economic participation** – because people with a disability need to be a vital part of Victoria's workforce
4. **Making the most of the NDIS** – because mainstream services are critical to the success of the scheme

DSR Response

In order for the VSDP to meet its goals, DSR has the following key responses. Each of the responses and recommendations are further elaborated on in this paper.

1. Participation in everyday life must include participation in sport and active recreation
2. Sport and active recreation are protective factors for both physical and mental health
3. Greater understanding and evidence of participation of people with a disability in community and civic life is needed
4. Investment is required to reduce barriers to participation for people with a disability
5. Participation in sport and active recreation is empowering and leads to optimal health, a basic right for all Victorians, regardless of their ability

1: Participation in everyday life must include participation in sport and active recreation

Key Themes: Active citizenship; Rights and equality; Making the most of the NDIS

Participation in sport and active recreation can provide real, effective solutions to a number of the key themes of the VSDP which will be expanded further within this submission. However, there is a central fundamental theme that illustrates our broad response to the VSDP which is:

All Victorians with disability have the **right** to be able to live life to their **full potential**. This potential includes **optimal physical and mental health** that participation in **sport and active recreation** make significant and meaningful contributions.

We know from first-hand experience that sport and active recreation has the potential to change both people with a disability and the broader population in a profound way. Apart from the physical benefits of participation addressing a number of chronic health issues, participation also provides opportunities to develop social skills, forge friendships outside the family, connect with a community of like interests, and develop responsibility and leadership roles.

Participation in sport and active recreation provides hope, meaning and focus for people with disability building strong connections to community. It is a key motivator that once established, self-propagates. Research by the Australian Sports Commission of over 1,900 people with a disability identified that the most important benefits of participation in sport and active recreation are:⁸

1. Achievement
2. Do something stimulating
3. Improve health or reduce risk of disease
4. Opportunities to socialise with others
5. Enjoy the company of friends
6. Increase energy levels
7. Improve self esteem
8. Improve heart and lung fitness
9. Be with people enjoying themselves
10. Spend time with friends

See attachment A which provides a summary of the key stories from an in-depth survey of 19 of our DSR members seeking to understand the impact that participation in sport and active recreation has had on their lives. Participants in the survey were asked their response to the following statements:

1. Participating in sport or recreation has helped me to feel connected to my community
2. Sport or recreation has helped me to make friends
3. My mental health has improved since I began participating in sport or recreation
4. My physical health has improved since I began participating in sport or recreation
5. I have become more socially active since I began participating in sport or recreation

The key finding was that 97% of respondents agreed with these statements. I.e. of the 95 potential responses from the 19 participants to the 5 statements above, only 3 responses disagreed.

In addition to the data above, key personal messages were recorded including:

- *“If I hadn’t found sport when I was 16, I don’t know where I would be now. I have played, coached and competed. I’ve done it all and if I wasn’t there, I don’t know what my life would be like”*
- *“Sport has helped me to grow and to enjoy life as it has made me happy and to feel I’ve achieved something and a reason to get up in the morning”*
- *“I used to be a very unhappy person with no confidence and a bit bitter about being in the chair, but picking up lawn bowls and the people who I met there just got me out of myself and helped me see that I still had a great life ahead of me”*
- *“I ride to keep fit, keep up with my friends and social contacts. I still hand cycle with my friends from my school days and my two brothers; it’s a great chance to combine able bodied with disabled”*

For the VSDP to achieve its stated goal to ‘create a better life for all Victorians with disability that includes participation fully in everyday life’, the final VSDP must include a clear focus on enhancing access and increasing the participation for all Victorians with a disability in sport and recreation as one of the central components.

⁸ See, Participation and non-participation of people with disability in sport and active recreation, Australian Sports Commission research project in collaboration with University of Technology, Sydney 2010

2: Sport and recreation are protective factors for physical and mental health

Key Themes: Rights and Equality, Making the most of the NDIS; Economic participation

Health Issues

The Victorian Public Health & Wellbeing Plan 2015-2019⁹ states the following with respect to the connection between health and physical activity:

- Poor nutrition and physical inactivity are the principal causes of overweight and obesity
- Physical inactivity is an important risk factor for chronic disease
- Chronic disease accounts for ¾ of all premature death
- Anxiety and depression are major causes of ill health

In this context, increased rates of participation in sport and recreation for people with disability is critical in order to deliver optimal health outcomes. This is especially true as people with disability typically have poorer health and experience less social connections than those without a disability as illustrated below:

- People with a disability experience higher rates and degrees of premature death from causes other than their disability¹⁰
- The rates of arthritis are 5 times higher than the general population
- The rates of diabetes are 4 times higher than the general population
- The rates of osteoporosis are 4 times higher than the general population¹²
- About 69% of adults aged 18–64 years with severe or profound disability were overweight or obese, compared with 58% for those without disability.
- Almost half (48%) of people with severe or profound disability had mental health problems, compared to 6% of people without a disability.
- Only 9% of people with a disability said their social contact needs were being fully met and only 6% said their community participation needs were being met.¹³

Economic Impact of Health Care Costs

It is clear that there is a large gap in the health status for people with a disability compared to the general population. Purely from an economic perspective, any minimisation in treatment costs would make a significant contribution reducing the health burden for all levels of government.

The potential for physical activity to be a significant tool to reduce the emerging health burden of government requires a strong focus if the government is serious about making the most of its limited resources.

DSR recommends that the VSDP includes a focus on economic modelling of this concept to clearly identify both the potential benefits but also to illustrate that it simply makes economic sense to invest in this area in addition to the clear social and community benefits.

⁹ See, The Victorian Public Health & Wellbeing Plan 2015-2019

¹⁰ See, for e.g., Valarie L Forman-Hoffman, Kimberly Ault, Wayne L Anderson, Joshua M Weiner, Alissa Stevens, Vincent A Campbell, Brian S Armour, 'Disability Status, Mortality, and Leading Causes of Death in the United States Community Population' [2015] 53(4) *Medical Care*, 346–354.

¹² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010a and b

¹³ Scope survey 2014

Almost all Victorians with a disability will ultimately spend considerable time within the hospital system as a result of chronic disease, particularly as they age. If one hospital patient can be deferred for a period as a result of initiatives that encourage a more active lifestyle, the potential savings to the broader health burden of government would be significant.

An opportunity to reduce the disease burden impacting people with a disability

While the data on the health of people with disability is disturbing, the VSDP presents an opportunity to address these issues. DSR proposes that enhanced participation in sport and active recreation provides a significant opportunity to address the poor health and participation in everyday life that is described above and numerous other sources.

Physical activity, social connection and freedom from discrimination are among the key social and economic determinants of mental and physical health (VicHealth). Physical inactivity has been identified as one of the key pillars in the current VicHealth Action Agenda.

While it has already been clearly identified that providing an environment where the broader Victorian population participates more in sport and active recreation, it is clear that the gap to optimal health is far greater for people with a disability.

“Being active is good for you in so many ways. It can provide a huge range of fun experiences, make you feel good, improve your health, and is a great way to relax and enjoy the company of your friends. Regular physical activity can help prevent heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure, reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and some cancers, help build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints reducing the risk of injury, and promote psychological wellbeing (Federal Department of Health and Ageing 2012). Many people participate in sport to enhance a healthy lifestyle and for the social opportunities it provides. People with a disability are just as keen to participate even though they may experience constraints”¹⁴

Sport has been identified to provide an effective mechanism to enhance the health of people with a disability. These benefits include functional capacity, health promotion, relationship development, increased optimism and inclusion in meaningful life activities and roles.¹⁵

For these reasons, a significant investment and focus is required to maximise the participation of people with a disability in sport and active recreation to deliver effective community outcomes and ensure that people with a disability have the potential to achieve their optimal health outcomes.

¹⁴ See, ABS2012b, *Perspectives on Sport, July 2012, cat. No. 4156.0.55.001, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra (2012)*

¹⁵ See, Barbara Wilhite and John Shank, ‘In praise of sport: Promoting sport participation as a mechanism of health among persons with a disability’, *Disability and Health Journal*, 2009 Volume 2, Issue 3, 116-127

3. Greater understanding and evidence of participation of people with a disability in community and civic life is needed

Key Theme: Active Citizenship; Rights and equality

Current Participation in sport is low compared to the general population

Evidence shows that people with a disability have consistently lower levels of participation in sport and recreation, and are consequently at a greater risk of chronic disease. Only 28.2% of males with disability and 21.1% of females with disability participate in sport and recreation¹⁶ compared with the general population of 64.2% adult males and 61.2% of adult females¹⁷.

In this context, DSR disagrees strongly with the misleading presentation of data related to participation in sport for people with disability in both the Discussion Paper for the VSDP (p4) and its Companion Document (p9) where it is suggested that people with disability participate in sport at a rate of 67.7% compared to 78.6% for the general population. The paper referred to as the source for this data (ABS2012b, Perspectives on Sport, July 2012, cat. No. 4156.0.55.001, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra (2012)) actually identifies that this 'participation' as follows:

"Participation in sport and physical recreation activities refers to participation in sport and physical recreation activities in the 12 months prior to interview. Participation in sport and physical recreation activities includes those who participated as a player and/or those involved in a non-playing role, such as a referee, umpire or administrator."

Of concern is that the paper refers to participation levels consisting of at least one session in the previous 12 months (i.e. in some instances it may only have been one sporting session completed in that entire period). It is also concerning that the data includes both playing AND non-playing roles. It is well established that the health benefits related to participation in sport and active recreation relates mostly to active participation (i.e. not the non-playing roles) and that participation needs to be undertaken regularly (ie at least three times per week).

In this context, it is highly misleading to suggest that the rates of participation for people with disability in sport are as high as 67.7%.

What the data does suggest, however, is a desire – a strong demand – for people with disability to be able to participate in sport and recreation. Just like over 60% of the general population, people with a disability *want* to participate in sport.

In fact, in a survey of over 1,900 people with disability, the Australian Sports Commission identified two crucial findings relating to participation¹⁸:

1. Nearly 75% of those currently participating in sport and active recreation **would like to participate more.**
2. 83% of non-participants from all disability types **want to participate in sport and active recreation** and realise that they are missing out on a very important part of life and Australian culture.

¹⁶ See, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008

¹⁷ See, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008

¹⁸ See, Participation and non-participation of people with disability in sport and active recreation, Australian Sports Commission research project in collaboration with University of Technology, Sydney 2010

Despite the flaws in the data described earlier in the VSDP Discussion Paper, the clear message is that there is a real gap in participation in sport and active recreation between people with and without disability that needs to be addressed as a priority in the VSDP.

DSR's impact on sport and recreation participation rates

DSR conducted a survey amongst its nearly 1,500 members who have a disability in December 2015. Of those who responded to the survey, 78% identified that they participated in sport or active recreation in the previous 12 months. This demonstrates that members of DSR are significantly more active and engaged in sport and recreation activities than those who are not members, whether this is compared to the 2008 ABS figures of 28.2% for men and 21.1% for women, or the data cited in the VSDP of 67.7% participation (that also included participation in non-playing roles).

Participation rates and frequency for people with a disability are not well understood

DSR suggests that evidence based decision making should be a central aspect of policy development and that there are clear gaps in the data around the true participation levels of people with disability in sport and active recreation. The VSDP should therefore urgently prioritise appropriate data collection around this topic so the true status of the issue can be understood and benchmarks set to measure effectiveness of any initiatives.

It should be noted that broader government direction around increasing the participation of specific parts of the community have the potential to deliver significant outcomes in a short period. In a presentation by VicHealth on 1 July 2016, Jennie Price, CEO from Sport England identified that their "This Girl Can" campaign to increase participation for girls in sport and recreation had been, "an investment for the broader good of society where sport participation was not seen as just for the young, fit and healthy and had already encouraged 1.6 million English girls to start exercising". Importantly, the next stage of the campaign will develop a clear data collection survey to truly monitor participation and future outcomes, something that is clearly needed in Victoria for people with a disability.

Current Government support for Disability Sport

The Victorian Government's Access for All Abilities program has undergone significant change in recent years with the focus switching from LGA to SSA delivery. It is important to have clear data on the outcomes of this change as it may be possible that a shared approach between sport (SSAs), local government and peak bodies such as DSR and other organisations is required to minimise duplication and to provide a clear and consistent approach for the people we are all seeking to serve.

There is anecdotal evidence, but little clear data around the impact of the change. Solid, quantifiable evidence on what is and is not working is urgently needed, as resources are limited both in government and in the community. DSR supports adopting a consistent approach to the administration of the AAA program and as the only body that has sport and active recreation for people with a disability as its core focus, we are keen to be part of and involved with the process.

In particular, there is some risk that funds supporting people with a disability are now being 'lost' in the recent Sport and Recreation Victoria funding stream in which we understand that disability is included within a broader 'inclusion' spectrum that also includes gender, CALD and LGBTI communities. While there are similarities with other inclusion issues, there is still a need for a direct targeted focus and data collection around specific disability sport and recreation.

4. Investment is required to reduce barriers to participation for People with Disability

Key Theme: Rights and equality; Active citizenship; Making the most of the NDIS

For people with disability, a number of barriers or constraints exist that limits their participation in sport and active recreation. In a survey of over 1,900 people with disability, the Australian Sports Commission identified the following most constraining factors¹⁹:

1. Lack of government support
2. Pricing
3. Lack of trained staff to support my participation
4. No integrated sport and recreation programs available
5. Lack of money
6. No friends to participate with
7. Lack of personal income
8. Scarcity of places
9. No assessment of people with disabilities' needs
10. No access to facilities close to home / work

The following section addresses these and other known barriers.

Access to specialised equipment

High costs for sport and recreation participation associated with purchasing highly specialised sporting equipment tailored for individuals, program registration, specialist instructors, carer and travel costs are significant barriers for people with a disability in participation. This creates even further disadvantage amongst Victorians with a disability who already have lower rates of paid employment and lower health status.

Sporting and recreation equipment are not eligible items for subsidy under the Victorian Aids and Equipment Program. Research shows that access to equipment is a major constraint for people with disability to participate in recreation and leisure and that current government aid and equipment programs are glaringly inadequate in supporting Victorians with a disability to take part equally in community life²⁰.

¹⁹ See, Participation and non-participation of people with disability in sport and active recreation, Australian Sports Commission research project in collaboration with University of Technology, Sydney 2010

²⁰ See, *The Equipping Inclusion Studies: Assistive Technology Use and Outcomes in Victoria*, Deakin University 2010

The experience of Disability Sport and Recreation members illustrates this, where there is high demand for access to our specialised adaptive sporting equipment library. It also shows that when access is addressed – such as via DSR’s equipment library – that participation rates increase substantially. Access to equipment is a significant factor for participation, demonstrated in the much higher rates of participation in sport and recreation of DSR members compared to people with a disability generally.

Attitudes and environmental factors

In regard to opportunities for existing sports, research shows that many of the barriers are attitudinal. As with most forms of conscious or unconscious bias, this is on multiple fronts: the venue operators and staff; the other users of the facilities; and, the person with a disability. This underlines the importance of building cultural awareness, that enhances the broader communities understanding of people with disability to create a more welcoming environment.

A number of years ago, VicHealth developed an accreditation scheme for leisure centres that audited their standards for inclusiveness. The scheme was never fully implemented. DSR has recently been working with Scope and YMCA Victoria in partnership to investigate a resurrection and reinvigoration of this scheme to provide an opportunity for people with a disability to identify a leisure centre for them to exercise in that was both welcoming and appropriate for their needs.

DSR has also been working with Australian Council of Health Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) to consider the development of tools and resources for Victorian School Physical Education teachers around the themes of disability sport and recreation.

Opportunities to shift attitudes

Community awareness can also be enhanced with additional funding around International Day of People with Disability. DSR already conducts an annual festival and awards program that provides a significant exposure to the broader community while supporting excellence in the field of disability sport and recreation. Further government investment and partnership in these initiatives would deliver enhanced outcomes for both people with disability and the broader community. This would also allow the program to be expanded to regional areas.

The education sector provides huge opportunity for change. DSR’s disability awareness program *Wheeltalk* being delivered in primary, secondary and tertiary schools has provided a positive message around disability for more than 20,000 students each year. This program could be expanded for each Victorian school providing an enormous program of enhanced community understanding and awareness while also delivering massive employment opportunities for people with disability who would need to be recruited as presenters.

Wheeltalk could also be expanded to the corporate environment enhancing environments for organisations to take on employment for people with disability using sport as the tool to break down initial barriers.

These programs help to provide a community where there is access and equity for all.

5. Participation in sport and active recreation is empowering and leads to optimal health, a basic right for all Victorians, regardless of their ability

Key Theme: Economic participation; Making the most of the NDIS; Active citizenship

The experience of DSR members mirrors the research for all populations, that sport and recreation participation provides physical and mental health benefits, preventing further disability, and helps build confidence for people with a disability. This then makes it easier for them to take part in community, working, family life and means less time at the doctor. This has a positive effect for carers, friends, family members and colleagues as independence is restored and health is impacted.

Employment Opportunities

Australia has the seventh lowest employment rate for people with disabilities in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Latest data shows that 53% of people with a disability participated in the labour force as compared to 83 % of those without a disability.

To address this gap, DSR's *Wheeltalk* / IMPACT disability awareness programs provide opportunities for enhancing the environment for people with a disability but also providing direct employment opportunities for the presenters on the program.

Similarly, our *Cycle Power* program empowers people with a disability, proving to them and those who might hold an unconscious bias against them, that they can make a real difference in people's life and effect change.

Coordination across government and the disability sector

Across government there is discord in that Sport and Recreation operates in a different way from the Office for Disability. While that is understandable, there ought to be information and knowledge exchange to ensure that the many discrete pockets of people with a disability, who really are not accessing the mainstream channels, are not lost in the gaps or confusion of what applies when and where.

Consider, for example, when one looks at key basic human needs like accommodation and employment, sport and recreation might be viewed as some sort of 'luxury' or fun time filler. This is a naïve view that ignores the significant links of sport and active recreation on physical and mental health outcomes. It would also ignore that one's community, their sporting team, their hobby – these are the reasons *why* we live. This is the one of the reasons that sport and recreation have a significant impact on mental health, whether you have a disability or not.

It is important for us to educate the disability sector on the importance of sport and recreation as a necessary component of health and wellbeing for all Victorians. The overwhelming evidence about impact of sport and recreation as a protective factor for health and wellbeing applies to all; so much more so for cohorts such as people with a disability who experience frighteningly higher morbidity and mortality rates from chronic and lifestyle diseases.

There ought to be a policy platform position from all levels of government in regard to disability sport and recreation that is consistently applied, because there is a different assessment in terms of priorities in the different areas of government.

DSR Specific Response to the key themes:

VSDP Themes / DSR responses	Active citizenship	Rights and equality	Economic participation	Making the most of the NDIS
Participation in everyday life must include participation in sport and recreation	✓	✓		✓
Sport and recreation are protective factors for both physical and mental health	✓		✓	✓
Greater understanding and evidence of participation of people with a disability in community and civic life is needed	✓	✓		
Investment is required to reduce barriers to participation for people with a disability	✓	✓		✓
Participation in sport and recreation is empowering and leads to optimal health, a basic right for all Victorians, regardless of their ability	✓	✓	✓	✓

1. Active citizenship - because people with a disability should be able to participate in community and civic life

RESPONSE:

Participation in everyday life must include participation in sport and active recreation

Greater understanding and evidence of participation of people with a disability in community and civic life is needed

2. Rights and equality - protecting and promoting rights and equal access to opportunities

RESPONSE:

Investment is required to reduce barriers to participation for people with a disability

3. Economic participation - because people with a disability need to be a vital part of Victoria's workforce

RESPONSE:

Participation in sport and active recreation is empowering and leads to optimal health, a basic right for all Victorians, regardless of their ability

4. Making the most of the NDIS - because mainstream services are critical to the success of the scheme

RESPONSE:

Sport and active recreation are protective factors for both physical and mental health

Conclusion

In summary, sport and recreation is saturated with opportunities for people to connect, to participate, to be accepted and included, both within peer groups and in the broader community. The full social inclusion value of sport and recreation for Victorians with disability must be exploited to maximise the benefits and protective factors. How to do this requires three key elements:

1. A person centred approach to sport and recreation services, transitioning away from the bulk service provision model that doesn't necessarily meet the needs of the person with a disability. A person-centred approach is more in alignment with the NDIS model of service delivery.
2. An evidence based decision making framework for sport and recreation services funding that includes appropriate data collection and analysis to both guide allocation of funding and evaluate effectiveness of investment
3. A legislative or policy framework to bring elevated social inclusion and accessibility priorities in sport and recreation services, to deliver increased participation in sport and recreation for optimal health for all Victorians, regardless of their ability, as a basic human right.

With these, and DSR's five responses to the VSDP, we will be on our way to realising the full social inclusion value of sport and recreation to the benefit of Victorians with a disability.

Disability, Sport & Recreation is well placed to support the State with achieving this and its laudable goals outlined in the VSDP.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Victorian State Disability Plan.

Attachment A – DSR Member Experience

Disability Sport & Recreation interviewed a cross-section of members to understand the impact participation in sport and recreation has had on their lives.

To capture the diversity of our members, we interviewed a range of ages, from under 17 to over 65, as well as an even mix of male and female interviewees. We also ensured our interviewees had a wide variety of disabilities, from acquired through trauma or disease, to those who had lived with their disability from birth.

Why do you participate in sport or recreation?

When asked why they participated in sport or recreation the themes of fun, social inclusion, an improved sense of personal wellbeing and physical health were the most common.

"I ride to keep fit, keep up with my friends and social contacts. I still hand cycle with my friends from my school days and my two brothers; it's a great chance to combine able bodied with disabled,"
Michael

For those who had acquired their disability, physical activity, through either organised sport or less structured activity, gave them sense of greater control over themselves and their disability.

"I used to be a very unhappy person with no confidence and a bit bitter about being in the chair, but picking up lawn bowls and the people who I met there just got me out of myself and helped me see that I still had a great life ahead of me," Wendy

The opportunity to be competitive was also among the answers, with some interviewees citing competitive sport as a significant part of their lives.

"Sport has got me to travel around the world and meet other people participating in sport with a disability," Viv

Every age cohort valued the opportunity to participate in sport or recreation and every person interviewed was currently, or had been until recently, physically active. For those who were no longer active, illness or injury were cited as the reason, not lack of interest.

Tell us about your negative experiences

The experience of participating in either organised sport or casual physical recreation were overwhelmingly positive. However, interviewees were open about the discrimination they had experienced and the barriers to participation they struggled to overcome. For some, appropriate activities were hard to find; for others, cost was a barrier.

"There is a lack of information of activities that I can do from a social and competitive nature. There is poor accessibility at events. The inability to access events and not be able to participate creates a poor sense of self-worth in the community and poor self-esteem," Tina

"I feel that there's no proper support in sports in general for the disabled, there's not enough money for athletes to achieve their goals...The equipment quality isn't up to par, money for athletes is at a lower level compared to able-bodied and there isn't enough promotion or avenues to create bigger competitions, better play and better results," Name withheld.

Clearly, there is still work to be done to make participation truly equitable in Victoria.

Sport and recreation has helped me...

We asked interviewees to finish this sentence and once again themes around physical health, mental wellbeing and social inclusion emerged.

“...to grow and to enjoy life as it has made me happy and to feel I’ve achieved something and a reason to get up in the morning,” Name withheld

“If I hadn’t found sport when I was 16, I don’t know where I would be now. I have played, coached and competed. I’ve done it all and if it wasn’t there, I don’t know what my life would be like,” John

“...to become a better person and it has helped shape who I am,” Leanne

Graph – each interviewee was asked was asked to rate five statements pertaining to the impact participating in sport and recreation has had on their lives.

