



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**

# **Participation Grant Program – Round 2: National Evaluation Report**

Prepared by SPRINTER for the Australian Sports Commission

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The Australian Sports Commission (The ASC) independently commissioned the Sport and Active Recreation Intervention and Epidemiology Research (SPRINTER) Group at the University of Sydney to undertake this independent evaluation of the ASC Participation grant program.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# Executive Summary

Regular participation in sport and physical activity has many health, social, and personal benefits. The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) awarded 36 grant applicants funding in November 2021 through Round 2 of the Participation grant program. The Participation grant program provides support to peak physical activity bodies, National Sporting Organisations (NSOs), and National Sporting Organisations for people with disability (NSOD), that have innovative new projects and ideas to bring our communities together, to make them stronger, more resilient, more active, and more inclusive.

This national evaluation report provides an assessment of the ASC's Round 2 Participation grant program. The evaluation assessed the program's impact on the capacity of organisations in the sport and physical activity sector and the effects of funded projects on participants. The Sport Recreation Intervention and Epidemiology Research (SPRINTER) Group at the University of Sydney conducted this national evaluation, covering the period from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

The evaluation was conducted in a similar way to the Round 1 evaluation of the Participation grant program<sup>1</sup>. All funded organisations used the National Evaluation Toolkit developed by the SPRINTER group to conduct pragmatic and high-quality evaluations of their projects. The findings from Round 1 and Round 2 of the ASC's Participation grant program can inform decisions made by government policymakers, strategic thinkers, sport and recreation sector organisations, practitioners, researchers, and evaluators to ensure progress towards the Global and National target to reduce population physical inactivity by 15% by 2030.

The 36 funded projects have reached over 190,000 people. More than half (59%) of people involved in the Participation grant program were women and girls. A high proportion of people were involved in the funded projects identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (7%).

Most funded projects received extensions and were still delivering their project at the time of reporting; only 14 funded organisations had completed project delivery and contributed to the evaluation. Project completion improved when compared to Round 1. Completed projects reported using a variety of strategies to deliver inclusive and high-quality projects across Australia.

Round 2 funded projects enabled participants to be active for about an hour and a half each week. Less than 1 in 5 participants reached by Participation grant projects were meeting physical activity guidelines, however they reported high-levels of sport participation. Participants reported being more physically active after participating in the project, with children reporting the greatest improvements. There was no change in total sport participation from before to after project participation.

The evaluation found that the Participation grant program had a positive impact on building the capacity of organisations in the sport and physical activity sector to tackle population physical inactivity. The program enabled organisations to address barriers to sport and physical activity participation particularly by enabling free opportunities for participants and to promote the benefits of being active to the community.

Funded organisations reported delivering new projects or expanding their projects to reach many more participants. They also established new partnerships through the funded projects, upskilled the sport workforce, and developed resources for sustainable delivery.

Overall, this evaluation report indicates that the ASC's Participation grant program has been successful in improving the capacity of organisations in the sport and physical activity sector. The report provides several recommendations for funding applicants, the ASC, and for the evaluation of similar programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Reece, L.J., Rose, C., Foley, B.C., and Owen, K.B., *Move it AUS Participation Grant; A national evaluation report*. SPRINTER Group, The University of Sydney. 2021.

### **Recommendations for funding applicants in the sport and physical activity sector**

- Ensure that the grant project is part of a larger strategic direction for the organisation.
- Continue to design projects to be inclusive of the target audience. Include a preparation phase in the project delivery plan which focuses on connecting with relevant people, organisations, and community groups, to gain an in-depth understanding of barriers to participation among the target audience.
- Develop risk mitigation plans to ensure delivery of projects can take place outside the traditional sport season. Organisations should be prepared to pivot their project based on contextual and environmental challenges.
- Implement strategies to upskill local community members to make projects more sustainable, particularly in rural and remote communities.
- Consider distributing funds to external experts or partners to achieve the project objectives on time.
- Implement strategies to build and foster trust between partners such as regular meetings.
- Produce an output at the conclusion of the project that will have an ongoing legacy, such as training programs, photographs for marketing, new equipment, or guides for others to use.
- Identify partners and/or sponsor who are strategically aligned to the project goals and can co-contribute to the project if the grant funds were not available.
- Demonstrate and share the value of involving diverse communities who are not “sporty” in sport.

### **Recommendations for the ASC**

- Continue to provide ongoing support for grant recipients during project delivery of future targeted Participation grant programs.
- Facilitate networking opportunities for projects targeting specific populations to provide updates and share learnings with other organisations with the same target audience during project delivery.
- The grant guidelines should require applications to focus projects on a primary target group and identify select the best evaluation approach to evaluate project outcomes for this group.
- Remove promotion of the physical activity guidelines from the grant application guidelines and focus on promoting the benefits of physical activity.
- Encourage organisations in the sport sector to use stories from their participants to promote the benefits of being physically active through sport.
- Allow more flexible timelines on the delivery of grant projects with a variety of partners to foster the development of trust between partners.
- Provide more flexible funding options, timelines, and minimise waiting periods for grant recipients. Consider allowing grant applicants to define their own delivery period upon application for a defined funding amount.
- Collate information about the different requirements for child safety, insurance and other tasks that present barriers for Australia-wide projects.

### **Recommendations for the evaluation**

- Offer training and support to increase the capacity for evaluation throughout the sport ecosystem, particularly in complex pragmatic evaluation.
- Allocate more time to education and training organisations on the strengths and weaknesses of the flexible evaluation options and how to best implement them. Attendance at pre-program training programs could be a mandatory component of fulfilling requirements of the evaluation.
- Measurement of sport and physical activity outcomes should be essential for Participation grant projects that target inactive participants to understand the impact of the Program.
- Avoid dependence on project completion in the evaluation design.

By implementing these recommendations, the ASC can increase the impact, and understanding of the impact, of the Participation grant program on the capacity of organisations in the sport and physical activity sector and the impacts of projects they delivered on participants from target groups. The findings from this report contribute to improving best practice grant guideline development, project design, and large-scale evaluations in the sport and physical activity sector.

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## Report Aim

This report presents an independent, critical analysis of the Australian Sports Commission's (ASC) Round 2 Participation grant program. This detailed report is aimed at policy makers, sport and recreation organisations and stakeholders, researchers, and evaluators interested in tackling physical inactivity through sport.

In 2021, the ASC awarded 36 organisations with grant funds. This report focuses on evaluating projects funded through Round 2 of the ASC's Participation grant program and those who participated in the national evaluation.

The report provides the following:

- Background to the grant program and an overview of the evaluation approach.
- Aligned with the evaluation questions, evaluation findings are presented with the key headline findings complete with a qualitative summary of the in-depth experiences captured directly from funded projects.
- A summary of what worked and what didn't work in the funded project delivery, along with recommendations for policymakers, the sport and recreation sector, and researchers regarding the determinants of success for tackling physical inactivity through sport.

# Background

Physical inactivity is a major public health and economic concern to global communities (1). Despite the benefits of physical activity and sport on population health outcomes (physical, mental, and social), improved community connectedness, and contribution to economic growth, there is limited evidence on population-level strategies to increase physical activity, particularly in communities most likely to be inactive (2).

In the 2018/19 Federal Budget, the Australian Government announced a \$230 million package for sport participation and physical activity initiatives. This package included an investment of \$28.3 million in grants over four years to get the least active Australians active. The investment was open to physical activity organisations, national sporting organisations (NSO) and national sporting organisations for people with disability (NSOD) and split across two funding rounds. The Participation grant program presented a unique opportunity for the ASC to establish new and broad partnerships with organisations across the Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity sectors.

The Sport Recreation Intervention and Epidemiology Research (SPRINTER) Group at the University of Sydney were commissioned to establish and undertake the independent national evaluation of the Round 1 and Round 2 of the Grant Program.

## Round 1

The ASC (then Sport Australia) awarded funding to 62 projects in 2018–19 and 2019–20 to the value of \$18 million to get inactive people moving in their local community, build awareness of the importance of physical activity, and improve the system of sport and physical activity. Inactive people were the priority population for the grant program and were defined as youth, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, women and girls, low socioeconomic groups, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, people in rural and remote locations, and people with a chronic health condition or disability. Round 1 funding was divided into two streams: (1) Participation grants, and (2) Better Ageing grants, which focused on inactive older adults (65+ years old).

A variety of organisations were eligible to apply, including National Sporting Organisations, National Sporting Organisations for people living with Disability, State Sporting Organisations, State Sporting Organisations for people living with Disability, Non-Government Organisations, Educational Institutions and Charities. The grant guidelines included this variety of organisations to increase the chance of reaching inactive Australians, who may not be involved with sports organisations. Findings from the national evaluation of Round 1 have been published in a [peer-reviewed journal](#) (3), and executive summaries are available online:

- [Move It Aus Participation grant program National Evaluation](#)
- [Move It Aus Better Ageing Grant Program National Evaluation](#)

The evaluation of Round 1 identified seven key insights from funding recipients (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Seven key insights from the evaluation of the Round 1 Move It Aus Participation grant program

Having **clarity of who** the funded projects were targeting led to successful engagement with participants during project delivery in Round 1. When the target audience was clear, the funded organisation could identify key partners and work together in a unified approach to involve the target audience. In Round 2 of the ASC’s Participation grant, grant recipients were encouraged to understand their target audience and the barriers they face from the outset of delivery.

New **communication** strategies were employed by organisations in Round 1 to attract the target audience to their projects. More of the same communication to sporty people could not engage their inactive target groups. Positive conversations were initiated internally to empower staff to try new ways of engaging the target audience. External communications shifted towards highlighting fun, enjoyment, and how everyday people can be active, rather than just ‘sporty people’.

Ensuring that **project delivery** had multiple components and provided flexible, social participation opportunities for people of all skills levels was critical to success. Developing resources and training staff and volunteers to modify their projects was one approach to ensure positive experiences for participants. The objective to provide inclusive and high-quality sports projects remained, with Round 1 evaluation findings providing examples of how this may be achieved by funded projects.

**Environmental impacts** caused substantial delays and created barriers for people in Australia to participate in physical activity and sport. In response, the ASC’s Participation grant program updated the objectives of the grant project to specifically addresses barriers to sport and physical activity, noting the impacts of COVID–19 on many Australians.

**Physical inactivity was a priority** for everyone in the sporting ecosystem. **Governance** by the ASC supported organisations to allocate resources to engaging less physically active participants.

**Partnerships** were identified as a primary driver of success in delivering sustainable projects. In Round 2, a new stream of funding was introduced which encouraged primary applicants to partner with other organisations, including those not eligible to be a primary grant recipient, to enhance delivery of the project.

The key findings from the Round 1 evaluation were that collaborating, “trying something new” and co-designing new sports offerings can improve participation rates and support growth in the sport sector. Learnings also showed that different target groups have specific needs, where ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches are ineffective. Organisations within the sport sector are willing to try something new and are really understanding the value of inclusive approaches in sport and physical activity.

## Round 2

The findings from the evaluation of the Round 1 program informed revisions to the objectives of the Round 2 grant program, and funding streams. The objectives of the Round 2 Participation grant program were to get inactive people moving in their local community, by supporting new or modifying or extending existing projects which:

- Address the barriers to sport and physical activity, noting that COVID 19 has impacted many Australians
- Increase participation in sport and physical activity through the provision of inclusive and high-quality sport and physical activity experiences, and
- Build awareness of the benefits of being active through sport and physical activity.

The Round 2 Participation grant program had three funding streams available. Stream 1 and Stream 2 supported individual organisational projects, similar to Round 1. Stream 3 was added to support partnerships between organisations to maximise reach and drive collaboration. In Stream 3, there was no limit to the number of times an organisation could be nominated as a partner across grant applications.

In total, there were 36 projects in 2021–22 and 2022–23 to the value of \$10.3 million. The successful applicants are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1 Organisations funded under each stream of the Round 2 Grant Program.*

<b>Stream 1 National physical activity project</b>	<b>Stream 2 National sporting organisation projects</b>	<b>Stream 3 National sporting organisation projects – Partnerships</b>
AUSTSWIM Limited	Athletics Australia	Touch Football Australia
Indigenous Basketball Australia Ltd	Australian Football League	Disabled Wintersport Australia
Live Life Get Active	Australian Taekwondo	Swimming Australia
AFL Masters Inc	Badminton Australia	Deaf Sport Australia
The Indigenous Marathon Foundation Limited	Cricket Australia	Shooting Australia
Victorian YMCA Community Programming PL	Disability Sports Australia	Lacrosse Australia
Endeavour Foundation	Hockey Australia	
Making Waves Foundation Inc	Motorcycling Australia	
parkrun Australia Ltd	National Rugby League Ltd	
Wheelchair Rugby League Australia	Rugby Australia Ltd.	
Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA)	Skate Australia	
The Trustee for the Mother's Day Classic Foundation	Touch Football Australia	
Play Australia (IPA Australia)	Transplant Australia	
Fitness Australia Ltd (Trading as AusActive)	UniSport Australia	
Little Athletics Australia	Water Polo Australia	

# The National Evaluation Methods

The purpose of the national evaluation was to critically appraise the extent to which the ASC's Participation grant contributed to supporting organisations, to involve individuals in physical activity. The SPRINTER group established a robust and pragmatic evaluation framework for Round 1. The Round 2 national evaluation adopted a similar approach to allow comparability of the findings.

The evaluation approach was simplified in Round 2 in response to feedback from participants in the Round 1 evaluation. It was a requirement that all funded projects participate in the National evaluation. Prior to commencing delivery, all funded projects were invited to attend an online information session about the evaluation requirements, in partnership by the ASC and the national evaluation team (SPRINTER). Grant recipients could join the workshops live and ask questions, and/or had access to a recording afterwards. The evaluation team provided their expertise to the staff and team members of funded projects as central evaluation advisors.

## Theory of Change

The logic model for Round 1 of the Participation grant program was developed by the ASC in a collaborative workshop facilitated by SPRINTER (Figure 2). From an evaluation perspective, logic models are essential in prioritising and structuring data collection to ensure the data can ultimately be used to explain whether the projects achieved its aims, or why it did not achieve its aims. The logic model was used to guide the evaluation and theorise how the grant program could influence change amongst the sport and physical activity sector (funded organisations) and the individuals who participated in funded projects (participants). Although the grant program evolved from Round 1 to Round 2, the logic model remained appropriate to guide evaluation in Round 2.

Population behaviour change interventions delivered within community, real-world settings make traditional evaluation design and implementation difficult, especially as they are outside of experimental conditions. Realist evaluation has often been used as an underlying framework for community-based evaluation (4). Rather than solely focusing on 'what works', realist evaluation attempts to understand the reasons for a certain outcome. Recognising the pragmatic approach adopted here, principles of Realist Evaluation were considered in the evaluation design.

Figure 2 Logic model developed in partnership with SPRINTER (University of Sydney) and the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) for the Move It AUS and Participation grant programs.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs			Outcomes		
		Short-term (June 2019-2021) <i>Move It AUS Participation and Better Ageing Grant Programs</i>			Medium-term (July 2021 – June 2023)	Long-term (July 2023 -)	
<b>Sport and Physical Activity Sector</b>							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$28 M Federal investment over 4 years</li> <li>• Federal investment for marketing support</li> <li>• 2 FTE ASC staff members plus in-kind cross agency support</li> <li>• Evaluation support (SPRINTER University of Sydney)</li> <li>• Sport 2030</li> <li>• Sport AUS strategic plan</li> <li>• Move It AUS Grants: Participation and Better Ageing</li> <li>• ASC Participation grants: NSOs and NSODs; National physical activity (PA) providers; Partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move it AUS Grants: 88 funded projects</li> <li>• ASC Participation grants: 36 funded projects</li> <li>• Marketing toolkit developed for program leads and associated partners</li> <li>• Monitoring and performance toolkit developed for program leads</li> <li>• Sector workshops and webinars developed with funded projects</li> <li>• Move it AUS and ASC Participation grants evaluation developed by SPRINTER (The University of Sydney)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 124 programs funded across sport and PA sector</li> <li>• Recognition of indirect beneficiaries engaged</li> <li>• Move it AUS and Participation grants delivered in regional and remote areas</li> <li>• Target populations engaged through Move it AUS grants – specifically <i>inactive</i> participants</li> <li>• Barriers to participation overcome through Participation grants – specifically through <i>inclusive and high-quality offerings</i></li> <li>• Increased understanding of the sport and PA delivery partner network</li> <li>• Increase capability of sport and PA sector to engage and deliver participation offerings</li> <li>• Enhance the partnerships of sport and PA partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage new populations (both inactive, and active)</li> <li>• Gain in-depth insights into participation behaviours across active, inactive, and target populations</li> <li>• Understand reasons for dropout and barriers to PA</li> <li>• Increased capacity and understanding from sport and PA sector to tackle physical inactivity through piloting of innovative, inclusive, and high-quality programs</li> <li>• Improved collaboration between government departments, Sport AUS and delivery partners</li> <li>• Contribution to the evidence base on physical inactivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners commit to reducing % of inactive people by 2030</li> <li>• Reduce the proportion of people who drop out/lost to follow up in PA opportunities</li> <li>• Ongoing and continual reflection by sport and PA sector to focus on understanding and meeting needs and overcoming barriers of inactive, new, or target populations (governance and quality control)</li> <li>• Establish new, and cement existing, cross agency partnerships</li> <li>• Increased variety, availability, and quality of PA opportunities for local communities</li> <li>• Continued contribution to building and listening to the evidence base across the sector for what works and what doesn't, in reducing physical inactivity in people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners commit to reducing % inactive people by 2030</li> <li>• Partners commit to sustain a diverse and inclusive sport and PA sector</li> <li>• Increase number of partners who commit to narrowing the equity gap in population participation</li> <li>• Increase sector capability to deliver inclusive, robust and sustainable PA and sport opportunities</li> <li>• Continued contribution to building and listening to the evidence base across the sector for what works and what doesn't, in reducing physical inactivity in people</li> </ul>		
<b>Participants</b>							
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inactive people engaged across 88 Move it AUS grant programs</li> <li>• Broad range of new and existing participants recruited into Participation grant programs</li> <li>• Increased awareness of PA guidelines among participants</li> <li>• Increased awareness of ASC/ Sport AUS Participation campaign (Move It AUS and Participation grants) among participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased self-efficacy of individuals to increase and maintain PA behaviours</li> <li>• Enhanced recognition and awareness of funded projects by target population</li> <li>• Increased awareness of the broad benefits of being active through sport and PA</li> <li>• Positive attitudes towards PA and sporting opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased self-efficacy of individuals to increase and maintain PA behaviours</li> <li>• Initiation and maintenance of 'new' PA behaviours</li> <li>• Initiation and maintenance of PA levels by active people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased proportion of people meeting PA guidelines</li> <li>• Contribute to population reduction of physical inactivity</li> <li>• Equity gap in population participation reduced</li> </ul>		

# Evaluation Questions

A series of evaluation questions were established for the national evaluation, focusing on the **sport and physical activity sector** through delivery of grant projects, the capacity of funded organisations, and the influence of funded projects on **participants**. This aligns with the logic model (Figure 2). Through answering each question, this realist evaluation sought to identify what worked and what didn't work for grant recipients in Round 2 of the Participation grant program. The evaluation questions included:

## **Sport and Physical Activity sector: Delivery of grant projects**

- What projects were delivered by funded organisations?
- Who did the funded organisations target?
- To what extent did funded organisations provide people with inclusive and high-quality sport and physical activity experiences?
- How did funded organisations increase:
  - awareness of the benefits of being physically active through sport?
  - understanding of the Australian Physical Activity Guidelines?
- How did funded organisations identify and address barriers to sport and physical activity participation?

## **Sport and Physical Activity sector: Organisational capacity**

- To what extent did the Participation grant funding influence the capacity of organisations to tackle population physical inactivity?
- To what extent did the funded organisations partner with external organisations to deliver their grant projects?

## **Participant outcomes**

- To what extent did funded projects increase participation in sport and physical activity?
- To what extent did funded projects increase participants' self-efficacy to be active and awareness of the broad benefits of being active through sport?

# Evaluation Methods

The national evaluation toolkit from Round 1 was updated and circulated to all Round 2 funded projects prior to their commencement of delivery. This included all expectations and tools to support grant recipients to conduct high-quality evaluations including process and outcome evaluation.

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach including **progress reporting** (process evaluation), **pre-post online surveys** (outcome evaluation), and **semi-structured interviews** (process and outcome evaluation). A limitation of the standardised national evaluation toolkit in Round 1 was that it was not suitable for projects targeting hard-to-reach populations. In Round 2, organisations were asked to identify how the outcomes of their project would be evaluated at the beginning of the project. For example, organisations could select a pre-post survey and qualitative interview (preferred), or qualitative interview only. Collectively, these methods ensure data collected aligned with the outcomes identified in the logic model.

## Progress reporting

All funded organisations were required to complete quarterly progress reports through the ASC's SmartyGrants portal ([sportaus.smartygrants.com.au](http://sportaus.smartygrants.com.au)). The progress reports aim to monitor the reach of the project and identify implementation challenges faced by funding organisations before the end of delivery.

Progress reporting collected the following information: amount of allocated funding that has been spent and committed; expected project end date; percentage of project delivered; key activities delivered; number of participants, coaches/officials, volunteers and other members involved in project delivery; number of target sub-group populations reached.

## Online survey

All participants involved with a funded project were expected to complete a pre-post survey, if the organisation elected to use this evaluation method. The national evaluation toolkit included the survey questions and could be administered using a pre-built online survey, or a modified survey administered by the funded organisations. The purpose of the question bank and flexible data collection methods was to reduce the data collection burden, allow for transparent reporting against the specified grant project aims, and ensure flexibility amongst the breadth and depth of funded projects. It was the responsibility of the funded organisation to distribute the survey to their participants.

Information collected through the online survey included: sociodemographic measures (age, sex, postcode, cultural background, language spoken at home, health conditions); meeting physical activity guidelines; physical activity and organised sport participation; self-rated levels of general self-efficacy; readiness for physical activity behaviour change; awareness of physical activity guidelines; intention to drop out of physical activity or sports; project awareness; motivations for, status of, and overall experience with funded project; awareness of benefits of physical activity and sport participation; and volunteering activities.

The primary outcome was the proportion of people who participated in the Participation (Round 2) grant program and were meeting physical activity guidelines. This was assessed using the Prochaska et al. screening measure for children 5–17 (5), and the single item measure for adults 18+ years old (6). Secondary outcomes were assessed, aligned where possible with existing validated or accepted measures. Organised sport participation (7), self-rated levels of general self-efficacy (8, 9) and readiness for physical activity behaviour change (10) were additional mandatory measures to investigate secondary outcomes from participants. This information was critical to understand the participant outcomes achieved.

## **Semi-structured qualitative interviews**

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to capture process and outcome evaluation data. The interview guide included open-ended questions to elicit a detailed recount of the project delivery and outcomes of the project on the funded organisation and participants.

A representative of the funded projects was invited to participate in a semi-structured interview after completing their project. All interviews were conducted by a trained researcher with experience of interview-based research. All interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Interviews averaged 63 minutes duration.

## **Data analysis**

### **Progress reporting data and survey data**

Progress reporting data were transferred from the ASC to SPRINTER. The number of participants within each subgroup were summed together.

Online surveys were completed by 11 organisations and the data were downloaded (if the organisation used the toolkit Qualtrics survey) or securely transferred from each organisation to SPRINTER for analysis. Data were cleaned according to the International Physical Activity Questionnaire Guidelines for Data Processing and Analysis.

We calculated area level socio-economic status and location using postcode of residence. Socioeconomic status was categorised using the Socio-Economic Index for Area (SEIFA), specifically the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (11), which ranks regions in Australia according to relative socioeconomic disadvantage. Postcode-based SEIFA percentiles were converted into quartiles, with the lowest 25% of postcodes classified as 1 (most disadvantaged area) and the top 25% of postcodes as 4 (least disadvantaged area). Location was categorised using the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+). ARIA+ indicates remoteness and groups areas based on relative access to services. Postcodes were categorised into major city, inner regional, outer regional or remote (12).

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and proportions, for all demographic characteristics (age category, sex, Aboriginal identity, primary language spoken at home, country of birth, socio-economic status, and remoteness) of all participants who completed surveys were calculated by timepoint.

For categorical outcomes (i.e., meeting physical activity guidelines), we calculated the proportions and 95% confidence intervals for each timepoint. For continuous outcomes (i.e., weekly minutes spent participating in sport), we calculated the median and 95% confidence intervals for each timepoint. For outcomes only assessed at the post timepoint (i.e., reasons for participating in the project), all organisations were included in the analysis. Whereas, for outcomes assessed at the pre and post timepoint, only the three organisations with both pre and post data were included. Due to the small number of people who completed the post program survey ( $n = 2,305$ ) and even smaller number of people who completed both the pre and post survey, the pre and post survey participants were treated as two separate cohorts, rather than linking pre-post data.

### **Interview data**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 organisations via Microsoft Teams and transcribed for analysis. Framework analysis was selected to analyse the qualitative data due to the systematic nature of this approach (13). Details of the five distinct phases of the systematic framework approach are outlined by Ritchie & Spencer (1994) (13).

Transcripts prepared by an Australian transcription company (WayWithWords) were examined for errors by two members of the research team, who also conducted the initial interviews. This involved listening to the audio-recording whilst simultaneously reviewing the transcripts for each interview. This process enabled the researchers to become deeply familiar with the transcript content.

Members of the research team analysed the same transcript independently, using key words to describe the content of each passage to understand common ideas emerging; this may have been a few words, sentences, or whole paragraphs. The research team then met to discuss their interpretations of the data and contrast it to the coding framework used in the Round 1 evaluation. The research team adapted the existing coding framework to better suit the new grant round, and more explicitly consider changes in the capacity of sports organisations. A new coding framework was developed and systematically applied to the transcript. During this process, researchers made notes of where content did not fit into the framework, where new codes may be required, or where the description of each code needed further refinement. After iterative discussions, the final coding framework was agreed and set up within NVivo (14). The final framework consisted of 8 codes and 33 sub-codes. This final analytical framework was then systematically applied to all transcripts, divided between the coders. A schematic of the coding framework is shown in Figure 3.

Illustrative quotes from interview participants are presented throughout this report but have been de-identified to ensure anonymity. The Stream of funding has been used to provide additional understanding about what grant recipients reported in their interviews.

### **Ethics**

The University of Sydney ethics committee granted ethics approval for this evaluation (ethics number 2019/533). Where required, written informed consent was attained prior to data collection. The qualitative study was also approved by The University of Sydney ethics committee (ethics number 2020/250).

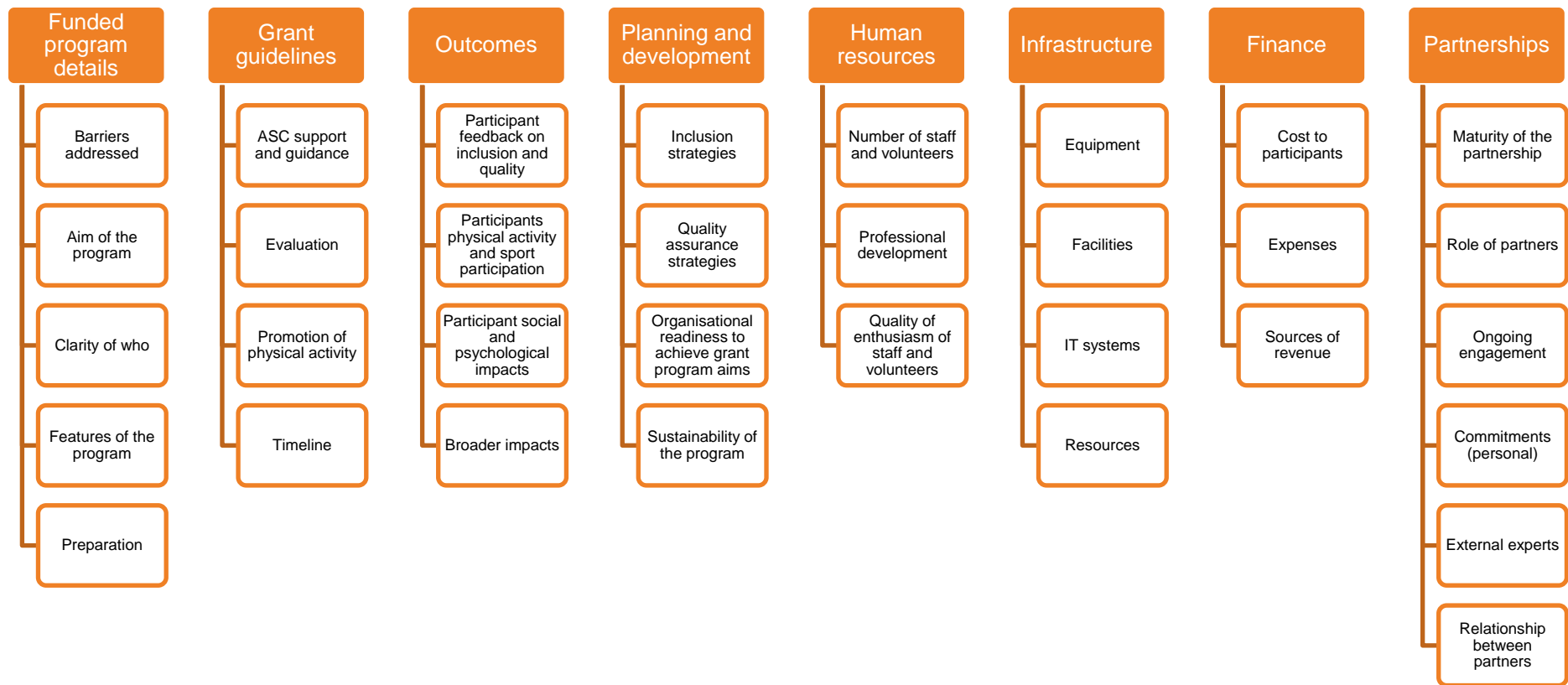


Figure 3 Coding framework for the analysis of semi-structured qualitative interviews with grant recipients

# Findings

## What projects were delivered?

Of the 36 funded organisations, 14 completed the delivery of their project by 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023 (Table 2). At the time of writing this report, 22 projects are still underway. Among completed projects, most were new projects for the organisation (n=9) and 5 had been piloted or implemented previously and were scaled up using the grant funding.

Projects funded under Stream 1 had the highest completion rate (53%), followed by Stream 3 (33%) and Stream 2 (27%). The projects that completed delivery had greater delivery flexibility, with many able to deliver their projects year-round, rather than requiring a specific delivery window.

Table 2. Funded organisations that completed project delivery (n=14), by funding stream

Stream 1 National physical activity project	Stream 2 National sporting organisation projects	Stream 3 National sporting organisation projects – Partnerships
AUSTSWIM Limited	Athletics Australia	Touch Football Australia
Indigenous Basketball Australia Ltd	Disability Sports Australia	Disabled Wintersport Australia
The Indigenous Marathon Foundation Limited	Transplant Australia*	
Victorian YMCA Community Programming PL	UniSport Australia	
parkrun Australia Ltd		
Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA)		
The Trustee for the Mother's Day Classic Foundation		
Play Australia (IPA Australia)		

\*Did not fulfil evaluation requirements.

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*National physical activity projects (Stream 1) that received between \$50,000 and \$250,000 were most likely to complete their project delivery within the funding period when compared to National Sporting Organisations in Streams 2 and 3.*

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## Who completed the evaluation?

All funded organisations were required to submit quarterly progress reporting data after receiving their funding. Progress reporting data were submitted by 35 organisations in part, with 24 organisations submitting data each quarter. Incomplete progress reporting was likely due to delays in execution of the funding agreement. Stream 3 funded organisations having the highest submission rate (83%), followed by Stream 1 (73%) and Stream 2 (57%). One Stream 2 funded organisation did not submit any progress reporting data, nor select an evaluation approach, as their funding agreement was executed in February 2023.

Using the National Evaluation Toolkit and with support from SPRINTER, 35 organisations selected an evaluation approach for their project. The methods adopted by each funded project are summarised in Figure 4. Funded organisations selected their evaluation method for their project (n=35) with 11 using the online national evaluation survey, 13 using a modified survey, and 11 opting to participate in the evaluation using qualitative interviews only. Organisations could also submit supplementary evaluation data to SPRINTER to provide contextual information to the evaluation.

In total, 14 organisations completed their project (Table 2). Of those 7 provided survey data and/or 12 participated in a semi-structured interview (Figure 4). Survey data were collected using the national evaluation survey (n=1) and modified versions of the survey (n=5). One organisation provided survey data before they completed their project and were included in the participant outcomes analysis.

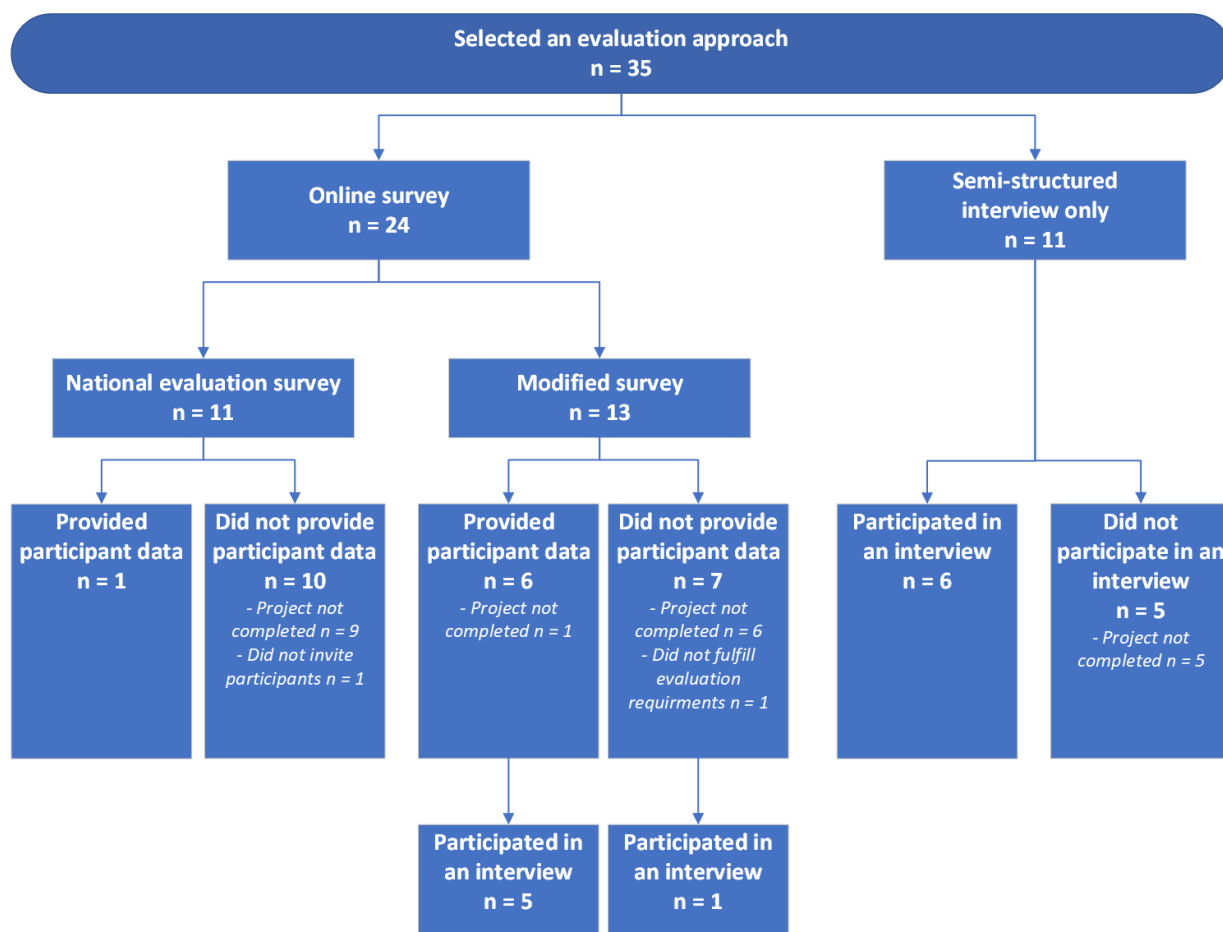


Figure 4. Flow of organisations through the evaluation.

### Explanation for not providing evaluation data

The evaluation of the Participation grants Round 2 was due to conclude in December 2022. At this time, many funded projects received extensions on their delivery and were still implementing their projects. The primary reasons for project extensions were:

- Delay in execution of funding agreement and release of funds meant organisations had to delay the start date of the projects (n=5).
- Project delays resulting in projects missing the target delivery windows – for example school term, sporting seasons, or holiday periods.
- Global supply chain issues which meant essential equipment for delivery was not available. Despite these delays, projects were able to progress on administration and marketing tasks to ensure the project was ready for rollout once supply chain issues were resolved (n=2).
- Staff shortages resulting in slow recruitment or inability to recruit appropriate staff (n=3). The inability to recruit staff in a timely manner meant the delivery of project in some locations was delayed while staff were recruited. The extension allowed time for full delivery in those areas.
- Prolonged staff absence (leave or medical reasons) or high staff turnover rates slowed delivery, requiring additional time to deliver the full project.
- Participant hesitancy to engage in group projects because of COVID-19, particularly for target audience who were living with disability and were at higher-risk of transmission and infection.

As a result, 14 organisations that had concluded their project and 1 that was close to completion, have been included in this evaluation report.

## Who did the Participation grant program target?

Clarity of who the project is aiming to engage (i.e., the target audience) was a key insight from the Round 1 evaluation. Organisations funded in Round 2 clearly identified their target audience and the reasons for targeting each group from start. Figure 5 shows the number of funded projects that identified targeting each sub-group of the population.

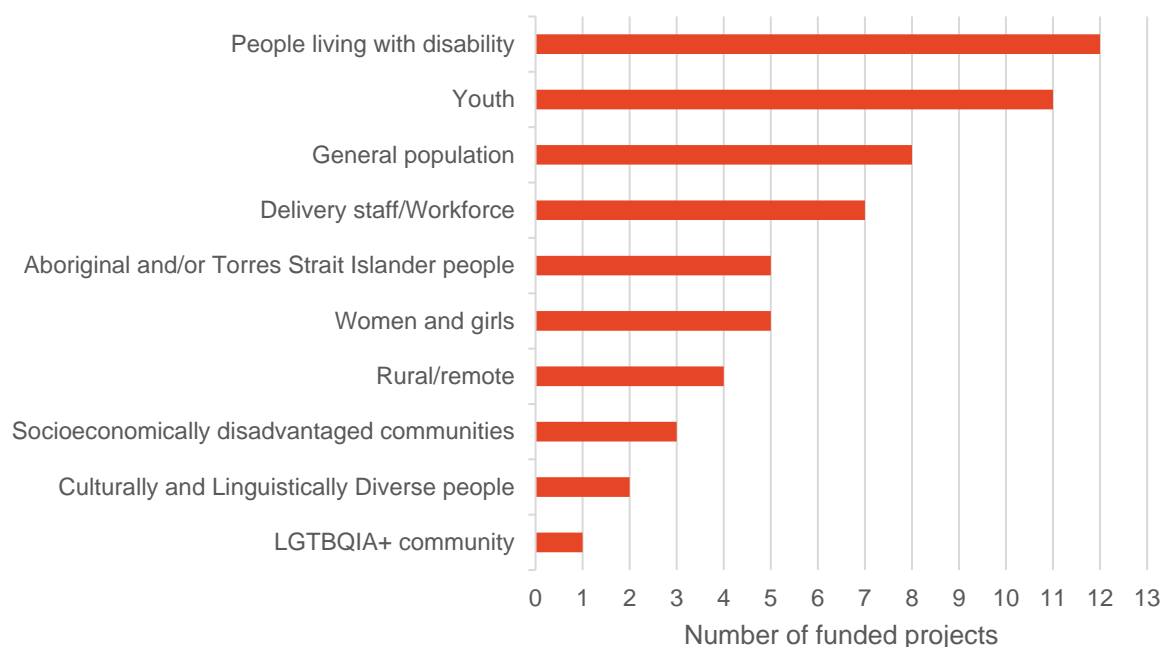


Figure 5 Number of funded projects that targeted population sub-groups (projects may target more than one group)

The most frequently identified target group were people living with disability (n=12) and youth (n=11), and these target groups were prioritised across all three funding streams. Projects in Stream 2 were more likely to report targeting the general population, compared to Stream 1 projects which focused on specific target audiences.

Interview participants stressed the importance of planning projects with the target audience in mind, or specifically involving them in the design of the project. Projects which had clarity of who they aiming to involve were successful at tailoring their projects to achieve meaningful engagement.

*Don't just assume that you know what they want. Find ways of engaging those audiences and speaking to them from their perspective because it's very easy for people in sport, I think, to just assume that people like sport like we all do. – Stream 2*

*You need to make sure that you're connecting with the community and that was noticeable when we just set everything up for a Sunday morning in [a major city] and we didn't have anyone turn up. So, we learned very quickly that you can't just have an event. You need to make sure you're connecting with community groups. – Stream 3*

The projects funded under the partnership stream (Stream 3) of funding usually included some workforce training as part of their project. Stream 2 projects did not report including workforce development in their projects. One organisation in Stream 1 used the funding to address barriers faced by their workforce, rather than participants directly. Projects that targeted the workforce and upskilled volunteers reported large flow on effects and more sustainable outcomes of their grant project. Organisations indicated that through upskilling a small number of their workforce, many participants would subsequently be beneficiaries of the Participation grant project.

*We were able to provide training and capability-building for their staff... So, people with a disability can go to those clubs, and now will be able to get engaged with the program. That didn't exist before. – Stream 3*

In addition, organisations reported that through upskilling staff, the funding will continue to provide benefits to the community beyond the funding period, if these people are retained in their roles.

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*Funded projects targeted some of the most physically inactive sub-groups of the population, particularly Stream 1 projects.*

*Having clarity of who the target audience was and why they aimed to involve them allowed funding recipients to tailor their projects specifically for their target audience.*

*Including workforce development as part of the project may contribute to more sustainable project outcomes.*

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## Who did the Participation grant program reach?

Reach is the extent to which a program attracts its intended target audience and is important to assess who was affected by the program. The demographic characteristics of participants who took part in the Participation grant programs are provided in Table 3 and Table 4.

- Across the 35 projects funded organisations reached 190,186 people. Almost all people involved were participants in the funded project (97% of all people involved).
- Women and girls were the sub-group most engaged (59% of all people involved) in the Participation grant program. This is a positive finding and suggests that the five organisations that targeted women and girls were successful.
- 35% of people involved in the grant projects were from low socioeconomic communities. This showed that the Participation program engaged more individuals from advantaged areas than individuals from disadvantaged communities.
- Of all participants, 7% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, which is higher than the population estimate of 3% (15).
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities made up 12% of participants. This is lower than the population rates of people who speak a language other than English at home (21%).

Table 3 Number and type of people involved across the funded projects (n=35)

Role of people involved	N	% of total people involved
Participants	183,553	96.5%
Volunteer	4,185	2.2%
Coaches/officials	1,451	0.8%
Other	567	0.3%
Teachers/Carers	343	0.2%
Registered Exercise Professionals	53	0.0%
Disability Services Providers	34	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>190,186</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 4 Number of people involved by demographic subgroups across the funded projects (n=35)

Demographic group	N	% of total people involved
Women and Girls	111,549	58.7%
Other	104,343	54.9%
Low socio-economic communities	66,275	34.8%
People from rural and remote communities	43,628	22.9%
People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities	23,151	12.2%
People with disability	17,097	9.0%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	13,713	7.2%

Note. The "Other" demographic group in the progress reporting may represent Youth or LGTBQIA+ people.

The target audience and the reach reported does not align (Figure 5 and Table 4). For example, with most organisations targeting people living with a disability, a large proportion of participants should have reported living with a disability, however just 7% of participants were living with a disability (Table 4). Conversely, a large proportion of participants in Participation grant funded projects were women and girls yet only five projects specifically targeted women and girls.

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*Understanding who the project reaches, and whether this reflects who inactive target population requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation*

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### **Who was reached and completed a pre-post survey?**

Three organisations completed their project and collected pre and post data (parkrun, ESSA and Athletics Australia). Demographic characteristics of participants within these three organisations by timepoint are displayed in Table 5. All comparisons between the pre and post timepoints include these three organisations.

- In total, 26,343 people engaged in projects delivered by Athletics Australia (n=23,435), ESSA (n=370) and parkrun (n=2,538) and completed an evaluation survey.
- At the pre timepoint, 24,038 participants completed a survey, compared with only 2,305 participants at the post timepoint. People who completed the post timepoint survey did not all complete the pre survey.
- Majority of participants who engaged in the funded projects were aged 5–8 years (35%), 9–11 years (31%) and 12–17 years (12%). This highlights the success of the project in reaching the youth target.
- Participants had a relatively even gender split (44% female and 50% male). The proportion of females in Round 2 was lower than Round 1.
- 1% of all participants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This is less than the population estimate of 3% (15). However, this item was missing for 91% of all participants.
- 3% of participants spoke a language other than English at home. This is lower than the population rates of people who speak a language other than English at home (21%). Note: this item was missing for 91% of all participants.
- The projects reached people living in inner regional areas (21%), and in outer regional or remote locations (11%), demonstrating the wide-reach of the funded projects.
- The projects reached 20% of respondents classified in the most disadvantaged quartile (1st quartile), and 25% in the least disadvantaged quartile (4th quartile), demonstrating a clear linear equity gradient. The Participation projects engaged more individuals from advantaged areas than individuals from disadvantaged communities.
- 57% of children and 12% of adults met physical activity guidelines before participating in the funded projects. This suggests that most participants were not sufficiently physically active prior to participating in the grant projects, indicating that the funded projects are reaching the inactive members of the community who need it the most.

Table 5 Demographic characteristics of funded organisations with pre and post data by timepoint

	Data from individuals before participating in funded project		Data from individuals after completing participation in funded project (Post)		All participants	
	(Pre)					
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>All participants</b>	24,038	100.0	2,305	100.0	26,343	100.0
<b>Age category</b>						
0–4 years	2,035	8.5	31	1.3	2,066	7.8
5–8 years	9,172	38.2	26	1.1	9,198	34.9
9–11 years	8,120	33.8	28	1.2	8,148	30.9
12–14 years	2,855	11.9	8	0.4	2,863	10.9
15–17 years	295	1.2	1	0.0	296	1.1
18–34 years	461	1.9	325	14.1	786	3.0
35–44 years	376	1.6	385	16.7	761	2.9
45–54 years	190	0.8	462	20.0	652	2.5
55–64 years	114	0.5	379	16.4	493	1.9
65+ years	96	0.4	287	12.5	383	1.5
Missing	324	1.4	373	16.2	697	2.7
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	11,256	46.8	1,942	84.3	13,198	50.1
Female	11,439	47.6	169	7.3	11,608	44.1
Prefer not to say	1,287	5.4	7	0.3	1,294	4.9
Missing	56	0.2	187	8.1	243	0.9
<b>Indigenous</b>						
No	425	1.8	1,902	82.5	2,327	8.8
Yes, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	4	0.0	22	1.0	26	0.1
Prefer not to say	4	0.0	12	0.5	16	0.1
Missing	23,605	98.2	369	16.0	23,974	91.0
<b>Primary language</b>						
English	417	1.7	1,879	81.5	2,296	8.7
Other	15	0.1	57	2.5	72	0.3
Missing	23,606	98.2	369	16.0	23,975	91.0
<b>Country of birth</b>						
Australia	296	1.2	1,398	60.7	1,694	6.4
Other	110	0.5	432	18.7	542	2.1
Missing	23,632	98.3	475	20.6	24,107	91.5
<b>Location</b>						

	Data from individuals before participating in funded project		Data from individuals after completing participation in funded project (Post)		All participants	
	(Pre)					
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Major Cities</b>	15,334	63.8	1,259	54.6	16,593	63.0
<b>Inner Regional</b>	5,004	20.8	567	24.6	5,571	21.2
<b>Outer Regional and remote</b>	2,526	10.5	281	12.2	2,807	10.7
<b>Missing</b>	1,174	4.9	198	8.6	1,372	5.2
<b>Socioeconomic status</b>						
<b>1st</b>	4,870	20.3	321	13.9	5,191	19.7
<b>2nd</b>	6,536	27.2	535	23.2	7,071	26.8
<b>3rd</b>	5,578	23.2	490	21.3	6,068	23.0
<b>4th</b>	5,891	24.5	759	32.9	6,650	25.2
<b>Missing</b>	1,163	4.8	200	8.7	1,363	5.2
<b>Health condition</b>						
<b>Yes</b>	341	1.4	851	36.9	1,192	4.5
<b>No</b>	270	1.1	1,230	53.4	1,500	5.7
<b>Missing</b>	23,427	97.5	224	9.7	23,651	89.8
<b>Adult met guidelines</b>						
<b>No</b>	499	2.1	1,624	70.5	2,123	8.1
<b>Yes</b>	49	0.2	230	10.0	279	1.1
<b>Missing</b>	23,490	97.7	451	19.6	23,941	90.9
<b>Child met guidelines</b>						
<b>No</b>	4,796	20.0	15	0.7	4,811	18.3
<b>Yes</b>	6,355	26.4	53	2.3	6,408	24.3
<b>Missing</b>	12,887	53.6	2,237	97.1	15,124	57.4
<b>Funded project</b>						
<b>Athletics Australia: Active Ba</b>	23,367	97.2	68	3.0	23,435	89.0
<b>ESSA</b>	185	0.8	185	8.0	370	1.4
<b>parkrun</b>	486	2.0	2,052	89.0	2,538	9.6

### How did organisations reach their target audiences?

A variety of strategies were used to reach and engage target audiences, many of which focused on what the target audience valued and connecting the sport or physical activity project to that. This may have involved promoting the fun and social benefits of participation in their communications, partnering with charities organisations to attract altruistic people, or building relationships with external organisations who could promote the project.

*Engaging with local community groups to get the message out that way so we were providing the information to other people who had contact points with students that might not think to engage in sports. – Stream 2*

A particularly successful approach reported by participants was using role models and community ambassadors with existing links with the target audience. Organisations reported that role models demonstrated to participants that someone like them could be active – which motivated the target group to step outside their comfort zone and participate in the project.

*We focus on the positive and really try to role model and tell stories about achievement and strength and resilience. And through that, we're able to provide more of an encouragement and incentive for First Nations people to come along and engage with what we do – Stream 1*

Some organisations used targeted social media to advertise their projects. Other organisations had existing databases of the target group contacted them via email to encourage participation, which was also successful.

*Our database covers people since [the organisation] first began some 42 years ago. So, having that amount of data really gave us the ability to shoot out the marketing campaign to the people who needed it. – Stream 1*

Engaging physically inactive people in sport and physical activity projects and keeping them involved after the initial participation is challenging. A few organisations highlighted the importance of regular communication throughout their project delivery to maintain people's involvement.

*Our marketing and communication plans, and the execution of those, and the ongoing engagement with the users, the feedback loop, all those sorts of things, those systems and processes, I think worked really well. – Stream 2*

### **Why did participants get involved in the funded project?**

Four out of ten (39%) survey participants reported hearing about the project through word of mouth. Followed by 27% finding projects through social media and 21% being referred to projects by a friend (Figure 6). This suggests that word of mouth is an effective strategy for increasing awareness of community projects.

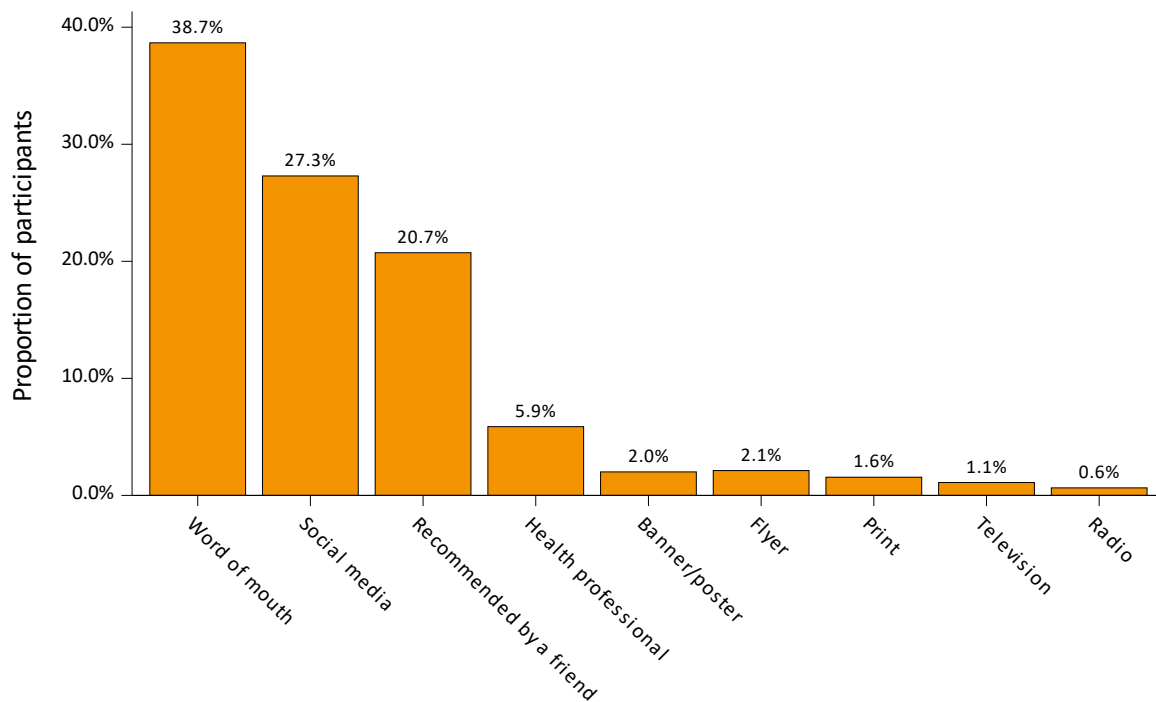


Figure 6 How participants heard about the funded project (n= 1,504)

The top 5 reasons for participating in the funded project included: fun/enjoyment (59%); to be outdoors (44%); sense of achievement (43%); to lose weight/keep weight off (35%); and physical health or fitness (35%) (Figure 7). This is consistent with prior research that suggests that to successfully engage inactive participants, projects should focus on fun and enjoyment.

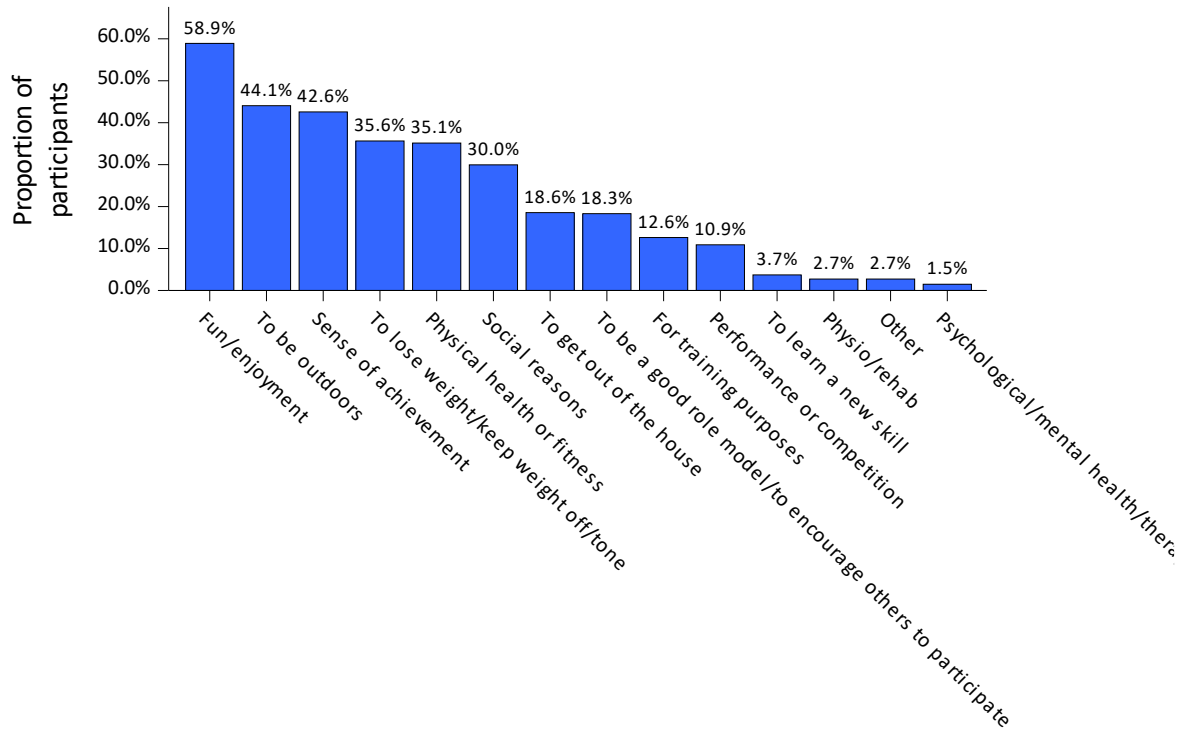


Figure 7 Top reasons for participating in the funded project (n=404)

## To what extent did funded organisations provide people with inclusive and high-quality sport and physical activity experiences?

All organisations that had completed delivery reported providing people with inclusive and high-quality sport and physical activity experiences through their grant funded projects (Table 6). One organisation which was delivered online was caught off guard by the interest from participants.

Overall, participants had a positive experience participating in the funded project. Just over one third of participants rated their experience in the project 10/10 and three quarters of participants rated their experience at least an 8/10 (Figure 8).

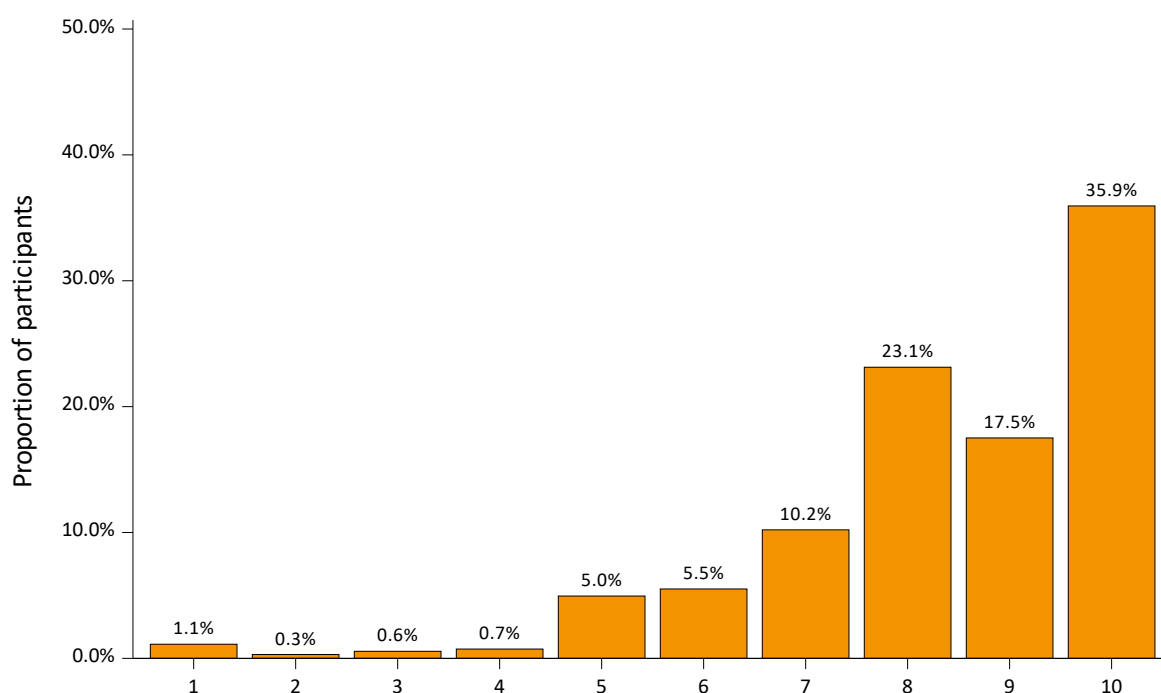


Figure 8 Ratings out of 10 of participants overall experience after participating in the funded project (n=3,917)

Funded organisations reported using a variety of strategies to provide people with inclusive and high-quality experiences in sport and physical activity – either during planning or delivery of their projects. Strategies included taking a person-centred approach, engaging external experts, having policies and standards in place, reducing the cost barrier, providing high-quality equipment, delivering projects in accessible facilities, providing staff and volunteers with professional development, and adopting inclusive language in marketing materials. Table 6 provides examples from a variety of organisations. Overall, good preparation was reported as critical to providing inclusive and high-quality experiences.

Table 6 Illustrative quotes of how organisations provided inclusive and high-quality experiences

**EXAMPLES OF HOW ORGANISATIONS PROVIDED INCLUSIVE AND HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES**

<p><b>PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH</b></p>	<p><i>But one of the key lightbulb moments for [the Ambassadors during their training] was – that’s great, you love sport, but how do you think you would you feel if you didn’t? You’ve got to put yourself out of your comfort zone. You’ve got to put yourself in somebody else’s eyes to understand how they’re potentially feeling about coming to the sessions that you’re delivering. I think that really helped. – Stream 2</i></p> <p><i>The technology in terms of the appeal of what we’re offering, but then the app itself worked well ... because we really wanted to focus on user interface and user experience, so give a nice, clean, logical feel. – Stream 2</i></p>
<p><b>ENGAGING EXTERNAL EXPERTS</b></p>	<p><i>So, we brought [an international lead in programming and coaching development] out to Australia. We went through all of our plans for the year. We went through all of our sector. He visited each of the locations. So, we did a lot of picking his brains about best practice and what happens overseas. And then he delivered coach training for us. – Stream 3</i></p> <p><i>We engaged quite a few external experts from writing programs for this group of women, through to physios, podiatrists, and nutritionists... We also had a creative agency that helped us create the content, produce the content. – Stream 1</i></p> <p><i>We engaged someone who’s an active physical education teacher, to run their eye over the content, to put new activities into there, to make sure the language was appropriate as well. – Stream 2</i></p>
<p><b>POLICIES AND STANDARDS</b></p>	<p><i>Putting some framework around certification for those providers, training for those providers, and meeting the guidelines of what we wanted from a provider. And so, we didn’t just accept any community sports club... they had to go through training and certification to be listed, and we did participant post-surveys to check in, to make sure that the experience was everything that we thought it would be. – Stream 2</i></p> <p><i>It’s all about how we train, accredit and license swim teachers in Australia. All the teachers have to sign a code of conduct to agree that they actually adhere to what we feel is best practice. – Stream 2</i></p> <p><i>Sessions that they were delivering on campus had to fulfil a few criteria, which was reduce barriers to participation, easy to access, engaged with community groups, or engaged with groups that they wouldn’t typically have engaged with. – Stream 2</i></p>

**EXAMPLES OF HOW ORGANISATIONS PROVIDED INCLUSIVE AND HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES**

<p><b>REDUCE COSTS AND OTHER BARRIERS</b></p>	<p><i>Putting in place the guidelines and templates and assistance for the run leaders to ensure that there is a risk management plan, and there's insurance, and all of those guidelines are included. – Stream 1</i></p> <p><i>I was free as a program. So, in terms of reducing that economic barrier- the barrier of costs- it was certainly inclusive from that perspective. – Stream 1</i></p> <p><i>Some of the kids who may turn up to the training may not have had a meal that day, so that's where [sponsorship partner] comes in. So, we provide meals, and we provide packs for the kids to take home. – Stream 1</i></p> <p><i>In terms of increasing connection, we've seen a lot of different approaches. So, everything from having a welcome officer to ensure that people feel comfortable when they come to the street. Ensuring that there are plenty of conversations early. That's the big one. Having nametags really works well. – Stream 1</i></p>
<p><b>HIGH-QUALITY EQUIPMENT</b></p>	<p><i>We were able to provide the equipment that meant that [people living with disability] were able to participate. We built the capacity and had trained and experienced volunteers and staff to help support the delivery in every single location. – Stream 3</i></p> <p><i>We had to put money into buying new kits, so more skateboards, helmets, wrist guards, knee pads. – Stream 1</i></p> <p><i>A lot of kids rock up without shoes on and they've never set foot on a skateboard...After that their parents would be, like, "oh, we're going to save up and try and find them a cheap board". It's good to be able to provide them with the gear to actually use. – Stream 1</i></p> <p><i>Councils have also brought along different activities, such as balls and hula hoops and different sorts of things for kids to get active with. – Stream 1</i></p>
<p><b>ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES</b></p>	<p><i>Because it's a specific program for people with disability, it was only held in locations that were wheelchair accessible, that had an accessible toilet, and so therefore it was able to be done in a dignified way. – Stream 3</i></p> <p><i>We also did a number of audits of their clubs to be able to have them become more accessible as well. And obviously, every community sports club that did our Accessibility Champion course, went through an initial evaluation of what accessibility looks like. And then we worked with local councils in some instances, to be able to upgrade facilities for accessibility. – Stream 2</i></p>

## EXAMPLES OF HOW ORGANISATIONS PROVIDED INCLUSIVE AND HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES

<p><b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS</b></p>	<p><i>We did our Train the Trainer model, which was us reaching out to community members and local skaters who wanted to be trained up to become coaches. – Stream 1</i></p> <p><i>We developed the Student Ambassador Program so that the students were the ones that were leading and delivering the activities on campus... we had some really positive feedback about the program, about the training. – Stream 2</i></p>
<p><b>MARKETING</b></p>	<p><i>We used a behaviour change model as our framework, a sort of a holistic intervention model looking at the drivers of any behaviour [to design the campaign] ... Basically, we used [COM-B] as our model and looked at how that might apply to this audience and how we can increase those three elements in terms of capability, motivation and opportunity to be physically active. – Stream 1</i></p> <p><i>We toned down particular words such as ‘sexuality’ and we highlighted more on ‘inclusion’ ... and then using the imagery of people having fun, they might be wearing a rainbow jersey or rainbow socks, and showing that the sport is fun, inclusive, and enjoyable rather than touching on words which would trigger people a little bit more. – Stream 3</i></p> <p><i>So really looking a lot more holistically than we used to... we know from our research that words like ‘exercise’ and ‘sport’, and ‘competition’ are triggers for a lot of people... so it was trying to provide a different prism for people to view [the project] through. And to move people away from either the triggers where they go, ‘I don’t do sport or exercise’ – Stream 1</i></p>

One participant reported using videographers at their events to capture a highlights reel and encourage other partners to use videos to capture the events as well.

*We had a videographer there as well ... each sport looked at it and said, well, if [they] can do it, why can’t we? Then it was a bit of a snowball effect from that, running those Come and Try participation events. That worked quite well for that one in regard to that. – Stream 3*

Funded organisations reported inclusion as simply part of what they do. When they encountered challenges in implementation that may have reduce the quality or inclusiveness of their project, they adjusted their projects.

*If we have to make the decision to call it, we call it, that’s the nature of working in public spaces. If there’s something that seems to be like a safeguarding issue, then we have to pull the plug. – Stream 1*

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*Multiple strategies were used to ensure inclusive and high-quality experiences for participants involved in the funded projects*

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## How did funded organisations increase awareness of the benefits of being physically active through sport?

The benefits of being physically active through sport were widely accepted by interview participants. Educating participants about the benefits was a priority for some of the projects (n=8). Organisations reported promoting the benefits through marketing and communication platforms (videos, social media, newsletters) or integrating discussions about the benefits of physical activity within their projects.

Most organisations that reported increasing awareness of the benefits of physical activity did this through sharing personal stories from project ambassadors (n=5). These personal stories were used in both marketing and communication approaches and integrated within projects with educational components. Interview participants reported that the personal stories they shared helped communicate the benefits in an engaging and holistic way. Whether project ambassadors were everyday people or elite athletes, they were able to use their reputation within their community to demonstrate the benefits of being physically active through sport. Using project ambassadors to communicate and demonstrate the benefits of being physically active was considered to make the benefits more relatable to participants.

One organisation reported actively avoiding specifically promoting physical activity through anything other than personal stories due to a lack of specialist knowledge.

*We'll either refer to a third party, or we'll look to our commercial partners who might specialise in [physical activity or sport] ...as an organisation we don't explicitly provide information around physical activity. – Stream 1*

Four organisations reported they did not promote the benefits of being physically active as part of their grant funded project. These projects were funded under the partnership stream, were targeting workforce capacity rather than participants directly, and/or assumed that participants would feel the benefits through participation.

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*Funded organisations promoted the benefits of being physically active through sport using lived experience examples from project ambassadors. The benefits of being physically active through sport should continue to be promoted, not taken for granted.*

*Clear guidance on the way to increase awareness of the benefits of physical activity should be provided for future grant rounds, such as the physical activity messaging framework and checklist (16).*

*Using personal stories to promote the benefits of being physically active appeared to be the most effective strategy used by organisations in Round 2.*

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## How did funded organisations increase understanding of the Australian Physical Activity Guidelines?

Physical activity guidelines highlight the importance of undertaking regular physical activity (17). Physical activity guidelines should be used to inform health and sport policies, and to strengthen surveillance systems. Guideline information can be unappealing to the general public or perceived not to have personal relevance(18). Funded organisations were encouraged to increase understanding of the Australian Physical Activity Guidelines using their own communication approach.

Most funded organisation did not report that increasing understanding of the Australian Physical Activity Guidelines (17) was a priority for their projects (n=10). Participants reported that their target populations were already aware of the importance of being physically active but that does not lead to achieving the guidelines.

*I'm willing to bet that if you ask most people, 'do you think that eating a bit better, drinking a bit less, and doing more activity will make you healthier?' They'd go, 'yes'. 'Are you going to do it?' 'No'. – Stream 1*

Organisations that used the evaluation toolkit were able to identify how many of their participants were aware of the Australian physical Activity guidelines, and whether change occurred through their projects. **76% of participants correctly identified the physical activity guidelines prior to involvement in the funded project**, with 5% participants underestimating the amount, and 19% overestimating the amount of physical activity required to achieve health and wellbeing benefits. The initial awareness was much higher than the Round 1 findings, where only 31% of participants correctly identified physical activity guidelines.

Overall, funded organisation did not change awareness of physical activity guidelines, with similar knowledge demonstrated pre-post project participation (Figure 9). There was also no change in awareness in the evaluation of the Round 1 grants from pre-post data.

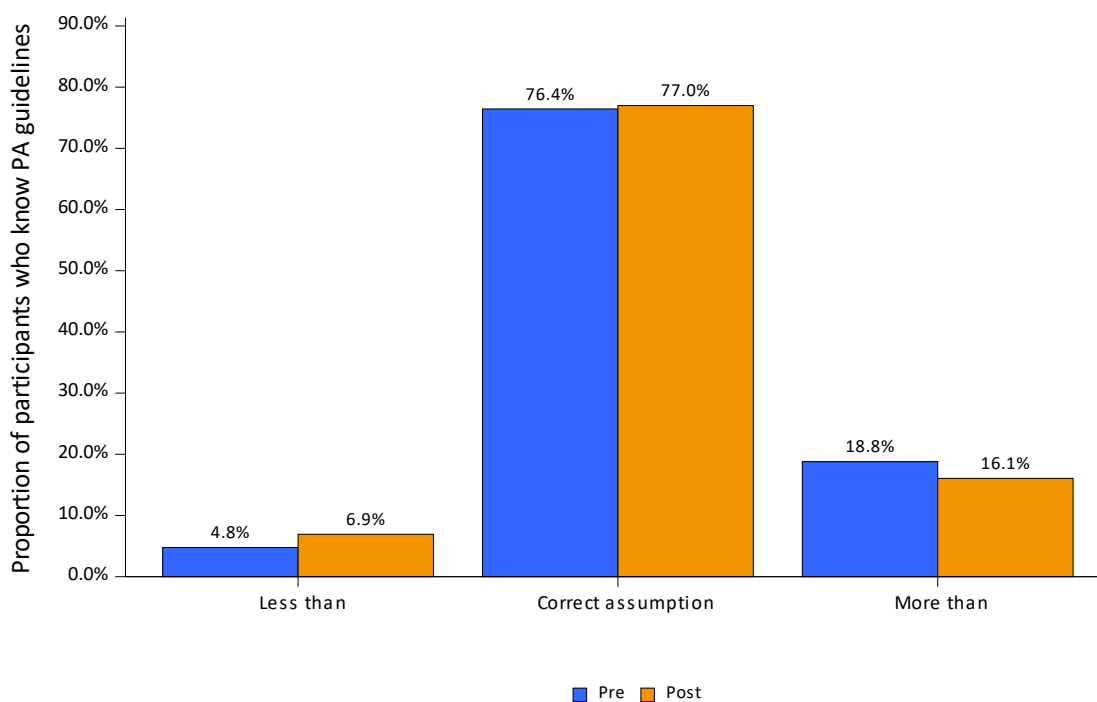


Figure 9 Changes in the proportion of people aware of physical activity guidelines from organisations with pre and post data (n=1,503)

This lack of change reflects the limited education opportunities provided to change awareness by funded organisations. Only one organisation reported using a strategy to increase understanding of the guidelines in their participants. They integrated the physical activity guidelines as a target for participants to achieve each day within their project. This organisation individually reported an increase in participants awareness of the physical activity guidelines.

*the app itself is tied into the Australian Physical Activity Guidelines, so the points accumulated in the app have a correlation between that 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day. We wanted to educate parents and kids around how much that looks like ... to get people to think about, 'hey, my child needs to be active for X amount of time each day, against these guidelines' So, there was an education piece around that, too. – Stream 2*

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*Increasing people's understanding of physical activity guidelines was not a priority for most funded organisations.*

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# How did funded organisations identify and address barriers to sport and physical activity participation?

An objective of the Round 2 Participation grant program was to address barriers to sport and physical activity participation, noting that COVID-19 has impacted many Australians.

The impacts of COVID-19 restrictions on the delivery of this grant round were minimal compared to Round 1 projects. Some organisations reported using COVID-19 recovery funding to enhance sport delivery after the major disruptions. Most funded organisations had adapted to new ways of working to deal with COVID-19 separately to this funded project, including more online meetings, improved IT systems, and enhanced sports administration platforms.

*we actually launched the platform...coming out post-COVID there. I think people are probably more familiar and comfortable with technology than perhaps they were a couple of years ago, so I think that probably worked in our favour. – Stream 2*

*We had to move the event twice because... The first time was because there was that fear around the Omicron wave, but the second time was the flooding. – Stream 3*

Floods in regional areas continued to cause disruptions to project delivery, which required projects to use online platforms or delay delivery in these areas. Organisation mentioned the importance of having empathy for the people in flood affected areas, providing support where possible, and waiting until they were ready before trying to re-commence delivery.

## Identifying barriers

Funded organisations reported identifying specific barriers faced by their target audiences through formative work (Figure 10). This may have been undertaken before writing the grant application or at the beginning of project delivery to design and tailor their funded project.

Figure 10 Examples of formative work undertaken to identify barriers

### Surveys

- Asking existing or past participants what barriers they face to participation

### Existing organisational data

- Analysing membership data to identify trends and gaps in participation

### Previous pilot projects

- Projects funded under Round 1 of the ASC's Participation grant program
- Small scale proof of concept projects

### Co-designed initiatives

- Involving the target audience in the design of the program
- Consultation with stakeholders

## Addressing barriers

**Cost** – Cost was the major barrier to sport and physical activity addressed through the grant projects. All projects were free of charge for participants.

**Visibility** – Lack of awareness, or visibility of projects among the target population was identified as a barrier. Funded organisations used targeted social media advertising to increase awareness of the project in some groups. Another approach was increasing the awareness of sports opportunities among stakeholders who engage with the target population e.g., medical professionals or social workers.

*If you don't know, you can't go. So, having that knowledge about what's available and being able to promote that and make that available to our members and to other people who may become members, I think removes a barrier in and of itself. – Stream*

3

**Inclusive opportunities** – creating a genuinely inclusive space for people to gather and feel like they are meant to be there. This was particularly important for population sub-groups who may not typically participate in sport. The target audience for the project influenced how organisations created inclusive opportunities. For example, projects targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reported working with local community leaders to design projects using the appropriate cultural protocols. It was also important to ensure Indigenous youth were encouraged to take part in sport by elders and did not feel guilty for participating.

*Kids were saying, "I don't feel like I have to leave my identity at the door of the locker room, I look around and everyone's like me". – Stream 1*

Other projects that were targeting women and girls had female-led sessions, or sessions for female-only attendance. It was important that project did not appear to be a token effort and that organisations were genuinely interested in creating safe and inclusive participation opportunities.

Connecting with trusted groups to develop and promote projects helped reached the 'hard to reach' participants. Organisations reported that their usual approaches tended to just engage sporty people, but to engage with less active populations they needed to put in more effort locally.

*If you just put a flyer in someone's letterbox, they're not just going to turn up and participate. They'll need a little bit more of a push or a connection. – Stream 3*

**Accessibility** – Inclusive access to the funded projects was achieved through either online delivery or hire of accessible facilities.

**Geographic locations** – The provision of travel funds for participants, or the delivery of new project in regional areas, helped address barriers related to geographic location.

*You may have a very engaged child, but if they don't have the support of a parent or a guardian to get them there every week, it becomes a challenge – Stream 1*

**Self-confidence** – Projects targeting young people reported the importance of ensuring children believed in their own ability to play. Using stories from role models was one approach used to inspire children to push themselves. Another strategy was designing a progressive project that built children's skills and confidence to perform a task each week.

Funded projects that included face-to-face events reported the need to acknowledge the risk of COVID-19 infection in their communications and try to put people at ease by describing the COVID-19 safety protocols being used to reduce risks. Being transparent about COVID-19 safety protocols was considered the best way to increase participants confidence to take part in community events again.

**Time** – Some projects reported delivering their projects at non-traditional times e.g., middle of the day or in the afternoon. This strategy was specifically to engage people who cannot participate in sport in the evenings due to other commitments.

*So, the real focus was making it as easy to find the information as possible, as easy to access the sessions, and as little barriers as possible. – Stream 2*

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*Organisations that identified the main barriers faced by the target audience before commencing implementation reported fewer challenges in implementation*

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# To what extent did the participation grant funding influence the capacity of organisations to tackle population physical inactivity?

Funded organisations reported that tackling physical inactivity was a high priority for their organisation. When asked to rank the importance out of 10, the average response was 9.5 out of 10.

*I would say it'd be sitting at around a nine or a ten for our sport. We want to make sure that there's a place on the field for everyone and growing the sport ... Well, it's in our strategic plan to enhance the experience and grow the sport, so it's one which we're working towards. – Stream 3*

*We're here to impact people who are not going to come without a lot of support. And that's ultimately our aim is to get those in who aren't active, and who aren't socially connected. – Stream 1*

Although tackling physical inactivity was a high priority for funded organisations, their capacity to tackle physical inactivity can be limited. Research by Misener and Doherty (2009) has identified that there are five dimensions that interact to influence the capacity of sports organisations (19). These include:

- **Finances** - Having enough money to meet expenses and allowing the organisation to pivot when unexpected events occur. Sports with diverse revenue streams often have greater capacity to achieve their goals than those relying on government funding and memberships alone.
- **Human resources** - Whether it's a brilliant coach, an enthusiastic administrator, or a dedicated volunteer - people are critical to capacity. Recruiting, developing, and retaining staff and volunteers can help sports organisations achieve great things.
- **Infrastructure** - The facilities, spaces, IT systems, and communication channels used by an organisation can either help or hinder growth.
- **Planning and development** - Road maps, strategic plans, and constitutions should be clear and evolve with the sport. Furthermore, implementation of plans and evaluation need to be conducted to monitor progress. Plans cannot just be on the shelf, they should be understood by the whole organisation, and used as a guide.
- **External relationships** - Creating inclusive sports opportunities often requires a team with diverse skills and reach into communities. A strong network of external people and organisations who are aware of the project goals and are interested in helping achieve them is critical. Both formal and informal partners have great potential to increase capacity.

These five interacting dimensions of capacity were used in the semi-structured interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participation grant funding influenced the capacity of organisations to tackle population levels of physical inactivity. All participants reported changes in multiple dimensions of their organisations capacity to tackle physical inactivity. The extent of the change in capacity is described under the following sub-headings with illustrative quotes.

## Financial capacity

The Participation grant funds ranged from \$50,000 to \$450,000. Grant recipients reported that this funding enabled them to achieve a lot more and accelerate their actions than if they had not received the funding. This increased financial capacity enabled organisations to remove the cost barrier and provide participants with sport and physical activity experiences free of charge.

A major limitation of the funding reported by interview participants was the timing of the funding release. Organisations who were delivering new initiatives required the funding to be available before they could truly begin delivery.

*So, I remember holding a meeting around February earlier this year and there was discussion around, what's happening with the project? Where are we at? But we weren't 100% sure on when there was funding or when the funding was going to come in ... So, we were waiting on it and they were waiting on it. So, it was a little bit of a speed bump to get started, for the project to start. – Stream 3*

The programs which relied solely on the grant funding were not considered favourable for building capacity in the sport sector by some participants. Programs which had high levels of engagement with local communities expressed concerns with not being able to continue meeting community expectations due to funding constraints.

*I'm very much concerned and against little programs that only go for a year... I think we need to look at longer-term funding agreements and partnerships, otherwise we just start to build things up and then all of a sudden, the funding stops. And not only do you have to stop what you're doing, but you've created an expectation in community, that you don't meet. And that's, I think, doing more harm. – Stream 1*

Organisations that used the grant funds to supplement a larger multicomponent initiative with other revenue streams were best placed to commence delivery if the funding release was delayed, and better able to sustain their intervention after delivery. Some organisations were beginning to look for additional grant funds or sponsors for their programs after the Round 2 funded project was completed.

*Continual business automation and evaluation is a big one to make sure that we're able to deliver without that funding, the same levels of service that we did in the funding. And then the second part ... a big reliance will be on partnership and corporate funding, that's the sustainable model – Stream 2*

*So, with more funding, we could just pick it up again, and do the project again... we have something that's scalable and usable. – Stream 1*

### **Human resource capacity**

The Participation grants helped increase and retain the number of staff working in the sport and physical activity sector (Figure 11). More than half (58%) of the interview participants reported that the Round 2 Participation grant increased the number of staff within their organisation during delivery. However, this finding may not reflect the impact of the grant project on all funded organisations, as many organisations reported not having staff available for delivery as a reason for needing an extension.

A quarter of the interview participants reported using the grant funding to engage external experts for their grant projects. This approach helped address a skills gap within the organisation. One organisation reported engaging a coach from overseas, because no-one in Australia had the required skills or experience. The remaining organisations used contracts with external experts with technical skills such as videography, website designs, app development, social media, or strategic communications. An advantage of external contractors was that the organisation could tap into expert skills and knowledge to commence delivery quickly. One organisation reported hiring external expert as staff, and another reported creating a staff role for a volunteer after the grant funding.

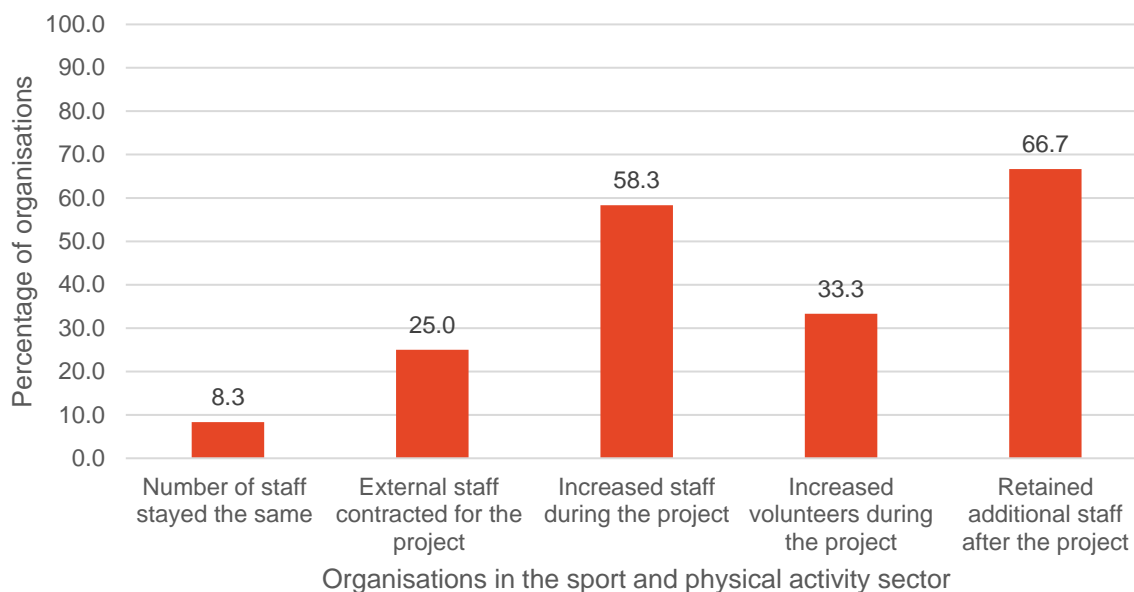


Figure 11 Changes in human resource capacity among funded organisations that participated in interviews (n=12)

In addition to change in the number of staff and volunteers, enhanced capacity of staff and volunteers was also achieved through the Round 2 Participant grant projects. The reach data in this report demonstrates that over 6,000 volunteers, coaches/officials, teachers, and exercise professionals were involved in Participation grant funded projects to date.

**The Round 2 Participation grants enabled sport and physical activity organisations to provide staff and volunteers with professional development opportunities.** This may have included coaching accreditations, certifications, or inductions for staff and volunteers. The training and educational resources that organisations developed will contribute to the sustainability of the funded projects impact on the capacity of the sport and physical activity sector.

*Our volunteers are really critical. The work of building the training for our volunteer guides, which we will roll out again this year, means that we will continue to grow that volunteer pool – Stream 3*

In addition to the education and training, organisations reported how the staff involved in the grant delivery gained new understanding about importance of delivering inclusive participation projects.

*Educating people within each sport to the benefits of having a diverse network and culture within your club or sport... that was beneficial – Stream 3*

As is often the case in sport and physical activity projects, the delivery staff were critical to creating an experience that people enjoyed. Some organisations were able to engage passionate staff to deliver their projects on the ground and others trained people to take a person-centred approach when delivering the project.

*It's our coaches, really. They're amazing. They're all just incredible people. They all have so much passion and drive for community work and just them going above and beyond for basically everything. – Stream 1*

*Invest time training the people that are going to be delivering it. Really invest time in that and make sure they understand what is trying to be achieved through the project. – Stream 2*

## Infrastructure capacity

Infrastructure related projects and the purchase of assets was not eligible to be funded under the grant project. Funded organisations typically already had access to facilities and equipment through other physical activity and sport projects the organisation delivers. Some organisations used grant funds to hire facilities where their project was delivered.

*Everything that we use for our event was existing or we borrowed it off state partners. We borrowed equipment or we borrowed from where we were hiring the grounds. So, what we did find, though, was that throughout the grant we were putting posters up around a place, particularly at the events, making sure there was information. So, the existing facilities that we used were dressed up correctly for the event. – Stream 3*

Organisations that used public spaces for the delivery of their projects reported multiple challenges identifying and accessing facilities. The major challenge was adjusting to different rules and regulations across different local government areas and/or different States and Territories.

*The traffic management is probably one of the biggest stumbling blocks because everyone... All councils seem to do that differently... There are different ways to actually go about the road closure, and the sign off to actually having a road closure can vary in different councils and different states, actually, too. – Stream 1*

*Different parts of the country just function differently, and we have to do our research before we just jump into this massive project. That was definitely something that we didn't consider at the start is that every state does require certain things to be done before you do jump into that ship. We're planning a lot better in the future. – Stream 1*

The infrastructure dimension of capacity also includes IT systems and digital platforms. One organisation that didn't include IT systems reported that this was an area they identified for improvement.

*When you've got a new project, it's 'what systems and processes do you need?' And you'll learn that you need new things ... with better systems, we probably may not have needed to spend so much time on staff training, let's say. But in order to get the program going, that's what we had to do. – Stream 1*

Three projects included digital communication campaigns linked to physical activity and sport participation opportunities, and 1 involved the development of a mobile application. All digital platforms enabled the funded organisation to promote the benefits of physical activity to a wide audience. These organisations reported that investment in an IT project was challenging for the organisation to justify with their existing revenue. The Participation grant funds changed 'nice to have' IT projects to 'must haves' for funded organisations, with all continuing to fund these initiatives with additional revenue sources going forward.

*This gave us the seed funding to allow us to build this platform. The fact that we were able to also, at the same time, create a partnership with [Sponsor] allows us to have that sustainability, and the fact that we built the operation to this into our business as well. So, we've set it up, so that it's something that is sustainable going forward. – Stream 2*

*The idea is that we can continue to populate that into the future. So, any time we have anything around research, or case studies, or campaigns, anything like that. All that material will then get added to that site. So that site will continue in perpetuity. – Stream 1*

## Planning and development capacity

Organisation that received Round 2 Participation grants were strategically aligned in tackling population physical inactivity. The grant funding enabled organisations and their partners to better engage inactive populations in sport and physical activity. Delivery of the grant project did not have a large impact on

the planning and development capacity of organisations, but instead enabled organisations to implement their plans. In the Round 1 evaluation, findings highlighted that the Participation grants enabled organisations to do things differently and take a more innovative approach to increasing participation. This was observed again in the Round 2 evaluation.

*This is completely different to anything that we would normally do, and like most National Sporting Organisations, our digital maturity is lacking... it really gave us this unique opportunity to show that we can do some things differently, and then hopefully then apply some of those learnings across how we might approach digital technology across the business going forward. – Stream 2*

*The concept and the idea were certainly there. But in order to be able to really facilitate the build, we did need a grant like this. – Stream 2*

A key factor that impacted on the quality of experiences for people involved in the completed projects were related to the extent of organisational readiness to deliver the project, and the capacity of staff and volunteers involved in delivery. The 12-month timeline for delivery, and the scale of the projects, limited the amount of preparation time organisations had before they needed to commence delivery. Some organisations rushed into large scale delivery without considered plans or promotional materials, which left them overextended during delivery.

*We basically had to invest into everything that we already do and make it bigger and then look at the things that weren't working and adjust them accordingly. So, rostering we had to adjust. Clocking in and out we had to adjust for staff because people weren't getting paid correctly. Training modules had to be adjusted. Codes of conduct. Everything had to be reviewed on the go, which was pretty wild. – Stream 1*

Other organisations, particularly those who were delivering multi-component projects with supplementary funding, reported spending time at the beginning of their project to establish new, efficient ways of working.

*When we were successful, it was, 'right, what do we need to do to make this work?' ... being able to sit down early on in the project and work out how that's going to work in a way which is sustainable and scalable was a massive challenge. But now that we've done that, it's created better ways of working for us. – Stream 1*

## **External relationships**

As identified in the Round 1 evaluation, the funding opportunity encouraged the development of new, or the formalisation of existing, partnerships that enabled to collaboration in project design and delivery. This aspect of capacity will be addressed under the research question 'To what extent did the funded organisations partner with external organisations to deliver their grant projects?' on the following pages of this report.

In Summary – organisations reported that the grant funding made a substantial contribution to their capacity to tackle population physical inactivity.

*It's [the Participant Grant funding] definitely contributed heaps to our programs and to sustaining them and giving opportunities to people to be a coach and learn and get qualifications and then young people to try the sport. – Stream 1*

*There's a wonderful, growing demand, and we're constantly being contacted by communities, whether that be health clinics or PCYCs or Sport and Rec, or schools, who are wanting to also tap into and be part of the program. So, I think the reputation and the profile and the enthusiasm for other communities to participate is a really good thing. – Stream 1*



## Engagement of partners in the project

The barriers to sport and physical activity participation faced by target populations are complex. Projects targeting young people found that educational institutions (schools and universities) were the most effective way to connect with the target audience and engaged these institutions as partners. Most had existing relationships with educational institutions through other activities e.g., Sporting Schools. Planning a new project with educational institutions which would engage more of their young people in physical activity was usually viewed positively by the partner.

Organisations targeting people that are living with a disability identified a lot of players in the disability space to consider and involve. It was considered vital to engage with the disability sector, and the sport sector, to gain a holistic understanding of the environment before setting up a new project.

*Mapping what was out there and wasn't out there. And it became very, very clear that together we could build something from the ground up really well. But it would need us to do that together. – Stream 3*

Similar experiences were reported by projects targeting specific target groups or areas. There was great potential for projects to be viewed as competitors rather than allies by other organisations. Interview participants reported needing to have conversations with stakeholders to ensure everyone understood what the project was trying to achieve and didn't view it as a threat. In some cases, this meant creating Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs), relocation of the project delivery, or other times a conversation was sufficient to address their concerns.

*There was a little bit of a territorial threat there. We found that we came into some issues with that person... so we had to figure that one out and move a lot of our programs elsewhere as well. – Stream 1*

Organisations that were using the funds to scale up their project often had existing relationships with sponsors/partners that co-contributed to the Participation grant project. This may have involved providing catering or equipment for participants, delivering coach training, or extending the marketing and promotion of the project. These existing partnerships enabled scale-up projects to commence much faster than projects which were completely new for an organisation.

*Through those [complementary] programs we are able to develop those relationships and partnerships with organisations that want to make a contribution... And they're really keen to do that, as long as their values align with what we do. – Stream 1*

*We already knew [peak organisational bodies] in that healthcare space. And then we connected with key demographic agencies within healthcare districts across the country... And so, this enabled us to be able to go and have meetings and discuss the parameters of the project. – Stream 2*

Organisations starting a new project or delivering a project in a new area reported challenges identifying the right person or area of a partner organisation to connect with. Projects that were delivered across various jurisdictions of Australia found there was little consistency, particularly at local government level.

*It's been interesting to see at local government level who picks it up and run with it, and it's been a bit of a mixed bag... you've got to dig down to find the right person that will be able to help you and work this and wants to be involved in the project. – Stream 1*

In addition to spending time identifying the right person, organisations reported further challenges establishing trust between the funded organisation and the partner. It was clear that when organisations rushed the establishment of their partnerships they were not as firm as those who had long-term partnerships. When organisations developed good relationships with partners, it increased their capacity to engage the target audience.

*They had great demographic information on who wasn't using funding in their plans, who was interested in physical activity or community activities. And so that showcased*

*to us that building strong partner relationships is really crucial when we're launching a new project, to be able to have that oversight and vision of really what that space is, so that we can utilise that information to be able to build more partnerships.*  
– Stream 2

*having that key staff member that was just purely focused on that programme was really good in terms of maintaining that relationship.* – Stream 2

### **Insights on Partnerships from Stream 3**

The main similarity between the two completed projects in Stream 3 was the use of regular meetings to bring partners together and keep them engaged throughout the delivery. Using regular meetings to foster collaboration between multiple organisations was reported as difficult to coordinate, even when they were completely online, but well worth it.

*We had monthly catch-ups with all NSOs coming in to give an update. So, we'd go around the room or around the grounds for each NSO to give an update on what's happening... Being able to bounce ideas, first and foremost, off those different NSOs was one which was a primary benefit for us. Taking learnings from what other sports have done previously around the inclusion side of things to be able to say, what are you currently doing, what are we doing, where are the holes in what we're currently doing, and how can we improve?* – Stream 3

A challenge reported by organisation in Stream 3 was that partner organisations may not have nominated the person with the right level of power to make decisions, or only have volunteers available to contribute. If the representatives involved in the groups were not able to make decisions, progress was slow. Another challenge arose when partners had limited capacity to deliver what was originally agreed. Partner organisations had no accountability to the ASC to contribute what was offered originally.

*We were supposed to have access to one of the staff, and we budgeted for that, from [Partner organisation] a couple of days a week. That then got rescinded because he was too busy with the high-performance program. And it wasn't his choice, it was his boss's choice.* – Stream 3

Among the two projects, one adopted an advisory group model which meant the funded organisation did most of the work, whilst the other functioned as a collective and allocated funds and support for partners. Sharing the funds with partners reduced competition and tensions between organisations. Another project in Stream 1 also adopted this approach and it seems promising.

In future, organisations should consider the capacity of each partner and how resources may be proportionately allocated to enable both large and small NSO's to achieve similar outcomes.

*All NSOs had varying levels of human resources and support. So that was difficult at times. So, you'd have some sports ... who had full-time inclusion and diversity stuff whereas you'd have other sports ... who have one full-time staff member or ... The sport is delivered by volunteers. So sometimes it was quite hard to get a hold of the contacts because they're working full-time.* – Stream 3

Evaluation of the partnership stream using the evaluation toolkit was challenging. An additional feedback tool was piloted with one organisation to understand the impact of the project on all partners involved in the funded project. This was an online form which asked partner organisations similar questions to what the funded organisation were asked in the interview.

Partners of the lead organisation (n=13) all completed the online feedback form. They reported that regular meetings, resource sharing, and support provided by an external expert work well. The major challenges were regarding the short time frame, difficulties of NSO's reaching grass roots (not typically done), and capacity of small organisations to deliver the project. Overall, through the Participation grant

project partner organisations also reported increases in human resource capacity, planning and development capacity, and external relationships.

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*Building relationships and collaboration between NSO's around a shared inclusion goal was highly successful and has potential long-term effects.*

*Lead organisations should consider distributing funds to partners to achieve the project objectives on time.*

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# To what extent did funded projects increase participation in sport and physical activity?

## Participation in the funded projects

Understanding the contribution that the funded project made to participants physical activity was a key component to this evaluation.

- People participated in the funded project for about an hour and a half (median 86 minutes). This is longer than in Round 1, where participants' median time spent participating in the funded project was 62 minutes. These 86 minutes spent participating in the funded project made up on average 13% of participants total weekly physical activity.
- The 15–17-year age group reported spending the most time participating in the funded project (165 minutes) (Figure 13).
- Women and girls spent more time per week participating in the funded project compared with men and boys (104 minutes vs 79 minutes, respectively).
- People who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander spent a similar amount of time per week participating in the funded project than those who did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (82 minutes vs 84 minutes).
- People who reported speaking a primary language other than English spent more time per week participating in the funded project compared to those who reported speaking only English at home (95 minutes vs 84 minutes).
- Similarly, participants who reported having a chronic health condition spent a higher amount of time per week participating in the funded project compared to those who reported not having a chronic health condition (92 minutes vs 77 minutes).
- Those living in inner regional and outer regional/remote areas spent a higher amount of time per week participating in the funded project (90 minutes and 89 minutes, respectively) compared to those living in major cities (79 minutes).
- There was no socioeconomic gradient for the proportion of time per week spent participating in the funded project. People living in the most disadvantaged areas spent a similar amount of time per week participating in the funded project compared to those living in the second- and third-most disadvantaged areas (89 minutes, 90 minutes and 88 minutes, respectively). Whereas people living in the least disadvantaged areas spent the least amount of time per week participating in the funded project (73 minutes).

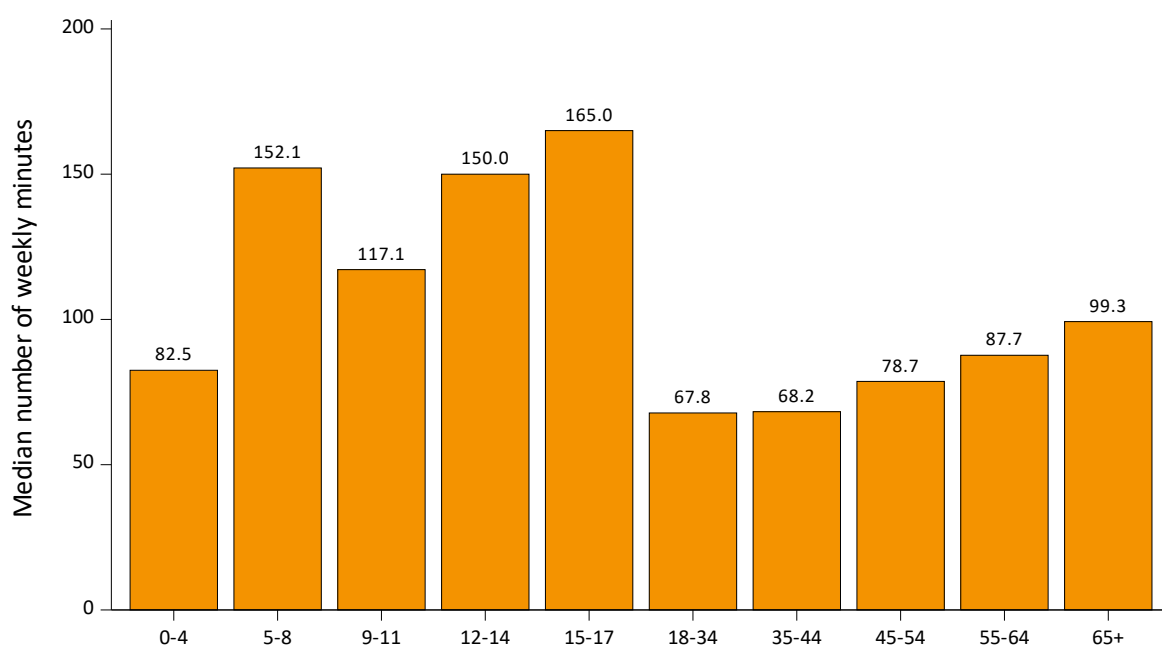


Figure 13 Weekly minutes spent participating in the funded project by age group – post only (n=792)

## Changes in meeting physical activity guidelines

Regular participation in physical activity is imperative for good health and wellbeing. Regular physical activity participation is a key driver for reducing the burden of chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease cancer and diabetes. Understanding the contribution of the investment through this grant program on the proportion of participants achieving physical activity guidelines important politically and strategically.

- The proportion of adults who met physical activity guidelines increased from 9% to 12% after participation in the projects (

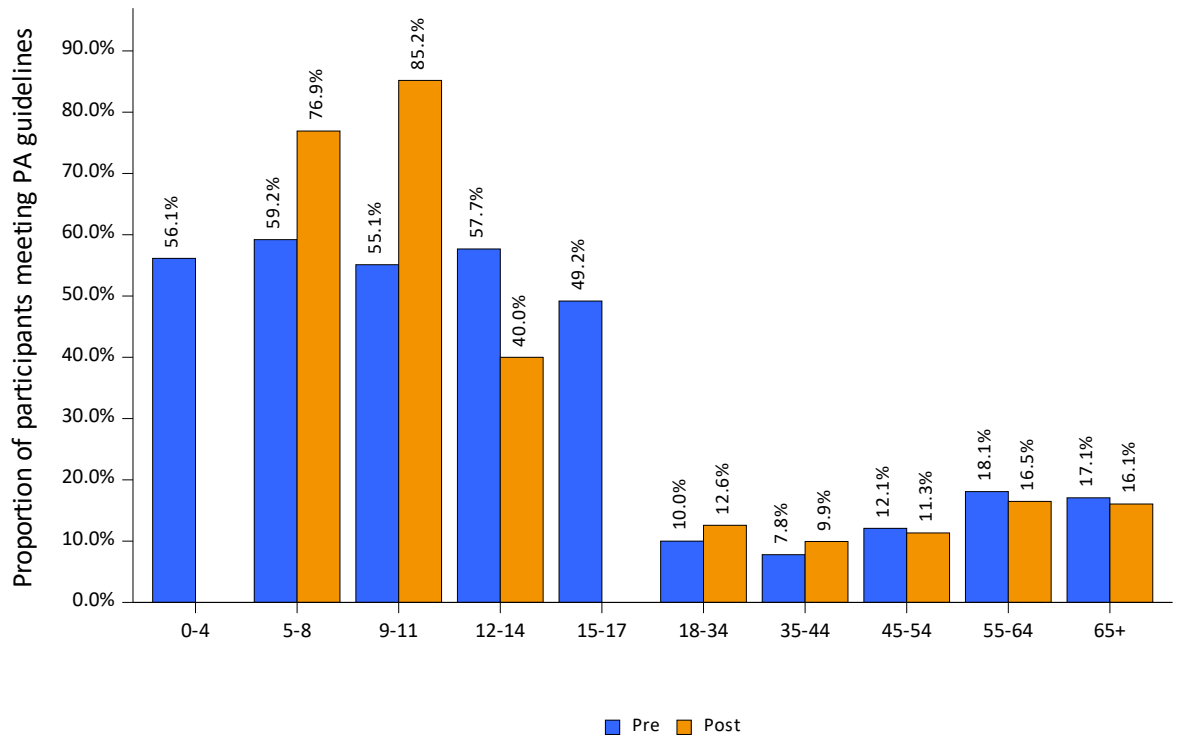


Figure 14).

- The proportion of children (n=11,219) who met physical activity guidelines increased from 57% to 78% after the projects (

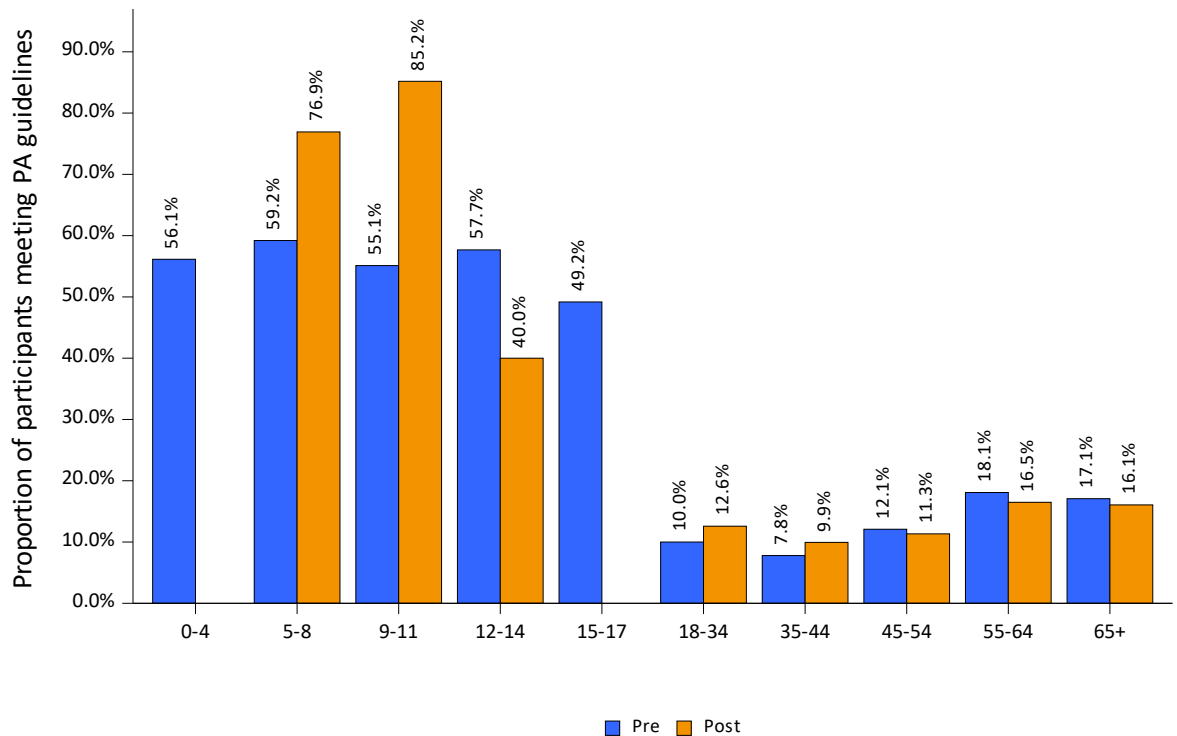


Figure 14).

- The proportion of female children who met physical activity guidelines increased from 53% to 64% (Figure 15).
- The proportion of adults who reported having a chronic health condition (n=2,402) and met physical activity guidelines increased from 11% to 13% after the projects.
- Remoteness of people involved in the funded projects had limited effect on changes in physical activity. There was no difference in the proportion of people living in inner regional and outer regional and remote areas at pre with 7% of people meeting physical activity guidelines. At post, the proportion meeting guidelines increased to a similar extent with 10% of people living in inner regional areas met physical activity guidelines 11% of people living in outer regional and remote met physical activity guidelines after the projects (Figure 16).
- There was no socioeconomic gradient for adults meeting physical activity guidelines (Figure XX).
- The proportion of adults living in the most disadvantaged areas who met physical activity guidelines increased from 12% to 15% after the projects (Figure 17).
- The proportion of people met physical activity guidelines and who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or who spoke a language other than English at home decreased after participating in the projects.

Overall, children demonstrated the greatest changes in meeting physical activity guidelines after participating in the funded projects.

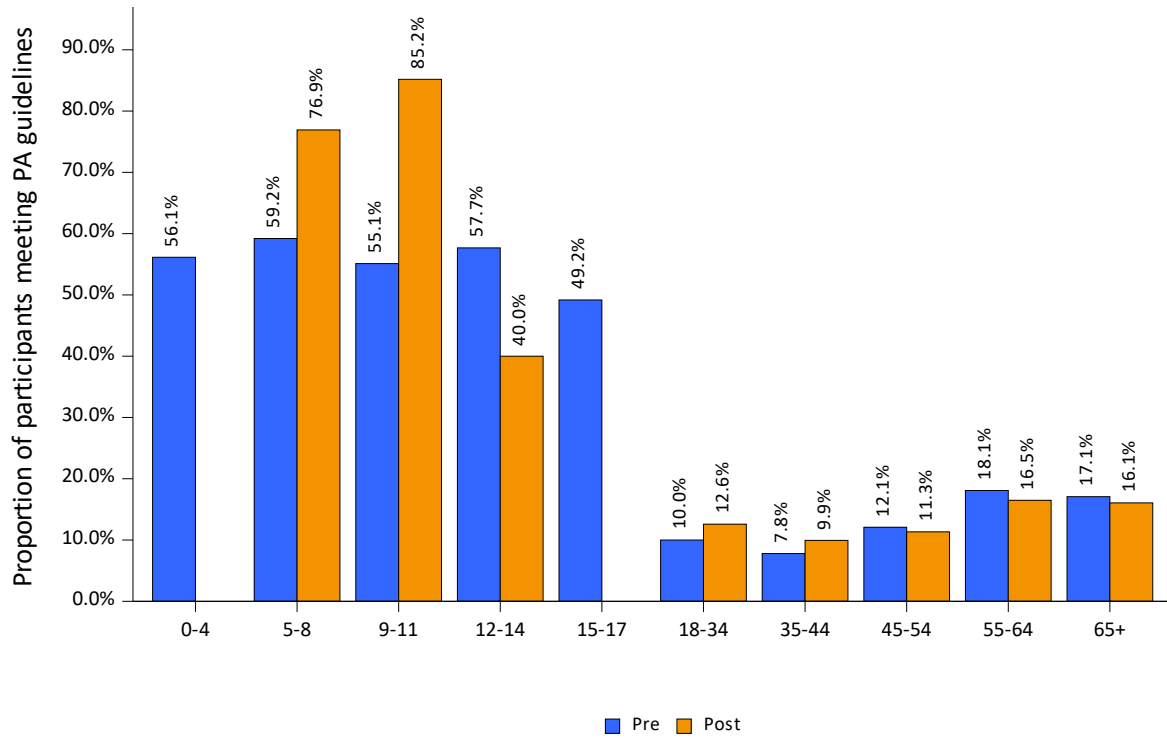


Figure 14 Changes in meeting physical activity guidelines organisations with pre and post data by age group (n=11,096)

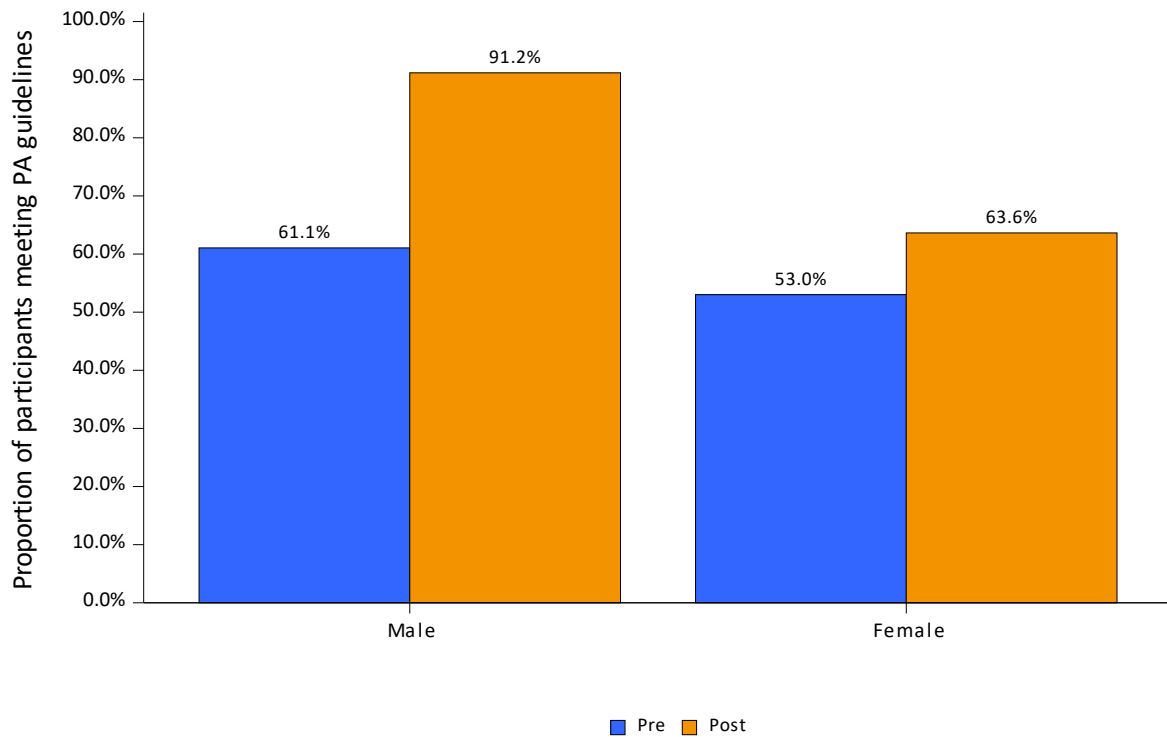


Figure 15 Changes in children meeting physical activity guidelines organisations with pre and post data by gender (n=11,219)

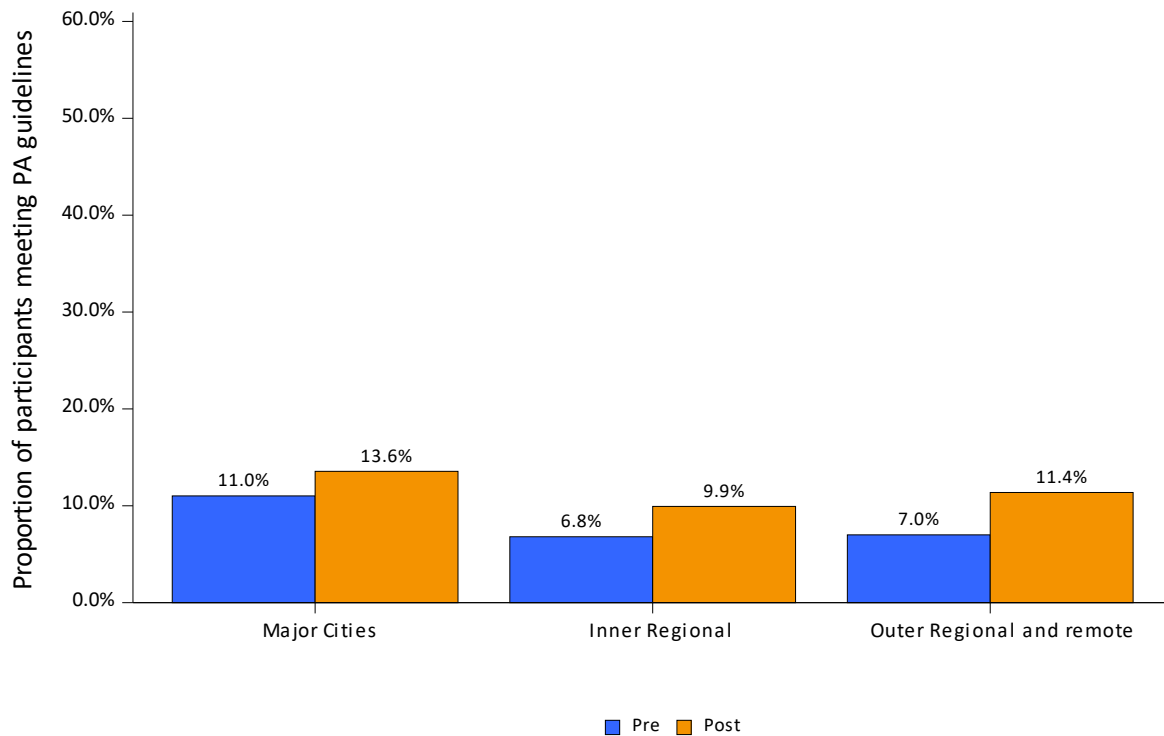


Figure 16 Changes in adults meeting physical activity guidelines organisations with pre and post data by remoteness (n=2,402)

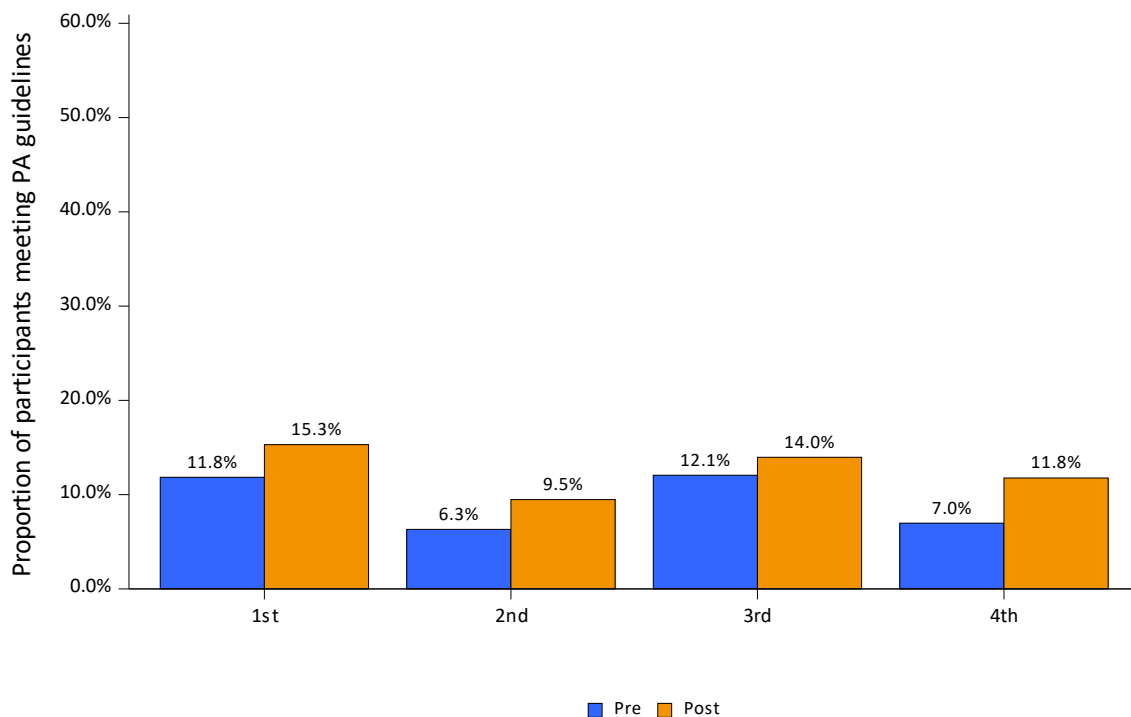


Figure 17 Changes in adults meeting physical activity guidelines organisations with pre and post data by socioeconomic status (n=2,402). Note. the 1<sup>st</sup> quartile is the most disadvantaged quartile, and the 4<sup>th</sup> quartile is the least disadvantaged quartile.

### Changes in time participating in sport each week

A key component of this evaluation was to understand the changes in weekly sport participation.

- Overall, the median weekly sport participation remained constant, with 600 minutes before participation in funded projects and 596 minutes after participation (Figure 18).

- Changes to median weekly sport participation, before and after participation in funded projects, varied by age category (Figure 19Figure 17). Sport participation did not change or reduce among younger participants, while improvements in the 55–64 years age group were substantial (550 to 700 minutes).
- Females reported more weekly minutes of sport participation compared with males (605 minutes vs. 505 minutes). Both males and females reported an increase in median weekly minutes of sport participation after funded projects (Figure 20).
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants reported participating in 855 minutes of sport per week, which was substantially higher than their non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander counterparts (595 minutes) (Figure 21). After participating in the funded projects Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants reported reductions in their sport participation per week. This is concerning, and it is important to note that the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants was smaller at the post timepoint (n=156), compared to the pre timepoint (n=315).
- People who spoke a primary language other than English at home reported participating in 630 minutes of sport per week, which was higher than participants who spoke English at home (599 minutes) (Figure 22). Time participating in sport remained stable for people who spoken English at home and reduced for those who reported speaking a language other than English at home (Figure 22).
- Participants living in both inner regional and outer regional/remote areas reported an increase in median weekly minutes of sport participation after participating in funded projects (from 540 to 563 minutes, and 580 to 600 minutes, respectively) (Figure 24).
- There was no socioeconomic gradient for improvement in median weekly minutes of sport participation (Figure 25). Participants living in the most disadvantaged areas reported an increase in median weekly minutes of sport participation after funded projects, from 620 minutes to 628 minutes (Figure 25).

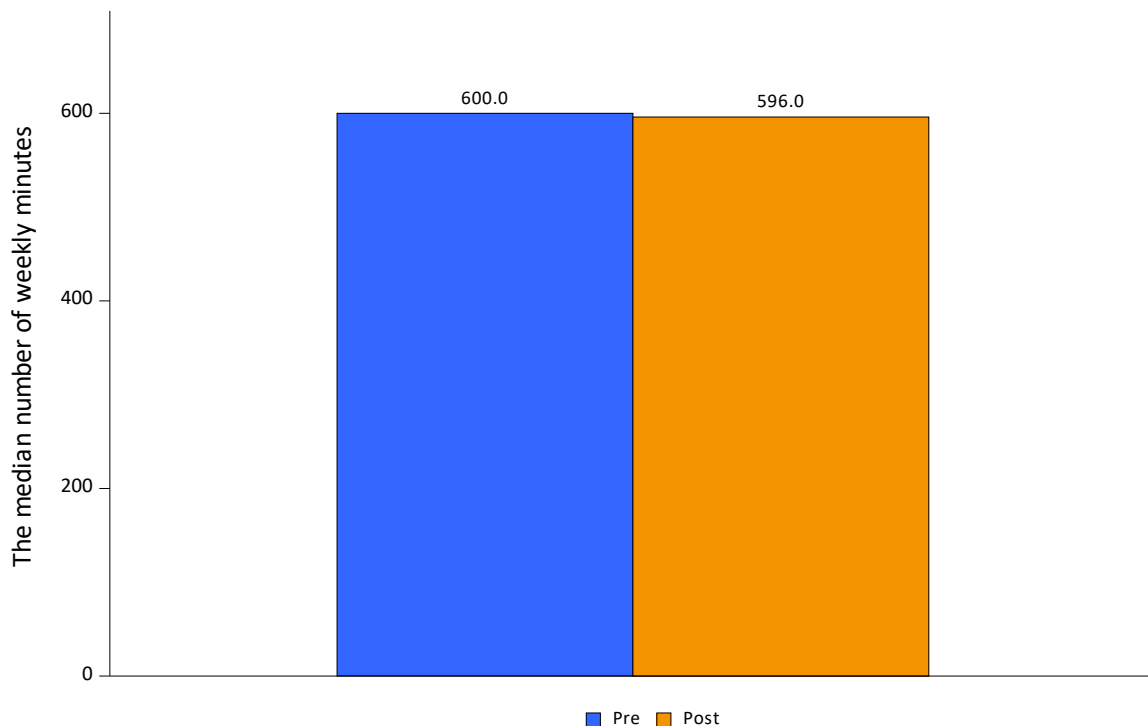


Figure 18 Changes in median minutes of weekly sport participation in organisations with pre and post data (n=1,503)

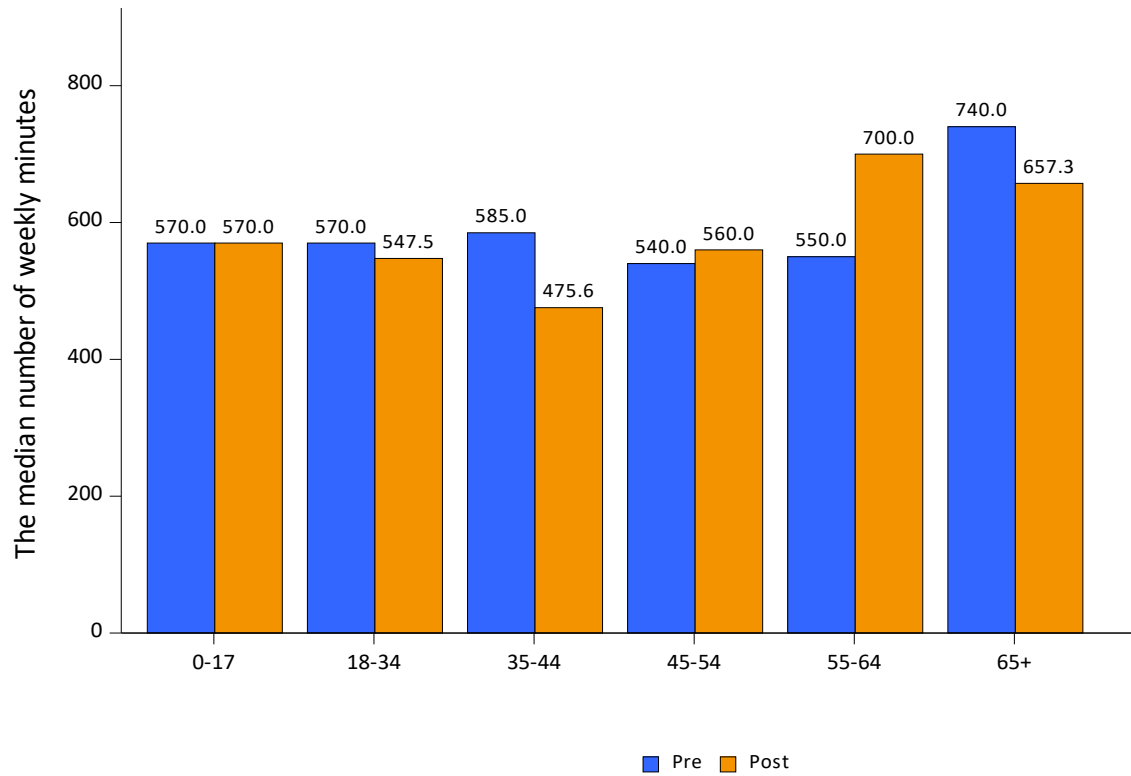


Figure 19 Changes in median minutes of weekly sport participation in organisations with pre and post data by age (n=1,503)

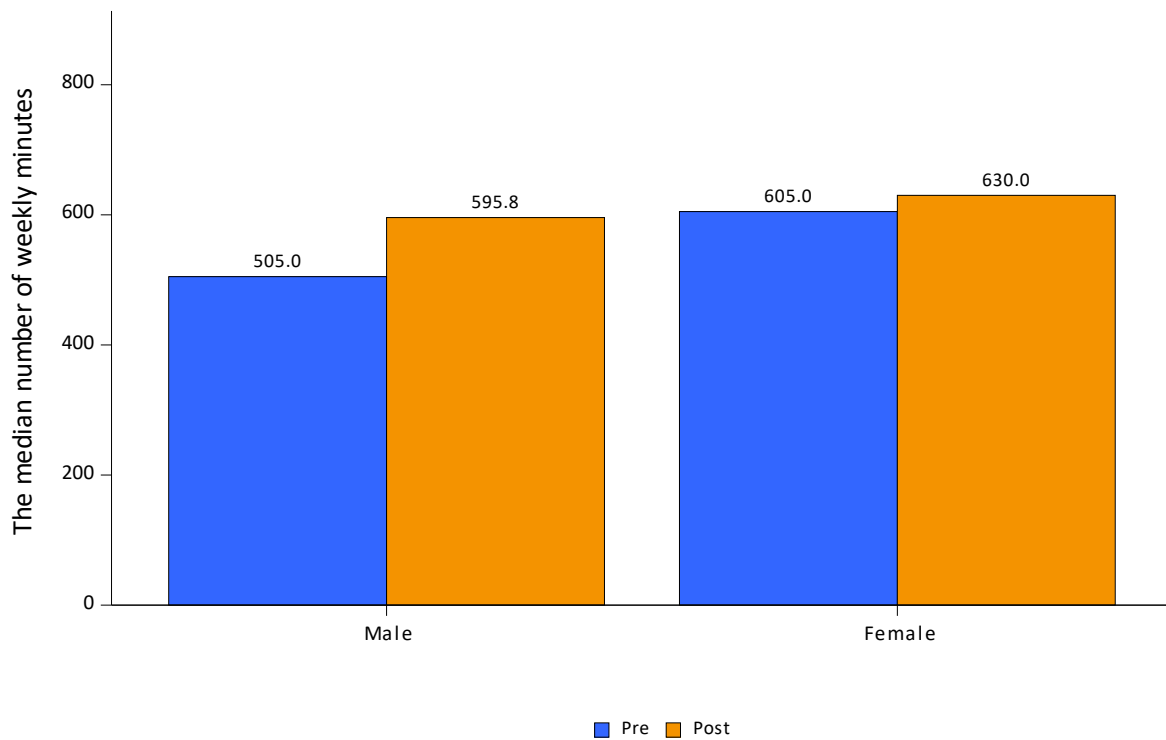


Figure 20 Changes in median minutes of weekly sport participation in organisations with pre and post data by sex (n=1,503)

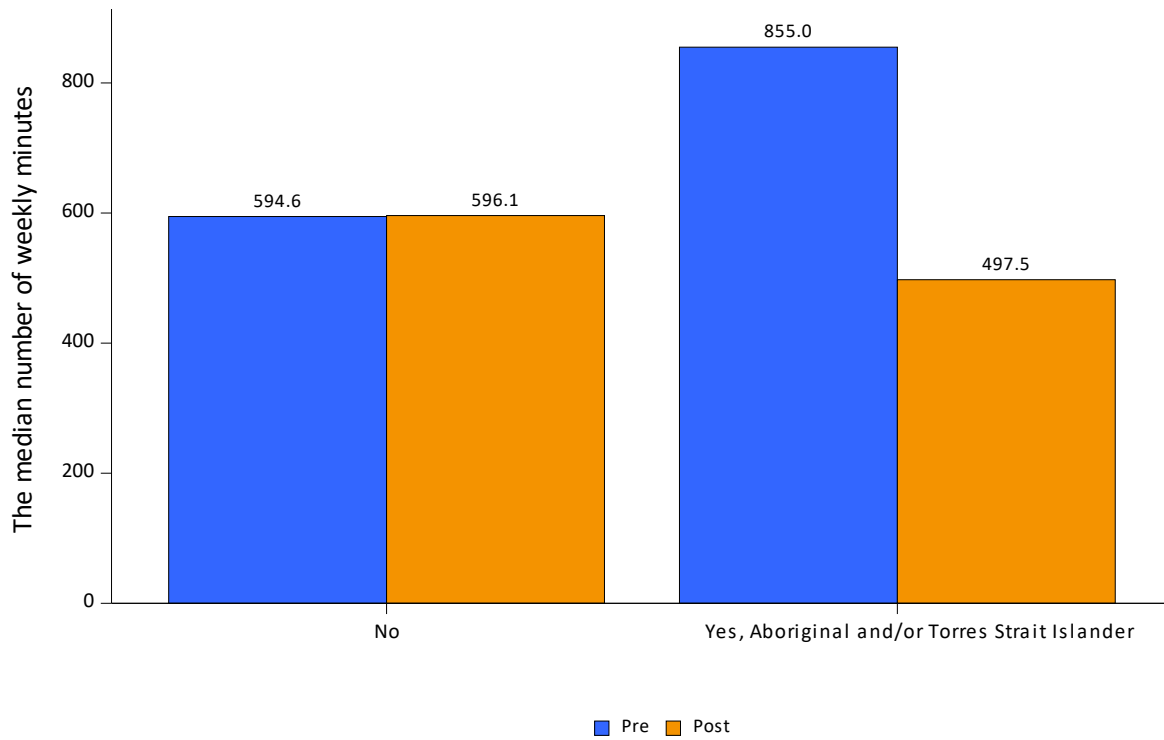


Figure 21 Changes in median minutes of weekly sport participation in organisations with pre and post data by Aboriginal identity (n=1,503)

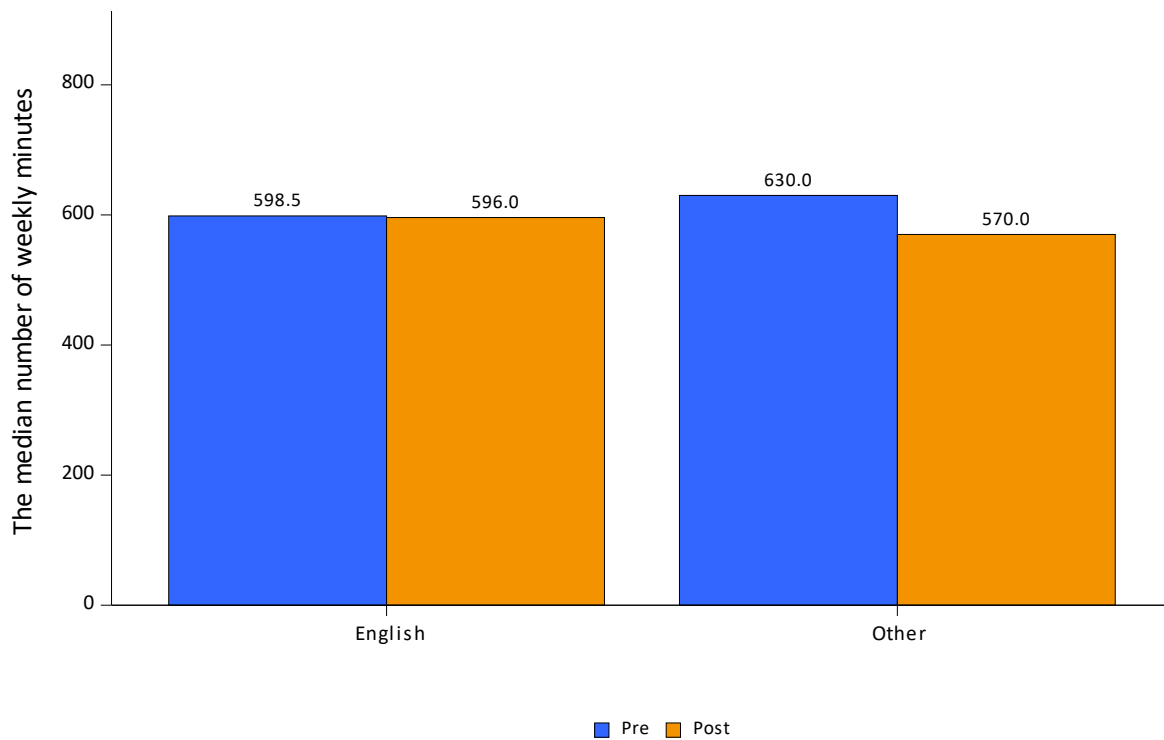


Figure 22 Changes in median minutes of weekly sport participation in organisations with pre and post by primary language spoken at home (n=1,503)

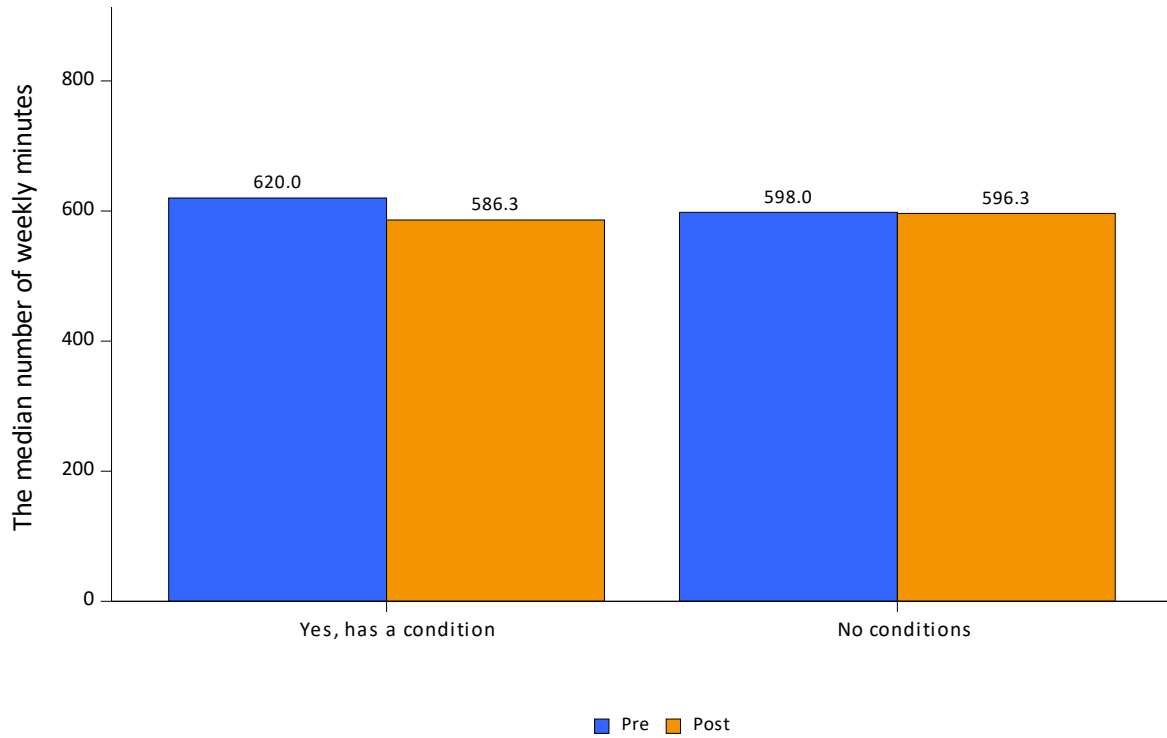


Figure 23 Changes in median minutes of weekly sport participation in organisations with pre and post data by health conditions (n=1,503)

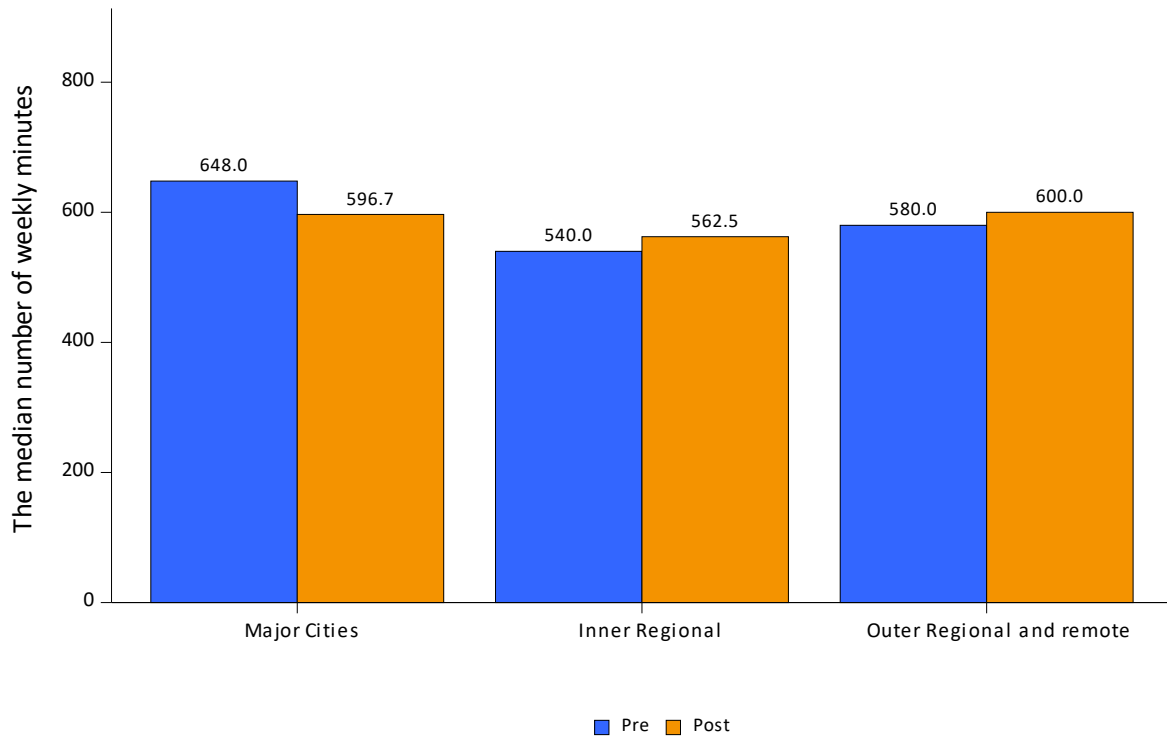


Figure 24 Changes in median minutes of weekly sport participation in organisations with pre and post data by remoteness (n=1,503)

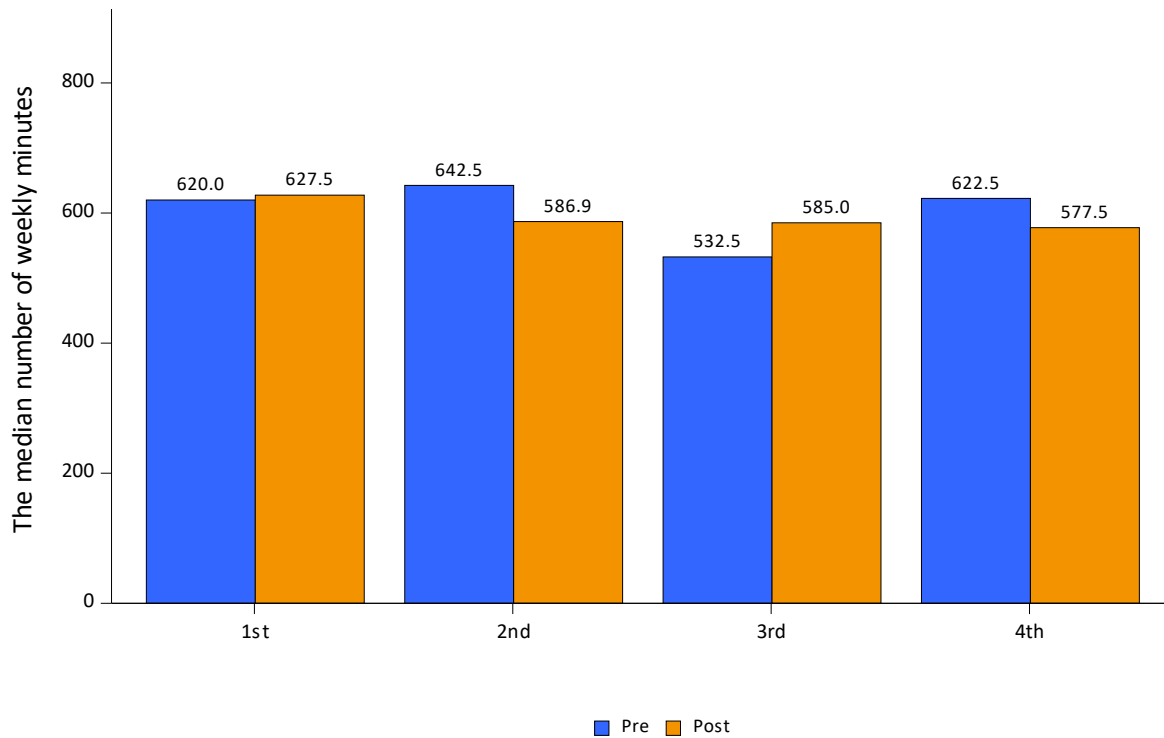


Figure 25 Changes in median minutes of weekly sport participation in organisations with pre and post data by socioeconomic status (n=1,503). Note. the 1<sup>st</sup> quartile is the most disadvantaged quartile, and the 4<sup>th</sup> quartile is the least disadvantaged quartile.

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*Less than 1 in 5 participants reached by Participation grant projects were meeting physical activity guidelines, however they reported high-levels of sport participation.*

*Round 2 funded projects enabled participants to be active for about an hour and a half each week. There was no change in total sport participation from before to after project participation.*

*Participants reported being more physically active after participating in the project, with children reporting the greatest improvements.*

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## To what extent did funded projects increase participants' self-efficacy to be active and awareness of the broad benefits of being active through sport?

- Participants demonstrated a slight increase in readiness to improve physical activity behaviours in the short-term, reporting varied levels of intentions ranging from readiness to “Exercise a little” (from 13% to 15%, respectively) to “Exercise regularly but <6 months” (from 15% to 18%, respectively) (Figure 26).
- There was no change in self-efficacy more broadly, with the proportion of people who indicated that they “strongly agree” or “agree” with the statement ‘I can achieve most of the goals I set myself’ from pre to post project delivery (Figure 27).
- There was a slight increase in the proportion of participants who reported being “More active”, compared to the previous year, after participating in the funded project (from 33% to 36%) (Figure 28). The proportion of participants who reported being “Far more active” compared to the previous year slightly reduced (although not significantly) from pre (17%) to post (15%) project delivery.

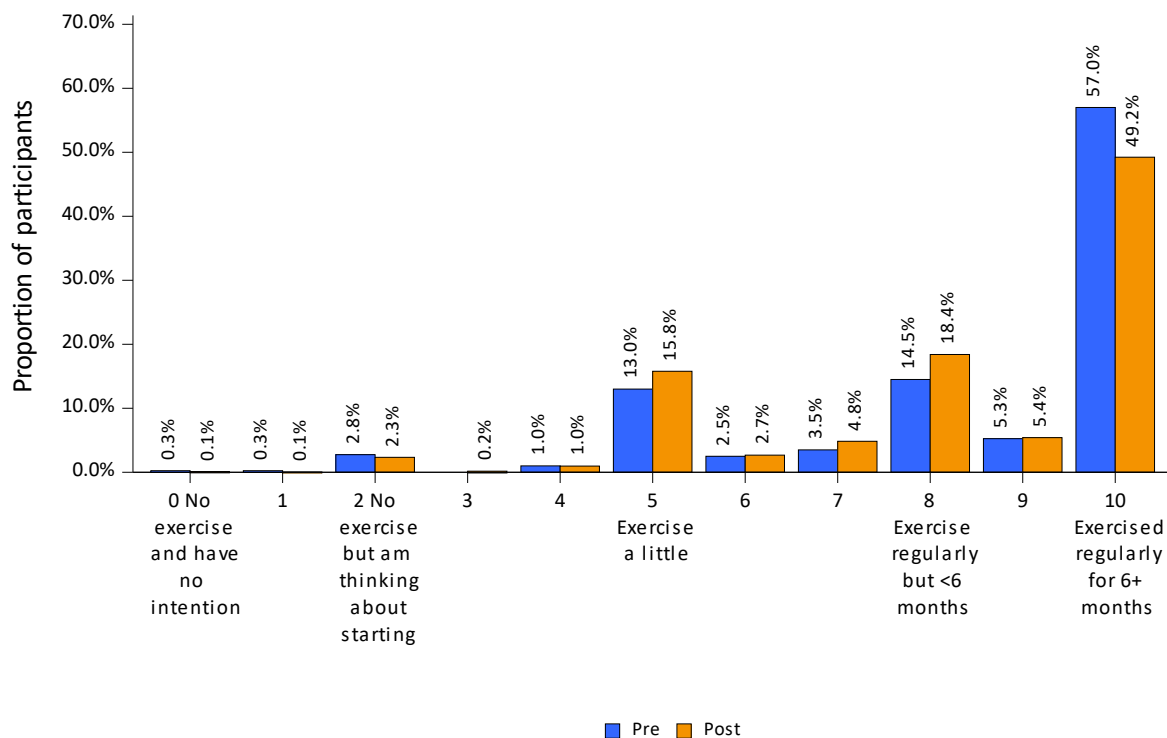


Figure 26 Changes in readiness to change physical activity behaviours in organisations with pre and post data (n=1,503)

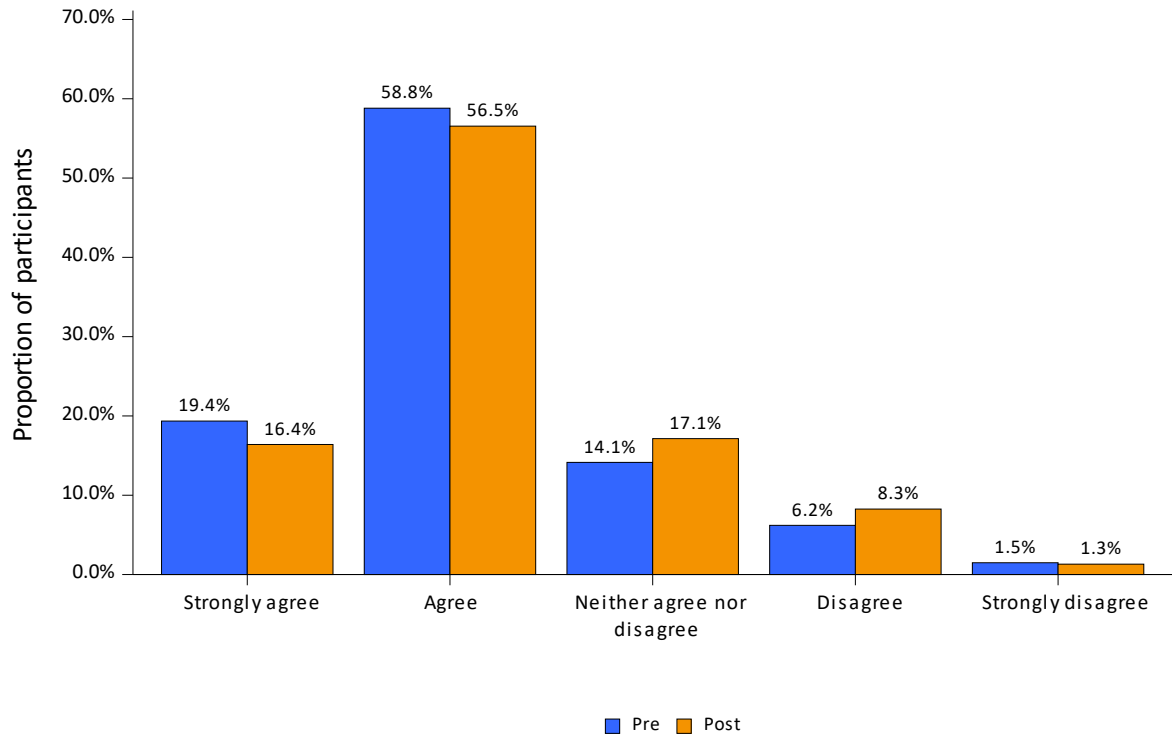


Figure 27 Changes in self-efficacy 'I can achieve most of the goals I set myself' in organisations with pre and post data (n=1,503)

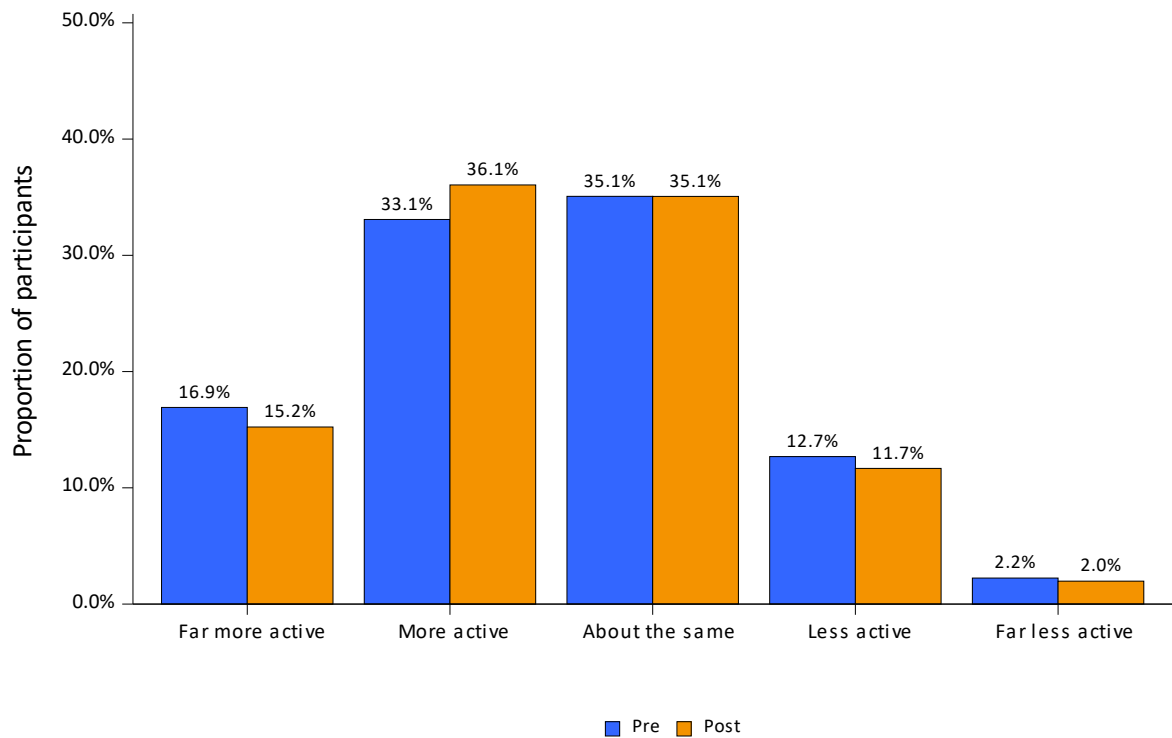


Figure 28 Changes in responses to "Compared to this time last year, how would you rate your current physical activity levels" in organisations with pre and post data (n=1,503)

## What worked, what didn't work, why and what next?

Table 7 and Table 8 provide a high-level summary of principals that appear to 'work' and 'not work' in terms of reaching physically inactive people through a national government sport grant program. Key learnings identified throughout the mixed method evaluation can be used to judge the value of this grant in tackling physically inactivity through sport, but also can inform future projects and organisations aiming to reach and engage inactive communities.

Table 7 What worked, why and what next in the delivery of Move it AUS Participation grants

What worked	Why	What next
<b>Projects that were designed to be inclusive of the target audience</b>	Projects that were tailored for target groups achieved good reach and reported using multiple strategies to deliver inclusive and high-quality projects.	Involve the target group in the development process and partnering with local organisations could improve the reach of these tailored projects into the community.
<b>Having an in-depth understanding of the barriers</b>	Research and collaboration with community groups helped organisations identify specific opportunities and barriers experienced by target groups, and to tailor their projects specifically to overcome these barriers.  This informed meaningful and impactful strategies which were likely to engage and improve the lives of the target audience.	Include a preparation phase in their project delivery plans which focuses on connecting with relevant community groups.
<b>Adding equipment and resources to the sector</b>	Projects which included the development of online resources, training and education projects, or purchase of equipment reported that these aspects of the project would have an ongoing legacy in the sport and physical activity sector.	Ensure the projects produce an output at the conclusion of the project, in addition to providing participation opportunities.
<b>Creating a network to share best practice approaches</b>	Organisations trialling new ways to engage the same target audience learnt a lot from meeting regularly with each other and providing updates on what works and what didn't in their projects. There was strength in coming together and bouncing ideas of each other, and whilst implementing their own projects.	Consider facilitating networking opportunities for projects targeting specific populations to provide updates and share learnings with other organisations with the same target audience during project delivery.

What worked	Why	What next
<p><b>Engage and empower people to increase project reach</b></p>	<p>Organisations that lacked specialised skills engaged external experts to complete high-quality project activities in a timely fashion.</p> <p>Organisations who provided funds and autonomy for their partners to lead aspects of the delivery were successful.</p> <p>Up-skilling community members with existing relationships with the target group and/or living in the delivery region enhance project reach to the target audience.</p>	<p>The primary applicant should consider distributing funds to external experts or partners to achieve the project objectives on time.</p> <p>Implement strategies to upskill local community members to make delivery more sustainable, particularly in rural and remote communities.</p>
<p><b>Telling the story of how being physically active through sport benefits individuals</b></p>	<p>Role model and project ambassadors were considered the most effective strategy by funded organisations to communicate the benefits of being physically active through sport.</p>	<p>Organisations should continue to promote the benefits of being physically active through sport – including the health, social, and personal benefits.</p>
<p><b>Preparation and risk mitigation plans to ensure delivery</b></p>	<p>The organisations that completed delivery reported they were extremely prepared to adapt their face-to-face activities in response to changing circumstances beyond the organisations control.</p>	<p>Develop risk mitigation plans to ensure delivery of projects outside of the sport season they typically use.</p>
<p><b>Build from existing organisational priorities</b></p>	<p>Organisations that were already investing in a project or working with the target population in some ways were able to enhance their activities using the grant funding, without having to start and complete an entirely new project within the funding period. Allocating the ASC funding to some components of a project, rather than the entire project appeared successful.</p>	<p>Ensure that the grant project is part of a larger strategic direction for the organisation.</p> <p>Identify complementary activities undertaken by the organisation which could contribute to the project's success and encourage participation, such as a strategic plan, training for delivery staff provided in-kind, or incentives provided by a sponsor.</p>

What worked	Why	What next
<b>Support from the ASC</b>	After receiving the funding, organisations found the ASC team responsive and supportive. When they needed to adapt their project, the team were understanding and helped identify solutions with the organisations.	Continue to provide support for grant recipients during project delivery.
<b>Enhanced organisational capacity</b>	The Participation grant program increased the capacity of funded organisations to involve people in sport and physical activity. Particularly, the program increased the financial capacity and human resources available to organisations.	The Participation grant program should be continued to encourage organisations to involve physically inactive people in sport and physical activity.
<b>Flexible evaluation options for grant recipients</b>	The national evaluation provided all information about the evaluation requirements for grant recipients to determine their evaluation approach. Some organisation appreciated the ability to adapt the survey to suit their project and others appreciated the ready-made survey option.	Allocate more time to education and training organisations on the strengths and weaknesses of the flexible evaluation options and how to best implement them.

Table 8 What didn't work, why and what next in the delivery of Move it AUS Participation grants

What didn't work	Why	What next
<p><b>Completion of projects within funding period</b></p>	<p>Many organisations reported challenges implementing their project within 12 months. Most of 36 funded projects received an extension and were still delivering their projects at the time of reporting.</p> <p>The most common reason for needing an extension was that organisations missed their desired delivery windows.</p>	<p>Consider allowing grant applicants to define their own delivery period upon application to address challenges of completing projects within the funding period.</p> <p>Organisations - particularly national sports organisations - should have risk mitigation plans in place to ensure they can still deliver their initiative outside of the sport season they typically use.</p>
<p><b>Waiting periods</b></p>	<p>Some organisations who were ready to implement had to wait until funds were released from the ASC which had impacts on their timelines or caused them to miss their ideal delivery period.</p>	<p>Minimise the waiting period between announcing grant recipients and release of funding.</p>
<p><b>Time pressure on partnership development</b></p>	<p>Developing trust can take time. Those working in partnerships reported activities were rushed and may have been better quality if they had 2 years rather than one, and the same amount of funds.</p>	<p>Implement strategies to build and foster trust between partners.</p> <p>Ensure flexible timeline for partnership stream grants.</p>
<p><b>Fly-in fly-out approaches, without upskilling the community</b></p>	<p>Targeting rural and remote communities was particularly challenging with low staff availability and bigger geographical distances between projects. Organisations that didn't have local staff delivering the project spent a lot of time and resources travelling or coordinating travel to deliver the projects in new areas. Whilst in some cases this could not be avoided, strategies that upskilled local community members helped release the pressure and made delivery more sustainable.</p>	<p>Implement strategies to upskill local community members to make delivery more sustainable, particularly in rural and remote communities.</p>

What didn't work	Why	What next
<b>Motivating the “old guard” to do things differently</b>	Most organisations found that their stakeholders were motivated to provide inclusive and high-quality activities. Some people reported resistance from people who didn't see the value in increasing community participation, focuses on elite participation, or had no interest working with the target group.	Demonstrate the value of engaging diverse communities in sport and physical activity to the community.
<b>Increasing awareness of physical activity guidelines</b>	Promoting the physical activity guidelines was a low priority for funded organisations. They did not recognise the value of this approach. Instead, projects should consider the recommendations within the design of their project activities e.g., delivering sessions that provide 30 minutes of physical activity for adults or 60 minutes for children.	Remove promotion of the physical activity guidelines from the grant guidelines and focus on promoting the benefits of physical activity.
<b>Assessing changes in physical activity and sport participation</b>	There was limited data available to specifically understand the effect of the funded projects on participants' physical activity and sport participation. Although eight organisations provided survey data only three of these included pre and post assessments which could be used to assess change. Within these three organisations, only a small number of participants completed the pre and post surveys, with majority only completing the pre survey.	Enhance measurement of sport and physical activity outcomes among project participants.
<b>Evaluation adherence</b>	Pre-post surveys were not considered feasible for all organisations to conduct. Funded projects commenced at different times, some were new, some existing, some ran one off events or were closely linked with seasonal events, others ran projects of varying durations. Consequently, the ability to accurately identify participants before and after participation in funded activities was challenging.	Training for the sport and physical activity sector in complex pragmatic evaluation to increase capability and capacity for research and evaluation throughout the sport ecosystem.
<b>Jurisdictional differences in rules and policies</b>	The grant guidelines required projects to be delivered across multiple States and Territories. Organisations who were new to this scale of delivery reported challenges updating their	Collate information about the different requirements for child safety, insurance, health regulations, and other tasks that may present barriers for Australia-wide projects.

What didn't work	Why	What next
	<p>systems to comply with requirements in each jurisdiction. For example, working with children's checks and COVID-19 regulations across the country.</p>	
<p><b>Targeting the general population</b></p>	<p>Almost all projects that were targeting the general population extended their projects beyond the grant period and were led by National Sporting Organisations. For the Participation grant programs to impact sport and physical activity behaviours of the target populations, projects need to be tailored to reach and retain the target audience.</p>	<p>An active society isn't created overnight, continued focus on addressing population physical inactivity through targeted funding will accelerate progress. The grant guidelines should require applications to focus projects on a target group.</p>
<p><b>Limited evaluation data available for reporting</b></p>	<p>Project extensions led to misalignment between grant project completion dates and evaluation reporting.</p>	<p>Realistic timelines and investment in evaluation should be established.</p>
<p><b>Funded organisations' understanding of evaluation</b></p>	<p>Although most organisations selected an evaluation approach from the national evaluation toolkit, there was limited accountability. The selection of an evaluation was administered through communication between the organisation and SPRINTER and may need to be more formalised.</p>	<p>Grant guidelines should require organisations to allocate staff time dedicated to conducting evaluation tasks to improve the quality of data collected.</p>

## Evaluation caveats

The evaluation methods implemented to assess the effectiveness of the participation grant using the outcomes identified in the logic model, reflect an academically sound and evidence-based approach. The process has been managed by a pragmatic and experienced evaluation team to ensure validity and reliability in the findings.

The mixed-methods evaluation approach provided insights that will enable researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to better understand the role of sport and recreation in tackling physical inactivity in Australia. However, there are several challenges that must be acknowledged.

- The diversity of funded projects by geography, target population, size, scale, and target audience made data collection difficult. To ensure consistent data capture at scale, an adaptable online toolkit was designed. All data therefore were self-reported and the limitations of this must be recognised. In future, objective measurements of physical activity and sport could be considered.
- Some participants engaged with funded projects but did not engage or complete an evaluation. Some might have engaged in evaluation pre and/or post only, and other did not engage with the evaluation at all. This report focuses on the outcomes of participants who engaged and/or completed an evaluation pre- and post- project participation. We therefore must recognise the possibility of self-selection bias.
- Participants who completed the evaluation survey might not have completed all survey questions, resulting in different samples for variables presented. The total sample of data included for each variable is presented in each figure title.
- Some projects only recruited small evaluation sample sizes which limit the generalisability of the results to the wider population. There are also therefore differences in the proportion of people represented in different age categories and demographic groups. When this may impact generalisations on data findings, it has been reported.
- Much of the data is cross-sectional, based on pre- and post-study designs. The absence of experiential design means firm conclusions about the causal and attribution for change are limited.
- Evaluation data presented are accurate at the time of report. Any subsequent delivery and/or changes to any funded projects are not reflected here.

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