

National Sports Plan – Submission

Recommendation(s): That you:

1. **Note** that participation in sport is beneficial to the settlement of newly arrived Australians and plays a critical role in strengthening a sense of belonging in new communities.
2. Note the importance of strengthening the participation of new arrivals in informal activities and in established clubs and codes.
3. **Note** the need to increase engagement between sporting codes and the settlement sector.
4. **Consider** the development of a refugee community engagement strategy.
5. **Consider** financial aid to newly arrived communities who face significant entry barriers to participation such as the purchase of equipment.
6. **Promote** the establishment of a national multicultural council to liaise with the goal of promoting outreach to migrant communities.

Introduction

Sports participation plays a fundamental role in the settlement and integration of newly arrived migrants and refugees. Sports participation offers a clear pathway to the development of local networks and friendships and builds confidence and understanding in the Australian social context. Sports is also shown to have significant mental and physical health benefits for newly arrived Australians, particularly humanitarian entrants who may have suffered trauma in their migration journey. At a community level sports helps to foster a sense of belonging and supports integration and shared understanding. For marginalized and isolated youth from non-English speaking backgrounds, sports participation can be key to rehabilitation and reintegration. Formal and informal sports activities play a key role in managing social cohesion and the settlement of new arrivals.

Responses to posed questions

Participation

60 per cent of Australia's population growth comes from migration, with 200,000 people settling permanently each year. In addition, over a million temporary migrants are living and working in Australia at any one time. At present, the Australian government accepts 13,750 refugees and humanitarian migrants each year, in addition to the 12,000 person special intake of Syrian and Iraqi refugees settled last year. The number of refugees and humanitarian migrants is set to increase year-on-year to 18,750 in 2018 to reflect the global need presented by the ongoing humanitarian disasters in the Middle East and Africa. As a consequence, in the coming years, there will be an increased need for tailored and creative settlement and integration programs.

Integration and benefits for all

Increasing participation amongst first generation Australians is important to the future physical and social health of Australia. It is incumbent on the sporting community to play an active role in engaging new members of the community, particularly vulnerable new arrivals. Participation in sports, at both a grassroots and elite level helps to build a sense of community and belonging and strengthens the resilience of migrant communities during their settlement journey.

At an individual level, sport is a highly effective tool for reaching vulnerable youth. For young new arrivals sports can be a critical vehicle for social acceptance and a key activity in supporting the transition from school to the workforce. Organized sporting activities can provide soft mentoring and foster positive role models, building confidence and supporting healthy choices. Further sports can be a powerful cross-cultural language, reducing isolation and marginalization.

At a community level, sports works to build bonds across cultures and creates local connections that bind local residents together. Sports play a powerful role in reducing community ostracism and provide a forum for engagement and acceptance. As such sports is critical to our social cohesion and sense of safety at the both the neighborhood and national level.

The benefits of sport apply to both formal and informal engagement. Formal codes increase belonging by encouraging membership across communities and cultures and offer mechanisms for whole of family engagement, allowing parents and other family members to participate in networking activities. Informal sports are an accessible means of engagement, increasing physical and mental health and developing confidence.

A national sporting plan should strongly encourage all sporting codes to work more closely with new arrivals to develop their resilience and sense of belonging. This has benefits not only for new arrivals but also for all Australians. A national plan should encourage greater engagement with the settlement sector to deliver long-lasting positive integration effects for local communities.

Tackling the high barriers to entry

For many refugees and humanitarian migrants the barriers to participation in sports are insurmountable. Organized sports often have prohibitively high costs to entry that preclude involvement by the communities that could benefit most from participation. New arrivals are often at a significant financial disadvantage as they have lower employment rates and have often arrived with very little social or financial capital.

For many humanitarian entrants and vulnerable migrants the means to afford equipment are a significant barrier to participation. Support for the provision of equipment such as football boots, balls, cricket bats, nets etc. would greatly open up the capacity for participation and would level the playing field. Further, lower or no entry fees would encourage disadvantaged new arrivals to engage with formal codes and gain the benefits of organized sporting structures.

Prevention through physical activity

Sports play a particularly important role for two groups: marginalized youth; and humanitarian entrants with significant torture and trauma backgrounds.

For marginalized youth, sports offers mentoring, engagement and positive role models. Further, sports provide an outlet and offer a sense of inclusion and belonging. For many of the most marginalized youth, sports are the most accessible and successful tool for building a path to re-integration.

For humanitarian entrants who have suffered torture and trauma related events, sport can assist in the healing journey. Physical activity strongly influences mental wellbeing and can build confidence and create a path to further

participation. Sports can also assist to re-build family bonds and develop intergenerational relationships. It has been used to great effect to assist families and youth who have significant trauma experiences.

Research has shown that refugees and humanitarian migrants are often less likely to engage with preventative health strategies than the wider community and more likely to present as a critical care patient in an emergency capacity. Further research shows that the health outcomes of migrants deteriorate over the first five years in Australia.

For migrant and refugee women the effect of increased sport participation has a positive impact not only on their health but also the health of their children and the community more broadly. While many codes have engaged with migrant communities and new arrivals, far less work has focused on engaging with migrant and refugee women. There is a significant need to develop a national migrant women's sports plan that looks at the gender as well as the cultural barriers to participation.

Engaging more with the settlement sector in its efforts to increase refugee sport and physical activity participation should be a key element of the national sports plan. The barriers to entry are significant and include financial, cultural and language impediments to participation.

Roles and Responsibilities

A comprehensive national sports plan would outline distinct and separate roles and responsibilities for national, state and territory, and community organizations across sports codes and would include engagement with settlement and cultural organizations.

National organisations have an important role to play in the effort to broaden the grassroots engagement with the sport. The engagement of national organisations is key to driving better social cohesion outcomes and greater integration for refugee communities. It is recommended that future government funding is tied to or requires codes to engage with new arrivals and migrant communities.

At the national level, it is recommended that the government consider establishing a 'Multiculturalism in Sport Council', which would bring together community and sporting sectors to help promote multiculturalism and achieve better integration outcomes.

At a state and local level, there is need for tools and resources to guide local clubs and state affiliates. Local clubs play a key role in helping migrants and humanitarian entrants feel welcome and feel part of the community. As such, these clubs should be given support, whether it is through financial incentives or program development and delivery aid, to achieve greater community engagement across cultures.