

Chapter 3

Grass Roots Participation

3.1 This chapter discusses data relating to the women's participation in organised and non-organised sport and physical activities; the major barriers to participation; and strategies to encourage greater participation by girls and women. The chapter also highlights the particular needs of special needs groups, including women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, women with disabilities, women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, Indigenous women and women living in geographically isolated areas.

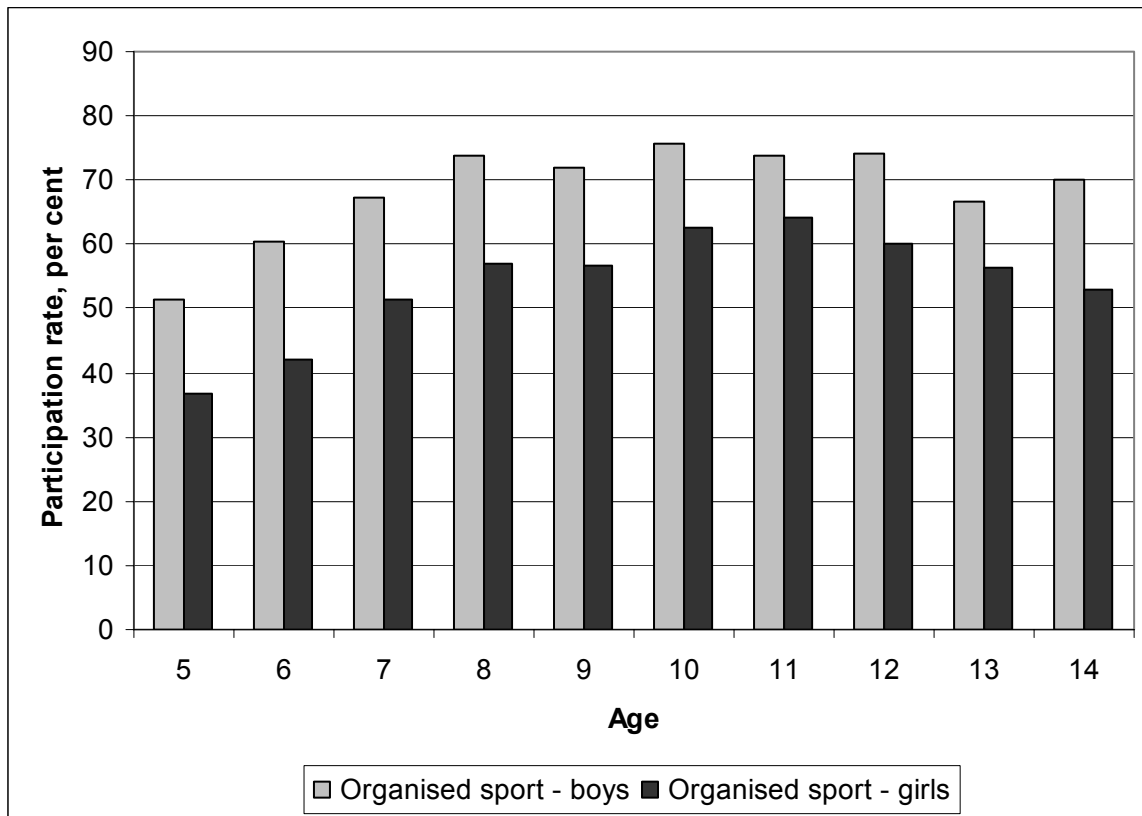
Participation in sport and recreation activities

Girl (5-14 years)

3.2 The ABS in its *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities 2003* collected information on participation in organised sport, organised cultural activities (music, singing, dancing and drama lessons) and leisure activities (skateboarding or rollerblading, bike riding, watching television or videos, playing computer games, other computer use, art and craft activities and reading for pleasure).¹

3.3 Figure 3.1 shows participation in organised sport by age and gender.

1 'Organised sport' is defined in the survey as sports played or trained for outside of school hours which were organised by a club, association or school. The club or association need not be a sporting body, for example, it may be a church group or a local gym. Any organised or structured training or practice sessions are included as long as they have been set by an instructor or coach. See ABS, *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities*, Cat. No. 4901.0, April 2003, p. 49.

Figure 3.1 Children's participation in organised sport

Source: ABS, *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities*, April 2003, p. 14.

3.4 The ABS data indicate that in 2003:

- Some 62 per cent of children aged 5 -14 years participated in organised sport. Across all age groups, boys had a higher participation rate (69 per cent) in organised sport than girls (54 per cent). Dancing was the one activity in which girls participated much more extensively than boys (23.8 per cent versus 1.6 per cent).
- Female participation rates in organised sport declined from a high of 64 per cent at 11 years to 53 per cent at 14 years.
- Female participation in active leisure activities such as skateboarding/rollerblading and bike riding also declined from about 10 years of age.
- The rate of participation of boys in organised sport increased from 66 per cent in 2000 to 69 per cent in 2003. However, there was no statistically significant change for girls.
- Nearly one-third (29 per cent) of children participated in two or more sports – 35 per cent for boys and 23 per cent for girls. For girls, the most popular

sports were netball (18 per cent or 233 000), swimming (17 per cent or 225 500), tennis (8 per cent or 100 000) and basketball (7 per cent or 88 900).²

- Some 46 per cent of girls did not participate in organised sport (compared with 31 per cent of boys).³

3.5 Age and gender are important variables in explaining participation rates in organised sport, with girls being less likely than boys to participate, even when organised dancing (a popular activity among girls) is included in the analysis. Children in the younger and older age groups (5 to 7 years and 12 to 14 years) are less likely to participate than those in the middle childhood years (8-11 years).⁴

Women (15 years and over)

3.6 Three data sources provide information on the participation rates of women in organised and non-organised sport and physical activity. They are:

- the Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey (ERASS) survey for 2004;
- the ABS Participation in Sport and Physical Activities survey for 2002 (based on results from the General Social Survey 2002); and
- the ABS Involvement in Organised Sport and Physical Activity survey for 2004 (conducted as part of the ABS Monthly Population Survey).

3.7 ERASS is a joint initiative of the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and the state and territory departments of sport and recreation. ERASS collects information on the frequency, nature and type of activities of persons 15 years and over for exercise, recreation and sport during the 12 months prior to the interview. It provides information on organised and non-organised activity for exercise, recreation and sport.⁵

2 ABS, *Children's Participation*, p. 5.

3 ABS, *Children's Participation*, pp 5–6, 14.

4 ABS, *The Young and the Restful (Re-Visited) – The Effects of Recreational Choices and Demographic Factors on Children's Participation in Sport*, 2005, pp 11, 15.

5 'Organised sport and physical activities' refers to sport and physical activities that were organised in full or in part by a club, association or other type of organisation. See Australian Sports Commission, *Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport, Annual Report 2004*, (ERASS survey), p. 61.

3.8 The ABS Participation in Sport and Physical Activities survey presents results from the General Social Survey 2002 relating to participation in organised and non-organised sport and physical activities by persons aged 18 years and over.⁶

3.9 The ABS Involvement in Organised Sport and Physical Activity survey 'presents information on the number of persons aged 15 years and over who were involved in organised sport and physical activity over a 12 month period'.⁷ The survey examined both playing and non-playing roles.

3.10 The main findings of these surveys include:

- The overall participation rate for exercise, recreation and sport in the ERASS survey was 82.8 per cent – with similar participation rates for males and females (83 per cent and 82.6 per cent respectively). The overall participation rate in the ABS Participation in Sport and Physical Activities survey was lower at 62.4 per cent – with participation rates for males (65 per cent) and females (59.9 per cent).
- Organised participation – all surveys showed higher rates of participation for men. The ERASS survey recorded a participation rate for males of 44.7 per cent) compared to females 40.8 per cent. The ABS Participation in Sport and Physical Activities survey recorded participation rate for males of 34.3 per cent compared to females 28.5 per cent, while their Organised Sport survey produced overall rates of 26.9 per cent for men and 20 per cent for women.
- Non-organised participation – the ERASS survey recorded a lower participation rate for males (38.3 per cent) than females (41.9 per cent). The ABS Participation in Sport and Physical Activities survey recorded a similar participation rate for males (30.7 percent) and females (31.4 per cent).

3.11 The ERASS survey reports higher participation rates overall and higher participation rates for women in both organised and non-organised physical activities than ABS data. The differences in results may be attributable to the surveys measuring distinct types of activities engaged in by respondents. The ASC commissioned ACNielsen Research to examine the reasons for the contrasting results, which they studied by administering the ABS and ERASS questions to two random samples of 700 interviewees using identical survey techniques. Their study reproduced the different participation rates for the two sets of questions. This implies that the two surveys are measuring different sorts of participation in physical activity:

6 'Organised sport and physical activities' refers to sport and physical activities which were organised by a club or association. The club or organisation did not need to be a sporting body – it may be a social club, church group or gym. Whether an activity was regarded as a sport or physical activity was left to the opinion of the respondent. However prompt cards listed the following –fitness/health activities; other leisure physical activities; ball sports; racquet sports; other team sports; water sports; other sports; and any other physical activities. See ABS, *Participation in Sport and Physical Activities*, Cat. No. 4177.0, 2002, p. 38.

7 ABS, *Involvement in Organised Sport and Physical Activity*, Cat. No. 6285.0, April 2004.

ACNielsen also found that even though the GSS had a higher response rate than ERASS (91% compared to 46% in 2002), this was not biasing ERASS results. ACNielsen proved this by using a split sample design, where they interviewed 1,400 respondents using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing. They randomly selected half the sample (700 respondents) and asked them the ERASS question, while the other half (700 respondents) were asked the GSS question. Even though this ACNielsen study achieved a response rate of just 32%, the participation rates obtained from the GSS and ERASS questions in this study were comparable to the results of the original surveys. ACNielsen, therefore, concluded that there is no evidence of bias in the ERASS data caused by response rates...

In summary, the GSS is asking a very different question than ERASS in the mind (comprehension) of respondents. ERASS is measuring a much broader concept of physical activity than the GSS, where respondents are more likely to include recreational physical activities (be they organised or non-organised).⁸

3.12 The ERASS survey for 2004 indicates that in the previous 12 months an estimated 13.1 million persons aged 15 years and over participated in at least one physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport – a participation rate of 82.8 per cent. As noted above, the overall participation rate for males and females was similar (83 per cent and 82.6 per cent respectively).

3.13 In relation to *organised* participation, 6.8 million persons aged 15 years and over participated in organised physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport.⁹ This represents a participation rate of 42.7 per cent. Of this number, participation for females was 40.8 per cent, whereas for males it was 44.7 per cent.¹⁰

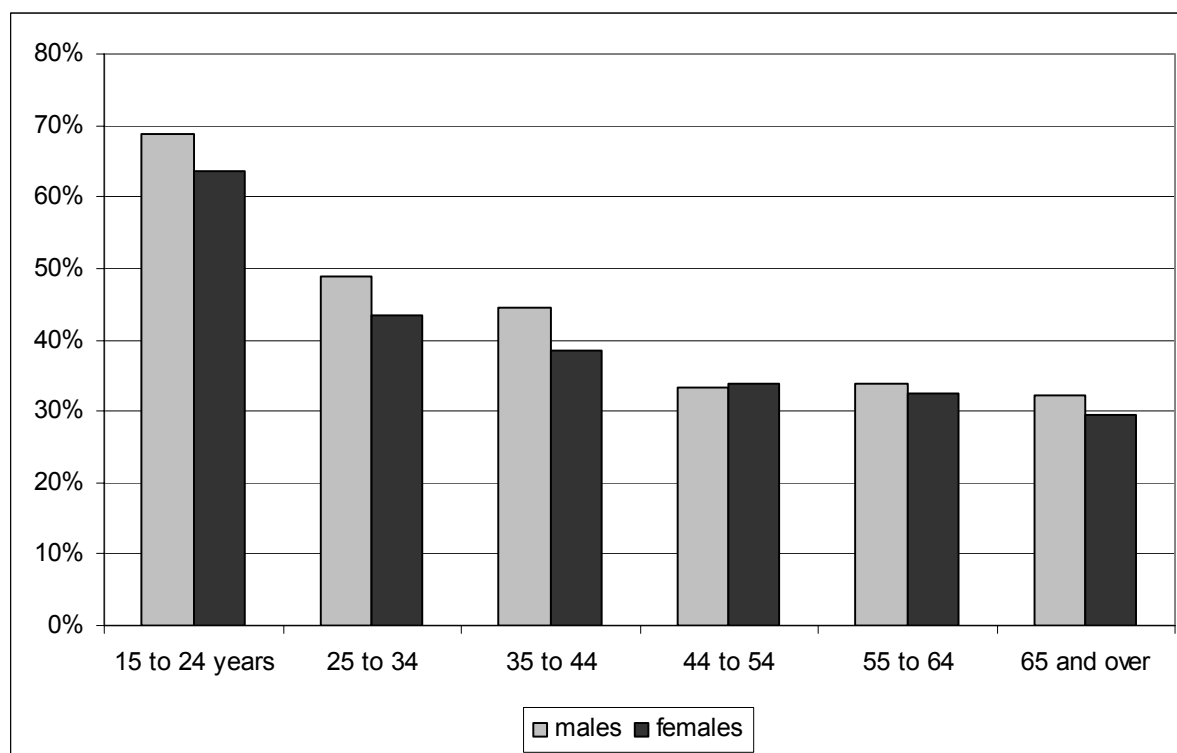
3.14 The data also shows that organised participation rates were highest for women (and for men) in the 15 to 24 age groups (63.5 per cent), and declined steadily with age to 29.4 per cent for women aged 65 years and over (Figure 3.2).¹¹

8 ASC, *Submission 30B*.

9 Relates to people aged 15 years and over who participated in any organised physical activities for exercise, recreation and sport over a 12-month period prior to interview in 2004. See ERASS survey, p. 2.

10 ERASS survey, p. 6. The report presents information regarding the level and frequency of participation in organised and non-organised activity for exercise, recreation and sport; type of participation in physical activity; and trends in participation over time.

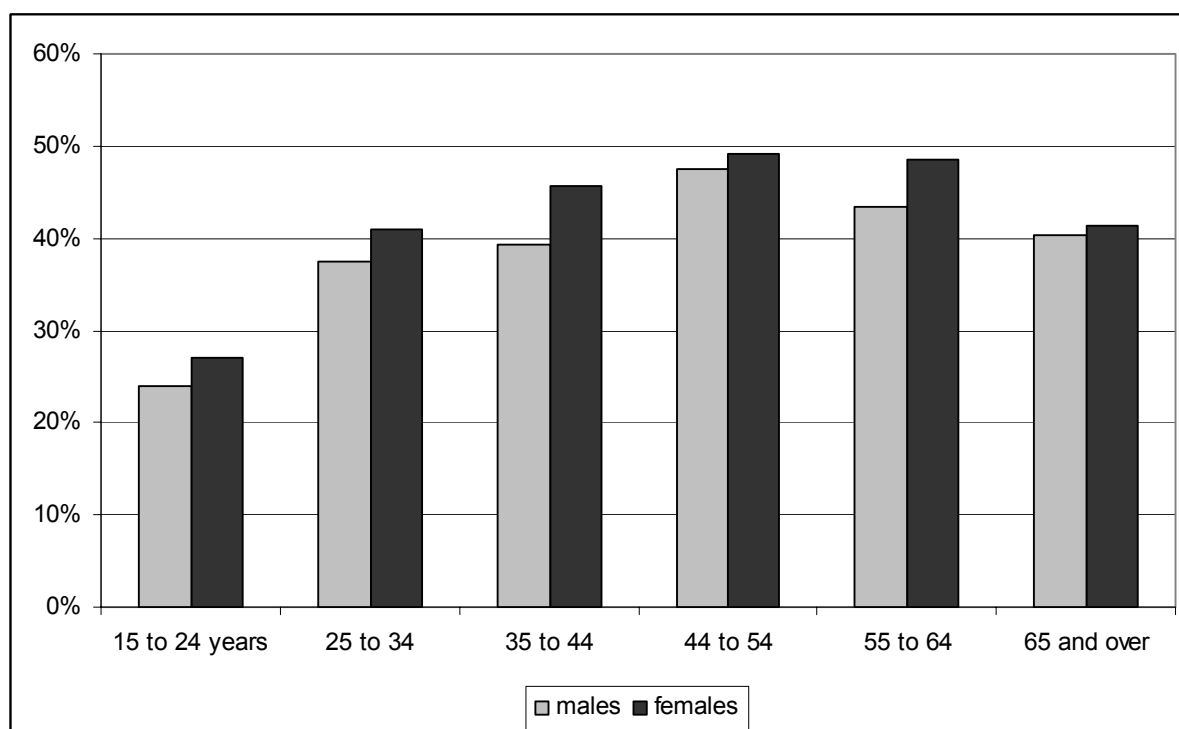
11 ERASS survey, p. 33.

Figure 3.2 Participation rates (organised activities) by gender, 2004

Source: ASC, *Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport, Annual Report 2004*, Table 14.¹²

3.15 The data for adults who are active, but do not participate in *organised* sport, tell a different story (Figure 3.3). Participation rates for non-organised activities show greater participation by women, and greater participation with age until around retirement, when participation declines.

12 These figures combine those who reported engaging only in organised sport and those who participated in both organised and non-organised sport.

Figure 3.3 Participation rates (non-organised activities) by gender, 2004

Source: ASC, *Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport, Annual Report 2004*, Table 11.

3.16 ABS data also provides information on participation rates. The data for the 2002 Participation in Sport and Physical Activities survey indicate that 9.1 million people aged 18 years and over participated in sport and physical activities in 2002 – with slightly more males (65 per cent) than females (59.9 per cent) participating in these activities.

3.17 In relation to organised participation, the two ABS surveys produce slightly different results. The Participation in Sport and Physical Activities survey showed almost a third (31.4 per cent) of the population aged 18 years and over participated in organised sport. Males were more likely to participate in organised activity (34.3 per cent) than females (28.5 per cent). The Involvement in Organised Sport and Physical Activity produced lower figures: 23.4 per cent for the population as a whole (26.9 per cent for men and 20 per cent for women).

3.18 Participation rates declined rapidly with increasing age. In the Participation in Sport and Physical Activities survey, females aged 25-34 years had the highest participation rate (68 per cent) while females aged 65 years and over had the lowest (41.3 per cent). For over half of those who had undertaken some participation (61.8 per cent), it was something done at least weekly. The proportion of the population with this frequency of participation was similar for both males and females – 38.6 per cent for males and 38.7 per cent for females. Almost three-quarters of people 18 years and over who participated in sport and physical activities limited their participation to one or two activities. Males participated in more activities than

females with 30.6 per cent of males compared with 22.4 per cent of females participating in three or more activities.¹³

3.19 Womensport and Recreation Victoria cited information from the Heart Foundation and Deakin University Seesaw study, which showed that generally participation rates are similar for men as for women, but that only 44 per cent of females reach the minimum physical activity threshold of 150 minutes per week.¹⁴

Changes in participation

3.20 As noted above, data indicate that girls and young women are less physically active than young men and become increasingly so as they get older, in particular as they leave the structured environment of school and make the transition to adulthood.

3.21 Data indicate that girls' participation in organised sport and in the more active leisure activities declines from the mid-teen years. Evidence to the inquiry commented on these trends. The Football Federation Australia (FFA) stated that:

...there is a massive drop-off rate, which is common in all female sports. There is a massive interest in sport when people are at a young age. They get to 14, 15 and 16 and the drop-off rate is extraordinary. The highest percentage of those playing sport are women over 35. Obviously a lot of mothers come back and play sport.¹⁵

3.22 Womensport and Recreation Victoria noted the same decline:

Our scoping research suggests that there is about a 50 per cent drop-out rate at the ages of 10 to 14, so it is actually much younger. Five or 10 years ago it was that 16-year-old age group, where there is the discovery of boys and all the other things that go along with being a teenager. But now, as children mature earlier, the dropout age has come down. It is obviously of massive concern. To be honest, I do not know how much is being done about it. There are certainly the mandates that VicHealth spoke about with regard to in-school hours. But I have not seen a significant investment in the out of school hours area from the government when you consider that Scotland invests about £42 million, or approximately \$100 million, in after-school activity for a population of about four million people.¹⁶

3.23 As indicated above, participation rates overall generally decline for women particularly after the mid-20s. While their participation in organised sport declines markedly, participation in non-organised sport generally increases. In the ERASS survey (see above), the participation rate of females aged 15-24 was 90.6 per cent but

13 ABS, *Participation in Sport and Physical Activities 2002*, pp 3–5.

14 Womensport and Recreation Victoria, *Submission 55*, p. 5.

15 Ms Buckley, FFA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 14.

16 Ms Justin, Womensport and Recreation Victoria, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 19.

declined to 84 per cent for 25-34 and 35-44 year-olds. Participation for the same age groups in organised sport declined from 63.6 per cent for 15-24 year olds to 43.4 per cent for 25-34 year olds, and 38.5 per cent for 35-44 year olds. However, participation in non-organised sport *increased* from 27 per cent for 15-24 year old to 41 per cent for 25-34 year olds and 45.6 per cent for 35-44 year olds.

3.24 Motherhood also influences participation in sport and recreation activities. Women with children are less likely to be active, whilst inactivity increases with the number of children.¹⁷ Qualitative research in Sydney found that the main barriers to participation for mothers to be personal resources (time and money), lack of partner support, lack of leisure companions, poor access to venues (including lack of transport), and lack of good quality child care.¹⁸

3.25 Research by Ms Gilchrist of the University of Sydney into the physical activity choices of young women aged 20-25 found that they had many competing demands on their time including work, study, friends, partners and finances. All participants in the study were active in sports when younger. Leaving school marked a decline in general physical activity. Opportunity for social sport and recreation decreased as they became older – 'negotiating time pressure and friendship became more of an issue and non-physical social activities (shopping and consumption focussed) became more desirable'.¹⁹ Several young women in the study stated that in their teens, sport ceased to be 'fun' and physical activity became about weight loss and body modification, often connected with a desire to appear sexually attractive.

3.26 Most of the women in the study engaged in some type of physical activity currently, at least intermittently, and almost half did so regularly. The majority of women who engaged in regular physical activity did so for enjoyment – only a small number did so to change their appearance through 'body work'. The minority not engaged in physical activity explained their inactivity due to 'busy social lives' and expressed satisfaction with their body image.²⁰ Older people also have lower participation rates and this is discussed later in the chapter.

3.27 The committee understands there is growing recognition of the problem that girls and women are dropping out of sport and recreation activities, and that there are programs aimed at addressing this, such as:

- Sporting organisations developing plans targeted specifically at recruiting and retaining girls and women to participate in sports, such as the Australian Football League's (AFL) Women's and Girls Strategic Plan.²¹

17 Womensport and Recreation Victoria, *Submission 55*, p. 5.

18 M. Lo Casio *et. al.*, *Busy Mums Wanted: A Qualitative Study of Mothers and Physical Activity*, 1999, cited in NSW Sport and Recreation, *Submission 53*, p. 5.

19 Ms Gilchrist, *Submission 11*, p. 3.

20 Ms Gilchrist, *Submission 11*, pp 2–4.

21 AFL, *Submission 69*.

- State governments targeting support programs specifically toward women, such as Queensland's Club Development Program and State Development Program, the guidelines which 'rate projects targeting the participation and development of women and girls very highly'.²²
- Girls' breakfast programs targeted at increasing girl's participation and keeping them involved.²³
- Bridging Gaps with Basketball, a cooperative initiative in Victoria getting young Sudanese migrants active in basketball.²⁴

Despite these efforts, it appears clear that more has to be done to keep girls and women active. Some of this effort must be in a school setting, discussed later in the chapter. Other parts need to be in the general community.

3.28 The committee found that:

- Women's participation in sport and recreation is according to most studies less than men's.
- Women's participation in organised sport in particular is lower than men's, and there are more organised sporting opportunities for men than for women.
- The involvement of girls in physical activity drops off sharply in the early teenage years, this trend is the biggest divergence between male and female participation, and is a serious concern.
- While there is a need for greater levels of physical activity amongst all parts of the population, this need appears most pressing amongst girls and women.

Recommendation 1

3.29 The committee recommends that the Australian Sports Commission and state and territory sport and recreation authorities, in collaboration with the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, develop and implement strategies to address the issue of the high attrition rates in female participation in sport and recreation activities.

Participation in particular activities

Outdoor recreation

3.30 The committee received evidence about women's participation in outdoor recreation. There have been several studies of outdoor recreation in Australia and overseas, and these have produced some significant results. A 2001 study in South

22 Sport and Recreation Queensland, *Submission 49*, p. 3.

23 Ms Boon, Womensport and Recreation NSW, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 25; Sport and Recreation Queensland, *Submission 49*.

24 Ms Jolly, VicHealth, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 2.

East Queensland revealed high participation rates in outdoor activities and that people prefer to conduct these activities in natural settings.²⁵ Selected rates of participation are shown in Table 3.1. Two of the most popular activities – walking and water activities – were both amongst the most likely to be engaged in by women, and the activities performed most frequently.²⁶ Similar results were reported in a separate study performed in Central Queensland.²⁷

Table 3.1 Rates of participation in outdoor recreation, South East Queensland

Activity	Male participation, per cent	Female participation, per cent
Walking or nature study	45	52
Camping	37	31
Bicycle riding	33	22
Horse riding	6	8
Water activities (other than use of watercraft)	57	56
Abseiling or rockclimbing	7	5

Source: Jackie Kiewa, Terry Brown and Ray Hibbins, *South East Queensland Outdoor Recreation Demand Study*, Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation, 2001, p. 32.

3.31 The rates of participation in outdoor recreation dwarf those for most organised sports, and typically show greater participation by women than in organised sport. Significantly, and consistent with studies of women's interest in sport generally, the studies of outdoor recreation showed that 'competition related reasons' were the least important reasons for people to engage in outdoor recreational activities.²⁸

25 Jackie Kiewa, Terry Brown and Ray Hibbins, *South East Queensland Outdoor Recreation Demand Study*, Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation, 2001.

26 Jackie Kiewa, Terry Brown and Ray Hibbins, *South East Queensland Outdoor Recreation Demand Study*, Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation, 2001, p. 37.

27 Queensland Department of Communication and Information, Local Government, Planning and Sport and Department of Natural Resources, *The Central Queensland Outdoor Recreation Demand Study*, The Departments, 2000.

28 See Queensland Department of Communication and Information, Local Government, Planning and Sport and Department of Natural Resources, *The Central Queensland Outdoor Recreation Demand Study*, The Departments, 2000, p. 12; Jackie Kiewa, Terry Brown and Ray Hibbins, *South East Queensland Outdoor Recreation Demand Study*, Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation, 2001, p. 85.

3.32 The Outdoor Industry Association produces a substantial annual study of outdoor recreation participation in the United States.²⁹ Its 2006 results reinforce findings of other Australian studies such as those discussed above, as well as providing some more in-depth analysis of individual trends than has been possible with some Australian data. Key findings from the US include:

- Participation in outdoor activities was quite high (just over two-thirds of American women).
- If fishing is excluded, participation in outdoor recreation is almost as high for women as it is for men.
- Participation rates remained stable, but the number of individual outdoor outings declined.
- There is a growth in outdoor activities that can be 'done in a day'.
- Time constraints are important in limiting people's participation, and this may be connected to the fact that women's number of outings may have dropped more sharply than men's.
- Women may be shifting to fitness activities at the expense of outdoor activities.

3.33 The Outdoor Council of Australia noted that government support for outdoor recreation organisations and data collection was so weak it was hard for informed decisions to be made or planning to be undertaken in this area.³⁰ The committee is concerned that, given the high rates of female participation in outdoor recreation (higher, typically, than for organised sports in general), this situation may be hampering efforts to ensure all people, and women in particular, are gaining the health benefits of outdoor activities.

Fitness

3.34 The fitness sector, comprising fitness centre businesses and personal training studios, is an important part of women's sport and recreation experience. The industry estimates that around 900 000 women in Australia use fitness businesses, and comprise around 55 per cent of all fitness centre clients.³¹ The industry is growing fast, with the largest player, Fitness First Australia, reporting a growth rate of around 30 per cent per annum, again with most members being female, and most members being new (that is, not just switching between clubs).³² Fitness First also reports that more than a third of their members do group fitness classes, and of these, more than

29 Outdoor Industry Foundation, *Outdoor Recreation Participation Study*, Eighth Edition, 2006, <http://www.outdoorindustryfoundation.org/resources.research.participation.html>, accessed August 2006.

30 Outdoor Council of Australia, *Submission 75*.

31 Fitness Australia, *Submission 74*.

32 Fitness First Australia, *Submission 73*.

80 per cent are female. Another major member of the fitness sector, Zest Health Clubs, reported having over 65 000 members, with 58 per cent of members being women, as well as 74 per cent of staff.³³ One of the highest profile and fastest growing businesses is Fernwood Women's Health Clubs, which caters exclusively to female clients. It is growing very rapidly and has over 80 000 members.³⁴ It reported that the majority of its members had not previously used a gym. It appears to be the second largest business in the fitness sector, despite catering only to women.

3.35 Meeting women's needs appears to be an important part of how the sector operates. Most clubs, at least amongst the major providers, appear to offer child care and/or women's only areas or classes. As with outdoor recreation, the fitness sector's high rate of female participation may reflect a preference for less organised and less competitive physical activity.

Dance

3.36 Dance has been used in many programs to encourage girls in particular, who are less likely to participate in organised sport, to become more physically active. Dance has been overlooked in the past as it does not fit into the traditional sporting model:

There is a relationship between sport, physical education, tourism, the creative arts and recreation which we need to see in focus. I have given definitions of sport, recreation, the sports industry, leisure and physical education. A dance, in some centres, is considered sport; in others it is not. Certainly it is part of sports programs in some schools. I am in favour of dance.³⁵

[W]e talk about active recreation but a lot of our work has been focussed a little more on organised sport or other forms of recreation. Where does dance fit? Everything seems to go into boxes, so is it within arts or sport? We are having those discussions and debates and recognising that, yes, we do need to be looking at it. Although it has never been something that has not been included, it perhaps has not been promoted.³⁶

3.37 Dance has been successfully integrated into the sports funding model in some programs:

Within the out of school hours sports program, which was a pilot we did with the Australian Sports Commission, we funded Dancesport Victoria to deliver programs. It was only two terms but it was extremely successful. They got a lot out of it. Dancesport Victoria did also; being linked to an

33 Zest Health Clubs, *Submission 79*.

34 Fernwood Women's Health Clubs, *Submission 78*.

35 Dr Colvin, ACHPER, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 83.

36 Ms Jolly, VicHealth, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 6.

organisation such as VicHealth gave them a bit of credibility within their industry as well.³⁷

Recommendation 2

3.38 The committee recommends that all levels of government consider extending resources to a broader range of sports to ensure that women are provided with greater choice and opportunity for participating in physical activity including for example outdoor recreation and dance.

Barriers to participation

3.39 Historically, women and girls have experienced barriers to their participation in sport, recreation and physical activity. Over the last decade in particular several strategies have been developed in Australia (and overseas) to redress this situation and advance opportunities for women and girls.³⁸ These strategies have partly resulted in more women and girls being involved in sport, recreation and physical activity and more competitive opportunities for them, both in Australia and internationally. The participation rate for women in organised physical activity increased from 37.7 per cent in 2001 to 40.8 percent in 2004.³⁹

3.40 These opportunities were brought about by strategies ranging from the creation of national leagues in netball, softball, basketball, cricket, soccer and hockey, to an increased number of disciplines and sports at Commonwealth and Olympic Games. Nevertheless, the lower participation rate of women in organised sports in particular suggests that there may still be barriers to participation that can be examined by sporting organisations.

3.41 Numerous studies and submissions to the inquiry have indicated that the factors that are directly responsible for the low participation rate of women and girls in sport, recreation and physical activity include:

- lack of information about what programs are available;
- lack of access to appropriate, accessible, affordable and acceptable facilities and services; and
- lack of culturally appropriate facilities/programs;
- social stereotyping;
- lack of time or perceived lack of time;
- lack of childcare and lack of awareness of childcare options;

37 Ms Kerr, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 6.

38 ASC, *National Policy on Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity*, 1999, p. 3.

39 ERASS survey, pp 9–12, 47–48.

- fewer opportunities available for participation;
- reduced leisure time owing to family responsibilities;
- lack of skills or perceived lack of skills;
- lack of financial resources;
- harassment;
- lack of confidence in approaching activities alone; and
- cultural and social pressures.⁴⁰

3.42 These factors indicate that major challenges must be overcome before gender equity in sport, recreation and physical activity can be achieved. They also suggest that to understand and address the complex influences on female involvement in sport, recreation and physical activity, issues such as the broader social, economic, cultural and physical context of the lives of women and girls and the impact of the current infrastructure of sport and recreation must be considered.

Barriers to girls' participation

3.43 As noted above, a number of barriers to girl's participation in sport have been identified and the major factors are discussed below.

Poor self image/self confidence

3.44 Body image, lack of self confidence and/or belief that they lack skills or physical competence is a significant barrier to girl's participation in sport and recreation activities. One study commented that:

Both men and women use their physical appearance, weight and body shape, as a measure of self worth and physical attractiveness. However there appears to be less room for manoeuvre for women and girls... Visual images of the 'ideal' women are used to sell everything... this commodification of the female body... can lead women to identify their physical appearance as a type of currency – personal worth or value as measured by body type.⁴¹

3.45 Girls also tend to underrate their ability to perform at sports and are less likely than their male peers to view themselves as talented. Lower rates of participation in early childhood may also mean that girls have poorer motor skills that are the precursors for sport. A lack of confidence in their abilities to perform physical tasks

40 *National Policy on Women and Girls in Sport*, pp 3–4; ASC, *Why Don't Girls Play Sport?*, 2001; ASC, *Body Image and Participation in Sport*, 2001; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, *Equity for Women in Sport: A Discussion Paper*, September 1991, pp 21–23; Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Submission 34*; Fitness Australia, *Submission 74*.

41 ASC, *Body Image and Participation in Sport*, p. 1.

may lead girls to avoid situations which could expose their lack of confidence. When this reluctance begins at an early age, girls can fail to master basic motor skills which in turn results in their avoidance of games or sports which involve such activities.

3.46 A further complicating factor is that females are more concerned than males about eating, body weight and appearance. For many women, dissatisfaction with body shape and appearance peaks during adolescence. It is at this time that many teenage girls are often required to wear school or club sports uniforms that make them feel particularly self-conscious.⁴²

3.47 Ironically, while many girls avoid sport because they are self-conscious or feel they lack skills, girls who are physically active report a more positive body image and greater self-confidence.

Dress code

3.48 The strict dress code in some sports can be a deterrent to women's participation in sport. Womensport and Recreation NSW argued that girls often feel uncomfortable in certain types of sports attire, especially if they are already self-conscious about their body shape.

...it can have a detrimental impact on the participation rate... If they are merely doing it on a social basis and they are not particularly looking to be an elite athlete or talented athlete and are just there to play the game and have fun, they may not have a size 8 or size 10 body; they may be a size 14 or size 16 but they are happy to get out there and participate. Put them in an outfit like that and it highlights to them that they do not look the same.

If that is the only way they are able to participate in their chosen sport at any level, particularly at a social level, where they are not playing for prize money, they are not competing in a state-level competition and where their skill level is about having a bit of fun then it makes it really difficult for them to think: 'I have to go through some discomfort, perhaps some embarrassment. I don't feel comfortable running around wearing this. I would feel more comfortable if I could wear shorts and a T-shirt or a longer skirt and a T-shirt or something like that'.⁴³

3.49 Womensport and Recreation Victoria also noted that a strict dress code may affect participation from the mid teens up to the elite level:

[it affects] not just in that age group [10-14 year olds] or at the amateur level but certainly all the way through to the elite level. In fact, I know of somebody in their late 20s or early 30s who was refusing to play basketball because they were not allowed to wear a particular short. They did not want to wear the baggy shorts; they wanted to wear bike shorts because they were more comfortable. With respect to professionals, a number of female

42 ASC, *Why Don't Girls Play Sport?*

43 Ms Boon, Womensport and Recreation NSW, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 30.

WNBL players find the bodysuits abhorrent. In fact, one team has recently gone back to shorts and singlets. It can be a deterrent not just at the younger level but throughout.⁴⁴

Lack of positive role models

3.50 Girls also suffer from a lack of positive role models which is influenced by the lack of media coverage for women's sport. This has the effect of limiting the opportunities to find out about women's sporting achievements and denies many young women and men female sporting role models. The lack of promotion of female athletes also reinforces the concept that sport is a male domain. Womensport and Recreation Victoria noted that young women are more likely to nominate a sportsman rather than a sportswoman as a role model in sport.⁴⁵

Role of family/peers

3.51 Family, friends and peers exercise an important influence on girls' sports participation. Girls whose parents regularly exercise are much more likely to continue their involvement in sport than those whose parents are inactive.⁴⁶ This is particularly the case for those girls whose mothers exercise. Friends and peers can also influence participation. Many teenage girls endure taunts and insults about their bodies, especially from their peers. During adolescence, a time when young women are particularly sensitive to comments about their bodies, such remarks can be especially potent.⁴⁷

Physical education in schools

3.52 People who participate in sport and other types of physical activity at an early age, and especially during adolescence, are more likely to be physically active adults. Submissions emphasised the need for quality physical activity, sport and recreation programs in schools as a means of equipping girls with skills and knowledge essential for them to confidently participate in organised sport.⁴⁸

3.53 Some submissions argued that there was a lack of opportunities to participate in sports at school or in after school sports activities.⁴⁹ Under the Commonwealth schools funding legislation for the 2005–2008 triennium, education authorities will be

44 Ms Justin, Womensport and Recreation Victoria, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 21.

45 Womensport and Recreation Victoria, *Submission 55*, p. 5.

46 Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Submission 34*.

47 ASC, *Why Don't Girls Play Sport?*, p. 4.

48 VicHealth, *Submission 54*, p. 12; WA Netball, *Submission 13*, p. 2.

49 Womensport and Recreation Victoria, *Submission 55*, p. 5; Confederation of Australian Sport, *Submission 60*, p. 4.

required to include in their curriculum at least two hours of physical activity per week in primary schools and junior high school.⁵⁰ This is discussed later in the chapter.

3.54 Submissions also noted that physical education classes in schools are often not geared to the needs of girls. One submission noted that many classes are gendered, 'producing constructions of young women as weaker, less enthusiastic and less skilled in sports than young men'.⁵¹ Girls responding to a survey conducted by a group in regional Victoria said that '[i]n school sport, the main focus is on competition meaning those with lesser ability are excluded/or feel excluded and give up'.⁵²

Barriers to women's participation

3.55 There are other barriers to participation in sport that particularly affect women.

Lack of time

3.56 Women tend to have less time than men as they take on the greater burden of responsibility for housework, childcare and the care of elderly or infirm relatives.⁵³ This is one of the key reasons for not taking part in sport. The Department of Sport and Recreation WA stated that more women than men report lack of time and childcare commitments as barriers to participation.⁵⁴ Increasing numbers of women are in the full time and part time workforce. Patterns of work are changing with increasing casualisation of the workforce, unpredictable shifts, and uncertain hours of work all working to impede access to opportunities to engage in sport or recreation.⁵⁵

3.57 The SA Premier's Council for Women commented on the time and work life pressures that place a burden on many women. The Council noted that studies have shown that more employees feel stressed by conflicting priorities of work and family and pressured by time with more than half of Australian couples with dependent children always or often feeling pressed for time.⁵⁶ The results of the outdoor recreation surveys mentioned earlier all appear to suggest that time constraints are an issue, and that these weigh disproportionately on women.

50 Department of Education, Science and Training, Active School Curriculum, [http://www.healthyactive.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing_nsf/Content/active_school_curriculum.pdf/\\$File/active_school_curriculum.pdf](http://www.healthyactive.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing_nsf/Content/active_school_curriculum.pdf/$File/active_school_curriculum.pdf), accessed August 2006.

51 Ms Gilchrist, *Submission 11*, p. 1.

52 Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Submission 34*, p. 2.

53 Dr Fullagar, *Submission 2*.

54 Department of Sport and Recreation WA, *Submission 48*, p. 1.

55 Recreation SA, *Submission 38*, p. 1.

56 SA Premier's Council for Women, *Submission 57*, p. 11.

Cost of participation

3.58 The cost of involvement in a recreation activity is prohibitive for many women. Womensport and Recreation Victoria reported that, in a recent survey of women and sport in Victoria, the cost of participating in sport was cited as the main barrier for women participating in sport.⁵⁷ Costs include membership fees and often uniforms or equipment costs. These costs put many activities out of the range of the average family. Women, especially from single income families, may not have sufficient disposable income to permit participation in activities other than activities that do not involve a cost, such as walking. Recreation SA stated that many women put their own social and recreational needs after the recreation needs of the rest of their family.⁵⁸

Child care

3.59 Access to appropriate, regular and affordable childcare options is a major barrier to participation in sport and recreation activities. While many large fitness centres and indoor swimming pools provide on site crèches and/or child minding facilities this is not the case for most sport and recreation organisations, particularly community based groups. Access to childcare also impacts on older women, such as grandmothers, who provide care on a regular basis for their grandchildren and often forego their recreation activities to care for these children.⁵⁹

Facilities

3.60 The lack of appropriate facilities is a barrier to participation for both girls and older women. At the time when the majority of current facilities were designed and built, participation in sports was strongly dominated by males, and sports grounds and amenities were built with little thought for women's needs. VicSport noted that:

...the best facilities are not necessarily those with the best buildings or grounds, but rather those catering for the needs of a wide cross section of society, including those of women...there are realistically still very few facilities genuinely accessible for women.⁶⁰

3.61 Submissions noted that the quality and quantity of facilities need to be improved, including the upgrading and/or proper maintenance of playing fields, and the provision of female changing rooms and toilets and other facilities.⁶¹ Submissions noted that the provision of appropriate facilities is a particular problem in regional and

57 Womensport and Recreation Victoria, *Submission 55*, p. 4.

58 Recreation SA, *Submission 38*, p. 1.

59 VicSport, *Submission 31*, p. 4; Recreation SA, *Submission 38*, pp 1–2.

60 VicSport, *Submission 31*, p. 4.

61 Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 11; VicSport, *Submission 31*, p. 5.

rural areas. The lack of suitable facilities is also increasingly felt as more women engage in traditionally male-dominated sports.

Encouraging girls and young women's participation

3.62 Reports and submissions to the inquiry have emphasised that if there is to be a significant change in the overall participation rates for women, it is essential that more is done to make involvement in sport more attractive for young women. As attitudes in relation to sport are developed at an early age, this requires action at both the primary and secondary school level.⁶²

Physical education in schools/transitional pathways

3.63 As noted previously, there was considerable evidence suggesting that there was a lack of opportunities for children to participate in sports at school.⁶³

3.64 Under new Commonwealth funding arrangements for schools, state and territory governments and non-government education are required to include in their curriculum at least two hours of physical activity per week for primary and junior secondary school children.⁶⁴ Physical activity is defined in this instance as any form of structured or non-structured exercise or movement. It may include, but not be limited to, activity such as walking, running, dance, the development of fundamental movement skills, swimming, basketball or other sports. It may also include activities that require physical skills and utilise strength, power, endurance, speed and flexibility.⁶⁵

3.65 The committee notes that reporting requirements under the agreement are still being finalised, and it urges governments to move quickly to a reporting framework. There appeared to be some confusion amongst inquiry participants regarding the status of school sport. This might be because some jurisdictions have highly devolved arrangements, meaning sporting activity can vary from school to school and region to region (such as in Tasmania). It may also be because changes are currently underway, under the inter-governmental agreement mentioned above.

3.66 The committee asked all states and territories to describe the arrangements in their education systems for physical activity. At the time of reporting, it had received

62 Sport 2000 Taskforce, *Shaping Up: A Review of Commonwealth Involvement in Sport and Recreation in Australia*, 1999, pp 90–93; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, *Half Way to Equal: Report of the Inquiry into Equal Opportunity and Equal Status for Women in Australia*, April 1992, pp 114–17.

63 Womensport and Recreation Victoria, *Submission 55*, p. 5; Confederation of Australian Sport, *Submission 60*, p. 4.

64 Department of Education, Science and Training, Active School Curriculum, [http://www.healthyaactive.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing.nsf/Content/active_school_curriculum.pdf/\\$File/active_school_curriculum.pdf](http://www.healthyaactive.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing.nsf/Content/active_school_curriculum.pdf/$File/active_school_curriculum.pdf), accessed August 2006.

65 www.healthyaactive.gov.au, accessed August 2006.

responses from the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. These responses are included in Appendix 4. The questions states and territories were asked by the committee were:

- (a) what physical education classes are required and what are available (but non-compulsory), in each year of school;
- (b) what proportion of physical education classes are required to involve exercise activity
- (c) what school sport during regular school hours is required, and what is available (but non-compulsory), in each year of school;
- (d) what other obligations are there to participate in school-organised sporting activity outside regular school hours;
- (e) in each of the above cases, what is included in the meaning of sport, physical activity or exercise;
- (f) in each of the above cases, who determines whether schools and students are complying with the relevant policy; and
- (g) does the regulation of any of the above matters vary according to the type of school (for example, public, Catholic or other private).

3.67 The extent of school-base activities varied between jurisdictions. It also appears that in some jurisdictions sport is compulsory to some degree (for example Victoria and NSW), while in others it is not at the present time (for example Tasmania and Western Australia).

3.68 Evidence suggested a lack of commitment by some State and Territory education authorities toward encouraging girls to take up or stay involved in sport. In particular it has been argued that the prevailing culture about sport at many schools does not encourage girls to participate. The WA Sports Federation stated that:

...the foundation of participation is born in the school system...until there is a more positive attitude and culture for skill development in basic school physical education programs delivered by qualified teaching staff ...there will be little, if any change in the future.⁶⁶

3.69 WA Netball stated that the removal of compulsory physical education from the school curriculum in Western Australia has 'had a noticeable impact on the likelihood of children becoming involved in sport, an, therefore, undertaking a healthy work/life balance in their long term lifestyle development'.⁶⁷

3.70 It is the responsibility of State and Territory education authorities to create a receptive and supportive environment in school so as to help encourage more girls to

66 WA Sports Federation, *Submission 37*, p. 4.

67 WA Netball, *Submission 13*, p. 2.

take up and stay involved in sport. The importance of quality physical education as being an integral part of every school curriculum was also emphasised.⁶⁸

3.71 The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) argued that there needs to be a review of school based physical activity programs to determine the extent to which schoolgirls are exposed to:

- skills and knowledge essential to participate in organised sport in the broader community;
- female teachers as role models of active women;
- the effectiveness of single sex or co-education classes in physical activity especially in promoting lifelong participation;
- best practices appropriate to Aboriginal, ethnic and cultural diversity;
- programs such as sport education which include information and experience on successfully making the transition from school to organised sport;
- opportunities to participate in school teams in competitions organised by state sporting organisations (or their regional affiliates);
- school policies and practices which support the training and competition of elite schoolgirl athletes without compromising their academic pursuits; and
- the opportunity to be made aware and linked to community based sport and recreation programs through their school and other agencies.⁶⁹

3.72 Recreation SA also emphasised the importance of improved pathways into sport and recreation activities from school. The organisation noted that the transition from school does not provide easy access to clubs etc, especially for young people whose parents are not involved in the activity. Recreation SA suggested that clubs and state sporting bodies could have greater involvement in school sport and help run competitions and provide coaches. By joining a school team run by a club, many school leavers will have a continuous pathway into their sport of choice.⁷⁰

3.73 There have been steps taken to improve the linkages between school and sporting clubs and organisations. The committee recognises the Active After-school Communities program as one vehicle for this.⁷¹ This is work on which all parties involved in sport and recreation can further build.

68 Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts, *Physical and Sport Education*, December 1992, pp xiii–xvi; *Half Way to Equal*, pp 114–17; *Shaping Up*, pp 90–91.

69 ACHPER, *Submission 17*, p. 3.

70 Recreation SA, *Submission 38*, p. 4.

71 Active After-School Communities,
<http://www.healthyactive.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing.nsf/Content/initiatives-a>,
accessed August 2006.

Recommendation 3

3.74 The committee recommends that, in light of the pressure on available sporting facilities, state and territory education authorities should work with sporting clubs and organisations, and local communities, to improve cooperation and access to facilities for children's sporting activities, particularly schools.

Dress code

3.75 There may be a need to relax the strict dress codes in place for many sports. Some evidence indicated that the dress codes are too strict or are applied in an inflexible way.

3.76 Bowls Australia noted that the implementation of its dress code is often inflexible:

At national level our dress code is very flexible, but it is the states and the clubs that implement those policies and they are very strict. The skirts are sometimes measured; there are regulations for the length of sleeves and so on. It is about educating the clubs and the states that that is not appealing to younger women. They do not want to do that.⁷²

3.77 Evidence however suggested some more positive examples. Netball Australia noted that:

...we attract an incredibly wide range of girls and women to play, of all different shapes and sizes, and so the netball uniform that has been developed for the majority of players is one that they feel comfortable in and do not feel threatened in. They do not need to feel sexy; they are just there to get out to play and to be free to move and participate. Our uniform has just been based on that.⁷³

3.78 Not everyone was happy with netball's arrangements, however:

All of the sports themselves obviously want to be seen to be up with the rest of the community, and we have seen the introduction in the last three years of lycra suits for the netballers. Unfortunately, that has had a detrimental effect on some of the girls.⁷⁴

3.79 The marketing of certain sports can influence dress code considerations. One witness noted that:

I was Chief Executive of Women's Cricket Australia, too. It has always been a choice: do you make them look sexy, or do you dress them

72 Miss West, Bowls Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 98.

73 Ms Dix, Netball Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 99.

74 Mrs Trotter, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 30.

appropriately for the sport? When you have athletes who are sliding on the ground and taking dives or whatever—

The softballers do look nice in shorts, but they are sliding on the ground and ripping their legs to pieces. Or do we go back to the old-style pantaloons or knickerbockers? It is a real choice. Do we market the game so that we attract some media coverage and they look really good, or do you play the sport as it needs to be played at the really high level?⁷⁵

3.80 Sports dress codes need to be based on health and safety considerations. Womensport and Recreation NSW noted that:

...the primary determinant for uniform styles should be health and safety aspects. In organised competition there should be a graduated range of uniforms within a fairly broad spectrum, but governed by that health and safety issue, which allows the widest range of people to comfortably compete in whatever they are doing. If that was the case then I think that would significantly resolve it.⁷⁶

Other strategies

3.81 Submissions also noted the need for innovative approaches to encouraging greater involvement of girls and young women in sport. NSW Sport and Recreation stated that 'best practice' approaches in this regard provided:

- more emphasis on skill development, participation and enjoyment, rather than competition;
- improved school-community links for transition into community based activities (as discussed above);
- early intervention; and
- re-orienting programs for adolescent girls in relation to choice of activities, structure and dress requirements.⁷⁷

3.82 Other suggested practical strategies for encouraging greater participation by and girls and young women included:

- Developing programs that cater to the different needs and abilities of women and girls eg. tailoring training programs to individual requirements.
- Providing non-traditional sports and physical activities to encourage greater participation by women and girls, including those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- Experimenting with different sports and lengths of seasons.

75 Ms Crow, Softball Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 99.

76 Mr Lozan, Womensport and Recreation NSW, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 31.

77 NSW Sport and Recreation, *Submission 53*, p. 5.

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- Reducing the duration of competition to accommodate the lack of time available that many women face in an era of longer working hours and family responsibilities.
 - Encouraging and supporting women and girls to conduct their own competitions.
 - Providing competition that focus on the fun and social aspects of sports participation – eg. 'come and try' days are being trialled in some sports.
 - Providing an environment that encourages women and girls to take up sports or activities that they've undertaken in the past in an effort to win back 'drop-outs'.
 - Adopting and implementing organisation-specific anti-harassment policies and procedures.
 - Ensuring that coaches and other personnel operate within an agreed code of conduct.⁷⁸

3.83 It was also noted that more promotional resources relating to women's sport need to be available and they should be targeted at women and girls, parents, teachers, coaches, health professionals and sport organisers. Such information needs to emphasise the health benefits of physical activity; ensure that coaches, officials and administrators are aware of women's health issues; and provide information on lifecycle changes (such as pregnancy and menopause) and how they affect involvement in sport.⁷⁹

3.84 The committee found that:

- Girls and younger women have a number of significant barriers to participation in sport and recreation activities.
- The foundations for children's participation in sport include learning at a young age basic gross motor skills including running, jumping, kicking, throwing and catching.
- There is extensive recognition of the issue of the barriers faced by girls and women, and there are some programs in place in individual jurisdictions and individual sports, to combat the problem.
- Participation in sport and recreation provides many positive psychological and physical outcomes for girls and young women.

78 Womensport and Recreation NSW, *Submission 20*, pp 3–4; NSW Sport and Recreation, *Submission 53*, p. 5; ASC, *How to Include Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity*, 1999, p. 8; NSW Department of Sport and Recreation, 'Increasing the participation of women and girls', *Information Sheet*, 2002; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, *Equity for Women in Sport: A Discussion Paper*, 1991, pp 12–15.

79 ASC, *How to Include Women*, p. 8.

- Strategies need to be developed by governments and sporting and recreation providers to increase the participation of girls and younger women in sport and recreation, and these need to include strategies to improve body image for young women. These strategies could include:
 - Improvements to the provision of physical education in schools, in particular aimed at ensuring girls are comfortable and able to participate equally with boys.
 - Relaxing the strict dress codes in place for many sports.
 - Improved school-community links for transition into community-based activities.
 - Providing programs that emphasise participation, enjoyment and the social aspects of sport, rather than the competitive aspects of sport.
 - Developing programs that cater to the different needs and abilities of girls and younger women.
 - Developing a variety of programs, such as non-traditional sports and physical activities, and programs that provide different approaches such as experimenting with different lengths of seasons and reducing the duration of competition.
 - Encouraging and supporting women and girls to conduct their own competitions.
 - Providing a supportive environment that encourages women and girls to take up sports or activities that they've undertaken in the past.
 - The dissemination of information relating to women's sport targeted at women and girls, parents, teachers, coaches, health professionals and sport organisers.

Recommendation 4

3.85 The committee recommends that the Australian Sports Commission inquire into the dress code policies of sports organisations with a view to encouraging clubs, schools and sports organisations to review these policies.

Recommendation 5

3.86 The committee recommends that sporting organisations, with the assistance of the Australian Sports Commission and state and territory sport and recreation authorities, develop strategies to provide more sporting activities focussed on participation and enjoyment.

Encouraging women's participation

3.87 Just as the barriers to participation differ for girls and women, different strategies have been proposed to encourage their increased participation.

Time considerations and cost of participation

3.88 A number of strategies were suggested to address the issues of the lack of time and the cost of participation that many women face.

3.89 VicHealth suggested that there is a need for a number of work-life supports to be adopted including the need to work with employers to implement work based sick leave, flexible work hours, job sharing, and day care subsidies. VicHealth also argued that there is a need to work with fathers and others with social and family responsibilities, to promote understanding and assist mothers to participate in sport and active recreation.⁸⁰

3.90 The UK study, *Making Women and Girls More Active*, suggested that efforts should be made to make physical activity a part of the working day, preferably with employer support, to address the lack of time many women have for physical activities, for example, lunchtime exercise groups. The study also suggested that subsidies for women's activities could be provided to make them more affordable.⁸¹ This possibility was also identified by the fitness sector peak body Fitness Australia.⁸²

Child care

3.91 Access to affordable and accessible child care options were canvassed during the inquiry.

It is a general female participation issue in all walks of life and is not restricted to sport and recreation, be it as a participant or as an official. We cannot look at it in isolation; it needs to be looked at as the issue of availability of child care for women to participate more fully in all aspects of life outside the home. This is just one aspect where the lack of adequate child-care impacts upon females being able to do what they want to do.⁸³

3.92 As noted above, while many large fitness centres and indoor swimming pools provide on site crèches and/or child minding facilities this is not the case for most sport and recreation organisations, particularly community based groups.

3.93 Submissions and studies suggested a number of options in relation to the provision of child care. The UK report referred to above noted that there was a need to investigate options for the provision of childcare, or assist with childcare costs, and for facilities to adopt a child-friendly approach so that women can bring their children with them to the venue.⁸⁴ VicSport noted that some sport and recreation groups have developed 'Mums and Bubs' classes and similar programs at their facilities to provide

80 VicHealth, *Submission 54*, p. 12.

81 SA Premier's Council for Women, *Submission 57*, Appendix 5.

82 Fitness Australia, *Submission 74*.

83 Ms Boon, Womensport and Recreation NSW, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 24.

84 Cited in SA Premier's Council for Women, *Submission 57*, Appendix 5.

access to physical activities for new mothers. This enables mothers to bring children with them when they exercise.

3.94 Netball Victoria suggested the possible option of child care facilities located in schools:

One of the issues for young mothers is access to facilities that are close to home and that do not require multiple drop-offs. In some places it was suggested that schools could act as hubs; for example, with child care in the school grounds where the community centre is so that there could be one drop-off for everybody. You would not have to take the child to child care, spend an extra 15 minutes going to the venue to play your game and then have to repeat your journey to come back, increasing petrol use and increasing the time taken. If there were a facility such as that, you could walk in the door, put the child into the creche, go and play your 40 minutes of netball, pick the child up and go home. There would be easy access at low cost and they would be more likely to participate.⁸⁵

3.95 Submissions noted that the high costs involved in operating crèches or child care facilities limits the ability of most sport and recreation organisations, especially community based groups from operating these facilities.⁸⁶ VicSport suggested that the sport and recreation sector be provided with government assisted subsidies to provide cost effective child care.⁸⁷

3.96 The fitness sector is growing fast and is an area in which women's membership outstrips men's, and in which organised classes are overwhelmingly populated by women. The provision of childcare arrangements is very widespread in this sector, and strongly suggests this is a critical factor for women.⁸⁸ VicSport noted that:

The fitness industries—say, gyms and swimming pools—have done really well because they have provided creches. Parents can pop in, do aerobics or spin or have a swim and leave their kids at the creche. They really saw this coming and made a focal point of it and they have women coming and using the centre when it is usually empty. That is great, but we do not have the same structure and we certainly do not have the same money in sport and recreation. It would be very difficult for the local hockey club to get licensed and do everything that would need to be done to have a recognised

85 Ms Sheehan, Netball Victoria, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 47.

86 Recreation SA, *Submission 38*, p. 1.

87 VicSport, *Submission 31*, p. 4

88 Fitness First Australia, *Submission 73*; Zest Health Clubs, *The Zest Difference – How Do I Choose?*, <http://www.zesthealthclubs.com.au/pages.asp?page=zest&pubid=17&issid=61&artid=307&pid=343>, accessed August 2006.

childcare centre there....One way to do that would be with some assistance from government in helping with the set-up costs.⁸⁹

3.97 Fitness Victoria and Fitness First Australia both drew attention to the impact of legislation governing child care on the availability of such care at fitness centres. They expressed particular concern that if short-term on-site care at fitness centres had to meet the same standards of staffing and infrastructure as long-term care, this could lead to fewer fitness centres offering care, reducing accessibility for women with families.

Facilities

3.98 Various strategies were proposed to improve the provision of facilities for girls and women. Submissions argued that facilities need to include separate change rooms and toilets for women and girls and that these facilities should provide adequate space and be of an acceptable standard.⁹⁰ The need for more adequate facilities for women will emerge as a more significant issue as women's participation rates increase.

3.99 Ongoing funding programs directed to community based clubs and associations to provide facilities could continue and be expanded. Netball Victoria cited as an example the Country Football and Netball Program which provides funding to assist country football and netball clubs to develop facilities (including shared community, club and social facilities and multi-use facilities) in rural, regional and outer metropolitan areas.⁹¹

3.100 Submissions also argued that there need to be co-funded programs between local, State and Commonwealth Governments to improve infrastructure in both metropolitan and regional areas, especially those that have demonstrated particular benefits for women.⁹²

3.101 Other options proposed included:

- flexibility of use – considering multi-purpose use in the construction of new facilities and the use of existing facilities in traditional 'down time' periods;
- the feasibility of alternative constructions, for example, open sided 'shed' constructions as facilities for indoor sports – with the aim of providing relatively low cost facilities which would allow all year round use and night use of facilities; and

89 Ms Roffey, VicSport, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 15.

90 VicSport, *Submission 31*, p. 5; VicHealth, *Submission 54*, p. 9. See also Mr Lozan, Womensport and Recreation NSW, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 23; Ms Jolly, VicHealth, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 2.

91 Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 11.

92 Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 11.

- urban design that facilitates access to physical activity including the provision of wide footpaths and access to public open space.⁹³

3.102 Playing and training access for women needs to be improved. When women have to compete with men for available times for access to playing fields and other facilities, they are often allocated non-prime time access which often conflicts with their other priorities such as family commitments or work.⁹⁴

3.103 The committee found that:

- Women face a number of significant barriers to participation in sport and recreation activities.
- Strategies need to be developed by all levels of governments and sporting and recreation providers and others to increase the participation of women in sport and recreation. These strategies could include:
 - Consideration of work-life issues, such as flexible work practices by employers, and the attitude of partners, to address the multiple time demands on women;
 - Increased provision and/or facilitation of physical activity, such as exercise groups, in workplaces;
 - The provision of on-site childcare facilities and/or assistance with child care costs;
 - Adoption by facilities of child-friendly policies to encourage women to bring children with them to venues;
 - Adoption by facilities of 'time-friendly' policies, especially providing access at the most convenient times for women;
 - Consideration by sport and recreation organisations of forming partnerships with child care providers to further facilitate child care options;
 - The increased provision of facilities that cater for the needs of women, including separate shower, changing facilities and toilets;
 - Funding of community-based clubs and associations to maintain and upgrade facilities;
 - Jointly funded Commonwealth, state and territory programs to improve sports and recreation infrastructure; and
 - The flexible use of facilities, including multi-purpose use of facilities.

93 VicHealth, *Submission 54*, p. 9; Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 11.

94 VicSport, *Submission 31*, p. 6.

Recommendation 6

3.104 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth, states, territories and local government recognise the importance of occasional child care in facilitating women's participation in sport and recreation.

Recommendation 7

3.105 The committee recommends that sport and recreation provider organisations canvass members to establish the most suitable times that will enable women to participate in sport and recreation activities and facilitate access to women during those times.

Recommendation 8

3.106 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth encourage state and territory governments, and especially local government, to address the lack of women's facilities at sporting venues.

Groups with special needs

3.107 Some groups, such as women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, women with disabilities, women from CALD backgrounds and Indigenous women generally have lower participation rates in sport and recreation activities than other women. Women living in geographically isolated areas also have barriers to participation. The needs of these groups and strategies to address their particular circumstances are detailed below.

Low SES groups

3.108 Women (and girls) from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds have lower participation rates than women from higher SES backgrounds. An analysis of 2002 ABS data found that participation in organised sport declined where children were from low SES households; or from families with unemployed parents or in single parent family with an unemployed parent.⁹⁵ A similar ABS study focussing on adults found that participation in organised sport declined for particular groups including those from low SES status groups. A direct relationship was found between participation and the socio-economic index for areas (SEIFA) – an index of relative disadvantage – with participation rates for each of the quintiles increasing from 50.7 per cent for the lowest quintile to 75.3 per cent for the highest quintile.⁹⁶

3.109 Conversely, data indicate that, in general, people from higher SES groups participate more in sport and recreation activities. Data also indicate that people who participate in organised sport and physical activity:

95 ABS, *The Young and the Restful*, p. 15.

96 ABS, *Sport and Related Recreational Physical Activity – The Social Correlates of Participation and Non-Participation by Adults*, 2005, pp 11–12.

- are more likely to have attained a higher educational level than the general population;
- are more likely to be employed full-time than non-participants; and
- are more likely to be employed in professional occupational groups than other occupations.⁹⁷

3.110 Some of the organised sports and physical activities whose participants tend to have incomes in the lower end of the income range include dancing, lawn bowls, netball, swimming, ten-pin bowling, tennis, basketball, and Australian Rules football. These activities are low-participant-cost sports. While lawn bowls and dancing are able to cater for older people not in the workforce, and with little or no income, the inclusion of sports such as tenpin bowling, tennis and netball may be explained by the player base which includes part-time workers or people not in the workforce.⁹⁸

3.111 Submissions outlined the constraints which preclude women from low SES groups participating in sport and recreation, including the cost of participation. Recreation SA noted that in Elizabeth Vale, an older low income area with high unemployment, an outdoor fitness area was opened that contained a range of fitness equipment usually found in gyms and fitness centres. The usage has been considerable with the users being mainly middle aged women. The organisation noted that the success of the venture indicates that women will be active and participate if there is little or no cost involved.⁹⁹

3.112 There are few studies that examine the reasons for the lower participation rates of women from low-SES backgrounds. One recent Australian study examined the socio-economic factors explaining differences in physical activity levels of high-, middle-and low-SES women and provides some insight into these factors. The study suggested that SES differences in women's physical activity may be mediated by multiple intrapersonal, social and physical environmental factors. These include negative early life physical activity experiences (a consistent theme among those of low/mid-SES), greater priority given to television viewing (low-SES), lack of time due to work commitments (low-SES) and neighbourhood barriers (low-SES).

3.113 Low-and mid-SES women reported negative childhood experiences in sport and physical activity and these negative experiences may contribute to lower levels of participation in later life. Intrapersonal barriers to physical activity included lack of time and lack of motivation. Often these barriers appeared linked with low SES women in particular reporting that they had little discretionary time available and that they were not always highly motivated to be physically activity. Low-SES women described work commitments as limiting their ability to be active. Adverse influences of the work environment on physical activity were not always attributed to long

97 ASC, *Active Australia: The Numbers Game*, 2000, pp 18–27.

98 ASC, *Active Australia*, p. 26.

99 Recreation SA, *Submission 38*, pp 3–4.

working hours. Women of low-and mid-SES also reported workplace stress, poor working conditions, inflexible working hours, as well as social norms whereby engaging in physical activity in worktime was frowned upon. Low-SES women commonly expressed negative views about their neighbourhood environment, in particular in relation to safety. Perceived lack of facilities and cost were not identified in the study as major barriers to participation in any SES group, although previous studies found that these factors were important. Many low-SES women acknowledged that their neighbourhood had good facilities, but that they lacked the motivation to access them.¹⁰⁰

Older women

3.114 Older women are less likely to participate in sport and recreation than other women. There is a growing body of literature that is exploring the impact of physical exercise on older women. Research indicates that it has far greater impact than just the obvious physical outcomes and that there are also significant social and mental health benefits. The Office for Women (OfW) is currently funding research into the impact of physical activity for older women. The study will consider the impact of physical activity and lack of physical activity on health and other outcomes for mid-age and older Australian women. The final report is due to be released in May 2007.¹⁰¹

3.115 One study into barriers to participation amongst older Australians found that the most common barriers to be lack of time; lack of motivation; poor health; a perception of being 'too old' or 'active enough'; and childcare commitments. More women than men reported lack of time and childcare as barriers. Among older adults (aged 55 years and over) the main five barriers after 'already sufficiently active' were injury or disability; a perception of being 'too old'; lack of time; and not being the 'sporty type'. Women were found to be more likely than men to report being 'too old' and not being the 'sporty type'. Women's barriers appeared to reflect their self image whilst men's barriers appeared to reflect their health status.¹⁰²

3.116 The ACHPER noted the problems of motivating many older women to participate:

They get out of the habit of being physically active. They get married, they have a family and they might be physically active as young mothers, but as they age, there is the old adage: 'the mind's willing, but the body ain't.' They

100 K. Ball *et. al.*, 'How can Socio-Economic Differences in Physical Activity among Women be Explained?', *Women and Health*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2006, pp 108–111. The study involved interviews with 19 high-, 19 mid- and 18 low-SES women in three suburbs in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

101 OfW, *Submission 32*, pp 2–3.

102 M. Booth *et.al.*, 'Perceived Barriers to Physical Activity Among Older Australians', *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, vol.10, pp 271–280, 2002. See also WA Department of Sport and Recreation, *Submission 48*, pp 1–2.

get out of the pattern of being physically active and then they do not necessarily see ways of getting into it.¹⁰³

3.117 NSW Sport and Recreation argued that 'best practice' in encouraging greater participation of older women is to implement programs with high levels of social contact, complemented by multiple reinforcements of the physical activity message.¹⁰⁴ The ACHPER also noted that:

There are plenty of opportunities for people to be physically active. It is just a matter of getting the message out and convincing women that they are able to do it and that there are lots of health benefits, both physical and mental, that are associated with it.¹⁰⁵

3.118 A number of recreational pursuits cater for the social needs of older women. The Women's Golf Executive of Yowani Country Club referred to the social support network at the golf club that extends even to older members that have ceased to play the game.¹⁰⁶

Women with disabilities

3.119 Women with disabilities have lower participation rates than the general population and when compared with men with disabilities. Data from the ABS 2002 General Social Survey indicates that the overall participation rate in sport and physical recreation for those with a disability or long term health condition (LTC) is at lower levels when compared to those without a disability or LTC (54.6 per cent as compared to 70.2 per cent). Overall more males (57.3 per cent), participated than females (52 per cent). This pattern of participation holds for all age groups from 18 years to 65 years and over. The severity or degree of disability appears to be related to the levels of sports participation. The lowest levels of participation were observed for those reporting a disability with 'severe' core activity limitation. Participation levels increased as the degree of limitation reduced.

3.120 Walking for exercise ranked as the number one activity for both genders for all disability types. The ranking of the top-ten activities however varied for each disability type but typically included swimming, aerobics/fitness and tennis. Higher levels of non-participation were observed for those who reported 'no access' to transport or 'difficulty' in accessing transport; and where self-rated health status was reported as 'fair' or 'poor'.¹⁰⁷

103 Ms Pickup, ACHPER, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 90.

104 NSW Sport and Recreation, *Submission 53*, p. 5.

105 Ms Pickup, ACHPER, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 90.

106 Ms Willis, Yowani Country Club, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2006, pp 29–30.

107 ABS, *Sport and Physical Recreation Participation Among Persons with a Disability*, July 2006, pp 9–10.

3.121 Women with disabilities face problems in relation to access to sport and recreation opportunities. It has also been argued that these women face greater barriers than men with disabilities, being subject to the stereotypes of passivity and dependence associated both with women and with people with disabilities.¹⁰⁸

3.122 Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) outlined the constraints which preclude women with disabilities participating in sport and recreation. These include:

- Lack of suitable programs, including programs which cater specifically for women with disabilities, and lack of an inclusive component in mainstream commercial and community programs.
- Lack of information – even where programs exist, many women with disabilities do not receive information about programs and thus do not participate.
- Lack of access, including the lack of physical access to premises and lack of suitable equipment.
- Lack of money – women with disabilities are amongst the most economically marginalised groups in society.
- Lack of transport, and the high cost of transport – for women with disabilities who rely on wheelchair accessible taxis, or accessible bus services, it is often impossible to schedule travel in order to get to an activity.
- Lack of personnel – conducting programs for women with disabilities is likely to require much more intensive involvement of personnel.
- Negative attitudes – for many women with disabilities, their experience of participation in sport, fitness and recreation has been a negative one. Taunts which focus on lack of ability, or physical deformity amount to severe harassment, for which the only defence is to withdraw from the activity.¹⁰⁹

3.123 WWDA pointed out that research indicated that there was significant unmet need amongst women with disabilities for programs in which they could engage.¹¹⁰ Much of this need is not amongst high profile disabilities such as wheelchair sports:

My perspective as a person in a wheelchair is that the highest profile of all disability sports, even though it is skewed to men, is wheelchair sports. In a way there are some things in place to help women in wheelchairs to participate in sports, but we have to look across the spectrum at people who are blind, vision impaired and hearing impaired. What are we going to do with those people who have severe core activity restrictions? We really

108 *Half Way to Equal*, pp 203–04.

109 WWDA, *Submission 25*, pp 5–7.

110 Ms Salthouse, WWDA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2006, p. 5.

have to look at what can help them to maintain their flexibility and fitness and at the same time help them in their general interactions in the community.¹¹¹

3.124 There is also an almost complete lack of role models:

what information do we have about even Paralympian women competing? What are the figures about elite sportswomen with disabilities? I do not think we have them. I also want to look at the media and women with disabilities. I would say that since Louise Sauvage retired we have not had a single picture of a woman with a disability in a single national daily. It is lamentable, even compared with the low coverage of our elite sportswomen. There is not a thing about Paralympians or women with disabilities doing anything participatory at a national level—nothing at all.¹¹²

3.125 WWDA proposed a number of strategies to encourage greater participation of women with disabilities in sport and recreation. These included:

- Funding of more disability specific programs to cater for all age groups, all disabilities, and with a range of degrees of impairment from mild to severe. The majority of targeted programs which do exist cater for young women with disabilities who are still in the education system, or have just left it, that is, from 15-20 years of age. Programs predominantly target young women with intellectual disabilities. In addition, some programs cater for senior women with disabilities. Programs for the 20-60 year age group do not exist.
- Greater attention needs to be paid to developing integrated programs in which women with disabilities can be supported by carers or fellow participants who are able-bodied. Mainstream sport, fitness and recreation organisers do not automatically consider an integration model, and this will require a cultural and attitudinal change. Few commercial establishments have a Disability Action Plan, or have had an access audit conducted of their properties. Encouragement for them to extend the scope of their fitness agenda to include targeted programs for women with disabilities could increase the opportunities for participation.
- Government funding is needed to encourage community groups to develop programs targeting women with disabilities. The *Well and Able* project in the ACT which promotes health and well being of women with disabilities is an example of a successful community development project funded by the ACT Government.¹¹³

111 Ms Salthouse, WWDA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2006, p. 5.

112 Ms Salthouse, WWDA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2006, p. 3.

113 Disabled WinterSport Australia, *Submission 9*, p. 1.

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- Information – organisations need to ensure that information on programs is available in locations where women with disabilities may be contacted, including peak disability organisations and disability service providers.
 - Access – government incentives needs to be provided to improve physical access to buildings and assist fitness establishments to purchase accessible equipment and to train staff in their use.
 - Cost – all organisations which conduct sport and recreation activities need to develop policies to enable women with disabilities from low SES groups to participate.
 - Personnel – conducting programs for women with disabilities requires more intensive involvement of personnel. The involvement of volunteers needs also to be considered.¹¹⁴

3.126 The committee believes that there may need to be greater accountability of NSOs for their efforts to increase opportunities for participation by people with disabilities.

CALD women

3.127 People from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD) are under-represented in the numbers of people participating in sport and recreation, particularly in the case of CALD women. The ABS has found that women born in non-English speaking countries have significantly lower participation rates in sports and physical recreational activities (46.3 per cent) than women born in Australia (63.6 per cent) or born in main English-speaking countries (66.5 per cent). Men born in non-English speaking countries had a participation rate in sport and physical activity of 56 per cent.¹¹⁵

3.128 The OfW is undertaking research on the characteristics of CALD women who participate in sport and recreation activities, for example, age, labour force status, education, number of years resident in Australia, and the factors that may encourage or inhibit CALD women from participating in sport and recreation activities.¹¹⁶

3.129 For CALD women, studies have identified the need for participation rates to be targeted and increased, not only in traditional sports but also in other culturally-specific leisure activities. Barriers to participation include lack of information, language and communication problems, family and cultural traditions, and racism.

114 WWDA, *Submission 25*, pp 4–7. See also Women's Centre for Health Matters, *Submission 33*, pp 1–5.

115 ABS, *General Social Survey: Summary Results, 2002*, p. 54.

116 OfW, *Submission 32*, pp 4–5.

Many sporting organisations do not have the resources, understanding or willingness to accommodate the particular needs of women from different cultures.¹¹⁷

3.130 A study by Professor Taylor of the University of Technology, Sydney on the sport and recreation needs of CALD women in NSW identified a number of barriers to participation. These included:

- a lack of information about how to access programs;
- lack of female-only facilities;
- lack of knowledge or empathy on the part of providers in relation to different cultures and their requirements;
- lack of programs that take into account the needs of all family members, eg both women and younger children;
- lack of knowledge of the benefits of physical activity;
- reluctance of many women to join exiting sport and recreation programs (and a desire to participate within their own cultural group);
- a perception that sport is too aggressive and competitive;
- lack of proficiency and lack of confidence in the use of English;
- the prohibitive cost of sport and recreation programs;
- the lack of female role models within ethnic communities who can encourage others to get involved in sport and recreation activities; and
- lack of access to transport to venues.¹¹⁸

3.131 Professor Taylor suggested a number of strategies for sporting and recreation providers to facilitate participation by CALD women. These included:

- ensure providers have a clear understanding of the ethnic composition of their local community;
- develop a listing of facilities that can be used as female only venues;
- establish child care services to allow women with younger children to participate in programs;
- develop a program of physical activity participation that incorporates education about the health, social and community benefits of physical activity;
- establish programs that are specifically designed to cater for the identified needs of the target group;

117 ASC, *Active Australia*, pp 15–16.

118 Professor Tracy Taylor, 'Identifying Best Practices in Sport and Recreation for Women from non-English Speaking Backgrounds', *Submission 29*, pp iii–vi.

- promote sport and recreation activities that emphasise the social aspects of participation;
- ensure wide promotion of programs and services through non-traditional outlets eg, places of worship, community centres;
- provide printed information in community languages. Where programs are only available in English, ensure staff are aware of how to incorporate the needs of women whose proficiency in English is poor;
- cost – conduct pilot and entry level programs at minimal cost to participants to initiate involvement;
- role models – target girls and women that are involved in sport and recreation to speak at schools, women's clubs and ethnic community gatherings;
- transport – develop program-based transportation schemes such as car pooling and community buses. Choose venues that are easily accessible by public transport;
- work with potential participants to develop non-exclusionary programs; and
- adopt flexible requirements for sports clothing.¹¹⁹

3.132 Dress code considerations are also an important consideration for women from certain ethnic minorities or those with low incomes. One submission noted many girls and women from ethnic backgrounds do not feel comfortable wearing certain types of clothing while playing sport. Womensport and Recreation NSW argued that there is a need to relax requirements for sports clothing (where they are not governed by safety issues) and for sports organisation to be aware of the clothing requirements of specific ethnic groups.¹²⁰ They also supported the provision of discrete facility usage periods in facilities. The organisation pointed to the example of Bankstown City Council which has been trialling discrete female use periods at one of their swimming pools.¹²¹

3.133 Professor Taylor noted that programs and services that incorporate 'best practice' for CALD women are scarce in NSW, especially outside major metropolitan areas. While resource constraints, eg budgets, staff, facilities, account for some of this inadequacy its main cause appears to be a lack of understanding of the needs of these women and inappropriate methods to facilitate their participation. Women only sessions, outreach workers of the same sex or religion and the employment of leisure/sport centre staff from non-English speaking backgrounds were found to be successful strategies for increasing participation. CALD women also indicated a strong preference for segregated programs. Professor Taylor noted that there was a

119 Professor Tracy Taylor, Identifying Best Practices, *Submission 29*, pp iii–vi.

120 Professor Tracy Taylor, Identifying Best Practices, *Submission 29*, p. vi. See also Mr Lozan, Womensport and Recreation NSW, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 31.

121 Womensport and Recreation NSW, *Submission 20*, p. 3.

need for the introduction of more ethnic-specific and women-only programs and that these programs need to be developed in close consultation with CALD women.¹²²

Indigenous women

3.134 ABS data on Aboriginal communities indicates that in 2005, Indigenous women were less likely to participate in a sport or physical activity than Indigenous men (36 per cent compared to 52 per cent).¹²³ The overall participation rate of the Indigenous population in 2002 was less than half (46 per cent) compared with almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of the non-Indigenous population.

3.135 For both populations, participation declines with age, however, there is a much greater difference between the participation levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the older age groups. For those aged 45 years and over, the rate of participation of Indigenous people is less than half that of the non-Indigenous population.¹²⁴ The ASC noted that '[r]esearch has shown Indigenous women and girls, particularly in regional and remote areas, are less likely to participate in sport because they do not have access to sport programs or competitions'.¹²⁵

3.136 Studies have noted that sport is important to young Indigenous people because the 'playing field' is seen as a place where equality can be achieved with non-Indigenous people. Sport is a vehicle in Indigenous communities to assist with addressing health problems such as obesity and diabetes (type 2) and also diverts juveniles away from risk taking activities (criminal activity, substance misuse, anti-social behaviour).

3.137 A key factor hindering participation is the lack of access to suitable facilities in both rural and urban areas. Another key issue is the need for cross-cultural awareness by non-Indigenous people who deliver services and training, including coaches, referees and others.¹²⁶ One submission commented on the cultural barriers that are faced by women from Indigenous backgrounds, particularly in regional area:

These cultural issues tend to be exacerbated by socio-economic issues, particularly in remote and regional areas, and particularly in relation to travel and other commitments required to participate.¹²⁷

122 Professor Tracy Taylor, Identifying Best Practices, *Submission 29*, pp 20-21.

123 SA Premier's Council for Women, *Submission 57*, p. 14.

124 ABS, *Aboriginal and Torres Trait Islander Peoples – Aspects of Sport and Recreation*, September 2004, p. 4.

125 ASC, *Submission 30*, p. 18.

126 Sport 2000 Taskforce, *Shaping Up: A Review of Commonwealth Involvement in Sport and Recreation in Australia*, 1999, pp 93-94; ASC, *Submission 30*, p. 18.

127 WA Netball, *Submission 13*, p. 1. See also Ms Jennings, NT Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2006, pp 39-41.

3.138 The Committee believes that Indigenous women need to have access to opportunities to participate in sport and recreational activities and that their particular needs should be taken into account in providing services and programs.

Women living in geographically isolated areas

3.139 ABS data for 2002 indicate that the rate of participation in sport and physical activities was slightly higher by residents of capital cities (63.4 per cent) than those resident elsewhere in Australia (60.6 per cent). Men resident in capital cities had higher participation rates than women (67.1 per cent as compared with 59.9 per cent), however the participation rates for men and women were similar for those resident outside the capital cities (61.2 per cent – for men – as against 60.1 per cent for women).¹²⁸

3.140 Analysis of this 2002 ABS data found that those living in an inner regional area are more likely to participate relative to major city dwellers. Data also show that those living in outer regional or remote areas are neither more nor less likely to participate as those living in major cities.¹²⁹

3.141 Although people living in less densely settled areas are just as active as their urban counterparts, they do not have access to the same range of recreational or sporting facilities or to the multitude of sporting activities and teams that may result from a larger population base. However, opportunities to participate are often particularly valued as a social driver in sustaining regional and remote communities.

3.142 Some of the difficulties encountered in fostering participation in sport and recreation in regional and remote areas were highlighted during the inquiry. The Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly highlighted some of the challenges that girls face in regional areas:

- Girls are interested in sport, but teams are quite small. It is the more skilled girls who get an opportunity to increase their skills, and those girls who are not as good may not even get the opportunity to play.
- Due to small populations in regional and rural areas, there are often not enough girls with ability and interest to field teams.
- The time and distance that students have to travel to participate, especially in higher level competition causes problems. These demands often discourage further participation at higher levels.
- Smaller communities are also very traditional in their outlook on sport. They tend to offer the 'big four' – tennis, cricket, football and netball. If women and

128 ABS, *Participation in Sport and Physical Activities*, pp 4, 11.

129 *Social Correlates of Participation*, pp 11–12.

girls do not access these sports, there few options for them in their own towns. Again, the towns lack critical mass to start a new sport.¹³⁰

3.143 The NT Government commented on the problems of remoteness in the Territory and the impact this has on participation. These factors including small populations, the distance between towns and communities, high travel costs involved, and limited facilities in smaller communities.¹³¹ The Department noted the 'serious challenges' that geographical remoteness plays in promoting female participation in sport and recreation in the Territory.¹³²

3.144 The Committee believes that women living in geographically remote areas need to have access to opportunities to participate in sport and recreational activities and that their particular needs should be taken into account in providing services and programs to these areas.

Concluding remarks

3.145 The evidence received by the committee appeared to contain some clear messages about how women's participation in sport and recreation can be encouraged. High rates of participation and rapid growth amongst women members occurs where there is convenience, flexibility, child care, and non-competitive activities. There is a message here to all sport and recreation providers that if they pay attention to women's needs, such as for childcare, women will participate.

3.146 There are a number of constraints on participation that disproportionately affect women generally, and some groups of women in particular. The lack of time reported by women, as well as convenience and childcare constraints, were prominent amongst these. The committee would be concerned if, as was being suggested by the fitness industry, government regulation could make it more difficult for women to make use of fitness centres because of limited childcare opportunities.

130 Mrs Trotter, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, pp 26–27.

131 NT Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport, *Submission 58*, pp 3–5.

132 Ms Jennings, NT Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2006, pp 40, 45.