

## CHANGING THE GAME

# KICKING GOALS FOR WOMEN IN SPORT

Pop-up spin classes, rock up netball, get into cardio tennis and AFL active may not sound like your traditional sports, but they are part of a new breed of sporting activities funded by VicHealth and designed specifically for women and girls in Victoria.

VicHealth's \$1.8 million *Changing the Game: Increasing Female Participation in Sport* program is working with sporting organisations to reinvent sport for women and girls of all ages in Victoria, and change the conversation about women in sport at every level.

More than two-thirds of adult Australian women are classified as being sedentary or having low levels of exercise,<sup>1</sup> and we know that participation in sport and physical activity generally declines as women get older.<sup>2</sup> VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter, who is also on the Victorian Government's Advisory Panel for the Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation, said that *Changing the Game* is about getting more Victorian women and girls to get active through sport, but it goes beyond increased participation. "Women are languishing behind men's sport in terms of media coverage, pay and prize-money, and hold fewer decision-making, leadership and media commentating roles in sport," Ms Rechter said. "So *Changing the Game* is also about challenging attitudes about women's participation in sport and changing the conversation to reflect the true value women add to sport in Victoria and Australia," she said.

Paving the way for the *Changing the Game* program, VicHealth worked closely with a number of internal and external experts, panels and sporting organisations part of a collaborative, strategic approach to the investment of funds.

This approach began with research to better understand the current status of

female participation in sport and gain an indication of what strategies could be used to improve this status. Research results directed the launch of the *Changing the Game* funding scheme in October 2014, calling for Victorian sporting organisations to submit initiatives that could engage women and girls who don't normally participate in traditional sports programs. Applications were reviewed by an Assessment Panel of VicHealth and independent experts, who recommended that further exploration was required for the suggested initiatives to be truly effective. To encourage and facilitate this exploration, VicHealth engaged an independent consultant to hold workshops with each of the applying sporting organisations, and gave organisations access to experts in research, program design and marketing; supporting them to resubmit a new proposal.

Simultaneously, VicHealth engaged an Expert Panel of leaders from across sport, business, media and government to discuss how to support and improve the visibility and exposure of female athletes and strengthen leadership opportunities for women across all facets of sport. This is a key objective of the *Changing the Game* program, recognising that women's sport will not progress without improved media coverage, enhanced profiling and sponsoring of athletes, and provision of more attractive opportunities for female leaders.

In August 2015, after the second round of assessment, the six successful sporting organisations were announced with great excitement and support from high profile sports people. The successful organisations

are AFL Victoria (together with AFL), Cycling Victoria, Gymnastics Victoria, Netball Victoria, Surfing Victoria and Tennis Victoria (in partnership with Tennis Australia) – see page 19 for details. These six organisations will endeavour to motivate 25,000 Victorian females – particularly those who don't normally participate in traditional sporting programs, clubs and competitions – to become active more regularly over two years, and to raise the profile and coverage of women's sport in Victoria.

The challenge is to provide new sporting opportunities that are specifically developed to meet women's needs and interests, and address some of the reasons why women aren't able to get active, such as time, cost and inflexible opportunities for physical activity.

Well-known sports journalist Sam Lane said the *Changing the Game* program is so important because we know that women, for a whole lot of reasons, just stop playing sport. "This program is going to give women what they want and, that will encourage women to start playing sport again," said Ms Lane.

Rock Up Netball is one of the six initiatives developed through the *Changing the Game* program by Netball Victoria. With accredited Rock Up Netball venues across Victoria and skilled coordinators who understand how to cater to varying fitness and skill levels, the program is designed to provide social, fun and unstructured opportunities for beginners and women returning to netball. Melbourne Vixens player Liz Watson said the Rock Up Netball concept is pay as you go, wear what you like and you kind of make the rules. "It's a really fun, relaxed environment so you could bring your friends down and all get active together," she said.

AFL Active is also part of the *Changing the Game* program. Developed by AFL and implemented by AFL Victoria, AFL Active is a group fitness session for women based on AFL training techniques. It is the first program developed by the AFL to address barriers that prevent women from participating in the sport, such as physical contact, organised sport structure and rigid time commitments. Suitable for women at any fitness level, the program does not require any specific AFL skills and can be delivered in any location. AFL Victoria CEO

Steven Reaper said we know that 50% of the people who actually go to games also want to participate. "AFL Active is a mix of exercise and also uses the balls that would be involved from a game day point of view," said Mr Reaper. "It is designed to appeal to women who are less actively involved in AFL."

AFL Umpire Chelsea Roffey is an ambassador of the *Changing the Game* program, and one of the many high profile women to show their support for women's sport at the program's launch. "*Changing the Game* is important because women need to know that there's a place for them in sport," said Ms Roffey. "Being a woman in a male dominated sport, and an umpire, has certainly tested my ability to really regard my confidence and assertiveness along the way. The more we can encourage women to be involved in sport, the more we can encourage them to reach their potential and really contribute," she said.

Improving on the traditional funding scheme model, *Changing the Game* also empowers the six successful organisations to raise the profile of women's sport in the media and champion the important role women play in sports' leadership and management, by using program-consistent media and communication messaging. VicHealth recently became the first major partner for the Melbourne Stars and Renegades Women's Big Bash League (WBBL) cricket teams, as part of *Changing the Game*. VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter described the partnership as a major step in the right direction. "We want to change attitudes and change the game. Partnering with these two clubs to support the first WBBL season is a major step in ensuring that women's sport gets the recognition it deserves," she said. "This has been an amazing year for women's sport in Australia. We've got some of the best female athletes on the planet, and they deserve better recognition."

*Changing the Game: Increasing Female Participation in Sport* is part of VicHealth's new Physical Activity, Sport and Walking strategy to get 300,000 more Victorians engaging in physical activity by 2023.

Read about the six funded sports on page 19.

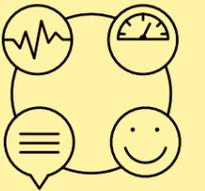
### IN VICTORIA, STATISTICS SHOW THAT...



Four times as many females (44%) choose to participate in non-organised or more flexible physical activity offerings compared to organised physical activity (9%).<sup>3</sup>



Compared to men, women also place more importance on the social aspects of physical activity, and are less motivated by performance outcomes, such as building strength.<sup>4</sup>



Women's motives for participating in physical activity include maintaining or improving health,<sup>5</sup> appearance and weight management,<sup>6</sup> personal fulfilment,<sup>6</sup> wellbeing and improve quality of life and social interactions.<sup>7</sup>



But these motives can also change and evolve over time – for example, a woman may begin physical activity for health reasons but will continue for the social enjoyment or their mental wellbeing<sup>8, 9, 10</sup> – depending on their age or life stage.