

Victorian rural women tee off to *Give Golf a Go*

Increasing participation in physical activity through community sport and active recreation

This project is part of a VicHealth funding program known as PICSAR, which aims to increase participation levels in community sport and active recreation amongst people with disabilities and those from low socio-economic, Indigenous and new arrival communities.

The organisation

Women's Golf Victoria (WGV) is the State Sporting Association for women's golf in Victoria. Consisting of affiliated golf clubs, women's golf leagues, districts and individual members, it represents 374 clubs in 21 districts (15 regional and six metropolitan) and has over 26,500 members. WGV is responsible for delivering quality golfing services to its broad member base.

The association also has the responsibility of growing the game and securing the future of golf in Victoria through junior development, introductory clinics, increased tournament activity, improved access to facilities and promotion to the broader market.

The project

Give Golf a Go aims to improve the social, physical and mental health and wellbeing of women living in regional and rural Victoria through participation in golf. People living in regional and rural communities often experience health inequalities due to geographic and economic factors. In this project, women are encouraged to try golf for the first time, attend golf clubs to share and experience a sense of belonging and are invited to take on leadership roles such as mentoring, committee positions and coaching accreditation.



Beginner golfers enjoying their introduction to golf. *Image supplied by Leah Sandeman.*

Giving all women a chance to join in

The story

Golf is an expensive sport to play. Women's Golf Victoria has been rolling out *Give Golf a Go* clinics in low socioeconomic areas where women may find it financially difficult to buy equipment, pay full membership fees and pay for private lessons.

Making the sport as inexpensive and accessible as possible is the key to growing participation rates in the game of golf. WGV advertises clinics in the host town and other surrounding areas which have limited sport and recreation facilities available.

The low cost involved is clearly printed on the advertisements to ensure everyone knows that the activities are affordable.

More information about Participation in Community Sport and Active Recreation (PICSAR) is available on the VicHealth website at: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/picsar

Women have the option to come to one or all of the clinics, which introduce them to a structured program and also provides social interaction and a sense of connection.

All participant fees are retained by the host club to help make the program sustainable. The fees provide enough income to buy equipment for beginners, cover the costs of future advertising and for the employment of a professional to run additional clinics.

Providing incentives to participants is compulsory for clubs hosting *Give Golf a Go*. When WGV first meets with the host club they ask them to introduce a discounted membership to be used at the completion of the clinics. This offer helps to promote golf as an affordable activity to all women. This is usually a 3–6 month offer which gives the women enough time to decide whether golf is the sport for them.

Modifications in rules and regulations are introduced to help make the game less challenging and more fun for beginners. Some of these include: a relaxed dress code, three to nine hole events and club handicaps.

Volunteers are an essential component of the program's success. Club members are encouraged to make the new golfers feel welcome and help to make their experience a happy one. Members do this by playing a few holes with them until they are confident enough to play by themselves.

To provide a safe and attractive environment for all women, WGV has a no-alcohol policy for all clinics and competitions.

The organisation believes it is important for sports to be aware that in order to be sustainable they have to change and/or adjust old traditions.

Golf clubs are very traditional and some club boards do not always see change as positive. WGV's aim is to modify some club rules and regulations to attract women who have never experienced a golf club environment.

Selected golf clubs running the *Give Golf a Go* program do not have the resources to run their own clinics. They rely on existing members to return to the club year after year. WGV's involvement enables clubs to increase their ability to attract potential members, which in turn assists the club's survival. Just as importantly, becoming part of a golf club provides women with a healthy physical and social environment.

For more information on the *Give Golf a Go* program go to: Women's Golf Victoria at www.womensgolf.org.au or email info@womensgolf.org.au or telephone: (03) 9523 8511

PICSAR

Sport and active recreation organisations are well placed to assist VicHealth in addressing the health inequalities that result in poorer health outcomes for many groups in the community.

They have a tradition of providing opportunities for individuals and groups to:

- participate in physical activity,
- connect with other members of the community,
- feel part of their local community, and
- develop knowledge and skills that can be used in a range of contexts.

The Participation in Community Sport and Active Recreation (PICSAR) Program comprises three funding programs:

- State and Regional Grants
- Active Participation Grants
- Active Club Grants

The first two programs are long-term investments that work with State Sporting Associations, Regional Sports Assemblies, statewide peak agencies and regional organisations to increase participation in physical activity in specific target populations.

A learning snapshot from the independent evaluation being conducted by Monash University/ ARTD Consultants shows that:

1. partnerships are perceived as beneficial to program delivery
2. it is important that staff (paid or voluntary) have the required skills to implement activities
3. sports at all levels should consider adapting policies and activities to provide greater flexibility to promote inclusion.