

Sport participation in Victoria, 2018

Research summary

Part 2: Discussion of key findings

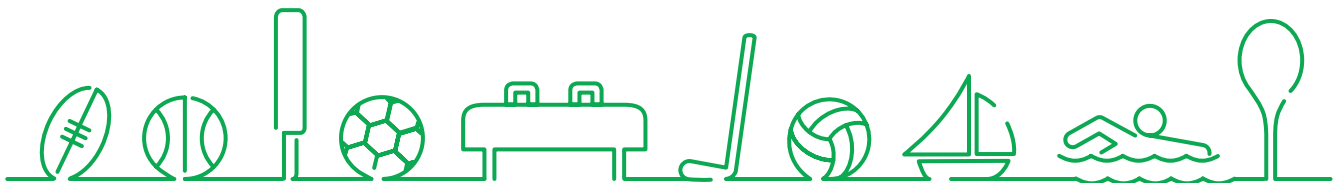
This report provides further discussion and recommendations from research into community sport participation in Victoria across ten popular sports detailed below in Figure 1. Now in its fourth year, this research, conducted jointly by VicHealth and Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV), compares participation across age, sex and location in 2018 and compared to 2015.

Part 2 contents

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Part 1: Key findings at a glance can be found [here](#).

Figure 1. Sports included in the VicHealth and Sport and Recreation Victoria research



Please note: golf and bowls did not provide data for 2018 and are not included

2.1 Discussion on key findings

The 2018 results include a 4-year program of research from 2015–2018. The key findings are discussed, and recommendations are provided.

1. Participation in sport increased by more than 95,900 participants (0.8% increase in the participation rate) between 2015–2018. There was a higher increase in participation for females (1%) than males (0.4%).

Key statistics

- Overall, female participation increased for all ages 4–84. Male participation decreased for ages 4–14 years.
 - The largest growth for females was within the 10–14-year age group (6% increase), compared to the largest growth for males (15–19-year age group) with a 2% increase.
- Regional – growth had an increase of 11% for females aged 5–9 and a 10% increase for females aged 10–14 years.

Refer to Figures 2 and 3 for age breakdown by age and gender.

There has been significant policy and investment strategies focusing on increasing participation in sport specifically for females. This includes VicHealth's This Girl Can – Victoria campaign, which focuses on encouraging women to be active whenever and however they like, and the Active Women and Girls program which provides more opportunities for women to be active in sport.

SRV targets the sector's hard infrastructure through 'Female Friendly Facilities', its soft infrastructure through 'Change our Game', and widening options for women and girls under the 'Access for All Abilities' initiative.

Additionally, VicHealth and the SRV worked together to introduce a Sporting organisations governing body gender diversity policy which required the boards of these organisations to have a minimum of 40% female representation.

It is promising that the participation rates reflect these policy and investment strategies with higher increases in participation for females, compared to males. This includes a considerable increase for females within the 10–14-year age group, with an increase of 6%. Over half, (n=6) sports reported on overall increase in female participation, and these included traditionally male dominated sports such as Australian rules football, cricket and football (soccer), as well as other sports including basketball, gymnastics and sailing.

These results demonstrate that there are greater proportional increases in female participation for certain ages, compared to males, and this is consistent with other recent research (Casey, Fowle et al. 2019).

The demand for community-level sport for females has increased in line with increased opportunities for sports that were traditionally male-dominated. However, this increased demand can place pressures on the supply at the community-level, in terms of facilities, infrastructure and volunteer workforce to deliver sport (Casey, Fowlie et al. 2019).

Despite this, females remain underrepresented in sport participation. Gender equity in sport requires continued focus, and sport may need further assistance to continue to create female-friendly environments to better engage and retain females (Casey, Fowlie et al. 2019).

Further, there are barriers to females participating in male-dominated sports which need to be considered such as sport skill development, female only teams and competitions, and visible player pathways across the lifespan for females, and supportive and inclusive club culture that value female participation and sporting achievements (Fowlie, Eime et al. 2020).

2. From 2015–2018, 16% of participants played their sport for each of the four years. Nearly half (48%) played for only one year, 21% playing only two years, and 16% playing three years.

Key statistics

- The highest rates age of retention overall all four years was for those aged 10–14 (39%), followed by 5–9 years (37%). Less than a quarter of participants (24%) aged four in 2015 played continually for four years. For these ages, retention was slightly higher for males compared to females.

Sport policy and strategy historically has focused heavily on increasing participation numbers annually. Recent sport participation and retention research has recommended that sport policy and strategic practices have a specific focus on retention and not just on an increase in numbers, and prioritise retention strategies especially for adolescents (Eime, Harvey, et al., 2020)

3. Sport participation rates are higher in regional Victoria compared to metropolitan Melbourne. Metropolitan – growth areas also have significantly lower sport participation rates than all other regions

Key statistics

- Regional Victoria 16%, Metropolitan Melbourne 12%
- Regional – growth 15%, Regional – other 17%, Metropolitan – growth 10%, Metropolitan – other 13%.

For age breakdowns by region, refer to Figure 4.

The difference in participation across regions, can be related to the social-constructs of sport in regional and rural areas and that traditional sports, such as those in this research, are readily available in regional and rural areas, whereas in metropolitan areas there is greater choice of sport and leisure activities (Eime, Harvey et al. 2016). However, it is a concern that participation in Metropolitan – growth areas is considerably lower than all other areas.

Figure 1. Participation rates, 2018, Victoria: by age

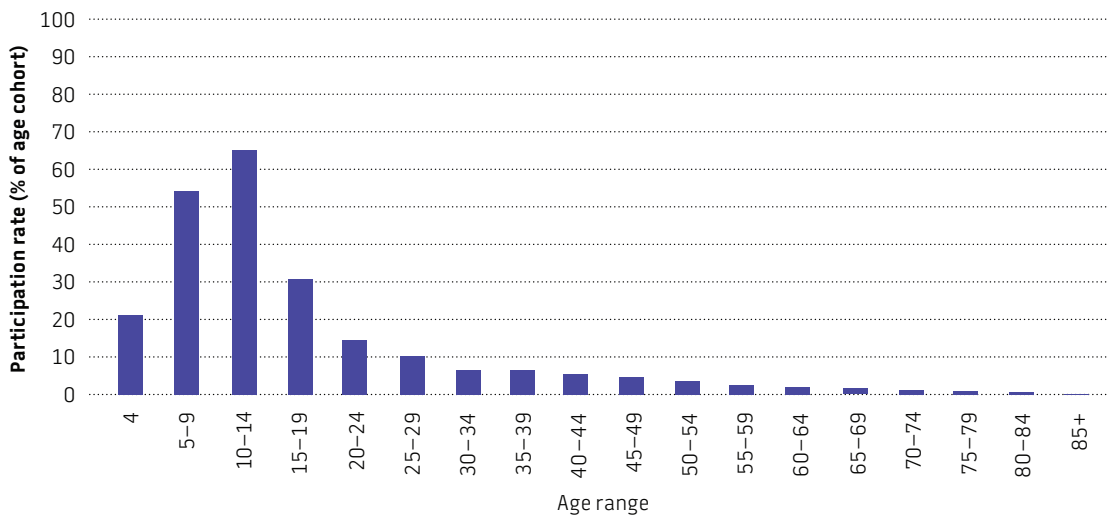


Figure 2. Participation rates, 2018, Victoria: by sex and age

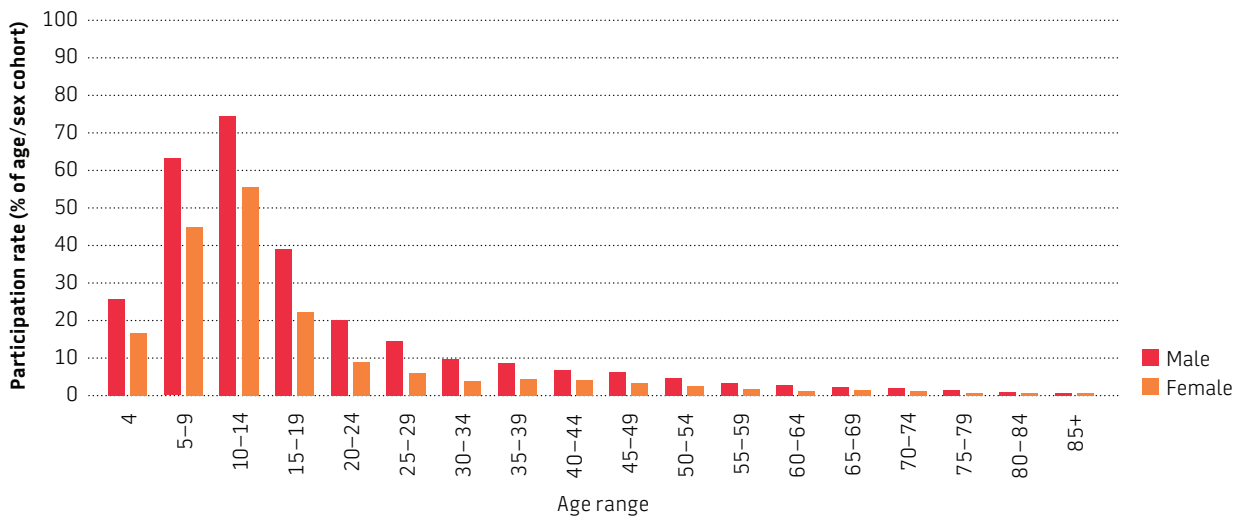
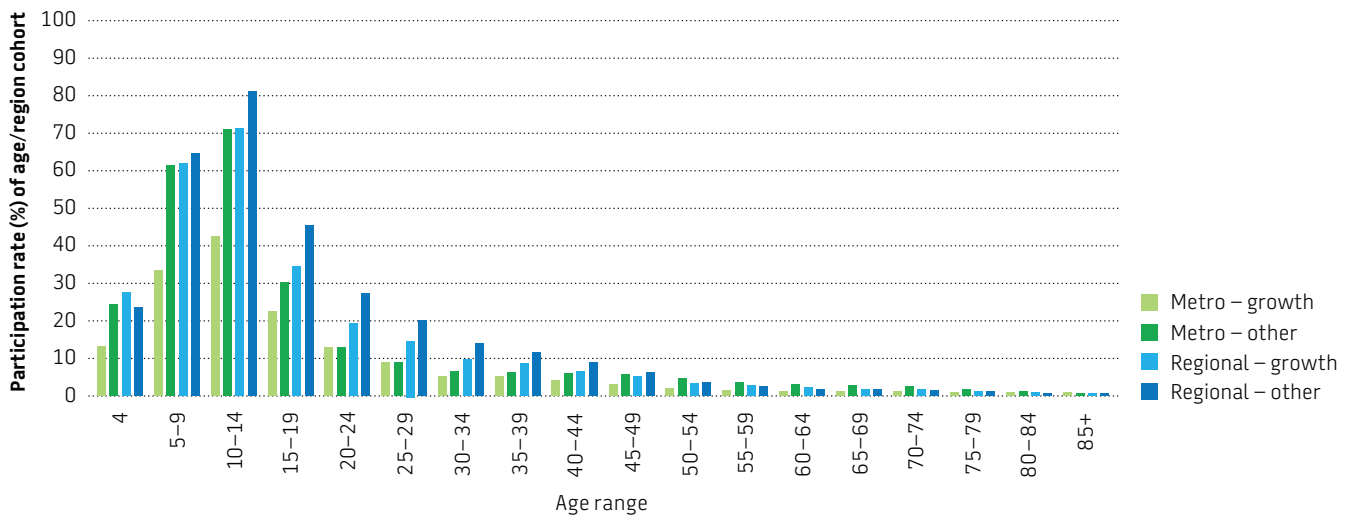


Figure 3. Participation rates, 2018, Victoria: by region and age



2.2 Recommendations for State Sporting Associations, sport policy makers and researchers

State Sporting Associations

Data collection

That National Sporting Organisations and State Sporting Associations:

- consider the continuity of participant data management systems – the ability to track individuals and therefore participation and retention trends over time (changing participant data management systems can hinder the ability to track participants over time and often has a reduction in quality and availability of data the year post a change in system)
- review and continually improve the quality of their registered participant databases; for example, requiring that each individual participant register their own details online (rather than permitting batch entries of teams) and requiring the reporting of basic demographic data including date-of-birth, gender identity and postcode
- use the details of their sport participation profiles and trends to inform their strategic developments
- continue to improve the data collection of their social and recreational program participants
- progress towards having integrated participant data management systems
- capture additional demographic data of participants including those with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Participation

That State Sporting Associations develop and implement:

- strategies that focus on retention of participants, particularly during adolescence, including the provision of social programs alongside competitions or where competitions are not viable
- sport opportunities/programs that focus a range of different formats including competition and other recreational or social formats
- strategies to incorporate skill development regardless of ability, age or gender or background
- specific and targeted policy and strategies to continue to increase female participation
- strategies related to improving health equity and increasing participation for specific demographic groups who face greater barriers for inclusion in sport, including those with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, or areas where participation is low including Metropolitan – growth areas and specific LGAs.

Sport policymakers and funding bodies

Data collection

That policy makers and funding bodies:

- continue data collection, analysis and reporting to inform evidence-based decisions across the sport sector, by sport and by specific demographic groups
- support the collection of a wider scope of basic demographic information
- support the sport sector by developing a consistent set of additional demographic questions for sports to include within the participant registration systems
- make analysis and reporting from the Sport Participation Research Project more widely available to local councils and other relevant bodies for use.

Participation

That policy makers and funding bodies develop and implement strategies and policies to:

- use the findings of the Sport Participation Research Project to inform their sport policy and strategic investments
- provide more opportunities for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds to play sport
- increase playing opportunities in a range of different formats including competition and other recreational or social formats
- increase female participation
- increase participation in metropolitan – growth areas, including consideration of infrastructure and club volunteer capacity and development
- increase participation opportunities for specific demographic groups including those with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Researchers

That further research be conducted into:

- the impact of COVID-19 on sport participation, by individual sports, and the sports sector more broadly
- the contribution of participation in sport to individuals physical, social and mental health.

Note: All recommendations should take into account the impact of coronavirus restrictions, which came into place in 2020 after this data capture and analysis, and remain in place at the time of publication.

2.3 About this research

The Sport Participation Research Project has involved the analysis of data on organised sport participation in 12 major sports annually since 2015. For 2018, two sports (golf and bowls) were unable to provide their participant data. Therefore, this report integrates and summarises sport participation across ten major sports and from 2015 to 2018.

This project reports on participation levels (numbers of registered participants and participation rates per head of population) and participation trends, for the Victoria population as a whole, and for various population segments.

The project aims to provide a reliable measure of organised sport participation in Victoria to inform planning, decision-making and investments for State Sporting Associations, all levels of government, funding bodies and sport participation promoters, particularly relating to participation initiatives and facility planning.

About the data

This analysis reports on 844,992 ‘participants’ or players, aged between 4–100 years, who were registered with a Victoria community sports club or program affiliated with one of the following ten State Sporting Associations: Australian rules football, basketball, cricket, football (soccer), gymnastics, hockey, netball, sailing, swimming, and tennis. It includes participants registered in:

- club competition
- junior or modified sport programs (e.g. basketball Aussie hoops or AFL Auskick)
- social programs (e.g. rock up netball).

Participation rates are expressed as a percentage of the estimated residential population for each age/sex group (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017).

Because the data analysed are anonymous, data about individuals who play multiple sports are not identified and linked across sports. These individuals are included in the data for each sport they play and therefore are counted multiple times within the overall data.

Reported rates are ‘registrations per 100 persons in the relevant population cohort’ but are referred to as ‘percentages’ for simplicity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The State Sporting Associations involved with this research are: AFL Victoria, Australian Sailing (Victoria), Basketball Victoria, Bowls Victoria, Cricket Victoria, Football Victoria, Golf Victoria, Gymnastics Victoria, Hockey Victoria, Netball Victoria, Swimming Victoria, and Tennis Victoria.

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VicHealth is committed to health equity, which means levelling the playing field between people who can easily access good health and people who face barriers, to achieve the highest level of health for *everyone*.



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VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.