



Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project

Evaluation highlights

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Cover image

The potential for sporting environments to promote good health is widely recognised, given the role they play in the community and the number of people regularly involved.

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Introduction

VicHealth's Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project was a pioneering \$2 million program that supported grassroots sports clubs to become healthier and more welcoming and inclusive.

The pilot was the first in Australia to take a holistic look at community sports clubs to promote good health.

Over two years, 73 clubs in the wider Barwon region put in place a set of minimum standards to reduce six factors that shape people's experience in a sports club and impact on health. They were supported to reduce harmful alcohol use; offer more nutritious options at the canteen; reduce smoking in and around the club grounds; increase the number of women and girls, culturally and linguistically diverse people, and Aboriginal Victorians in local sport; prevent and manage injuries; and work to reduce spectators' and players' exposure to harmful UV.

Clubs made significant changes to their culture, facilities and policies so that players, spectators and volunteers have a positive, healthy experience – leading to greater participation in sport, and improved health and wellbeing in communities.

Evaluation was a major part of the program – identifying how community sports clubs can work through some of the major health issues that affect Victorians. This report summarises findings from the Centre for Sport and Social Impact at La Trobe University, and includes lots of ideas for local action.

Long term, we hope this project will increase community demand for healthy sporting clubs and contribute to reducing the future burden of preventable disease.

Champions of change

This unique program was implemented by Leisure Networks in the local government areas of the wider Barwon region – the City of Greater Geelong, Golden Plains Shire, Surf Coast Shire, Borough of Queenscliffe and Colac Otway Shire.

Leisure Networks is one of nine Regional Sports Assemblies that provide volunteer support, information and training and development opportunities to local clubs in rural and regional Victoria. It has a long history of increasing sport and recreation opportunities in the Barwon region and was selected through a competitive tender process.

Leisure Networks was tasked with helping clubs to identify areas for improvement and implement gradual change in a way that suited their individual needs and capacity. Much of this work involved adapting and using existing health promotion programs and resources targeted to sports clubs.

Given the success of the Demonstration Project (which concluded in March 2013), the program was expanded to regional and rural areas throughout Victoria. See page 5.



Community demand for healthy and welcoming sports clubs will encourage clubs to create long-term change.

Why sports clubs?

The potential for sporting environments to promote good health is widely recognised, given the role they play in the community and the number of people regularly involved.

In 2009–10, 26% of Australians aged 15 years and over participated in some form of organised sport or physical recreation, while 64% participated at least once in the last 12 months¹. We also know that many more are involved as volunteers, spectators, supporters and sponsors, who are crucial to sustaining sporting clubs in local communities.

Sports clubs engage the community at many levels, providing opportunities for children and adults to exercise, develop new skills, and to compete and socialise with others in their community. The leadership strength of sports clubs allows them to reinforce healthy and respectful attitudes, social norms and behaviours.

We know from experience and our long-standing partnerships in sport that people flock to good clubs. We also know that sports clubs can sometimes give rise to unhealthy environments that can discourage people from participating, deter broader community engagement, and perpetuate unhealthy attitudes and behaviours.

VicHealth's 2009 *Community Attitudes Survey: Healthy community sporting environments* showed strong support for health promotion in grassroots sports clubs, particularly around responsible alcohol consumption and healthy eating. Respondents also identified some of the unhealthy aspects that were having a negative impact on their experience, including fights between attendees, sporting injuries, smoking and discrimination.

In addition, community sport faces a range of issues, including changes to the way that people participate in sport, the need to increase volunteering in sports organisations, and time pressures on community members.

The Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project was an ideal way to address some of these issues and to secure Victoria's place as a nationwide leader in promoting all aspects of good health through sport.

“The program reinforced what we were trying to achieve and gave us a platform to formalise it.”

– club representative



With the right support, all community sports clubs have the potential to become healthier and more welcoming places through good governance, leadership and a culture that supports health and wellbeing.

¹ ABS 2011, *Australian Social Trends June 2011, Sport and physical recreation*, Cat. No. 4102.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

Regional and rural roll-out

Building on the momentum and energy generated from the Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project, VicHealth is investing a further \$3.3 million to expand this program throughout regional and rural Victoria between July 2012 and June 2014. This is giving us the opportunity to refine the program based on the evaluation of the Demonstration Project and to learn more about the implementation of health promotion programs in community sport.

To reach more than 250 community sporting clubs through the Healthy Sporting Environments program, VicHealth is partnering with Victoria's nine Regional Sports Assemblies (RSAs):

- Centre Active Recreation Network (North East Victoria)
- GippsSport (Gippsland)

- Leisure Networks (Barwon)
- Mallee Sports Assembly (North West Victoria)
- Sports Central (Central Highlands)
- Sports Focus (Loddon Campaspe)
- South West Sport (South West Victoria)
- Valley Sport (Goulburn Valley)
- Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly (Wimmera and Grampians Region).

These RSAs are assisting clubs to identify which of their current activities are promoting health, and what can be improved, including training of volunteers, changes to club practices and establishment of new procedures.



Six standards for healthy clubs

Community sports clubs participating in this program strived to become healthier by achieving minimum standards relating to six key factors that shape people's experience in a sports club and impact on health. These were identified as priorities in VicHealth's *Building health through sport action plan (2010–2013)*.

These standards applied differently to each club, and were dependent on their sport type, facilities, understanding of health issues and volunteer capacity.

“We had already started to improve the vibe and atmosphere of the club. Through this program we felt empowered to go back to our club with new ideas and ways of doing things.”

– club representative

Clubs across 25 sporting codes implemented policies, programs and practices to ensure that:

- alcohol is served and consumed responsibly
- a variety of healthy food and drink choices are available
- smoke-free venues become the norm
- women and girls, Aboriginal Victorians² and people from culturally diverse communities are provided with safe, supportive and meaningful opportunities to participate, free from discrimination and fear of violence
- injury prevention and management is prioritised within clubs
- measures are taken to reduce harmful exposure to UV.



Clubs with a welcoming, family friendly culture are better placed to attract more volunteers for coaching, administration and other club support roles.

² In this publication, the term 'Aboriginal' is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Table 1: Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project standards

Alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Sports Level 2 accreditation. • Not selling or providing alcohol before midday on match days. • Displaying health promotion messaging of equal weighting to branding and messaging provided by alcohol industry sponsors. <p>A choice of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spirits to be sold at an additional 20% premium on 2010 prices and full-strength beer to be sold at an additional 10% premium on 2010 prices; or • only serving beer and spirits with alcohol content of not more than 3.5%, and wine in 100ml glasses.
Healthy eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with legal food handling obligations. • Canteen menus to contain at least 30% 'green' food and drinks (best choices) and at least 20% 'amber' food and drinks (choices to select carefully). 'Red' foods and drinks (choices to limit) can make up no more than 50% of the canteen menu. • In clubs that receive sponsorship from food* and sugary** drink industries, health promotion messaging to be of equal weighting to messaging provided by these sponsors. • Development of strategies to phase out food* and sugary drink** vouchers, incentives and donations for junior activities/events or competitions. <p>* <i>core food industries exempt (milk, yoghurt, cheese, fruit and vegetables, lean meat, chicken or fish, wholegrain bread and cereals).</i></p> <p>** <i>sugary drinks include soft drinks, cordials, flavoured waters and mineral water, sports drinks, energy drinks, bottled iced teas.</i></p>
Tobacco	<p>Adoption of a smoke-free policy incorporating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no sale of cigarettes • signage promoting no sale of tobacco products, and smoke-free areas and times • coaches, club officials, players and visiting players not to smoke while in club uniform or operating in official club capacity • no smoking in any form of covered area or in any uncovered outdoor dining area • junior (under 16s) events to be totally smoke-free (no smoking anywhere on grounds).
Inclusion, safety and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two representatives from each club to be responsible for leading work around race-based discrimination and women's and girls' participation, including 6 hours of training. • Implementation of VicHealth's Everyone Wins Framework – Level 1.
Injury prevention and management	<p>Completion of Smartplay safe club assessment and ensuring at least 8 injury prevention strategies are in place.</p>
UV protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of SunSmart Club Assessment. • Implementation of at least one action from each category: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – schedules, fixtures and rule modifications – education and information – shade – clothing and apparel – sunscreen – individual risk factors.

Evaluation highlights

VicHealth engaged the Centre for Sport and Social Impact at La Trobe University to evaluate the Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project to find out:

1. the extent to which the project supported clubs to become healthy sporting environments
2. the health and social impacts of having minimum standards
3. the capacity of sports clubs to create healthy sporting environments
4. barriers to long-term cultural change.

Data was compiled from both summer and winter sports and from a variety of sources: focus groups with volunteers; exit surveys; club surveys; site visits; interviews and individual surveys.

The evaluation gives us a clear indication of what worked, where more effort is needed, and the practicalities of a large-scale health promotion intervention in community sports clubs.

To what extent were clubs supported to become healthy sporting environments?

The project was a catalyst for positive change in many clubs:

- 93% agreed their club was better as a result of being involved
- 86% believed they received enough help implementing the standards
- almost 50% of clubs said that some standards were very difficult to implement; however, 74% disagreed/strongly disagreed that there were too many standards.

Some clubs worked on all six standards, while others have worked on only two or three. For example, all the football clubs had to work on all six standards as they have bars and canteens and none operate within smoke-free venues. By contrast, indoor sports in a shared or centrally managed facility with either no bar and canteen or no capacity to influence the sale of alcohol and food, only had to work on the injury prevention and management and inclusion, safety and support standards.

Given these differences, it is useful to acknowledge that sports clubs are complex and that each club has different needs, priorities, capacities and ideas about the role their club plays in their community.

The most significant change was in members' behaviour around sun protection and inclusive environments; the hardest areas to change were alcohol and healthy eating.

“The program coincided with the need for the club to arrest a significant decline in on-field success and effective administration. It's helped us focus on more than just playing issues.”

– club representative

Did the minimum standards have health and social impacts?

Delivering minimum standards in the six key areas in sports clubs has the capacity to raise awareness of health issues within the club environment, leading to positive changes in the way a club operates. These changes have the potential to deliver health and social benefits to those involved in the club and members of the broader community.

Data for the pilot program was collected across a relatively short timeframe while the project was being implemented. To establish whether this style of program is likely to result in any health or social impacts, it would be useful to collect data over a longer period.

It is possible, if not likely, that the participating clubs will experience positive health and social benefits among their members in the years to come as some of the environmental, policy and cultural changes become more accepted, and as these changes begin to take effect and influence individual member behaviour and attitudes.

What was the capacity of sports clubs to create healthy sporting environments?

Each club came from a different starting point, which had an impact on how healthy the environment was to begin with as well as their capacity to create a healthier environment.

The success of a program like the Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project depends on a number of important factors:

- at least one, but preferably a handful, of club volunteers or committee members to champion cultural change
- a well-run committee of management with good governance that is able to make clear decisions and put in place policies and practices that support change
- a 'whole of club' commitment from the start of a project, rather than a 'special project' approach by one person or a small group of members.

Community sports clubs rely heavily on volunteers across almost every facet of their organisation. Many club volunteers recognise they feel over-worked, but considered this program important enough to commit even more volunteer work to improve the culture and facilities of their club.

In many cases the club representatives would have liked greater support from their committees of management to deal with the demands of the project. This demonstrates the need for strong engagement across club leadership and membership.

These findings are not unique to this program, but are common where community sport clubs attempt to institute change or programs that are dependent on human resources for their implementation and success. Therefore, health promotion programs need to consider how other organisations can make it easier for clubs to be healthier.

“If we can successfully implement all aspects of the program and maintain vigilance, then our club will grow in a healthy way.”

– club representative

What are the barriers to long-term cultural change?

Clubs develop their identities and culture over a number of years, sometimes decades, and are shaped by their particular sporting code. When people become members, they bring their own expectations and values with them. For long-term success, health promotion programs must be tailored to the specifics of club and to the culture of sport more broadly.

“I think [change] is a long-term thing and you do it through leadership, and constant messaging and being consistent. But from experience, that takes time.”

– club representative

Barriers to long-term change include the following:

- Club cultures can be obstructive to changes that are perceived as coming from the 'outside', especially if proposed changes are regarded as contrary to the way that the club has always acted.
- Change is most likely to be achieved if it is coming from within the club itself; however, there are some exceptions where clubs would prefer an external party (league, governing body or government to lead the change, eg: smoking legislation).
- It is common or even usual for prominent individuals to dominate decision-making thereby shaping and/or maintaining club cultures. Cultural change from outside this dominant grouping is likely to be significantly less successful and/or short-term.
- Changes to club-bound attitudes and practices that are viewed as being 'ahead' of general societal levels will be the most difficult to achieve in some circumstances but potentially easier to achieve in others.
- Some clubs (for example, with a high performance focus) may be more conducive to attempts to re-connect sport and health than others.

Building healthier clubs – key findings

Responsible use of alcohol

Clubs that were not in the Good Sports program³ clearly benefitted from being in this project. They adopted minimum standards such as not serving alcohol before midday, and matching alcohol and health promotion messages. Clubs already involved in Good Sports – the vast majority – benefitted little, and have changed little or not at all because they were already at an appropriate benchmark.

“One of our big fundraisers is heavily centred around alcohol. It’s a big money spinner and to change would be difficult.”

– club representative

The bar is a source of revenue for many sports clubs. Replacing full-strength beer with mid-strength beer was not considered a viable option by winter or summer clubs. All clubs opted to increase the price of beer by an amount they believed their members would accommodate. The price increase does not appear to have had a measurable effect on drinking behaviour or attitudes towards alcohol consumption.

In fact, price rises may cause clubs to be even more dependent on revenue from alcohol sales – an unintended consequence of the price component of the alcohol standard. A price differential model based on volumetric alcohol content would be more suitable for a sports club environment, potentially supported by a consistent price across entire leagues, established by the appropriate governing body.

Smaller female-dominated sports had fewer issues with alcohol compared to larger male-dominated sports, which supports targeting these clubs with further assistance.

Based on the evaluation:

- Replacing full-strength beer with mid-strength beer was not considered viable.
- Price rises could make clubs more dependent on alcohol revenue.
- 25% of members are still concerned about underage drinking of alcohol at their club.



Policies about the responsible service of alcohol in sporting clubs can reduce the problems associated with risky alcohol use.

³ A national program managed by the Australian Drug Foundation and partially funded by VicHealth, which is designed to promote family friendly environments through better alcohol management.

Healthy eating

There was a marked difference between clubs in terms of the provision of food, which has an impact on the ways in which they interpreted the healthy eating standard, as well as their capacity to alter their offerings.

Some clubs run a canteen every night and often have a high proportion of packaged foods, while other clubs run a canteen every week, but cook/prepare very little food (eg, junior clubs that run activities on a weekend). Some clubs do not run a canteen for their training or competition days, but run a series of events throughout the year that are professionally catered.

“We sold very good quality food but the program encouraged us to make it even healthier: include more fruit, cook in better oil, and have a few more options.”

– club representative

In most clubs, canteen offerings are driven by demand and ease of preparation (such as frozen foods). A wide range of initiatives were put in place to make the food offering healthier. Canteens were asked to use the traffic light system that puts foods in green, amber and red categories based on their nutritional content. Many club canteens that were heavily skewed with high fat, sugary and salty red foods, made good progress towards offering more green options.

While 83% of survey respondents believed that the traffic light system worked well by the end of the project, the evaluation notes that changes to canteen menus resulted from practical solutions, such as changing menu items and cooking methods, and support from Leisure Networks rather than the traffic light system itself, which is difficult to implement in a setting managed by volunteers with minimal time and tight budgets.

Many clubs use the traditional ‘bring a plate’ system, which has its own issues and challenges, so it’s worth considering a healthy eating standard that accounts for the different food preparation and delivery systems that operate within community sports clubs.

Based on the evaluation:

- 88% of clubs said their food offering was healthier as a result of the project.
- The number of canteens offering at least 30% ‘green’ food choices rose from 35% to 57%.
- Clubs said they would offer healthier food if there is demand.
- Changes have been made to menus but it is unclear how long it will take to change consumption.



Improving nutrition in sports clubs is not about banning any food or drinks – it’s about providing more healthy choices for players, officials and spectators.

Reduced tobacco use

While smoking was not seen as a major issue for most clubs, and most participants indicated that smokers were in the minority, the idea of policing others' smoking practices was controversial and challenging for many of the clubs – especially individuals smoking in club uniform (members or visitors).

Clubs that found this standard easy to implement often had a 'no smoking' policy adopted by the venue or a state sporting association. These clubs were enforcing an externally determined policy, rather than being responsible for both setting and enforcing a policy among people they know.

No club sold cigarettes, the vast majority had smoke-free signs, and improvements of around 20% were reported across the areas of undercover smoking, junior event smoking and smoking by coaches, officials and players in club uniform.

One of the more problematic areas of the smoking policy appeared to be policing the actions of members and visitors, particularly when moving smokers away from the external undercover areas.

Many clubs agreed that a league-wide or statewide ruling restricting tobacco use on club premises would have helped greatly.

These results demonstrate the need for the reduction of tobacco use to be prioritised across the sports sector.

“If a directive came from our governing body saying that all local grounds had to become smoke-free it would be far easier to implement.”
– club representative

Based on the evaluation:

- 60% of clubs said it was difficult to police visiting players' smoking.
- 76% agreed the standard would be much easier to enforce if adopted statewide.
- No-smoking undercover was difficult to enforce.



Going smoke-free outdoors reduces people's exposure to second-hand smoke and helps to make smoking less visible and socially acceptable.

VicHealth used learnings from this standard to inform the Victorian Government's tobacco reforms to protect Victorian children. The legislation was finalised in 2013.

Inclusion, safety and support

This standard was large and complex and required a considerable amount of planning, in part because the components cut across many different areas of operational responsibility and in part because there are so many components to the standard that it would be difficult to allocate responsibility to one person alone. It is often the entire committee of management that must take responsibility for this standard as it is closely linked to the core business of the club.

“The most important battle for us in sport is inclusion...being aware of our behaviour and how we communicate with people inside and outside the club.”

– club representative

Understanding the difference between not discouraging new participants from diverse communities and strategically encouraging diversity was a challenge throughout the project.

Success was highest for objectives that involved a ‘one off’ change such as developing a code of conduct or adopting written guidelines for dealing with complaints. Clubs perhaps not surprisingly found it harder to institute new systems designed to persist over time such as having a welcoming officer and a buddy system.

The summer interviews revealed a strong ‘us/them’ dichotomy, in which people were welcomed as long as they were prepared to fit in with existing values, culture and practices. This dichotomy provided a valuable context to comments such as ‘all people are welcome at our club’ and ‘we don’t turn anyone away’, which are often proffered by community sport clubs as evidence of inclusivity.

Based on the evaluation:

- Despite the complexity of this standard, increases of between 25% and 39% were reported for areas including: creating a welcome kit; adopting written guidelines for dealing with complaints and grievances; adopting a member protection policy; having written codes of conduct for club roles; adopting guidelines and policies for the club to become more welcoming; and providing information for women in the club if they were victims of violence.
- Success was mostly where ‘one off’ changes were implemented, such as developing a statement of purpose, codes of conduct or adopting written guidelines – compared to establishing new systems for the club.



Everyone involved in sport should be able to do so in an enjoyable, safe environment, free from discrimination, harassment and abuse.

Injury prevention and management

For this standard, the bigger, well-resourced clubs were able to provide more sophisticated injury prevention and management strategies. Football clubs were typically more advanced with this standard, such as providing a qualified trainer and physiotherapist, and conducting indoor training sessions in inclement weather.

“If we work our way up over the long term, we are going to have people doing the right thing throughout their sporting lives.”

– club representative

For many clubs, their state sporting association had an injury prevention and management program in place that the club was obliged to follow. For smaller clubs, the injury prevention and management standard was not something that had previously been a high priority.

Clubs were able to refer to a wide range of practices, eg checking the state of the playing surface; providing ice packs, first-aid kits and stretchers; mandatory use of protective equipment.

Clubs strongly agreed that while first-aid response strategies and tracking systems should be in place, educating members and ensuring that they used good practice for their sport in terms of protective gear, warming up and avoiding injury was preferable.

VicHealth used learnings from this standard to inform the Victorian Government’s Sports Injury Prevention Taskforce. The Taskforce’s final report was released in June 2013.

Based on the evaluation:

- 70% of clubs introduced eight injury prevention strategies (up from 12%).
- Larger and better-resourced clubs provide more sophisticated injury prevention and management strategies.



It’s important for clubs to embed good prevention methods to reduce the number of sporting injuries as well as implement procedures for managing injuries.

UV protection

The 'Protection from harmful UV' standard was of greater concern to summer clubs than winter clubs and indoor sports. However, it is recognised that winter and indoor sports often train in times when UV protection is required.

Clubs were more prepared to take responsibility for basic infrastructure and equipment, such as sun shading or the provision of sunscreen, but believed that responsibility ultimately rested with the individual, a notion that was particularly true for adult sports.

Providing permanent sun shading was identified as an issue by clubs, particularly those that are under-resourced or have difficulty in securing grants. This is an example of where making the club environment healthier falls beyond the direct capacity of the club.

“The shade tent was fantastic – people flocked to it, and children and adults from visiting clubs used it.”

– club representative

Based on the evaluation:

- 87% found it easy to improve UV protection; temporary shade and sunscreen were the most prevalent strategies.
- 81% agreed that 'you can provide sunscreen but you can't make people use it'.
- No clubs reported making no/not much progress.



Clubs can minimise overexposure of UV by providing broad-spectrum sunscreen, encouraging the use of sun-protective clothing and providing shade.

Sponsorship in sports clubs

The Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project included funding for a Sponsorship Coordinator role at Leisure Networks to explore how sponsorship affected the responsible use of alcohol and healthy eating standards, and to investigate the potential for developing healthy sponsorship policies within the sport sector.

Given the community support for reducing grassroots sporting clubs' reliance on alcohol and junk food sales and sponsorship⁴, this was an important part of the project.

Only a small number had a formal sponsorship agreement with an alcohol company. Many of the larger clubs had promotional products supplied in-kind by beer brands.

Some of the participating clubs had sponsorship arrangements with the local hotel or pub, but in the main did not consider these to be alcohol sponsorships, in part because many of the businesses served food and were viewed as 'family establishments'.

Alcohol sponsorship and promotion appears to be most significant within football clubs. This is because they are often the clubs that have the game attendance that attracts an alcohol sponsor. Indeed, many clubs, particularly football and cricket, are predicated on a competitive environment in which clubs compete for members, spectators and sponsors.

Ten clubs had some form of sponsorship arrangement with a food company/provider; however, only four clubs had distributed fast-food vouchers to juniors, and only four clubs had a sponsorship arrangement with a major fast-food outlet. Fast-food company sponsorships were gained by club personnel approaching the local fast-food franchise to request sponsorship support, rather than applying through the company itself.

Clubs were asked to match alcohol and unhealthy food signage with health promotion signage. No clubs reported that this was difficult, but the impact of the signage is unclear. Some clubs reported that it was hard to keep the health promotion signs up in a shared facility.

Most clubs attract sponsors over time by key committee personnel targeting local businesses, rather than implementing an embedded strategy. None of the participating clubs had a social responsibility policy that associates the club with healthy sponsors. Creating healthy sponsorship policies within clubs requires clubs to take a more strategic approach to sponsorship more broadly, and should be consistent with appropriate state sporting association policies.

Sponsorship within community sport requires further research to determine the impact on the health and perceptions of brands from members of the community. However, it is clear that sponsorship arrangements in community sports clubs are complex and diverse. Many clubs had no sponsorship at all, and while some clubs have sponsorship arrangements the majority were with local businesses and groups rather than larger corporations.

While there are opportunities to further reduce the level of sponsorship from alcohol or unhealthy food brands in community sport, this project suggests that making a broader impact on sponsorship in sport can be made by restructuring sponsorship arrangements at the elite level.

⁴ See VicHealth's 2009 *Community Attitudes Survey: Healthy community sporting environments* (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/community-attitudes-sport).

How you can make a difference

Through the Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project and evaluation we have identified that many other organisations have a role to play in providing opportunities for people to have healthy, safe and welcoming experiences on and off the field.

We encourage you to look at how your organisation supports and influences health within community sports clubs, and assess what you can do to make clubs healthier.

Ideas for action

Community sports clubs

- Identify how you can raise awareness of health issues, promote healthy lifestyles, and create health promoting environments in a way that suits your club.
- Ask your members and participants for their views about how your club can further incorporate health into its everyday operations.
- Regularly discuss your club's health at committee of management meetings. This will make it a priority at the leadership level.
- Ask your league or state sporting association to demonstrate leadership by continually refining practices and policies to meet community values.
- Actively reach out to people who are not currently using your club.
- Establish partnerships with key organisations/community groups to improve the health of your club and attract new participants.
- Use club handbooks, newsletters, noticeboards and social media to promote and explain healthy sporting environments.

Local councils

- Assess the health of the community sports clubs in your community.
- Identify the health issues which are most relevant and adapt existing resources and tools to suit what's needed.
- Include healthy sporting clubs as a priority in Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans to address the needs of population groups and support overall community health and wellbeing.
- Identify local champions who can raise awareness, be positive role models and maintain a focus on the importance of healthy sports clubs.
- Develop funding opportunities for sports clubs to improve the health of their facilities, operations and culture.
- Work with clubs to ensure new/redeveloped facilities are welcoming, inclusive and appropriate.
- Ensure health is factored in to council-run facilities, and provide opportunities for discounted facilities, fees and charges for clubs that meet specific benchmarks.
- Run workshops/roundtables with clubs to discuss opportunities and barriers to prioritising health in sports clubs and brainstorm solutions.
- Ensure all new and refurbished sport and recreation facilities meet universal design principles and sport-specific standards.
- Work with sports clubs to encourage and facilitate the implementation of health promoting policies.
- Work in partnership with community organisations to increase the number of quality sport and active recreation opportunities for women and girls, Aboriginal Victorians, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.



Look at how your organisation supports and influences health within community sports clubs, and assess what you can do to make clubs healthier.

Health promotion organisations

- Review your existing policies, practices and resources. Are they adequate for the complexities and diversity of community sport?
- Consult community sport clubs about opportunities and barriers to prioritising health in clubs, and brainstorm new approaches.
- Use the full evaluation of the Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project (available on VicHealth's website: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/hsedp-evaluation) to refine or develop programs and resources.
- Identify opportunities to inform the development and establishment of legislation that supports clubs to be healthier – for example, to reduce the acceptability of smoking in community sport.

Sports organisations

- Identify which areas from the Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project can be adapted by clubs, leagues and associations.
- Identify champions of your sport who will help raise awareness, be positive role models, and maintain a focus on the importance of healthy sport.
- Review existing policies, practices and resources. Do they adequately increase awareness of health issues, promote healthy lifestyles and create health promoting sport club environments?
- Integrate health and wellbeing into club development initiatives, volunteer training and recognition programs, governing policies and coaching/official accreditation.
- Use the full evaluation of the Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project (available on VicHealth's website: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/hsedp-evaluation) to refine or develop programs and resources.
- Develop funding opportunities for clubs to improve the health of their facilities, operations and culture.
- Use newsletters, websites and social media to discuss healthy sport environments.



Clubs that prioritise the health of their communities provide a healthy experience in sport, both on and off the field.

Conclusion

VicHealth's long-standing partnership with sport is critical to our goals of increasing participation in physical activity, increasing opportunities for social connection, and creating supportive environments for health.

VicHealth established the Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project to build the evidence for health promotion interventions in sports clubs and create opportunities for people to have a healthy experience in sport, both on and off the field.

While it's too early to say that this program has increased participation, we do have a better understanding of how health promotion can be weaved through grassroots sports clubs.

With the right support, all community sports clubs have the potential to become healthier, more welcoming places through good governance, leadership, and a culture that supports health and wellbeing.

Reducing harm from alcohol, promoting healthy eating, reducing smoking, increasing safe and inclusive participation, reducing injuries and reducing harm from UV all lead to improved health outcomes for the whole community.

Creating a healthier culture can also add value to sports clubs, with the potential benefits ranging from getting more players on the field to increased sponsorship opportunities.

In addition, clubs with a welcoming, family friendly image are better placed to recruit and retain members, and attract more spectators at games and people at social events.

And opening sports clubs up to a wider section of the community helps build important social networks as well as the club's capacity to attract more volunteers for administration, coaching and other club support roles.

This project was a catalyst for positive change in many clubs – almost all club representatives said their club was better as a result of being involved.



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