



More than just sport

PICSAR State and Regional Grants (2007 to 2011)
Program evaluation and outcomes report

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Cover photo

Waddington Mwayenga, a former Zimbabwean Test cricketer, works for Cricket Victoria's Cricket4Me project which is successfully boosting diverse participation within a traditional sport.

More than just sport

Participation in Community Sport and Active Recreation
(PICSAR) State and Regional Grants (2007 to 2011)

Program evaluation and outcomes report

Contents

Foreword	01
Introduction	02
Lessons learned and insights gained	04
<hr/>	
Strategic approaches (includes case studies)	
1. Reaching and engaging target communities	07
2. Partnerships	10
3. Organisational capacity building	13
4. Increasing participation opportunities	16
5. Sustainability	19
<hr/>	
Looking ahead to more inclusive sports	21
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Foreword

For 25 years VicHealth has worked with thousands of sports organisations, from the smallest of community-based clubs to the largest national codes.

Over time we have improved the way we monitor and analyse the relationship between sports and health in Victoria. This includes changes in sport participation rates, the ways sports improve health and the extent to which specific groups engage with particular sports activities.

Through our work in sport over the years, we also understand the leadership potential and strengths of sports clubs and organisations for setting and reinforcing community standards.

We are very proud of the outcomes that have been achieved through VicHealth's Participation In Community Sport and Active Recreation (PICSAR) State and Regional Grants program (2007–2011). This initiative funded 61 projects across Victoria undertaken by State Sporting Associations, Regional Sports Assemblies and peak bodies.

We know that widespread serious health challenges – obesity, type 2 diabetes, lifestyle-related cancers – affect our communities. To address these concerns it is important that we continue to focus our efforts on getting 'more people more active more often' – particularly those from communities which are underrepresented in sport. In PICSAR, the focus was on people with disabilities, Aboriginal Victorians, culturally diverse communities (with an emphasis on newly arrived migrants and refugees) and people from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

This report captures the many lessons including the triumphs and challenges experienced through the PICSAR program. It highlights the breadth of activities undertaken to increase participation for Victorian communities.

PICSAR created over 47,000 extra opportunities to get people involved in sport. Participants reported many benefits, including improvements in physical health and social networks, the development of new skills, benefits for families, employment and voluntary experience and integration into their community.

This feedback highlights the potential of sports to move beyond a traditional service model that primarily delivers competitions and physical health benefits, to one that actively promotes and reinforces a range of strategies that can help shape attitudes and behaviours to ultimately foster healthier communities.

PICSAR has also provided valuable insights about attracting and retaining new participants. It is evident that sports needs to address cultural, social and built environments to welcome, value, involve and provide a quality sports experience to new participants. This is essential for sporting groups to realise their full potential in creating healthier communities, while continuing to attract and retain a membership base which makes their clubs viable entities.

That's why VicHealth is now working closely with State Sporting Associations, Regional Sports Assemblies and peak bodies to create safe, accessible, inclusive and equitable sports environments through our State Sporting Association Participation Program (SSAPP) and Healthy Sporting Environments (HSE) Program.

As we move into the future, we congratulate the organisations and individuals involved in making PICSAR such a success and look forward to working towards a more inclusive and healthier state.



Jerril Rechter

CEO
VicHealth

Introduction

This report provides a snapshot of VicHealth's PICSAR State and Regional Grants program. It is based on the findings of a comprehensive evaluation of the program conducted by Monash University and ARTD Consultants.

For many years VicHealth has worked with sports organisations to promote the benefits of physical activity and enable healthy practices – from sun protection to healthy food choices – at venues. Yet there has been less attention given to increasing participation in community sport and active recreation.

PICSAR was designed to increase participation of Victorians across all levels of community sport and active recreation. The program had a specific focus on increasing participation of the communities experiencing disadvantage, which were also known to experience the worst health and have low levels of participation in sporting activities. This is in keeping with VicHealth's key strategic priority to reduce health inequalities. Strategic community partnerships were facilitated by State Sporting Associations (SSAs), Regional Sports Assemblies (RSAs) and peak organisations to underpin and support the program.

Target communities were identified for the program – people with disabilities, Aboriginal Victorians, newly arrived and culturally diverse communities and people from low socioeconomic communities. Sport and active recreation organisations worked through innovative ways to attract these groups by adopting a more inclusive approach and addressing barriers to participation.

As well as developing long-term, inclusive programs with meaningful and sustainable outcomes, PICSAR also fostered considerable organisational and cultural change in Victorian sports.

PICSAR was a catalyst in funding sports activities that looked beyond the number of people participating, to 'see' those who weren't being engaged. Who was missing out and why? How could they be encouraged to participate?

Experiences and insights gained through the PICSAR program have shaped VicHealth's priorities and future sports funding. Case studies presented in this report highlight the diverse approaches taken by PICSAR-funded organisations and reflect common lessons learned. Together with the tools and links provided, this report offers valuable insights into the ways that sport and community organisations can increase physical activity through sport.

Background

Over the past 50 years, Australian culture has shifted. We have gone from an active nation to one with a lifestyle that is largely sedentary. More recently, the impacts of physical inactivity have led to a national focus on the issue. A key challenge is the need to facilitate opportunities for all people to engage in physical activity.

Regular physical activity offers fundamental health benefits. It can prevent heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, some cancers and obesity. It also provides protection from common mental health problems, anxiety and depression.

Sport and active recreation activities can also socially connect people, break down social isolation and help build strong and resilient communities. From coaching to running the canteen, sport helps people develop knowledge and skills that can be used in a range of other contexts.

Many people who would most benefit from involvement in sport and active recreation have the least access to opportunities to participate.

Many people in our community who would greatly benefit from involvement in sports and active recreation come from groups that are underrepresented in sports, with the least access to opportunities to participate. Australian Bureau of Statistics data confirms that particular groups have significantly lower levels of participation in physical activity than the general population. These include the four PICSAR target communities – Victorians from low socioeconomic groups, those with disabilities, Aboriginal Victorians, and new arrivals.

The most common barriers to participation are cost and transport. Language barriers and lack of cultural understanding by sports organisations present a barrier for newly arrived communities, while accessibility of facilities is a major issue for people with disabilities. Many sports clubs and organisations lack an understanding of what it means to be an inclusive sport.

In VicHealth's 2009–2013 Strategic Plan, our investment in sports funding focused on increasing broader participation in physical activity by creating equitable access to sport and active recreation opportunities.

About the program

The PICSAR State and Regional Grants program focused on three of VicHealth's strategic goals – increasing physical activity, increasing social connection, and reducing health inequalities to improve community health and wellbeing.

Funding

Between 2007 and 2011, VicHealth allocated \$20.4 million of PICSAR funding to 43 State Sporting Associations (SSAs), nine Regional Sports Assemblies (RSAs) and nine peak agencies representing community organisations across Victoria.

Objectives

PICSAR's main objectives were to:

- increase understanding of the role of sport and active recreation in promoting diversity, social inclusion, positive health and wellbeing
- raise awareness of the barriers and enablers to participation for underrepresented groups
- boost direct and indirect sports participation opportunities for underrepresented groups.

Strategies and activities for engagement

Participating organisations were required to identify up to four target communities to engage with. They then developed innovative strategies and activities to:

- reduce barriers to participation
- encourage new opportunities
- increase awareness and interest in their sport among their target communities.

Organisations representing a wide spectrum of sports created new opportunities through a range of projects and community partnerships, with more than 47,000 people participating in PICSAR-funded activities during the four-year program.



CHSA Sports Central used PICSAR funding to establish Sport Equipment Libraries at seven sites around the Ballarat area. These free libraries have increased many people's access to a huge variety of physical activity options.

Solutions

Beyond simply encouraging more people to play sport, PICSAR focused on building the capacity of sports organisations and clubs to engage with priority communities. This was achieved through effective partnerships, inclusive policies, modified facilities and programs, and training of staff and volunteers.

PICSAR demonstrated that there is no one single solution to overcoming barriers to sports participation. Rather, involving people in sports requires a combination of multi-pronged approaches underpinned by strong, collaborative partnerships.

Lessons learned and insights gained

The combined experience of PICSAR-funded projects over four years has yielded valuable insights. We now have a more refined understanding of the barriers and enablers for increasing physical activity through sport, especially for groups within the community who are underrepresented in sports.

Some organisations and clubs had already begun to address inclusion issues and had a strong understanding of the social and health benefits of physical activity. For others, this was challenging new ground, requiring a significant change in mindset.

There is no one single solution to overcoming barriers to sports participation.

Starting points

State Sporting Associations

PICSAR's inclusion objectives were a relatively new focus for many State Sporting Associations (SSAs), although some had an existing commitment to increasing participation in their sport by engaging underrepresented groups.

SSAs engaged with local leagues, associations and clubs who were interested and able to take on PICSAR projects to create new opportunities for participation. They helped others build capacity to reach target communities, provide welcoming environments and adopt a more inclusive approach.

Regional Sports Assemblies

Most Regional Sports Assemblies (RSAs) had a strong understanding of the social and health benefits of physical activity and the barriers to participation. They were already working to increase opportunities for underrepresented groups in regional communities.

These RSAs used PICSAR to strengthen existing collaborative partnerships between local clubs, schools and community and social service providers to engage all target communities. They generally had a clear understanding of how to facilitate change within their own organisations and provided advice and support to local sports clubs and associations.

Peak agencies

Peak agencies served as the link between sport, the social services sector and the target communities. As change agents, they:

- motivated sport and community organisations to increase diversity and inclusiveness
 - trialled and expanded initiatives that used sport as a vehicle for broader social integration
 - modified their own training methods (in some cases) to focus on leadership and social opportunities, as well as empowerment and self-determination for the target communities
- * adapted existing resources and promotional materials to support education and training in a range of settings.

Engaging communities and creating partnerships

Partnerships have been the cornerstone of the PICSAR program's achievements in reaching and engaging with target communities.

Through collaborative partnerships with schools, multicultural organisations and social services agencies, sports organisations created affordable and accessible opportunities for participation. They did this by successfully incorporating sports activities into existing community programs or creating new opportunities for target communities.



By modifying some of their traditional programs to accommodate the needs of special groups, CycleSport Victoria has reaped the benefits of increased interest and participation in their sport. The CSV Special Schools Cycling Championships also gave a chance for participants like Nathan Broenen to compete at state and international levels.

Partnering with organisations that had existing relationships of trust with local communities helped overcome many barriers to communication. It offered knowledge, skills and resources to help sports organisations reach the right people within their target groups.

For example, in partnering with newly arrived communities, it was important to identify and engage community leaders and gain a cultural understanding, as well as raise awareness of the sport and health benefits within the groups.

Overall, the PICSAR projects that were most successful in reaching and engaging with target communities:

- tended to have an existing presence and knowledge of that community
- were able to establish trust and ongoing relationships
- made concerted efforts to understand the needs of the target communities
- persevered in the process of creating welcoming and inclusive environments.

Overcoming barriers to participation

The main barriers to participation in sports are cost and transport. Organisations employed various strategies to address these and other universal obstacles.

For example, sports activities that required attendance at different venues every week were a major issue for groups that did not have cars, could not afford to drive long distances or in which parents were unable or unwilling to take children.

To overcome these barriers, some projects started holding competitions at the same location at the same time each week. This reduced travelling time and costs for many participants and enabled regular ride-sharing and familiarity with public transport routes. The routine of regular attendance helped some participants plan their week and gave a sense of purpose.

Some communities also required initiatives that allowed for specific needs, cultural barriers and sensitivities. Employing skilled workers and training volunteers, leaders or coaches from within targeted communities had a positive impact on direct and indirect participation. This provided mentors and role models who could advocate for their community to be involved.

Building capacity within local sport clubs and organisations

Building capacity, especially in sports clubs, appeared to achieve more sustained engagement with the target communities. Yet changing the structure, mindset and ways that sports clubs function proved a significant challenge.

The traditional model of sports participation – joining a club, paying an up-front membership fee and participating in regular competition in a team – was identified as a barrier to participation in many sports.

PICSAR focused on building the capacity of sports organisations and clubs to engage with target communities.

Many SSAs recognised that building sustainable change had to come from within – by demonstrating leadership and providing education and training for staff, volunteers and board members. This meant allocating extra resources and, in some cases, recruiting new board members to help bring about policy and organisational cultural change.

However, limited progress was made in removing barriers to participation at the club level. Many clubs did not have a strong understanding of how to create an inclusive sports club. Their readiness to embrace change was often influenced by limited resources and reliance on time-poor volunteers, as well as the attitudes of club committees.

Challenges in meeting PICSAR objectives

The challenges that sports organisations faced in meeting program objectives provide valuable insights into some of the issues around increasing engagement and inclusion within sports.

Perseverance and a long-term outlook were often required to find the right way to engage communities. Some projects tried to do too many things and spread themselves too thinly. This highlights the need for carefully targeted initiatives.

To overcome cost and time barriers, some sports undertook activities that were more aligned with a social approach to increasing participation. However, less competitive participation opportunities are not the core business of most local sports clubs. Some clubs were reluctant to keep supporting initiatives when participation did not always result in membership or ongoing involvement.

Involving people in sports takes strong, collaborative partnerships and a combination of multi-pronged approaches.

The lack of demographic information collected by clubs made it difficult to monitor the profile of participants. Limited human and financial resources, including high staff turnover, restricted capacity building efforts by most organisations.

The PICSAR evaluation found that further changes were needed in sports clubs and sports environments to:

- increase knowledge and awareness
- provide more welcoming environments
- adopt more flexible, accessible and inclusive models of delivery
- establish policies and practices to support participation by underrepresented communities.

Reaping the benefits

Despite the systemic challenges associated with creating inclusive sports environments, there were many benefits that came from the PICSAR program.

- Many sports found that embracing a more diverse participation base raised their profile in the broader community. This boosted memberships and led to more people wanting to get involved as participants and/or volunteers.
- Some underutilised facilities were reinvigorated and became thriving social hubs. Increased participation came from PICSAR activities such as running sport and recreation activities for some groups during off-peak times.
- Most organisations reported an increased awareness of the challenges faced by people from target communities as a result of their exposure through PICSAR.
- Some sports reported that members of target communities who had never had the opportunity to participate in or learn the skills of their sport had, through PICSAR, gained the knowledge and confidence to join a club or sports organisation.
- For many newly arrived and culturally diverse communities, PICSAR activities increased awareness of the benefits of sport and recreation and opportunities for participation. It also increased their understanding of how sport and active recreation activities are provided in Australia.
- Sport was found to be a good way to address boredom and provide structure and routine to disengaged young people. Some reported improvements in their family relationships and greater motivation to return to education and training or join other community programs.
- Participating in sport provided opportunities to build social networks and integrate into the community, develop new skills and gain employment and volunteer experience.
- Overall, many participants noted social and physical benefits and reported increased confidence, sense of purpose and pride. Families experienced increased opportunities to participate in activities together.

The case studies in the next section highlight the way diverse organisations can engage, build partnerships and provide opportunities through sport to promote health.

Strategic approaches

1. Reaching and engaging target communities



The sportsaccess program gave primary school children from low-income families an opportunity to try their chosen sport by connecting them with local sports clubs.

PICSAR projects employed a range of strategies to reach and engage their target communities.

Building understanding and trust

Some of the most successful projects had an existing presence in and understanding of the community they were trying to engage. This provided knowledge of cultural sensitivities, community structures and leaders, as well as specific barriers to participation.

Establishing a relationship of trust led to ongoing partnerships. In many cases, target communities took ownership of projects.

Identifying mentors

Identifying and getting community leaders on board was particularly important for engaging Aboriginal and newly arrived communities. Several PICSAR projects found that engaging and employing key members of the target community – training coaches and developing leaders from within communities – led to increased participation.

Forging partnerships

Partnerships were instrumental in reaching and engaging target communities. Sports organisations partnered with local schools, businesses, government and community organisations that had experience with, and access to, the communities they wanted to reach.

Partner organisations employed a range of communications strategies, such as social networking and use of local media, to publicise and alert community members to participation opportunities.

Engaging families

Engaging families was often crucial for sustained participation of priority communities. Many organisations found parents did not have the interest, time or ability to support their child's participation in sport and physical activity.

Providing family-friendly activities or opportunities for parents to participate in parallel activities led to broader participation, especially from Aboriginal and newly arrived communities.



Toolbox

Find out more about these featured organisations and resources.

Sportslink: www.sportslink.org.au

ReLink Australia: www.relink.org

Leisure Networks: www.leisurenetworks.org

VicHealth fact sheet 'Connecting kids to clubs': www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Physical-Activity/Sport-and-recreation/PICSAR-Success-Stories-2010.aspx

Case study Reaching families by linking kids to sports

Reaching families by linking kids to sports was a good fit for Leisure Networks, an RSA that promotes community sport, recreation and health opportunities for people of all abilities across the Barwon region.

Leisure Networks' pilot sportsaccess program connected primary school children from low-income families with local sports clubs in the Corio and Norlane areas.¹ Eighty children joined their chosen sports club for a season, participating in sports ranging from horseriding and cricket to gymnastics and trampolining.

Reflecting on previous short-term programs that had shown some success in linking young people to sports clubs, Leisure Networks realised the major barrier preventing families from taking the next step into ongoing participation was cost. Brooke Connolly, Senior Project Officer explains: "Using PICSAR to fund the 'person-power', we developed sportsaccess as a way of connecting families to sporting clubs and providing financial assistance."

- Initially involvement in sport was not a priority for many families. The sportsaccess model changed this by requiring families to become project partners. Parents and carers were asked to sign an agreement to support their child's participation and encourage them to take part.
- School staff were asked to identify students with an interest in sport whose family's economic circumstances may prevent them from participating. (This was done in consultation with local council and social service agencies.) Priority was given to students receiving the education maintenance allowance.
- Clubs were approached to gauge their capacity to accept new members and provide support. The overwhelming response was 'the more, the merrier'. Most participating clubs assisted with transport, subsidised fees and increased opportunities for family involvement.

Following the success of the initial pilot program, Leisure Networks funded and resourced subsequent programs in the northern and eastern suburbs of Geelong. In all, over 200 children from 13 primary schools have received sportsaccess support to participate in 30 local sporting clubs.

"Our evaluation has highlighted two significant outcomes; there has been a 90 per cent retention rate of participants and increasing numbers of parents and siblings are getting involved in club life", says Brooke.

Partnerships have been crucial to the success of the program, enabling us to reach and engage target communities.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

"Principals report that the program has made positive connections within families and the kids say they love going to their club each week."

"We meet people from other schools, make new friends and 'sometimes' beat them."

"Clubs and coaches say they valued the support of sportsaccess to 'get the word out' and find new players. In many instances, an additional four or five players made the difference between fielding a team or not."

"Families see their children learning new skills – 'he knows how to take his turn' – and observe 'there are always different kids here so she has to mix with new people'. They say they wouldn't be able to participate without the sponsorship."

¹ 73 kilometres south-west of Melbourne.

Case study Creating 'off-peak' opportunities

New sporting opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged people were created through the PICSAR-funded expansion of Reclink's Victorian projects. These innovative partnerships and programs were extended into Melbourne's western suburbs, Ballarat and Bendigo.

Reclink is a nationwide network targeting some of the community's most vulnerable and isolated people. Working with more than 200 sports clubs and recreation and aquatic centres, it provides sport and recreation opportunities during off-peak times.

"We create the competition and participation opportunities to bridge the gap and get disadvantaged people engaged", says Reclink CEO, Adrian Panozzo.

Reclink also connects sports clubs and organisations with community workers who often lack the capacity to access sport and recreation opportunities for those in need.

"A social worker may not have the networks or skills to put someone into a swimming or gym program or a sports competition", Panozzo explains. "Reclink is both a resource and an opportunity – they can also approach us with an idea, for example: 'We want to do a sailing day or fishing' or 'How can we get involved in basketball?'"

Weekday boredom is a major issue for disadvantaged people. We get people together in an environment where they can get back their confidence and self-esteem.

"Some sports clubs include in their community charter that they embrace disadvantaged groups. We can bring large numbers of people from these groups to their club and, sometimes, make life easier by becoming their community partner."



Reclink's partnership with lawn bowls clubs enabled them to provide sport, recreation and mentoring opportunities to some of community's most isolated and vulnerable people.

Reclink, PICSAR and lawn bowls

One of Reclink's most successful projects, expanded under PICSAR, was their partnership with lawn bowls clubs. More than 370 people participated in Reclink lawn bowl events over the life of the PICSAR program, including four Reclink bowlers who have since gone on to play in competitions overseas.

Lawn bowls was an ideal fit for Reclink, offering accessible venues and an activity that includes skill, competition and recreation. "The facilities were underutilised and crying out for membership and there were a lot of experienced older people with time on their hands", says Panozzo.

"We put disadvantaged people (with little or poor social networks) together with these older club members – it's chemistry for success. Our midweek programs have no shortage of volunteers offering support or coaching."

"Disadvantaged people are often underemployed, lack social confidence and may feel that clubs are not right for them. We get people together in a sport and recreation environment where they can get their confidence and self-esteem back."

Financial assistance, equipment and mentoring opportunities are also available under Reclink's Transformational Links program, which assists individuals who are ready to move into mainstream community events, competitions and activities.

2. Partnerships

Collaborative and effective partnerships were a vital ingredient for success under PICSAR. Projects brought together organisations across a range of sectors beyond sport and recreation. These included community and culturally specific organisations and Aboriginal cooperatives, local government, Neighbourhood Houses, welfare agencies, schools, disability agencies and health services.

Many sports organisations had limited contact and understanding of the target communities they were trying to engage. At the same time, peak and community organisations needed the backing of State Sporting Associations (SSAs) to deliver sport and recreation activities to their communities.

PICSAR partnerships:

- enabled sports to work with local organisations to deliver new programs to their communities
- provided SSAs with knowledge, skills and access, from the groups already working in the field
- provided education and training for PICSAR-funded projects
- enabled sharing of resources, particularly human resources – this allowed overstretched organisations to achieve more together than they could ever have done separately

- helped break down barriers between sports and community groups
- fostered a greater commitment to inclusion by many sport and active recreation groups.

Partnerships were particularly crucial when reaching out to newly arrived and culturally diverse communities, who often had limited exposure to sports and specific cultural issues.



Toolbox

VicHealth's Partnership Analysis Tool: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Vichealth-General-Publications/Partnerships-Analysis-Tool.aspx

Find out more about the Centre for Multicultural Youth's sports program and publications: www.cmy.net.au/MulticulturalSport/MulticulturalSportHome



Partnerships have been the cornerstone of the PICSAR program's achievements in reaching, and engaging with target communities.

Case study Investing in broader community participation

When Badminton Victoria decided to create opportunities for Asian and newly arrived communities, they tentatively approached the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY). The CMY Multicultural Sport and Recreation program aims to create a sports sector that is responsive to the needs of refugee and migrant young people, as well as increase young people's access and participation in sport and recreation.

The regional city of Ballarat² was an obvious place to start. CMY's project worker was contracted to spend half a day introducing badminton to newly arrived residents. Ballarat is home to one of Badminton Victoria's largest member associations and had an underutilised 18-court stadium.

A range of initiatives achieved impressive results in increasing participation. Members of Ballarat's African, Chinese, Filipino, Argentine, Iranian and Thai communities attended introductory sessions. A local bus company provided transport and the Ballarat Badminton Association (BBA) provided coaches and barbecue lunches. Five-week introductory classes and a special day targeting international students from the local university have led to many groups now playing regularly.

While the sport's peak body had previously focused on producing club champions, they found investing in broader community participation secured a healthier future for the sport. The BBA now has a booming casual court hire trade and the stadium has become a community hub, with a new pool of eager volunteers.

"Our confidence has grown since the success of this partnership", explains Peter Roberts, Badminton Victoria's State Director. "We now employ a sports development person to coordinate our work in this area. We are hoping to replicate the Ballarat model in other areas such as Geelong and Bendigo."

² Approximately 110kms west of Melbourne.



Instead of just focusing on producing club champions, Badminton Victoria embraced strategies that explored opportunities to work with existing or newly arrived multicultural communities.

Two other community-based badminton projects have become self-sufficient, after initial provision of start-up equipment and venue hire through PICSAR. This has been due to partnerships with the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association and a multicultural group supported by Moreland City Council.

Case study Finding the 'right' partner

For Tennis Victoria, developing programs for newly arrived communities presented a big challenge. They approached a number of multicultural organisations for assistance.



Partnering with organisations that had existing relationships of trust with local communities helped Tennis Victoria overcome many barriers to communication.

"We had so much to learn about barriers to participation for newly arrived communities. It was difficult for us to know where to start", recalls Tim Hatzi, Tennis Victoria's former Club and Programs Coordinator.

After settling on a trial program focusing on Sudanese communities in Brimbank and Dandenong, Tennis Victoria realised that expecting people to 'just turn up' to traditional open days was unrealistic. So they looked for a partner with links to local Sudanese groups to help them build a relationship of mutual trust with the community.

Our confidence has grown since the success of the PICSAR partnership.

They found the perfect fit in the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning (SAIL) program, which provides voluntary English tuition to primary-school-aged Sudanese children. SAIL was enthusiastic about adding tennis to the fun activities, such as cooking, that they had already started using to extend their English classes.

In partnership with coaches from Dandenong Tennis Club and Our Lady's Tennis Club in Sunshine, more than 160 Sudanese children participated in eight four-week tennis programs.

Tennis Victoria's multicultural program has since been expanded into the Footscray and Werribee areas and has resulted in new club memberships, which are subsidised.

Hatzi says working with the right organisation helped the program run smoothly.

3. Organisational capacity building

Only by building organisational and community capacity for inclusiveness can sport begin to address the role of culture, practices and structures as barriers to participation for underrepresented groups.

PICSAR was a stimulus for organisational change both within State Sporting Associations (SSAs) and their member associations and clubs. Significant organisational change was achieved to meet PICSAR objectives, including the recruitment of new board members committed to participation and diversity and allocation of more resources to initiatives focused on equity and inclusiveness.

Most SSAs recognised that for change to be successful and sustainable, it had to be embraced within the whole organisation. This means starting at the top, with supportive management and committed leaders. Many reviewed their internal policies, added inclusiveness objectives to their strategic plans and websites, and created dedicated staff positions responsible for diversity and inclusion programs.

Internal capacity building and workforce development initiatives included training for staff, board members and volunteers in inclusiveness, cultural awareness, social equity and health promotion. Some organisations employed members from the target communities within the organisation, particularly as development officers.

Both Regional Sporting Assemblies (RSAs) and SSAs played an important leadership role in increasing awareness among local clubs of the underrepresented target groups and the various barriers to participation.

Resources and programs were developed to enhance the capacity of clubs. These included inclusive coaching workshops, referee training programs and manuals developed in partnership with disability organisations. Education and training was provided to staff at sport and recreation facilities.

Many projects identified that sports clubs often didn't provide a welcoming environment for newcomers who did not have a relationship with someone from the club. Some organisations worked with individual clubs to build their capacity to provide more welcoming environments. Others developed resources such as Gippsport's Welcoming and Inclusive Clubs program, in which the RSA worked with local sports clubs to improve their ability to welcome and meet the needs of members of underrepresented communities.



Gippsport's Welcoming and Inclusive Club program was rolled out to many local sports clubs including the Gippsland Soccer League and the Sudanese Stars.



Toolbox

VicHealth's Capacity Building for Health Promotion resource: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/VicHealth-General-Publications/Capacity-Building-for-Health-Promotion.aspx

Gippsport's Welcoming and Inclusive Clubs program: http://gippsland.sportslink.org.au/Page/page.asp?page_id=569

Case study Getting ready for change

The Pony Club Association of Victoria's Inclusive Riding and Coaching program aimed to increase participation for people with a disability. This meant developing a program that focused on ability and level of skill rather than the rider's disability.

Before they could begin to implement the program (developed in partnership with Rideability Victoria), clubs and coaches had to be assessed for their readiness. Early feedback led to organisational changes to assist clubs and make implementation of the program easier.

Former Executive Officer, James Fitzpatrick, had the task of implementing the Inclusive Coaching and Riding Program across hundreds of Victorian pony clubs. Initially, the organisation had a plan that it thought was infallible.

"We were powering along, really excited about this new program. We assumed we would get a really great response," he says, "the clubs' reactions made us see that more choices were needed."

"We needed to assure clubs that we wouldn't assess them until they are ready. It was important to let them know that we'd look after them and give as much help as possible."

Through PICSAR, the Association conducted training for 183 instructors in clubs across the state during the first 12 months. The program continues to be embraced by new riders with a disability and coaches who have undertaken inclusiveness training.

"Our message to other sports is that listening to feedback and monitoring a new program's implementation can be used to refine and improve pilot programs."

The partnership between the Pony Club Association of Victoria and Rideability Victoria has given many riders with a disability, the freedom and new mobility to thrive in a mainstream sport.



Building the capacity of riding instructors so that they are equipped to offer innovative and inclusive coaching has meant that more riders with disabilities were able to attend local pony clubs.

Case study Setting industry standards

The PICSAR-funded Inclusive Leisure Initiative aimed to improve the accessibility of leisure centres for people with a disability. This required industry-wide capacity building.

This was a joint project between disability organisation Leadership Plus (formerly Inclusive Leisure Victoria) and Aquatics and Recreation Victoria, the leisure industry's peak agency. Partners worked strategically to set industry standards and support people with a disability to participate in leisure centre activities.

The pilot program was rolled out at 13 leisure centres across Victoria. It included training for centre staff and fitness instructors and focused on accessible equipment, facility accessibility, policies and procedures, and marketing and communications.

A key tool developed for this project was a series of communication cards and support materials for people who cannot speak or are difficult to understand. During the development process ILV consulted with two centres already using a similar tool.



Through consultation and collaboration, a series of communication cards have been successfully developed which meet the needs of both people with a disability and the leisure industry.

"Discussions with those centres provided us with valuable feedback on the practicality of the resource for the industry. We were able to include their suggestions into the final product," recalls Hanna Phillips, former Inclusive Leisure Initiative Coordinator.

Staff were trained to use the cards, which are displayed at key points around the centres, with special cards for lifeguards and swimming instructors. Hanna believes the production of the resource highlights the importance of consultation and research to identify and meet the needs of the target group.

Feedback from the consultations increased the practicality of the resource for the whole industry.

"Although this process took much longer than we first envisaged, by ensuring systematic processes were followed, we have been able to develop and deliver a quality resource. This has taken us one step closer to developing an inclusive standard for the leisure industry."

4. Increasing participation opportunities



The Flippa Ball™ program was just the starting point for Victorian Water Polo's introduction to working with newly arrived communities.

Identifying and overcoming the main barriers to participation is critical to increasing involvement in sport and recreation activities.

Regardless of age, gender, cultural heritage or ability, a person should be able to participate in sport in any role – player, coach, official or volunteer.

Key barriers include:

- cost and transport – the most common obstacles for all target populations
- language and lack of cultural understanding by sports organisations
- accessibility of facilities – a major barrier for people with disabilities
- lack of understanding about what it means to be an inclusive sport.

Many PICSAR projects addressed cost and transport barriers by organising buses, reducing or subsidising fees, introducing new categories of membership, allowing casual participation, providing equipment and uniforms and holding activities in easily accessible locations.

Others had to overcome cultural and language barriers, lack of interest and knowledge of sports. Where particular cultural requirements could be met, such as appropriate swimming conditions for Islamic women, projects reported increased participation by target communities.

Stand-out projects were able to successfully engage with the target groups and provide innovative and sustainable direct and indirect participation opportunities. Some sports set up specific types of competitions or activities designed to meet the target group's needs, either run alongside existing competitions or as separate events.

Some sports found that employing and training role models and mentors from within the targeted communities led to greater participation and retention.

For example, under PICSAR, Cricket Victoria took major strides in making cricket more inclusive by introducing inclusion training and education programs for staff, coaches, officials and club volunteers. They also employed a full-time inclusion officer and mentors from within target communities. Coaches developed new ways to teach a broader group of players, such as using batting tees, larger balls and modified rules to make the game more engaging.

Cricket Victoria's Cricket4Me project, which helps make cricket more accessible and inclusive for newly arrived communities, employed former Zimbabwean test cricketer Waddington Mwayenga as their multicultural cricket officer. This helped build the trust of African families and introduced new members to the Victorian cricket community.

Victorian Water Polo had to overcome an unforeseen cultural issue when attempting to introduce Ethiopian, Chin, Burmese and Vietnamese communities to their Flippa Ball™ program. This is a fun, modified version of non-contact water polo for children designed to promote the sport.

However, many in these communities had never seen or been in a swimming pool or even heard of water polo. Some had a fear of water. The program was adapted to serve as an introduction to water and water games. By switching the focus from sport to general wellbeing, the program helped people overcome fears and barriers to participation that can extend into other areas of their lives.



Toolbox

VicHealth's increasing participation web page: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Programs-and-Projects/Physical-Activity/PA-Overview/Increasing-participation.aspx

Department of Planning and Community Development – inclusive clubs web page: <http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/sport/inclusive-sport/welcoming-and-inclusive-clubs>

Department of Planning and Community Development – access all abilities web page: <http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/sport/inclusive-sport/Access-For-All-Abilities>

Case study Riding the wave: 'Indigenous Surfing Program'



Employing leaders or coaches from within target communities has a positive impact on participation. It also provides mentor and role models who can advocate for their community to be involved.

Surfing Victoria's long-term efforts to increase Aboriginal participation in surfing were given a major boost under PICSAR, allowing them to broaden community projects across the state.

More than 1,000 people participate in their 'Indigenous Surfing Program' each year, including more than 130 competitors in the annual 'Woorrangalook Victorian Indigenous Surfing Titles', held near Anglesea.³

"When we started we'd be lucky in a year to get 100 participants across the state", says Surfing Victoria's Executive Director, Max Wells, who has spearheaded the 'Indigenous Surfing Program' for 14 years. "Now our statewide carnival is one of the most successful engagement programs for the Aboriginal community in the state."

Wells says partnerships with the community have been pivotal to their success.

"The reason we had those sorts of numbers was simply because the communities now want us to be involved and because we allow it to be driven by them", he adds.

Surfing Victoria expanded its 'Indigenous Surfing Program' on several fronts to overcome barriers and create new opportunities for participation. They employed a full-time 'Indigenous Aquatics Officer', trained more than 20 Aboriginal Victorians in surf riding coaching and surf rescue, and developed existing programs.

"What PICSAR started was identifying leaders from within communities and giving them skills to take back to their specific community", Wells says.

³ 113 kilometres south-east of Melbourne

Riding the wave: 'Indigenous Surfing Program' *continued*

Surfing Victoria also addressed barriers to participation by providing resources and equipment for Aboriginal children, often through partnerships with the surfing industry.

Success came from taking a slow approach, working with communities to identify and nurture leaders from within.

"For some communities cost may be the only barrier to participation, so we take the equipment to them and subsidise their participation expenses. As the kids become more engaged, we provide wet suits for them to borrow and, if they actually start taking up the sport on a regular basis, we'll go out and find them a wetsuit if they can't afford it."

"We've now got communities going out and purchasing equipment so they can be more actively involved in surfing. That's come about by us taking a slow approach, by working with communities to identify and nurture leaders within communities."

Understanding and engaging the community you are working with and giving them ownership of projects was important, Wells says. As a result of their partnership with the Wathaurong Cooperative, the annual surfing carnival was moved from Warrnambool to the Geelong region, which is Wathaurong country, and ownership of the event was eventually handed over to the cooperative, with Surfing Victoria continuing as facilitators.

Surfing Victoria's 'Indigenous Surfing Program' has also embraced social media as a communication tool, with a new website and a Facebook page (with more than 800 members) alerting people to participation opportunities.



Regardless of age, gender, cultural heritage or ability, a person should be able to participate in sport and recreation.

5. Sustainability

Achieving sustainable initiatives and outcomes requires a strong framework of support. This means developing effective partnerships, building cross-organisational capacity and committing staff and resources.

PICSAR created ongoing participation opportunities when funded projects partnered effectively with peak bodies, other local clubs, sports facilities or providers, local councils and community groups.

If you don't have support from the top, it's going to be tough. There has to be ownership across the entire organisation.

Many projects identified the need to embed initiatives within the communities they were targeting. In fact, some SSAs anticipated that new programs and competitions could only be sustained if they were eventually run by community groups, with the ongoing support of partners.

Promoting inclusive practices and enhancing internal commitment and organisational capacity requires education, leadership and mentoring opportunities, as well as flexible and workable policies and models.

One way to find and support leaders is to make sure inclusion is part of the organisation's strategic plan. Inclusion training and adaptive coaching are essential to achieving a sustainable outcome. As one SSA manager said, "It's about giving people the confidence to step inside that sphere."

Often, successful programs have been driven by the commitment and efforts of a particular leader or staff member, leading programs to falter when that person moves on.

PICSAR also identified the need for sustainable strategies to address cost barriers, such as subsidising participation fees and creating new categories of membership. Several initiatives set up for newly arrived communities were not sustainable when geographical distance was a barrier and transport was removed.



Yachting Victoria's Tackers program aims to foster a lifelong love of sailing among young people who would normally not be exposed to the sport, especially those encountering social and economic barriers.

One SSA manager observed that there are still many sports organisations putting inclusiveness in the 'too hard' basket. "It's about getting associations to understand this actually increases your membership."



Toolbox

For resources and free online training to keep sport safe, fair and inclusive see Play by the Rules: www.playbytherules.net.au

Case study Leading for ongoing commitment

Basketball Victoria demonstrated exemplary leadership with its committed approach to providing sustainable participation opportunities for people with a disability. More than 14,500 people participated directly or indirectly in PICSAR-funded activities during the program.

The majority of Basketball Victoria's work focuses on people with an intellectual disability, a mobility restriction and/or hearing loss. During PICSAR, Basketball Victoria established:

- a statewide specialist school competition (the VicHealth Cup)
- the Junior United Mentoring Program (JUMP), which has specialist and mainstream schools working together
- association-based All Abilities Tournaments
- a number of awards recognising significant contributions (at all levels) to basketball within the disability community
- a special affiliation fee for participants with disabilities to make basketball more affordable.

Inclusion has been a priority of Basketball Victoria's strategic plan since 2009. While they had already begun some work in the disability area, PICSAR funding allowed the organisation to:

- employ a dedicated inclusion officer
- begin to implement their vision through a comprehensive Inclusive Basketball Strategy – covering both their own organisation and their affiliated associations.

Basketball Victoria's Strategic Operations Manager, Karen Pearce explains: "We're not just doing one-off clinics out in the field. Inclusion must be embedded more widely in strategic plans and core business plans, otherwise it will be glossed over. People will keep doing what they've been doing forever, with inclusion as an intermittent by-product of basketball and not part of the overall scheme."

Under PICSAR, Basketball Victoria facilitated collaborative partnerships between local basketball associations and Access All Abilities (AAA) providers. AAA is funded by the Victorian Government to help build local networks and partnerships to create sports activities inclusive of people with a disability. They assisted the associations to take ownership of the programs, freeing up Basketball Victoria resources to roll out more inclusion programs with other affiliated associations.

"The AAA Officers were integral to making the programs sustainable...we've now got 27 associations running inclusion programs throughout the state", Pearce says. Another 48 were expected to come on board in the next phase.

Some of the most significant changes, however, have taken place within Basketball Victoria itself.

"If you don't have the support from the top, it's tough. There has to be ownership across the entire organisation for it to work...part of that is to embed it right into the organisation from Board level down, as well as within our associations."

We're not just doing that one-off clinic out there in the field and saying 'Yeah, I am inclusive'.

Basketball Victoria now has four inclusion officers, along with Pearce, spearheading their programs. All staff, board and managers must complete Play by the Rules training and be inclusive in their work practices. While conceding there is still a long way to go, Pearce believes basketball in Victoria now provides more opportunity for people of ALL abilities to participate across the entire spectrum of basketball. The sport has definitely become more inclusive, more welcoming and more equitable.



To ensure sustainable participation opportunities for people with disabilities, Basketball Victoria has made an ongoing commitment to inclusion by embedding it in their strategic and core business plans.

Looking ahead to more inclusive sports

PICSAR paved the way to making community sport and active recreation in Victoria more inclusive, and broadening participation. It marked an important shift in thinking about sport and physical activity and the role of sports and recreation organisations in promoting health.

Evaluation of the PICSAR program highlighted the achievements and challenges faced by funded organisations in attempting to extend the benefits of sport and active recreation to underrepresented groups. It found that involvement in PICSAR had been rewarding in unanticipated ways for both participants and local sports clubs.

Achievements

PICSAR's achievements can be measured in many ways, not least the 47,000 people who participated in its initiatives. Sports clubs began to see the potential for gaining new members through inclusion programs that reach out to a broader community base.

Many sports reported that casual participants had progressed to joining a club and regularly participating in competition, with some moving on to elite competition. Other sports reported large increases in casual participation, especially at events designed for the target community. Several State Sporting Associations (SSAs) reported large increases in club and/or association membership.

PICSAR projects also led to greater involvement of people from the target groups as volunteers, coaches, spectators and in various administration roles.

Over the life of PICSAR, sports organisations have become more sophisticated in how they engage with underrepresented target groups. They have gained greater knowledge of how these communities work and experience in trialling a variety of approaches for engagement.

Partnerships and relationships were established with community health, local government, social service and multicultural agencies. These played a critical role in enabling sport and recreation organisations to reach diverse population groups.

As well as equipping SSAs with the knowledge and skills to include these new groups in activities, partnerships provided valuable resources for delivering programs and increased opportunities for community engagement and sustainable initiatives.



Canoeing Victoria's Go with the Flow project successfully developed opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal communities to participate in community-based canoeing.

Challenges

Many common and unique factors impact on sports participation; however, cost and transport barriers and the nature of sports club environments present ongoing challenges to sports organisations.

Although positive changes to club culture, attitudes and environments are increasing the capacity of clubs to welcome underrepresented groups, the nature of some sports environments remains an obstacle to broader community involvement. The PICSAR evaluation found limited progress at club level, despite 'the removal of barriers to participation' being a stated priority for most sports clubs.

PICSAR funding gave clubs the resources to develop innovative ways to deliver sport. It encouraged strategies and programs that would lead to more sustainable participation and continue beyond the life of the program. However, PICSAR demonstrated that, in order to achieve sustainable change at the club level, SSAs must take the lead in building capacity for inclusiveness by demonstrating change within their own organisations.

Facilitating equity in participation requires a strong board and senior management support, as well as staff with the skills to build partnerships and engage diverse communities.

The PICSAR evaluation recommended building on VicHealth's achievements through a coordinated capacity building program for sports clubs. Strategies would be needed to change club practices and support the creation of welcoming environments that foster inclusiveness and increase participation by underrepresented groups. Clubs would need to provide accessible and affordable opportunities to be involved in sport, including casual participation and pathways to regular competition.

Ongoing programs

Insights gained during the PICSAR program affirmed VicHealth's longstanding efforts to create healthier communities through greater participation in sport and recreation. VicHealth continues to support sports organisations to create safe, accessible, inclusive and equitable sports environments through its programs. Through partnerships with broader community organisations, sport and active recreation organisations are in a unique position to help VicHealth address the health inequalities that result in poorer health outcomes for many groups in the community.

The State Sporting Association Participation Program (SSAPP) builds on the achievements of PICSAR, working with 30 State Sporting Associations to increase participation in community sport and active recreation among priority populations. Peak organisations, although not directly funded under the SSAPP program, can partner with SSAs to share expertise and knowledge and support them to provide more inclusive environments. They may also have the opportunity to become the support agency for specific priority population activities. This program focuses on structured, organised sports activities.

The Healthy Sporting Environments (HSE) program works with Regional Sports Assemblies to support grassroots community sports clubs across rural and regional Victoria to become healthier, welcoming and more inclusive.



Positive changes to club culture, attitudes and environments are increasing the capacity of clubs to welcome underrepresented groups.

Building on PICSAR

PICSAR demonstrated the challenges and far-reaching benefits of creating sporting environments that are open and sensitive to underrepresented groups such as people with disabilities, Aboriginal Victorians, newly arrived and culturally diverse communities and people from low socioeconomic communities.

For change to be sustainable it has to be integrated across the whole of sport

Helping sports focus on cultural, social, economic and physical barriers to participation will ultimately make sports more welcoming and accessible, creating a better sporting experience and allowing more Victorians to enjoy the health and social benefits of being involved in sport and recreation.



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