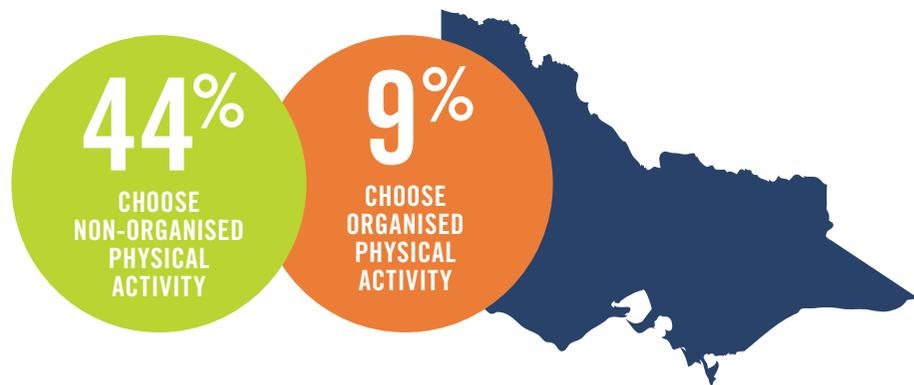


# Female participation in sport & physical activity

## A SNAPSHOT OF THE EVIDENCE

Females of all ages generally have lower physical activity participation rates than males.<sup>1</sup> Increasing physical activity levels for females is important for health and mental wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

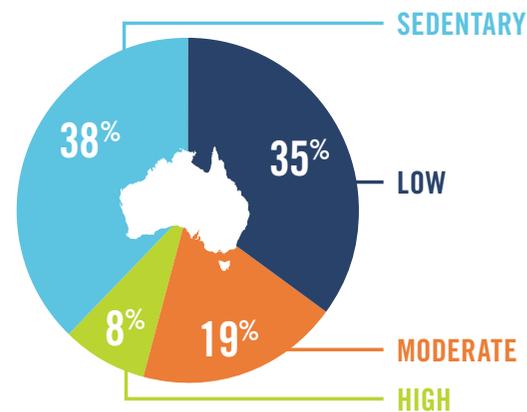
Understanding and addressing the barriers preventing more female participation in physical activity is complex. Evidence shows that gender and the needs of females should be considered when developing specific physical activity opportunities.



## TREND: NON-ORGANISED/ORGANISED ACTIVITY LEVELS

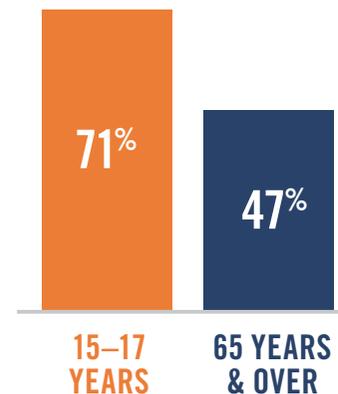
In Victoria, statistics show four times as many females (44%) are choosing to participate in non-organised or more flexible physical activity offerings compared to organised physical activity (9%).<sup>3</sup>

Female participation through sporting or recreational clubs is lower compared to males.<sup>4</sup>



## TREND: ACTIVITY LEVELS

More than two-thirds of adult Australian females were classified as being sedentary or having low levels of exercise.<sup>1</sup>



## TREND: PARTICIPATION LEVELS

Participation in sport and active recreation by Victorian females declines as females get older.<sup>2</sup>





## HEALTH BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR WOMEN

Even having a low level of physical activity is better for health than not being active at all.<sup>5</sup>

Participation in sport and physical activity can provide females with the following benefits:

- prevention and management of disease, such as: coronary heart disease, strokes, type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer's Disease and dementia<sup>6,7,8,9</sup>
- increased health, fitness, body and bone strength<sup>10,11,12</sup>
- weight loss and prevention of obesity<sup>7</sup>
- reduced risks of mortality<sup>5</sup>
- increased mental health and improved wellbeing<sup>13</sup>
- increase in social connections and enjoyment<sup>14,15</sup>.



## MOTIVES FOR FEMALES TO GET PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

- Compared to men, women place more importance on the social aspects of physical activity, and are less motivated by performance outcomes, such as building strength<sup>14</sup>.
- Motives to participate can change and evolve over time. For example, a woman may begin physical activity for health reasons, however find enjoyment in the social aspect or mental wellbeing and continue for those reasons<sup>16,17,18,19</sup>.
- Key motivations include maintaining or improving health<sup>20</sup>, appearance and weight management<sup>16</sup>, personal fulfilment<sup>16</sup>, wellbeing and improving quality of life<sup>16</sup> and social interactions<sup>14</sup>.
- Younger women (18-35) have been found to be more motivated by appearance, weight loss and peer pressure compared to older women<sup>21</sup>, however conversely can be hampered by societal expectations of body image<sup>13</sup>.
- Older women are predominantly motivated by health outcomes<sup>20</sup>.



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ACROSS LIFE STAGES

- Addressing the barriers can have a greater influence on females being more active, compared to promoting the benefits of physical activity<sup>22</sup>.
- Reducing the perception of, or the actual barriers could be necessary to increase participation. The more barriers a female perceives the less likely she is to engage<sup>22,23,24</sup>.
- Not all females are the same and some may experience different barriers and challenges to others. Certain barriers can affect a female more at different life stages<sup>13,24,25,26</sup>.

See page 3 for more details



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ACROSS LIFE STAGES

Influencers on physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents' physical activity levels<sup>27,28</sup></li> <li>Parental support (transport, cost and organisation)<sup>28,29</sup></li> <li>Parental encouragement<sup>28,30</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Life stages and lifestyle (education, work, home life, family)<sup>13</sup></li> <li>Inflexible opportunities for physical activity<sup>13</sup></li> <li>Societal pressures and guilt (prioritising physical activity in their lives)<sup>13</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family priorities rather than self as a priority<sup>32,33,13</sup></li> <li>Physical activity less of a priority, guilt laden and seen as a luxury (cost, time)<sup>32,33</sup></li> <li>Level of partner, family and social support<sup>23,25,33</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewer 'perceived' barriers (than other age groups)<sup>20</sup></li> <li>Illness and injury<sup>20</sup></li> <li>Lack of information or opportunity<sup>20</sup></li> <li>Long-term patterns of being sedentary<sup>20</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural background, beliefs around gender and sport or value of physical activity<sup>40,41</sup></li> <li>Confidence, knowledge and perception of ability<sup>42,43,44,25,20,40,17</sup></li> <li>Perceptions of safety<sup>40,47,48</sup></li> <li>Availability of facilities<sup>40</sup></li> <li>Previous physical activity experience<sup>40</sup></li> </ul>
LIFE STAGE	 <p><b>GIRLS &amp; ADOLESCENTS 0–18 YEARS</b></p>	 <p><b>WOMEN 18–55 YEARS</b></p>	 <p><b>MOTHERS</b></p>	 <p><b>OLDER WOMEN 55+ YEARS</b></p>	 <p><b>FEMALES OF ALL AGES</b></p>
Keys to engagement in physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote parental involvement<sup>27,31,28,30</sup></li> <li>Consider logistics, parental support and involvement<sup>27,31,28,29,30</sup></li> <li>Provide non-competitive options<sup>31</sup></li> <li>Make it fun and social<sup>31</sup></li> <li>Provide goal setting and self-monitoring options<sup>31</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide flexible physical activity options in terms of schedule, cost and location<sup>14,24,13</sup></li> <li>Promote benefits of short duration physical activity that is suitable to fit into lifestyle (e.g. at work)<sup>14,24,13</sup></li> <li>Consider social, group and peer support<sup>14,24</sup></li> <li>Make it enjoyable<sup>14,24</sup></li> <li>Provide opportunities for involvement in program creation (creates a sense of ownership and meets needs)<sup>14,24</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider preference to unstructured over structured<sup>33,34</sup></li> <li>Consider flexibility<sup>33,34</sup> by providing child care<sup>33,40</sup> and variable payment options<sup>35</sup></li> <li>Provide group activities that includes their children and provide social benefits<sup>33,23,25</sup></li> <li>Provide individual tailored approaches (diaries, pedometers)<sup>33,35</sup></li> <li>Provide education and engagement for the broader family in activities and<sup>14,37,33</sup> communication<sup>23,25,33</sup></li> <li>Communicate by text message and email<sup>33,35,36</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote relevant, timely, specific information with consideration to overcoming health concerns<sup>20,24,38,39</sup></li> <li>Highlight the social focus<sup>20,24,38,39</sup></li> <li>Consider preference for scheduled routine<sup>20,24,38,39</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create partnerships and consultation with cultural and community groups<sup>40,45,46</sup></li> <li>Use word of mouth or face-to-face communication<sup>14,37,53</sup></li> <li>Foster social group and family support<sup>40</sup> and engage them in participation<sup>14,37</sup></li> <li>Encourage family and friends to engage other females<sup>14,37</sup></li> <li>Consider welcoming and inclusive approaches<sup>40,45,46</sup>, environments<sup>14,47,48</sup> and attire<sup>40,45,46</sup></li> <li>Use diverse images<sup>40,45,46,49</sup></li> <li>Ensure a female can see herself participating<sup>50</sup></li> <li>Focus on skill and confidence building<sup>14,49,40</sup>, reward and motivational approaches<sup>14,49,23</sup> and goals<sup>51,52</sup></li> </ul>

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