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**Active and healthy ageing through sport: Sporting organisations' opinions on the potential barriers and benefits of engaging older adults in sport, and potential strategies to increase sports participation for this demographic**

Abstract ID: EASM-2015-162 - (583)

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Date submitted: 2015-03-19

Date accepted: 2015-04-21

Type: Scientific

Keywords: Sporting organisations  
older adults  
socio-ecological model

Category: 11: Sport Participation

Synopsis:

Abstract:

AIM

A lack of regular physical activity contributes to poor physical, mental and social health, all of which negatively impact on quality of life (Nelson et al, 2007). Sport, as a popular form of physical activity, has specific health benefits across the lifespan, however sport specific participation tends to decline with age (Eime, Payne & Harvey, 2009). Given the rapidly ageing global population (World Health Organisation, 2011), reasons for this decline need to be investigated, yet most current research focuses on physical activity rather than sport. The aim of this study is to answer three key research questions: 1. what opportunities are currently available for adults aged 50 years and older (hereafter referred to as older adults) to play sport; 2. what potential barriers and benefits do sporting organisations face when trying to increase sport participation in older adults; and 3. what potential strategies could be implemented by sporting organisations to increase sport participation amongst older adults.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The theoretical background for this study is based on the socio-ecological model. This model states that when deciding to undertake particular behaviours, such as sports participation, there are four interdependent factors that can influence this behaviour: personal; social; environmental; and policy factors (Kohl & Murray, 2012).

## METHODOLOGY

Data were collected through an online survey, which contained 19 questions, apportioned into four sections: You and your role; Your sport; Sport and ageing: barriers and benefits; and Sport and ageing: increasing participation. Questions were developed following data analysis from a preceding study, in addition to content from previous literature (Hickey & Fitzclarence, 2004), and structured according to the socio-ecological model.

A total of 319 national and state sporting organisations within Australia were contacted. There were 192 organisations who completed the survey (60% response rate), with 51 different sports represented (from 71 eligible sports). Data is being analysed using descriptive statistics, and will include an overall perspective from Australian sporting organisations, in addition to national and state organisational comparisons, and types/ categories of sport comparisons.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

\* The data collection for this study has recently been completed, and thus full analysis is currently being undertaken. Full analysis will be available for the revised abstract deadline, and will be fully available for presentation at the conference.

Initial findings are presented below.

Initial findings indicate that whilst older adults are a relatively low priority group for sporting organisations, organisations recognised that by encouraging participation by older adults, this demographic can contribute towards increasing overall sports participation figures, and also help engage their respective older fan bases. The main barriers for sporting organisations to engage older adults were that they have a main focus on other target groups, and have a lack of organisational resources, including staff.

Organisations were also asked to rate potential modifications that sports could make to become more attractive to older adults. Modifications that were rated as the most highly agreed were providing greater opportunities for social play and changing the way in which respective sports are advertised, whilst the modifications that were rated as the most agreed modifications were collaborating with community and/or ageing organisations. Thus in summary, whilst older adults are currently not the main focus for sporting organisations, there is an interest, and there are feasible opportunities for sporting organisations to help increase sports participation for older adults.

References:

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