

# Current Trends And Opportunities For Community Sport Organisations

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## Aims and background literature

It is now widely recognised that participation in sport and other forms of physical activity has substantial benefits for health and wellbeing, including the prevention and management of non-communicable disease, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and dementia; obesity prevention; increased social connectedness; improved mental health; and increased health, fitness and body strength (see Reiner, Niermann, Jekauc, & Wolf, 2013). Consequently, engaging inactive and somewhat active adults in physical activity is a priority for sport, health and community organisations. Contemporary physical activity and sport trends are shifting, which can be observed in the rise of new physical activity formats and socio-cultural changes in how people participate in, and consume, sport. In an Australian context, examples include the proliferation of formats that are quick, exciting and social. National examples include Big Bash Cricket, Nitro Athletics and Fast5 Netball. These interactional patterns connect with barriers that have been outlined in literature focused on adults aged 18–55, which include time constraints with increased work, study and domestic responsibilities; cost; inflexibility of current sport systems; confidence; and balancing daily lifestyles (see Codina, Pestana & Armadans, 2012; Hanlon, Morris & Nabs, 2010).

Set against this context, our work is based on evaluative research conducted with Hockey Victoria to explore the potential for engaging inactive, or somewhat active adults in a social, modified version of hockey. For the purpose of this research, 'inactive' is defined as not having participated in thirty minutes of physical activity in the past week; 'somewhat active' is represented by engagement in one to three days. In this paper we examined the factors constraining physical activity and hockey engagement and the approach undertaken by Hockey Victoria to adapt to the changing consumption of physical activity and sport in society. Our research offers a unique insight into how State Sport Associations (SSAs) are responding to changing participation demands; explores current innovations in physical activity and sport practice; and offers an overview of how constraints can potentially be overcome. Hockey Victoria is responsible for the governance of hockey in the state of Victoria, Australia and was funded by VicHealth's State Sport Program to design and implement a modified form of hockey to engage inactive and somewhat active community members.

## Methodology

The research approach we employed was an exploratory mixed-method design and followed a sequential typology. During stage one a quantitative survey was administered to existing senior Hockey Victoria members (N = 1,217) and the parents of junior hockey players (N = 980). Stage two consisted of qualitative telephone interviews (N = 30) with the parents of junior hockey players to gather further data and elicit an in-depth understanding of barriers to physical activity and sport. Stage three consisted of focus groups with players (N = 30) after they had participated in two modified formats developed by Hockey Victoria. We analyzed the quantitative data by generating descriptive statistics to understand similarities and differences between demographic groups. The qualitative data was analysed using a systematic data coding process, as recommended by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

## Results and implications

The results highlighted that there is an increasing 'casual consumerism' of sport and physical activity; individuals are turning away from 'traditional' sport formats to activities that are more flexible, maximise time, are social, enjoyable and provide an active workout. These were key motivating factors for groups defined as inactive or somewhat active. It was apparent that achieving maximal physical health and wellbeing for limited resource investment (i.e. time and finance) was important for participants. The successful, key innovations implemented by Hockey Victoria that emerged from the focus groups included using a scaled-down pitch size to ensure more interactional game time; adopting a three-third timeframe; casual, pay-as-you play costing structure; initial six-week commitment; weekday evening participation; and a 'zoned' format to increase playing opportunities. Providing opportunities for parents of junior players to participate simultaneously also emerged as a productive way to engage these individuals.

Our research is indicative of wider trends in community sport and highlights current innovations and emerging modifications. Working with sports to identify barriers and design social formats for inactive and somewhat active individuals has wider implications for current sport practice and connects with current public health priorities. It should be noted that there are wide-ranging complexities to providing opportunities for

all. There is a need for further research that can unpack specific mechanisms that can be implemented by organisations to overcome constraints and reach out to a wide population-base. These constraints should be accounted for across individual, interpersonal, environmental, regional and national levels.

## References

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