



# National Disability Strategy

Australian Sporting Alliance for people  
with a disability – ASAPD  
Submission

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### Question 1:

During the first stage of consultations we heard that the vision and the six outcome areas under the current Strategy are still the right ones. Do you have any comments on the vision and outcome areas being proposed for the new Strategy?

**Australian Sporting Alliance for People with a Disability represent 9 of the key national sporting Organisation's.** (NSOD's) Our vision is All Australians have an opportunity to engage in sport and physical activity in a welcoming and inclusive environment. Whilst our purpose is to collaborate, advocate and facilitate inclusive sport and physical activity for people with a disability. As an Alliance, we welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the strategy and note that we support the Outcome areas. In addition we offer the following feedback for your consideration.

- There is ample evidence discussing the positive associations of physical activity, including several physical and mental health benefits. Regular physical activity can reduce people's risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and some cancers, as well as improve bone density, muscle strength, and psychological wellbeing. All of which plays a major role in reducing the national health budget.
- The associations between sport, physical activity, and social health are also growing stronger, with global recognition of the value of social connectedness and social support growing.
- A recent Paralympics Australia report rated highly psychological and social benefits as among the most likely and most important benefits to come from sport participation. As well over two thirds of the medical and health professionals surveyed for the report said they would like to prescribe sport more often to their patients. The main barriers that prevent health professionals from prescribing sport is knowledge of appropriate and local opportunities.
- Participation in sport is an important rehabilitation pathway for people with disability joining or re-joining the community, increasing social connections and improving independence, self-esteem and health and well-being.
- Almost 20% of people in Australia live with a disability, but only one in four of these participate in sport.
- 75% of Australians with disability want to take part in sport but feel there are limited opportunities.
- 12.5% of people with severe/profound impairments participated at least once in sport in the previous 12 months. In the same period, 65-70% of the general population did.
- People with disability don't have access to the same sporting opportunities as their able-bodied peers, yet their need to engage in physical activity is far greater.
- Because people with impairments (especially those with severe/profound impairments) are so inactive, they are particularly prone to diseases of inactivity – diabetes, heart disease, mental illness, certain types of cancer.
- In Australia in 2020, to be born with or acquire a disability means – for many people – to enter a world of reduced opportunities and expectations. Despite recent progress, this is also true of sport.
- Successful inclusion is about translating good attitudes and values into action. Inevitably this means challenging and changing the status quo. This may mean rethinking how you can do something different or better, how you can change entrenched attitudes and habits, or what new programs, games, products or education can be implemented.
- We believe participation in sport provides positive social and physical benefits to people with a disability and plays an important role in challenging community perceptions and changing attitudes
- The UNESCO Charter of Physical Education and Sport also states that “every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport”. The Charter takes a very holistic approach to sport, using it as a catalyst to advance global objectives in field of education, towards inter-cultural dialogue, civic engagement of young people, social cohesion and development.

## Question 2:

What do you think about the guiding principles proposed here?

### **Involve and engage**

- We need to ensure sport for people with a disability is being discussed from the start of all participation planning and includes the voices of people with disability at all stages of planning and implementation.
- Sports can better reach under-represented groups (including people with a disability) by understanding who their *people* are (through participation surveys), what their needs are and the barriers to participation.

While not downplaying the needs for focus on all under-represented groups in sport, we must continue to shine the light on all layers of sport for people with a disability, from elite to grassroots, so that all people have equity of opportunity and respect.

### **Design universally**

- It is important that we design our sporting infrastructure in accordance with universal design and inclusive design principles. Using principles of design thinking and universal design make our sport programs more engaging and appealing to a wider audience.
- Inclusive design considers the broad range of diversity in our society such as age, gender, race, culture, language, socio economic background, ability, sexual orientation and other types of difference.
- All participants, regardless of difference, have the right to access sport programs, spaces and facilities without facing unnecessary obstacles. Every facility, whether fields of play, car parks, school ovals, clubs, gyms, stadiums, open spaces, should be designed and built with the needs of all participants in mind, and be accessible and easy to use. We should also consider transport connections to clubs and venues to ensure that that provide easy and welcoming access to all people.
- Various universal design projects and information, such as *Design for Everyone Guide* and work by the Australian Sports Commission has helped to raise the level of accessibility awareness around the design, delivery and management of community sport and recreation infrastructure and state sporting facilities.

### **Engage the broader community**

- Following the successful 2018 Commonwealth Games in Queensland that merged able-bodied and para events on the one schedule, Australian Paralympic Champion Kurt Fearnley said: “We’ve had disability on the television, in the papers, all across social media. Not because we had been denied access to a flight, been involved in an accident or stuck outside a building with a flight of stairs blocking access. We’ve been in your faces because of hard work, determination and success on the track and in life.
- Disability events such as the Virtus Global Games, Deaflympics, Invictus Games, Special Olympics and Paralympic Games have helped to break down biases and misconceptions in the community about people with a disability and what they can achieve.
- We need support to continue this wave of momentum so the benefits of sport continue to expand for people with a disability and ultimately lead to greater equity in all areas of life.

### **Address barriers faced by priority populations**

- Sport is lauded as a universal language that transcends cultural, ethnic, religious, age, gender, ability and linguistic boundaries. This is particularly the case in Australia, where sport is a fundamental element of our society and culture, and for some, forms the very fabric of our daily lives.
- A small minority make it to the top levels of sport in competition, administration or as officials, but many do not because of structural and institutional barriers, discrimination, exclusion and inequality of opportunity. This is particularly true for women and girls, people with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people, LGBTI people and those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

### *Indigenous Australians with a disability*

- Sport can be a very powerful way of engaging First Nations people and providing positive outcomes in the areas of health and welfare. However, First Nations People with disability are one of the most marginalised, disadvantaged and disengaged groups in Australia.
- Indigenous Australians with disability do not participate in sport at the same levels as other groups in the community and are under-represented in all areas of disability sport. Anecdotal evidence suggests that cultural issues associated with disabilities within Indigenous cultures limit the participation of people with a disability. And because ATSI people with impairments are so inactive, they are particularly prone to diseases of inactivity – diabetes, heart disease, mental illness, certain types of cancer. These diseases compound the effects of the primary impairment causing further health disadvantage.
- For Indigenous people with disability, many barriers to sport participation exist. These include cost, access, organisational and governmental support, acceptance, safety and inclusion policies. Another major barrier identified by people with disability and their families and carers, is they don't know how to get involved in sport, what sports they would be most suitable for with their impairment, and what opportunities exist for them to join local clubs or progress to different pathways or levels should they choose to do so. These barriers can make navigating sport and physical activity very difficult.
- We know that sport offers considerable benefits to Indigenous Australians who have a disability, in the same way it offers benefits to able-bodied Indigenous Australians. Engaging people in sport is a good way of reducing preventable health disadvantage in this vulnerable group. Participation in sports and active recreation activities has direct benefits in improving physical health and wellbeing; such as increased life expectancy and reduced heart disease (Higgins, 2005).

### *People from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background with a disability*

- The experience of resettlement for new arrivals in Australia is testament to how difficult and daunting it is to integrate into a new society, with individuals and families required to adjust to a different culture, language, social systems and even sports. Young refugees may be faced with additional burdens such as the physical and mental impact of torture and trauma, and the loss of family members.
- Sport can be an open and inclusive activity, in which migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with disability can develop a network of friends with similar interests. Participating in sport and recreational activities positively contributes to the development of young people through; capacity and trust building; therapeutic benefits; and, as an entry point for broader participation and engagement.
- Consensus from research suggests that sports can play a vital role in contributing to positive settlement outcomes, promoting social inclusion and supporting migrant and refugee integration into society (Settlement Council of Australia, 2012). The social interactions that occur through participation in sporting teams and community clubs play an important part in shaping and reinforcing patterns of community identification and community belonging

### **Support carers and supporters**

- People with higher needs are one of the most marginalised, disadvantaged and disengaged groups in the community, particularly in relation to sport.
- In general, people with a high level of disability assume there are no sporting opportunities available for them and/or they face difficulty in allocating very limited carer and financial resources to enable them to participate in sport.
- For people with higher needs, the barriers to participation in sport can be overwhelming, despite extensive evidence that sport is very beneficial for people with disability, from its effective use in rehabilitation programs through to its ongoing social, fitness and psychological health benefits and community understanding.
- Distinguishing features of this group are the need for sport assistants - usually one-to-one – to facilitate the

participation of the athlete, smaller groups, the provision of one-on-one care, mobility and equipment aids or specialised equipment, and the need to minimise travel.

- Participants with higher needs are not easily accommodated within mainstream sporting programs or even activities for participants with milder levels of disability.
- This is an extremely challenging area and the existing structure of disability sport in Australia has largely failed to meet the needs of this group for meaningful sporting opportunities and for access to development pathways.

### Question 3:

What is your view on the proposal for the new Strategy to have a stronger emphasis on improving community attitudes across all outcome areas?

- Sport is a tool that can be utilized to achieve social and community outcomes through its ability to support and enable positive social impact and change community attitudes.
- In addition to achieving sports-specific outcomes, sports-based initiatives are becoming widely recognised as crucial program strategies in addressing specific health, education and development objectives.
- The use of sport in this context and as a catalyst for social change helps alter the way people think and feel about disadvantaged population groups and also changes the way people think and feel about themselves, and their position in society.
- change community attitudes in outcome areas with secondary contacts such as volunteers, administrators, coaches, mainstream sporting clubs and corporate partners.
- Through their influence and reach, NSODs can also promote health and welfare issues that affect the community, plus facilitate valuable national conversations about issues such as social inclusion and disability discrimination.

### Question 4

How do you think that clearly outlining what each government is responsible for could make it easier for people with disability to access the supports and services they need?

It is an imperative for government services, including the NDIS, ensure that access to sport is included as a key life opportunity and service offering. The benefit of sport not only supports physical fitness, health and wellbeing, but also provides a positive influence in social and community participation. There is ample research evidence showing that sport contributes to positive academic and career path development, where leadership skills and development of teamwork, hard work, and determination might help prepare sport participants to be leaders at work and in their communities later in life. Sport therefore needs to be easily accessible, inclusive and supported for people with a disability to enable them to reap the benefits available to them.

### Question 5

How do you think the Strategy should represent the role that the non-government sector plays in improving outcomes for people with disability? (Examples of the non-government sector include big, medium and small businesses, community organisations, employees of these businesses, private research, investment organisations and individuals.)

It is paramount that the National Disability Strategy highlights the role the community must play in ensuring the outcomes are achievable. Sport can play a huge role in achieving all six of the outcomes and it is important that the Strategy reflects this, especially as an additional guiding light to personnel within National Disability Insurance scheme to promote sport as an option to people with a disability. Individuals should be able to participate in the sport of their choice at the appropriate ability level and we must assist

### Question 6

What kind of information on the Strategy's progress should governments make available to the public and how often should this information be made available?

Rather than the existing set of 'current commitments' and broad 'areas for future action' listed in the National Disability Strategy (2010-2020), each outcome area of the National Disability Strategy should have an agreed and defined list of prioritized socio-economic targets that have an impact on the life outcomes of people with disabilities.

Outcome areas should have defined criteria with established baseline data at national level and for each state and territory. These criteria should be reported on annually by Ministerial Council and can be a standard to help all parties (government, NFP, for-purpose, peak organisations and communities) focus effort on improving quality of life for people with disabilities.

organisations with the outcomes framework, and subsequent evaluations, to facilitate a more cohesive implementation approach. Further details on Outcomes Framework and evaluations are at pages 9 - 10. In addition, all governments could work toward aligning the timeframes of their disability inclusion plans to allow for a nationally consistent approach to implementation, reporting and review.

### Question 7

What do you think of the proposal to have Targeted Action Plans that focus on making improvements in specific areas within a defined period of time (for example within one, two or three years)?

Defined targets are essential to ensure that community groups can work to a timeframe and achieve success. It is also important to hold governments and others working in this area in the community to account. Sport has very organized structures with annual budgets and programs with constant measuring and evaluating occurring, ensuring targets are established with clear outcomes and timelines, provides more structure and helps all of our deliver on the outcomes.

### Question 8

How could the proposed Engagement Plan ensure people with disability, and the disability community, are involved in the delivery and monitoring of the next Strategy?

The 2010-20 plan refers to *stakeholder engagement* as an essential strategy to ensure government programs, policies and systems that affect people with a disability are appropriate and supported. The engagement plan must include the involvement of people with disabilities and their organisations in the sport sector to ensure inclusion is of a holistic / whole of life consultative process.