

# WHY DON'T OLDER ADULTS PARTICIPATE IN SPORT?

Report prepared for the  
Australian Sports Commission  
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## Glossary

- **Australian Health and Social Science study (AHSS)**

The AHSS is initiated and funded by the Institute for Health and Social Science Research at CQUniversity, Australia. It is administered by the Institute's resident Population Research Laboratory. The AHSS examines the unique issues affecting Australians now and into the future through targeted and regular research using a randomly selected national group (panel) of participants. This panel, with members from all states and territories, provides regular input via the completion of web-based surveys on key issues such as all aspects of wellbeing, activity levels, nutrition and behavioural risk factors. [1] The 2013 panel study included a series of questions about sport participation which were developed by the research team at Victoria University for the Active and Healthy Ageing through Sport project. Responses from people aged 50+ years who were a member of a sport club in the past 10 years (n=47) were used in this report.

- **Sport**

A human activity capable of achieving a result requiring physical exertion and/or physical skill which, by its nature and organisation, is competitive and is generally accepted as being a sport. [2]

- **Health**

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. [3]

- **Older adults**

For this report, 'older adults' refer to adults aged 50 years and over.

## List of abbreviations

AHSS	Australian Health and Social Science study
ERASS	Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey
FGIS	Focus Group Interview Study
ISEAL	Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living
NSO	National Sporting Organisation
SC	Sport Club
SO	Sporting Organisation (umbrella abbreviation to include NSO, SSO and SC)
SSO	State Sporting Organisation
VU	Victoria University

## Executive Summary

Sport is a form of physical activity that can contribute towards improving health across the life span. However the proportion of adults engaged in sport decreases with age [4]. The aim of this report is to provide information on why older adults do not participate in sport, why older adults may re-engage with sport and to discuss potential strategies to engage this age group in sport. For this research, older adults were defined as those aged 50+ years.

The aims of this research were to:

- 1. Investigate the reasons why older adults do not participate in sport**
- 2. Investigate the reasons why older adults may re-engage in sport**
- 3. Recommend strategies to engage older adults in sport**

This research included two specific research studies, a qualitative Focus Group Interview Study (FGIS), and a quantitative Australian Health and Social Science study (AHSS). The FGIS investigated all three aims of this research. The AHSS investigated the first and second aims only.

The key results are summarised below. For this report, National Sporting Organisations are referred to as NSOs; State Sporting Organisations as SSOs; and sport clubs as SCs.

### 1. Reasons why older adults do not participate in sport

The FGIS participants suggested that there were 11 main reasons that could explain why older adults do not participate in sport. They have been categorised into personal, social or organisational reasons:

#### Personal reasons

- **Time constraints:** Many respondents believed that older adults had competing priorities, such as caring for family members, and may have prioritised their children/grandchildren's sport participation over their own participation (FGIS)
- **Physical health concerns:** The perception that the risk of injury increased as they aged was discussed by some respondents (FGIS)
- **Costs:** Some respondents felt that income was often spent on other priorities (FGIS).

#### Social reasons

- **Family commitments:** Most respondents believed that older adults often did not play sport as they had families to look after (FGIS)
- **Friends stopped playing sport:** Some respondents felt that older adults sometimes stopped playing sport when their friends stopped playing sport (FGIS)
- **Working patterns changed:** A few respondents felt there had been a change in working hours in the past generation, where hours had become more flexible and people often worked on weekends, instead of playing sport (FGIS)

- **Lack of social acceptance that older adults played sport:** Some respondents perceived that sport was an activity for young people and not older adults (FGIS).

### Organisational reasons

- **Sports that specifically catered for older adults:** A few of the respondents felt that some 'age appropriate' sports were seen as boring or unattractive (FGIS)
- **Lack of playing opportunities with peers:** Many respondents felt that there were few opportunities for older adults to play with, or against, their peers (FGIS)
- **Older adults were not a high priority for Sporting Organisations:** It was perceived by many respondents that participation in sport for older adults was a lower priority than other younger age groups. Their needs were often not catered for due to a lack of organisational capacity within Sporting Organisations (SOs) (FGIS)
- **Non-inclusive marketing:** Marketing was discussed by a few respondents. They believed it often focused on competition, rather than the fun and social aspects of sport. They also felt that marketing was usually targeted at younger age groups, with graphics and photographs used that appealed to younger people (FGIS).

## 2. Investigate the reasons why older adults may re-engage with sport

Despite the above reasons for why older adults may not participate in sport, the FGIS participants gave reasons why some of them had re-engaged with sport at an older age. Also, the AHSS respondents who had been a sport club member in the past 10 years (n=47) were asked to rate their agreement with four potential reasons to re-join a sport club. There were six main reasons given from both set of participants which were classified as personal or social reasons:

### Personal reasons

- **Physical health:** Many respondents (62%) stated that they would consider re-joining a sport club to become more physically active or to improve their physical health (AHSS). A number of respondents felt that playing sport had improved their physical health (FGIS)
- **Time rich:** Several respondents perceived that older adults often had more time to pursue their own activities, as they had retired or their children had grown up (FGIS)
- **Mental health:** Some respondents (36%) reported that they would consider re-joining a sport club to improve their mental health (AHSS).

### Social reasons

- **Social opportunities:** A number of respondents (55%) stated that they would consider re-joining a sport club for social reasons (AHSS)
- **Family/friends:** Many respondents only took-up a sport when their children or grandchildren had started to play that sport. Some respondents perceived that older

adults had used sport as an opportunity to interact with their families or friends (FGIS)

- **Sporting ability:** The sporting ability of players became less important in older age, and thus sport became more attractive to less 'sporty' types, according to some respondents (FGIS).

### 3. Recommended strategies to engage older adults in sport

The FGIS participants suggested the following six social and organisational strategies that could help engage older adults in sport:

#### Social strategies

- **Develop and promote intergenerational sport opportunities:** Older adults should have the opportunity to play social sport within the same sport club setting as their children or grandchildren (FGIS)
- **Develop and promote age specific sport opportunities:** This may include age specific competitions that are less physically strenuous; and/or more social play opportunities (FGIS)

#### Organisational strategies

- **Introduce rule amendments:** These amendments could be used by sports, where appropriate, to cater for older adults' physical health needs. For example, SOs could amend the physical requirements by reducing the level of physical contact and exertion needed, and shorten match times (FGIS)
- **Produce age appropriate marketing:** This marketing should focus on the fun and social aspect of sport, and show photos with a variety of ages, including older adults (FGIS)
- **Introduce flexible sport club membership options:** Offer reduced senior membership prices and encourage off peak play at discounted rates (FGIS)
- **Develop external partnerships:** Engage with external community partners to develop and deliver specific joint programs. Developing such partnerships could help capacity building and/or knowledge transfer (FGIS).

## Introduction and aims

Populations throughout the developed world are ageing. In Australia, the proportion of adults aged 50+ years is projected to increase to 39% by 2061 [5]. At present, many Sporting Organisations (SOs) tend to prioritise younger age group participants, and therefore older adults are not a high priority. However, as sport participation declines with age [4,6,7,8], and there is an ageing population, the older adult age group may provide a good opportunity for SOs to increase overall participation in sport. For this research, older adults were defined as those aged 50+ years.

This report expands on results from an earlier report. In 2015, the 'Active and Healthy Ageing through Sport' report [9] explored the relationship between older Australian adults and sport. The earlier report covered details of older adults' sport participation, the benefits and barriers to older adults' sport participation, and potential opportunities to increase participation for older adults. It suggested that past sport club members were generally more interested in becoming a sport club member than those who had not previously been a sport club member. Furthermore, more older men than women were interested in joining sport clubs.

## Aims

The aims of this research were to:

- 1. Investigate the reasons why older adults do not participate in sport**
- 2. Investigate the reasons why older adults may re-engage in sport**
- 3. Recommend strategies to engage older adults in sport**

This research included two specific studies, a qualitative Focus Group Interview Study (FGIS), and a quantitative Australian Health and Social Science study (AHSS). The FGIS research study investigated all three aims of this report. The AHSS investigated the first and second aims only.

This report presents the integrated findings from the two separate studies within each of the research aims:

- Chapter 1 provides a summary of the methodologies
- Chapter 2 presents the results of aim 1: Reasons why older adults do not participate in sport
- Chapter 3 presents the results of aim 2: Reasons why older adults may re-engage in sport
- Chapter 4 presents the results of aim 3: Recommended strategies to engage older adults in sport.

## Chapter 1: Methodologies

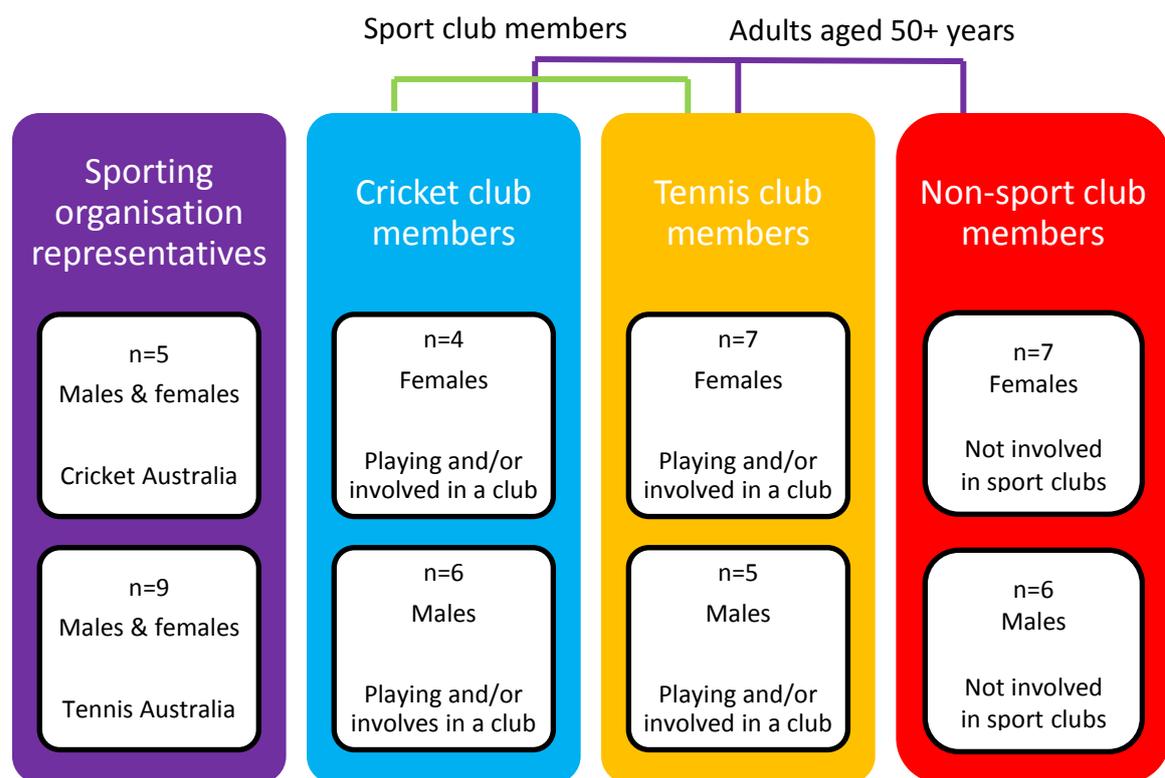
### Focus Group Interview Study (FGIS)

The 2014 qualitative FGIS investigated reasons why older adults do not participate in sport, the reasons why older adults may re-engage with sport at an older age and potential strategies that organisations could implement to engage older adults in sport. Two sports were selected for this research: tennis and cricket. This study involved representatives of the two National Sporting Organisations (NSOs): Tennis Australia and Cricket Australia, older adults who were sport club members of these two sports and older adults who were not members of any sport clubs.

#### **Sport selection:**

- The sports (tennis and cricket) were selected using analysis of 2010 Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey (ERASS) data [10]. Sports in the 2010 ERASS data were ranked from high to low levels of participation amongst older adults to understand participation rates in specific sports
- The 10 most frequently played sports and the 10 least frequently played sports in this age group for both genders were considered in the context of existing relations with NSOs, and the appropriateness of each sport for this age group
- Tennis was selected from the 10 most frequently played sports and cricket was selected from the 10 least frequently played sports
- Representatives of Tennis Australia and Cricket Australia (referred to as NSO participants), and a selection of their older sport club (50+ years) members (including actively playing or administrative members) were invited to participate in the focus group interviews. These members were recruited through the NSOs or local sport clubs were independently contacted by the research team
- Older adults (50+ years), who were not members of a sport club, were also invited to take part. They were recruited through community groups and public advertisements

A figure showing the study design of the focus group interviews is presented in Figure 1 on the following page.



**Figure 1: Structure of focus group interview study**

**Data collection and analysis:**

- There were eight focus group interviews. Separate focus group interviews were held for each NSO, sport club members and non-sport club members, and they were stratified for gender
- There were 49 participants in total (four to nine adults in each interview)
- The focus group interviews lasted for approximately 75 minutes and discussions on this topic area lasted for 10-15 minutes. There was general agreement in each focus group interview about the issues discussed, and although some differing opinions were offered, these were debated in a friendly manner
- There were two VU facilitators at each focus group interview, with one to lead the group and the other to take notes of any non-verbal communication
- Data were transcribed and analysed using a hybrid approach of content and thematic analysis
- The ideas discussed were developed into common themes, and these themes are presented in the following three chapters of this report. The results presented are therefore the perceptions of these people in the focus group interviews and may not be representative of the sport as a whole.

## **Australian Health and Social Science study (AHSS)**

The 2013 quantitative AHSS study surveyed a panel of 2034 people from the Australian public. They completed regular web-based surveys on key issues such as wellbeing, activity levels, nutrition and behavioural risk factors. The study included a series of questions about sport participation which were developed by the research team at VU for the Active and Healthy Ageing through Sport project for this report. Only current sport club members or those who were a sport club member in the past 10 years were asked the sport participation questions.

### **Respondent selection:**

- A total of 1,856 adults responded to the sport participation questions. Of these, 560 were younger than 50 years and 1,296 were over 50 years
- To address the first and second aims of this research, responses from adults aged over 50 years who were a sport club member in the past 10 years (n=47) were analysed
- The full demographics of these 47 participants are detailed in Table 1 on the following page. In summary, their mean age was 60.3 years, with 22 female and 25 male respondents.

### **Data collection and analysis:**

- There were 12 survey questions related to respondents' association with sport. These questions included their history of belonging to a sport club or association, the benefits of belonging to a sport club, reasons for discontinuing membership and potential reasons to re-engage with sport
- The data were analysed for frequency of agreement with each question. Gender differences in frequency of agreement were also analysed.

Respondent demographics	Sport club member within the last 10 years	
<b>Age (mean)</b>	60.3 years	
<b>Gender</b>		
	Female	47%
	Male	53%
<b>Marital status</b>		
	Single/widowed/divorced	25%
	Married/de facto/live in	75%
<b>Living situation</b>		
	Children <18 years	17%
	Children 18+ years	28%
	Children moved out/no children	53%
<b>Area of residence</b>		
	Major cities	54%
	Inner regional	31%
	Outer regional/remote	15%
<b>Country of birth</b>		
	Australia	79%
	Other	21%
<b>Education</b>		
	Up to year 12	32%
	Technical studies/trade certificate	17%
	Tertiary studies	51%
<b>Employment status</b>		
	Full-time	43%
	Part-time	19%
	Casual	2%
	Unemployed/home duties/student	11%
	Retired/pensioner	25%
<b>Income</b>		
	Lowest tertile	32%
	Middle tertile	27%
	Highest tertile	41%

**Table 1: Characteristics of adults aged 50+ years who were a member of a sport club in the past 10 years (n=47)**

## Chapter 2: Reasons why older adults do not participate in sport

The reasons why older adults stopped participating in sport have been categorised into three sections in this chapter: **personal reasons**, **social reasons** and **organisational reasons**. There were some similar reasons that arose from both the AHSS and the FGIS studies, particularly relating to time constraints, physical health concerns and lack of playing opportunities. Other reasons reported by the FGIS participants included family commitments and marketing.

The main reasons why older adults do not participate in sport are summarised below.

### Personal reasons

#### Time constraints

- Some older adults (17%) who were a sport club member in the past 10 years discontinued their membership due to **time constraints** (AHSS)
- Many respondents believed that older adults had **competing priorities**, which included prioritisation of their children's sport participation over their own participation. This limited older adults' availability to participate in sport themselves (FGIS)
  - *"It was two nights a week for them [kids], then it was on the weekend with them with their sport...you don't have time to do your own stuff, when you're there two nights and half a day over the weekend. Family is more important"* (54 year old male non-sport club member)
- A few respondents felt that **sport matches were sometimes too long and too structured**, so participation in other activities was sometimes prioritised (FGIS)

#### Physical health concerns

- A little over a quarter of respondents (28%) discontinued their sport club membership due to their **physical health** (AHSS)
- The perception that the **risk of injury increased as they aged** was discussed by some respondents (FGIS)
  - *"As you get older, you're more susceptible to injuries"* (53 year old male non-sport club member)
- Some respondents believed that **existing injuries** meant it was harder to participate in sport at an older age for some people (FGIS)

- *“Usually they [older adults] play every second Sunday because it takes them two weeks to get over the physicality of the whole thing” (53 year old male non-sport club member)*

### Costs

- Some respondents felt that **income was often spent on other priorities** (FGIS)
  - *“They may be spending their money on other things, like travel rather than sport” (Male NSO participant).*

### Social reasons

#### Family commitments

- Most respondents believed that older adults often did not play sport because **they had families to look after** (FGIS)
  - *“My main sport has always been netball from the time I was at school right through till like when I was working... and I stopped ... when I got married and moved to another location and was planning another team and all excited about that, and then I was pregnant and then that was it. Never went back” (60 year old female non-sport club member)*

#### Friends stopped playing sport

- Some respondents felt that older adults sometimes stopped playing sport **when their friends stopped playing sport** (FGIS)

#### Working patterns changed

- A few respondents felt there had been a change in working hours in the past generation, where **hours had become more flexible and people often worked on weekends, instead of playing sport**. This meant that traditional weekend competitions sometimes had fewer participants (FGIS)
  - *“Saturday tennis isn’t the same as it used to be because the workforce are working a lot of Saturdays now instead of working just weekly, five days a week...I think that’s taken a lot of participation out of tennis” (69 year old male tennis club member)*

## Lack of social acceptance that older adults played sport

- Some respondents perceived that **sport was an activity for young people** and not older adults (FGIS)
  - *“I’ll say I’m going to tennis. ‘Oh do you still play tennis?’ Like hell, once you get over fifty, you shouldn’t be playing”* (70 year old female tennis club member)
  - *“Some people also perceive it as culturally or as not really appropriate to play competitive any longer once you’re getting older, especially on the female side”* (Female NSO participant).

## Organisational reasons

### Sports that specifically catered for older adults

- A few of the respondents felt that **some ‘age appropriate’ sports were seen as boring or unattractive** (FGIS)
  - *“Golf is one of those games that a lot of people take up in retirement, but I find it boring”* (60 year old female non-sport club member)
  - *“It’s [bowls] boring. You roll the ball and then you walk out”* (54 year old female non-sport club member)
- A number of respondents believed that **contact sports became less desirable** as people aged, due to physical health concerns (FGIS)
  - *“I don’t want to have the contact sport anymore”* (60 year old female non-sport club member)

### Lack of playing opportunities with peers

- Some respondents (16%) discontinued their sport club membership due to lack of playing opportunities (AHSS)
- Many respondents felt that there were **few age specific sporting opportunities for older adults**. This included opportunities for older adults new to a sport, those who wanted to continue playing sport and also those who wanted to start playing sport again (FGIS)
  - *“There’s a lack of adult beginner programs. I think if you haven’t played at age 50, people are too embarrassed and too nervous to start picking up a racquet when they start retiring”* (Male NSO participant)

- *“There didn’t seem to be anywhere they could go to next for that age group [in netball], so they both stopped playing...I always thought that was such a shame because they loved netball and really enjoyed it so much for years”* (65 year old female non-sport club member)
- *“For older people there are not many sporting clubs or anything that you could just go and join except lawn bowls”* (61 year old male non-sport club member)
- A number of respondents believed that older adults **did not want to compete against younger players** and were therefore likely to transfer to individual/lower contact sports or visit the gym (FGIS)
  - *“At some point the realisation came ‘I can’t compete with those kids anymore’ and there’s really nowhere else to go”* (62 year old male cricket club member)
  - *“I think when I was younger, I played more team sports. And as I got older and I couldn’t compete anymore, I did individual things like karate”* (50 year old male cricket club member)
- Some respondents felt that whilst competition was still important (especially to men), the **desire to play sport in a competitive structure decreased with age** (FGIS)
  - *“I’m not as competitive as I was when I was younger. Nowhere near”* (54 year old male cricket club member)

### **Older adults were not a high priority for Sporting Organisations (SOs)**

- It was perceived by many respondents that **participation in sport for older adults was a lower priority than younger age groups** (FGIS)
- Some respondents believed that specific needs of older adults were often not catered for due to a **lack of organisational capacity** (FGIS)
  - *“At the end of the day, our business is about junior development”* (Female NSO participant)
  - *“We tend to focus on the players that we currently have and then recruiting new players and fans, so that’s very much pitched at younger age groups”* (Male NSO participant)

## Non-inclusive marketing

- Marketing was discussed by a few respondents. They felt that marketing for sport participation was often **focused on competition**, rather than the social and fun aspects of sport (FGIS)
- Some respondents felt that **marketing was usually targeted at younger age groups**, which used graphics and photographs that appealed to younger people (FGIS)
  - *“It would be really good if they showed a range of women who are playing, not just the young’uns [sic], perhaps a few older women? That would be a broader advertising campaign”* (69 year old female cricket club member)
  - *“You think sporting clubs are for when you’re young and then you’re going to give them up, but maybe they haven’t really been advertised as something that’s appropriate for all age levels”* (55 year old female non-sport club member)
- Some respondents believed that older adults had a **general lack of awareness** of sporting opportunities available (FGIS)
- A few respondents felt that there **must be a suitable product on offer to advertise**; otherwise there is little point in advertising sport to older adults (FGIS).

## Chapter 3: Reasons why older adults may re-engage with sport

Despite the barriers to participation in sport for older adults discussed in the previous chapter, most FGIS participants felt that sport drop out occurred more frequently in their 30s due to having a young family. A 62 year old male tennis club member stated *“it can be very difficult, say in your 30s and that if you’ve got kids, it’s really hard to make commitments to other people”*.

For some people, there may be a greater opportunity to re-engage in sport as an older adult than a young adult. Many older adults within the FGIS also felt that their participation had changed positively over their lifetime for the **individual reasons** and **social reasons** shown below.

AHSS respondents who had been a sport club member in the past 10 years (n=47) were asked to rate their agreement with four potential reasons to re-join a sport club. Their responses are also shown below.

### Personal reasons

#### Physical health

- Almost two thirds of respondents (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider re-joining a sport club to **become more physically active** (AHSS)
- Many respondents (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider re-joining a sport club to **improve their physical health** (AHSS)
- A number of respondents perceived that **sport had improved their physical health** as they had aged (FGIS)
  - *“It’s helped my health. I mean I don’t know where I’d be if I wasn’t playing tennis”* (69 year old male tennis club member)

#### Time rich

- Several respondents perceived that older adults often had **more time to pursue their own activities**, as they had retired or their children had grown up (FGIS)
  - *“I’ve found the mid-30s when your kids are sort of less than 10, it’s harder to leave the home, whereas now my kids are all in their 20s, I never see them. So my wife’s happy to not have me under her feet and stuff, so it’s actually easier now in the 50s to actually spend more time at the club without young families”* (53 year old male cricket club member)
  - *“Now you’re semi-retired...you’ve got time on your hands and so you can [play sport]”* (64 year old female tennis club member)

## Mental health

- Almost half of respondents (49%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider re-joining a sport club to **improve their mental health** (AHSS).

## Social reasons

### Social opportunities

- A little over half of respondents (55%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider re-joining a sport club for **social reasons** (AHSS)

### Family/friends

- Many respondents had taken up a sport only **when their children or grandchildren had started to play that sport** (FGIS)
  - *“My daughter roped me into doing a bit of cricket and I thought, “Oh that looks like fun!”* (69 year old female cricket club member)
- A number of respondents also perceived that older adults had used sport as an opportunity to **interact with their families or friends** (FGIS)
  - *“There is nothing better than playing with your kids”* (62 year old male tennis club member)
  - *“A friend of mine played tennis, so I joined in and actually from then we played every week”* (68 year old male tennis club member)

### Sporting ability

- The **sporting ability of players became less important in older age**, and thus sport became more attractive to less ‘sporty’ types, according to some respondents (FGIS)
  - *“In those days you couldn’t play those sports unless you were good. Really you just weren’t welcomed. Nowadays it’s probably the same, but tennis people have given up laughing at me because I don’t give a stuff”* (62 year old male tennis club member)
  - *“I don’t care what the younger ones think anymore”* (59 year old female non-sport club member).

This chapter identified reasons why some older adults started playing sport in their adult years. The dichotomy in the data collected for this chapter and the previous chapter demonstrates the complexity of issues involved in older adults’ sport participation.

The influences described in this chapter, that lead older adults to start playing sport in a sport club, could give SOs insight into how they might attract this age group back to club sport. SOs could also draw on the specific strategies described in chapter 4 to engage older adults into their respective sports.

## Chapter 4: Potential strategies to engage older adults in sport

This chapter explores the potential strategies that Sporting Organisations (SOs) could implement to engage older adults in sport. FGIS respondents discussed **social strategies** and **organisational strategies** that could be implemented to increase sport participation for older adults.

### Social strategies

- **Develop and promote intergenerational sport opportunities:** Older adults in the FGIS felt that they experienced time constraints and had competing priorities, such as looking after their families. Older adults can re-engage with sport when their children play sport
  - *“They’ve [older adults] got families and their offshoots of that family might join as well, and those offshoots are going to have kids and they’re going to grow up in the same environment, so it goes on”* (69 year old male tennis club member)

**Recommendations:** Develop and promote intergenerational opportunities to play sport, where older adults can play sport within the same sport club setting as their children or grandchildren.

- **Develop and promote age specific sport opportunities:** Older adults in the FGIS felt that it became harder to participate in sport as they grew older, specifically due to their declining physical health. Respondents also believed there was a lack of appropriate opportunities to play sport. The FGIS respondents provided examples of appropriate playing opportunities within their sport clubs, and these should be used by SOs to further develop appropriate opportunities for this age group to play sport
  - *“We go out. Four people go out. We all have a serve. Then that’s the end of the game. Or else if there’s eight of us, then we change ends. Four have a serve, then that’s the end of the game. Then we all change partners... we have party day so we all bring something different...I would think number socialising first. Second, thinking you’re getting a little bit fit”* (70 year old female tennis club member)
  - *“[veteran competitions] It’s more the enjoyment. You still play to win and our team still play to win and you have finals and all that sort of stuff, but at the end of the day, the fact that you’re still playing is a bonus when you’re over 50, and that’s what vets is all about...it’s a one-day competition, 36 overs. Its maximum six overs. You retire at 40. It’s more I open the bowling, so I bat down the order. You try to make sure that the guys all get a go, the fielding’s slower, the umpires, so it’s all that sort of stuff. It’s good”* (57 year old male cricket club member)

**Recommendations:** Introduce age specific competitions that are less physically strenuous, thus helping to negate concerns of increased risk of injury in sport. Introduce age specific sport competitions or social play opportunities, which would also provide appropriate opportunities for older adults to play sport.

### Organisational strategies

- **Introduce rule amendments:** FGIS respondents discussed how potential rule amendments may not be applicable to all sports. It is recommended that sports identify amendments with older adult players in mind and implement these where appropriate
  - *“We talk about modified sport for the young kids who can’t play, but we don’t talk about modified sport for older people who find it difficult to play the full sized court... Your racquet is smaller, so you can actually have a rally of 10-15 hits with someone who truly can’t play the game. And I think that’s the thing is that there’s no distinct level of ability between it, and I think that makes people enjoy it more”* (Male NSO participant)
  - *“They modify the courts. They modify the period of time and they also have minimal contact for a lot of them depending on the age and what they tend to do. Normally when you play AFL football, its contact. As you get older, it’s minimal contact”* (54 year old male non-sport club member)

**Recommendations:** Reduce contact, reduce physical exertion and shorten match time.

- **Produce age appropriate marketing:** FGIS respondents felt that the majority of sport marketing focused on young, athletic people. This, in a way, implied that sport was not for older adults, or for those who did not conform to an athletic stereotype. FGIS respondents mentioned that to increase the appeal of sport for older adults, marketing needed to become more inclusive and change its focus
  - *“It would be really good if they showed a range of women who are playing, not just the young’uns [sic], perhaps a few older women? That would be a broader advertising campaign”* (69 year old female cricket club member)
  - *“The marketing is...so you’re retiring next week? Why don’t you take up tennis instead of golf? It’s cheaper, it’s more accessible, it’s this...you can learn...so I think the actual marketing and selling of the benefits of it, actually wouldn’t be that difficult”* (Female NSO participant)

**Recommendations:** Market the fun and social side of sport, and promote the potential health benefits of playing sport. Include people of different ages on marketing material,

including older adults. Encourage/market less strenuous and less competitive sports that include less physical contact.

- **Introduce flexible sport club membership options:** FGIS respondents felt that memberships were a vital income source for sport clubs, but there was scope to offer some pricing flexibility for older adults. The simple principle applied that it was better to have older adults participate in sport clubs at a modest membership fee, than not to have them around at all. FGIS respondents also linked this to their assertion that older adults contributed more generously in volunteering time than younger adults
  - *“I think one of our issues has been the whole membership question that a lot of our traditional clubs who have relied on their membership and said you can’t come and play at our club unless you’re a member and not everyone wants to become a member. They might only want to play half a dozen times a year, so they’re looking for value for money and membership becomes a bit of an obstacle”* (Male NSO participant)
  - *“I think flexibility in their pricing could be good. And trials would be excellent”* (53 year old male non-sport club member)

**Recommendations:** Introduce flexible membership options for older adults. Provide reduced senior membership prices and encourage off peak play at discounted rates.

- **Develop external partnerships:** FGIS respondents provided examples of successful programs that had been developed and delivered in partnership between SOs and external partners. These examples included the Rusty Rackets Tennis Program in South Australia, which was run in partnership between Active Ageing Australia and Tennis South Australia.

SOs should develop similar partnerships with community, health or senior organisations to provide sport opportunities for older adults. FGIS respondents identified that working in such partnerships could help negate capacity issues within SOs, and provide an opportunity for SOs to utilise membership databases from external organisations

- *“We’ve partnered with them to pilot a couple of these Rusty Racquets programs... I’m not sure if it was running Australia-wide with Active Ageing or just South Australia, but you could choose a bunch of sports and do five weeks of each sport for 10 dollars and then ideally, the local coach that was running it would try and encourage them to continue playing either cardio tennis, which was probably the*

*most common outcome here or get into competitive playing” (Male NSO participant)*

**Recommendations:** Engage with external community partners to develop and deliver specific joint programs. Develop partnerships that could help capacity building and/or knowledge transfer.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The main aims of this report were to investigate the reasons why older adults do not participate in sport, investigate the reasons why older adults may re-engage with sport at an older age, and then to provide recommended strategies to engage older adults in sport.

There were a range of personal, social and organisational reasons why older adults did not play sport. In order to increase participation in older adults, these reasons have to be identified for each sport and sport specific strategies have to be put in place to address these reasons to increase sport participation in older adults.

The main recommended strategies to increase sport participation drawn from this report include:

- Develop and promote intergenerational sport opportunities, where older adults can play sport within the same club setting as their children or grandchildren
- Develop and promote age specific sport opportunities/products
- Introduce rule amendments
- Produce age appropriate marketing
- Introduce flexible sport club membership options
- Develop external partnerships with community organisations.

Considering the ageing Australian population, Sporting Organisations have an excellent opportunity to engage with this age group, which could also help increase their overall participation figures.

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