

# INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS' PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Part 2, Qualitative research (National Report)

Prepared For:

Australian Sports Commission

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## Contents

1	Executive Summary.....	3
2	Introduction.....	7
3	Objectives.....	8
4	Data and Literature Review – Key Findings and Identified Gaps.....	9
5	Methodology.....	15
6	Key Findings.....	17
7	What can Sporting Clubs do to increase sporting participation amongst Indigenous people?.....	49
8	Conclusion.....	51
	Appendix A: Case Studies.....	52

## List of Tables

Table 1	Summary of focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted.....	15
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# 1 Executive Summary

ORC was commissioned to conduct research on participation in sport and physical activity amongst Indigenous Australians. The research explored current participation levels and behaviours, key drivers and barriers to participation and the role of sport and sporting clubs within communities.

The research was qualitative, with focus groups and interviews being conducted across urban, regional and remote communities with Indigenous people age 15 years and over. Additionally, interviews were conducted with intermediaries who are engaged in the organisation development of sports and physical activity programs which target Indigenous participation. Respondents were recruited by local Indigenous organisations which ORC partnered with for the research.

## 1.1 An overview of sports and physical activity participation in the Indigenous community

Football (all codes), basketball, netball and softball were the most common sports within Indigenous communities.

Participation was generally quite high amongst school aged children, but then dropped off for older teenagers and continued to decrease into late adulthood. Overall it was felt that sport played an important role within communities and was a source of pride for Indigenous people.

## 1.2 The decision-making process – participation drivers and barriers

It was a widespread belief within Indigenous communities that participating in sport and physical activity had many benefits and should be prioritised for both adults and children. When discussing the actual benefits, the most common themes which emerged could be classed under the categories of physical health benefits (e.g diabetes prevention, cardiovascular health), mental well-being (alleviates stress, improves mood), social benefits (competition, social skills, family togetherness) and pride (increasing confidence).

Barriers to participating in sport and physical activity varied by age and location, however, recurring themes across locations included costs associated with activities, lack of time, lack of motivation (feeling in a rut), injuries/ health issues and lack of cultural inclusiveness.

Cost was one of the most frequently reported barriers to participation – both for adults and their children, and included seasonal costs as well as the cost of uniforms and equipment.

Across communities a lack of transportation was repeatedly highlighted as a barrier to participation.

All of these drivers and barriers (plus more) are instrumental in the decision making-process around what sports and physical activities Indigenous people participate in (if any).

### **1.3 How to encourage and increase sports and physical activity participation. What are the key success factors?**

Encouraging greater participation in sports and physical activity amongst Indigenous people centred on overcoming the key barriers and ensuring opportunities are made available. Specific suggestions included the provision of holistic programs which include overall healthy lifestyle and cultural programs (particularly for older adults), providing assistance with costs and transport, and ensuring passionate individuals are available to assist in the facilitation of programs. A need for greater opportunities for older adults to get involved in passive non-competitive activities was also identified.

### **1.4 The role of sport and sport clubs in building social capital and community capacity**

The experiences of Indigenous people with sporting clubs covered a wide spectrum, though were generally positive. In particular, clubs that embraced and respected Indigenous culture were more likely to have elicited positive reactions than others. This is not to say that only clubs with all-Indigenous or majority-Indigenous memberships could be popular amongst Indigenous participants; but cultural awareness and inclusiveness were seen as key success factors in sustaining the engagement of Indigenous participants. Examples of this being done well included saying the welcome to country and acknowledging the traditional owners. Additionally cultural awareness and sensitivity amongst coaches and organisers was crucial. This included acknowledging the community and family obligations of Indigenous players, and allowing leniency when they were unable to play as a result of these commitments.

### **1.5 What can Clubs do to increase sporting participation amongst Indigenous people?**

Recommendations for sports clubs to focus on to increase Indigenous participation included:

- Not charging people to be involved, but instead relying more on fundraising from local businesses and events (e.g. barbeques and raffles)
- Making Indigenous people feel welcome, safe and included.
- Focusing on the fun aspect and the game is instrumental for children, however for longer-term engagement a focus on overall healthy lifestyles is a key driver for adults.
- Getting their mates involved is very important. Clubs don't need to have an Indigenous only focus, but do need to make it clear that Indigenous people are welcome and respected.
- Mentoring is very important, both professional athletes and local community members.
- Long-term funding is crucial, and can be extremely difficult to obtain.

Additionally, evaluating the success of the programs isn't just about the number of people participating, it's also about making sure they're all having a good time and having fun, and the whole community is involved.

## 1.6 Conclusion

The research affirms the central role of sport and physical activity within Indigenous communities and the importance of sporting clubs and organisations to facilitate these opportunities. Increasing participation and overcoming barriers to sports and physical activities, for both adults and children was a priority amongst Indigenous people.

Recommendations include ensuring that programs are culturally inclusive and respectful of Indigenous people, reducing costs, and increasing opportunities which are available within remote and some regional areas. While many issues related to sporting infrastructure, public transport and economic factors are beyond the remit of sporting clubs to solve, clubs can take some practical measures to improve participation amongst Indigenous Australians.

Two simple things sporting clubs can do include:

1. Create an environment that is welcoming to Indigenous Australians. Demonstrating acceptance of cultural diversity can be done through simple measures like putting up Indigenous specific posters and having welcome to country messages before important meetings start. That promotes a sense of inclusion and acceptance amongst Indigenous people - which is key to long-term sustained engagement.
2. Work with existing grassroots Indigenous community organisations to encourage Indigenous participation. Such organisations have the trust and involvement of

Indigenous people, but are often short of funds. By connecting with community organisations, sporting clubs can tap into Indigenous community members and networks and resources to build sustained participation in sports programs. Instead of reinventing the wheel, consider partnering with such organisations by providing funding or specialist personnel or resources (e.g. a football coach or a bus for transport) to work together and create great programs.

## 2 Introduction

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) engaged ORC International to conduct a research project on Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's participation in sport and physical activities. The study was designed to explore Indigenous Australians' sports participation behaviour and provide the ASC with a deeper understanding of the drivers of that behaviour.

The ASC sought this research to:

- inform their policies and engagement models
- help inform how the ASC's sport sector partners (National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) and their supply chain) may successfully and viably deliver sport to Indigenous communities and develop targeted sports delivery, for both products and services, and communication strategies and tools to more effectively encourage participation among Indigenous Australians.

There were two phases to the research project:

- a data and literature review conducted in May 2017, which then informed
- a qualitative research phase conducted from June 2017 to February 2018.

The present report focuses on the results of the qualitative research phase across all states and territories. Detailed findings of the data and literature review are provided in a separate report, but to provide context for this report, a summary of key findings are provided in chapter four. Separate reports which focus on the results of the qualitative findings for South Australia, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory are also available.



### 3 Objectives

The purpose of the overall Indigenous Sports Participation Study was to research Indigenous Australians' sports participation and physical activity behaviour and help the ASC and their partners understand the context, patterns and drivers of that behaviour.

The specific research objectives were to:

- **explore participation** in sport and physical activity amongst Indigenous Australians, including in metropolitan, regional and remote or very remote locations
- **identify and describe different segments** that exist within the Australian Indigenous population who are either participating or not participating
- **understand the perceived benefits** of sport participation for the Indigenous community, including but not limited to health and wellbeing, education, crime or anti-social behaviour, social capital, in particular the role played by club sport
- **explore the key drivers** – emotional, attitudinal, motivational – **and the needs and barriers** – both real and perceived – to participation in sport and physical activity within the Indigenous community
- gain a better understanding of how people in Indigenous communities **conduct decision-making** to participate or not to participate in sport, as well as what drives them to participate in other physical recreation
- identify **what would encourage** Indigenous Australians to become more active
- understand what the **participation opportunities** – both sport and physical recreation – are for Indigenous communities, and how/if they are tailored to suit their needs
- **understand which sports**, programs or products, and which avenues, including sport clubs, **work well** for Indigenous communities **and which don't**, and why
- **understand the drivers**, opportunities and challenges **for** sport and physical recreation **providers**, in relation to Indigenous communities and Indigenous Australians.

## 4 Data and Literature Review – Key Findings and Identified Gaps

Prior to conducting the qualitative research phase, analysis was conducted on data produced by the AusPlay survey, which is the ASC’s Australian national population tracking survey of adults’ and children’s sport and physical recreation participation. In addition, recent literature on Indigenous sport and physical activity participation was reviewed, in relation to a set of research objectives stipulated by the ASC.

### 4.1 Data analysis

The AusPlay survey was the first time that the ASC had useable data on Indigenous people’s participation in sports and physical activities, at a national population level. It is important to note that the sample of Indigenous AusPlay respondents was relatively small (481 from October 2015 to December 2016), which affects the overall reliability of the Indigenous population estimates and trends presented in this report, especially for segments within the Indigenous population. Over time, as more data is collected through the AusPlay survey, more robust analyses will be able to be conducted.

#### 4.1.1 Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians’ participation in sport and physical activity

The AusPlay data analyses found that, in keeping with previous research findings, **Indigenous people were less likely** than non-Indigenous people to have participated in sports or physical activities in the last twelve months (79% compared with 87%). However, the AusPlay data suggested that Indigenous adults who did participate tended to participate more frequently and for longer session times. Although based on less reliable data, the findings also suggested that participation rates and frequencies for Indigenous children peak around the ages of 9-11 years old, possibly even surpassing non-Indigenous children’s participation during this age. The rates then decline at a faster rate than non-Indigenous children’s participation after the age of eleven.

The analysis of the AusPlay data also revealed that the most popular sports and physical activities were similar for both male and female Indigenous participants, and non-Indigenous participants, with recreational walking and fitness/gym topping the list for all groups of participating adults. Participation through organisations or venues was less prevalent for Indigenous adults than non-Indigenous adults; but higher proportions of Indigenous adults participated through sports clubs or associations. There were no clear

patterns of participation in organisations or venues, or in sports clubs and associations, by age or sex of Indigenous participants.

## **4.1.2 Indigenous Australians' participation in sport and physical activity**

Although there were no differences between participation rates of Indigenous men and women, the AusPlay rate for men was slightly lower overall than ABS statistics from 2007-08. According to the AusPlay data, active Indigenous women tended to participate more often than men, whereas active men tended to engage in longer sessions of sport or physical activity. Among Indigenous children, the AusPlay rate of participation for girls was lower than that of boys, although this needs to be interpreted with caution due to the small sample sizes.

Although also based on less reliable data, it appeared that the participation rates of Indigenous adults may have been lowest in outer regional and very remote areas of Australia, and that the rates of participation through organisations or venues and through sports clubs and associations dropped in remote and very remote regions.

## **4.2 Literature review**

### **4.2.1 Perceived benefits of sport participation**

A wide range of benefits were identified in the literature on Indigenous sport and physical activity participation. These included benefits to health and wellbeing, education and employment, the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour, and increased social capital. It was also suggested that regular, organised, group participation created opportunities which could be leveraged for other service provision (such as health services), that it had potential economic benefits, and could contribute to reconciliation of Indigenous culture in the wider community. Sports clubs and associations were generally viewed as particularly positive enablers of these benefits; however, authors cautioned against treating either sports and physical activity, or sports clubs, as some sort of 'magic bullet', noting that the benefits were inter-related, difficult to measure, and always occurring within a particular social and historical context which limits or enables the ability to achieve benefits, and influences the extent of the benefits and even how they are conceptualised or measured.

### **4.2.2 Key drivers and barriers to participation, and the decision-making process**

The key drivers for Indigenous participation in sports and physical activity included, desire for fun or enjoyment, a perceived (often health or fitness-driven) need, a lack of barriers,

perceived suitability (to personal requirements and preferences), and the existence of external, social support or encouragement. The main barriers fell broadly under the categories of (in no particular order):

- other commitments, especially to family or community
- personal illness or injury
- financial constraints
- access issues
- safety or comfort concerns
- a different cultural construct of sport and physical activity
- racism.

While the drivers and barriers to participation provided insights into some of the underlying factors influencing Indigenous participation in sports and physical activity, the subjective nature of decision-making and feelings of encouragement (or discouragement) to participate made these topics ideal for further exploration during the qualitative stage of this research.

### **4.2.3 Existing opportunities for Indigenous communities to participate**

Macniven et al captured the details of 110 programs, operating in 2015, which aimed to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' physical activity levels, for health benefits. Their work significantly contributes to the understanding of the sport and physical activity opportunities for Indigenous Australians. There are, however, additional opportunities for Indigenous sport and physical activity participation, provided through programs and products which do not necessarily have a primarily health-benefit-based focus. Some mainstream sporting associations offer Indigenous program components, or have made efforts to introduce and document inclusion policies which explicitly refer to the inclusion of Indigenous Australians in their sports. There are also a number of organisations which are specifically dedicated to providing sports and physical activities opportunities for Indigenous people, and numerous grass-roots programs and community initiatives, which are quite often run out of local youth and community centres.

### **4.2.4 Effectiveness of programs and products**

To be effective in encouraging sustained Indigenous participation, the literature suggested that sports and physical programs and products encapsulate the following characteristics: ongoing relationship-building and community consultation and involvement, at all stages

of development and implementation. This includes initiation and evaluations; local capacity-building, enabling long-term, sustainable control of the program; a tailored, flexible offer that is specifically designed for the needs and preferences of the particular community; a group, family or community, rather than individual focus; an environment which enables, not hinders, participants' cultural identity; a safe environment where participants feel welcome and supported; integration with healthy living programs, cultural learning and wider cultural experience; evaluations that take a more holistic, long-term approach and recognise benefits that may be difficult to quantify, rather than assessing separate, often short-term health variables; and long-term, reliable funding. Regular contact between experienced sportspeople and participants was recommended for sports programs, by the literature review. Additionally it was advised that all programs and products encourage mentoring and modelling by older participants, and be promoted as games or sports, rather than as exercise or in terms of their desired outcomes (such as a fitness or personal health).

#### **4.2.5 Provider-side drivers, opportunities and challenges**

Opportunities exist for mainstream providers to continue to develop and apply inclusion policies, to recognise and embrace Indigenous cultures, and to expand the Indigenous components within their programs and products. Moreover, opportunities exist for any provider to increase the variety of offerings available to Indigenous Australians, or to address the absence of sport and physical activity offerings in some locations. Providers' main challenges arise from the inconsistent, changing policy and funding landscapes in which they operate, and in meeting the criteria for effective programs outlined above. Providing sports and physical activity programs and products to Indigenous communities requires time, effort and flexibility to work with the communities to ensure that the program or product is ultimately driven by the community, and that the particular needs and preferences of that community are met.

### **4.3 Knowledge gaps and recommendations**

The research gaps identified in the data and literature review included the following issues for **exploration in the qualitative phase**:

- The decision-making process. There was a scarcity of literature focusing on:
  - how Indigenous people decide to participate or not participate in sports and physical activities; the decision-making process
  - what has worked to encourage Indigenous participation in sport or physical activity broadly, as opposed to encouraging participation within a particular program or product

- There being no recent, national data on sports and physical activity participation by Indigenous 15-17 year olds, as this group of respondents cannot be identified within the AusPlay sample<sup>1</sup>
- An inadequate understanding of whether Indigenous women and men conceptualise and experience sport and physical activity differently to each other, or to non-Indigenous women and men, and whether this affects reported statistics
- A lack of findings on the potential relationships between Indigenous participation in sport and physical activities, and in sports clubs and associations, by remoteness
- Insufficient data to allow analyses of participation by further segmentations within Indigenous populations, such as:
  - sex within state or territory or remoteness areas, or remoteness areas within states and territories
  - participation rates throughout the lifecycle stages, particular for differently aged children, also by jurisdiction and/or remoteness category
- A requirement for more research to explore the role that sport and sport clubs play in building social capital and community capacity
- Few insights into the additional programs and products adults would like for the children in their families and communities (family-orientated and culturally connected activities are preferred, but which types would they like more of, for their children)
- Minimal coverage of the drivers for providers of sports and physical activity providers.

Thus, the qualitative stage of this research focuses on addressing these questions:

1. Provide an overview of sports and physical activity participation in the Indigenous community
2. What are the participation patterns for Indigenous youth aged 15-17?

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<sup>1</sup> In the AusPlay survey, only respondents who are aged 18 years or older are asked potentially sensitive questions, such as cultural background, as described in the *Methodology* section, on page 8.

3. What is involved in the decision-making process to participate, or not to participate in sport and physical activities, how individuals decide whether or not to participate, and experiences of sport and physical activity?
4. What would encourage an increase in sports and physical activity participation? That is, what currently works and what doesn't?
5. What are the differences between men and women's experiences and understanding of sport and physical activity?
6. Sports clubs - What role can sport and sport clubs play in building social capital and community capacity? What are the experiences with sports clubs (positive/ negative)?
7. What opportunities would Indigenous parents like for their children (family-orientated and culturally connected activities are preferred, but which types would they like more of, for their children)? What do adults think would enable and encourage their children to participate more?
  - Across all these issues, what are the differences by state/territory or remoteness?
  - In conclusion, what are the key barriers and the key success factors for driving sporting and physical activity participation amongst Indigenous Australians?

## 5 Methodology

### 5.1 Data collection

The project was carried out in compliance with ISO 20252 and membership requirements for AMSRO and AMSRS. Thirty-eight focus groups and 32 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over, and 35 interviews were conducted with Indigenous Australians aged 15 – 17 years old (conducted in pairs where possible) and 34 IDIs were conducted with intermediaries engaged in the organisation of sports and physical activity programs which target Indigenous participation (see table 1 for a summary of the sample design). Fieldwork was conducted between June 2017 and February 2018.

Table 1 Summary of focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted

Remoteness	State	Location	15-17 year olds*	18-39 year olds	40+ year olds	Intermediary Interviews	TOTAL
Urban	NSW	Sydney	2 IDIs	2 FGs	2 FGs	2 IDIs	4 FGs + 4 IDIs
Urban	NSW	Queanbeyan	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 4 IDIs
Urban	ACT	Canberra	2 IDIs	6 IDIs	2 FGs	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 10 IDIs
Urban	VIC	Melbourne	2 IDIs	2 FGs	2 FGs	2 IDIs	4 FGs + 4 IDIs
Urban	QLD	Brisbane	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 4 IDIs
Urban	SA	Adelaide	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	1 IDI	2 FGs + 3 IDIs
Regional	QLD	Cherbourg	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 4 IDIs
Regional	QLD	Roma	2 IDIs	1 FG	1FG	1 IDI	2 FGs + 3 IDIs
Regional	QLD	Cairns	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 4 IDIs



Regional	SA	Port Augusta	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 4 IDIs
Regional	NT	Alice Springs	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	1 IDIs	2 FGs + 3 IDIs
Remote	QLD	Bamaga	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	3 IDIs	2 FGs + 5 IDIs
Remote	QLD	Thursday Island	3 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 5 IDIs
Remote	QLD	Mount Isa	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 4 IDIs
Remote	QLD	Palm Island	1 IDI	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 3 IDIs
Remote	SA	Ceduna	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 4 IDIs
Remote	SA	APY Lands	1 IDI	10 IDIs	16 IDIs	2 IDIs	29 IDIs
Remote	NT	Yuendumu	2 IDIs	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 4 IDIs
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>35 IDIs</b>	<b>18 FGs + 16 IDIs</b>	<b>20 FGs + 16 IDIs</b>	<b>34 IDIs</b>	<b>38 FGs + 101 IDIs</b>

*\*IDIs with 15 - 17 year olds were conducted in pairs where possible*

Respondents were recruited through local Indigenous organisations, who assisted with the facilitation of focus groups and interviews.

Discussion guides were developed in collaboration with the ASC in order to maintain consistency across focus groups and IDIs, and were informed by the findings and recommendations from phase one, as well as the overall objectives of the research (see appendix B for a copy of the final discussion guide).

## 5.2 Analysis of findings

This research phase was qualitative in nature and hence the results and findings are presented in a qualitative manner. This research approach does not allow for the exact number of participants holding a particular view on individual issues to be measured. This report, therefore, provides an indication of common themes and reactions among research participants rather than exact proportions of participants who felt a certain way.

## 6 Key Findings

### 6.1 Defining sport or physical activity

To begin with, participants were asked to define sport or physical activity and state what first comes to mind about the topic. For many respondents their definition centred on specific sports, especially football. For an even greater number of respondents their definition and top of mind associations with sport were around the perceived positive outcomes of playing such as:

- Making friends / socialising / having fun / friendly competition;
- Doing something active / physical activity;
- Bonding / teamwork / being committed; and
- Health / wellbeing / mind set / keeping fit.

‘Walking’ was generally not a top of mind response for most participants when asked about physical activity. However, when prompted, participants agreed that walking was a form of physical activity and for some it was their main source of exercise. For many respondents walking was their main form of transport, hence it was not a ‘top of mind’ response when discussing physical activity as it was a functional aspect of their lives.

### 6.1 An overview of sports and physical activity participation in the Indigenous community

To provide some context it is useful to reflect on the general sports and physical activity participation and behaviour amongst Indigenous people, as well as the overall importance of sport within Indigenous communities.

In general, participation in sports and physical activity tended to decline with age, with school aged children typically participating in a wide range of sports.

Football (all codes), were by far the most common sport within Indigenous communities. Respondents played themselves, their children played and/or they were involved with the sport in some other form (e.g spectators or organisers). During discussions on sport, Rugby League and Australian Football were generally the first sports that would come to mind. Within South Australia (SA) and Victoria, Australian Football was the most common football code, whereas Rugby League dominated within other states.

“I reckon with the blackfella, rugby's a big one”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

“Footy is the only sport available in town. During the off season, you can play basketball and soccer but that [soccer] stopped two to three years ago. Don’t know why it stopped but it would be good to get that back on.”

Remote, Intermediary

“Out this way it's mainly football and touch”

Regional, aged 40 and over

“Around here, it's always rugby.”

Regional, aged 40 and over

The two other dominant sports across communities were basketball and netball (for girls). Within regional and remote communities, where there were generally fewer opportunities available, the three most common sports (football, basketball and netball) were often cited as the main (if not only) sports easily accessible. However, this did vary within some remote communities where softball was the most common sport amongst women and girls, rather than netball.

“Not much of a choice here. It's either rugby league or netball at the moment”

Regional, aged 18 to 39 years

“There's not many sports around here. It's either football, basketball, netball.”

Regional, aged 18 to 39 years

“I think focusing on Aboriginal people, I suppose it's more footie, netball, basketball, they're like the main, you know, or in Adelaide when I grew up, that's what I've seen anyways as the main sports that they play.”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

“That’s all we got here in Ceduna is football. Football and netball.”

Remote, aged 40 and over

These were the sports most commonly associated with Indigenous participation across all states and regions, but many respondents expressed a desire to branch out and would welcome the inclusion of other sports within Indigenous carnivals.

“We need more variety of sports.”

Remote, 40 and over

“My son is playing cricket, and I wanted him to play because you don’t see any Indigenous kids playing cricket”

Urban, aged 40 and over

Across all locations school aged children were more likely than older people to participate in multiple sports and physical activities. This included organised sports through clubs or school teams, as well as ‘casual’ games amongst their friends. These were played regularly at school, after school and on weekends.

In later teenage years, while some continued to be involved in organised team sports, others changed activities somewhat by starting to take up individual sports like boxing or non-sporting activities like going to the gym. This was particularly common within urban locations where these facilities and opportunities were more readily available.

Organised sports participation tended to continue into early adulthood, but with an increasing number of people dropping out as age progressed. This often coincided with Indigenous people leaving their remote or regional community for work or further study, and was associated with disconnecting from their established community/extended family with whom they had often participated in sport.

In addition to this dislocation, young adults also became much busier with work and young children often causing a break from physical activity and sports involvement generally.

“But um, it just gets away from you. You give it (sport) up for a year, and that’s it. Hard to get back into it. You go out having a baby. That’s one of the hardest things to do. I know with seniors touch football that’s what the adult comp is called, there’d, there’d be a handful of people that I could think of, the Indigenous people that play touch footie, at that age. You know, into their 40s. In their 20s and early 30s maybe, sure, but once the family comes along...”

Urban, aged 40 and over

For adults (both younger and older) non-sport activities like ‘boot camp’ and going to the gym (where they are available), or more passive activities (especially walking) were popular and this often continues into later life.

“Yeah, I do walking. With the kids. I go to the gym with my daughters.”

Urban, aged 40 and over

“Just mainly walking. I do a lot of walking. I walk every day, ten or twenty minutes.”

Remote, aged 40 and over

“I walk all day long, only stop at midday for lunch or if it gets too hot”

Remote, aged 40 and over

Playing sports outside of clubs within regional and some remote locations also became more popular with those aged 18 to 39 years, as informal games amongst friends were less competitive, less structured and fitted their busier lifestyles. This was particularly relevant for those who lived in communities with limited access to alternative sources of exercises such as gyms.

“We just wanted to try something different so we started playing [volleyball]. We got our own posts and stuff. People saw we were playing all the time and wanted to join in. It’s really popular now”

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

For many respondents, their line of work e.g. as a labourer, cleaner or on a camel yard (common within the APY Lands), meant they were already getting a physical workout and therefore they were less inclined to participate in organised sport.

“After a day of work, I’m stuffed, my job’s really labour intensive so I don’t need to go to the gym”

Regional, aged 18 to 39 years

In middle age some adults make a conscious effort to get fit or take better care of their health and this is typically associated with a combination of activities like walking, going to the gym, or doing ‘boot camp’. A very small proportion of respondents returned to the sports they played in their youth. A detailed case study of the can be found in appendix A (see Case Study 1).

“That’s why I like doing boot camp. That’s for me.”

Regional, aged 18 to 39 years

“I had a check-up with my GP about 9 months ago and he said “Dan, if you don’t do something to lose weight, you are not going to be around much longer.” That day I decided I am going to do something about this.”

Urban, aged 40 and over

Cultural practices which are physically active were very common amongst Indigenous people within remote locations; and for adults within these regions, were often the most common form of physical activity. Cultural activities were also mentioned within regional areas, and to a smaller extent urban communities. These activities varied by location. Within North

Queensland remote communities (Bamaga, Palm Island and Thursday Island) spearfishing and skin diving were very common. Within central Australia remote communities (Yuendumu and APY Lands) visiting local watering holes and digging for honey ants (particularly amongst older women) were popular activities. Activities which were consistent across different regions included hunting, foraging, traditional dancing and going out into the bush for extended periods at a time.

“I’d just get all of the younger ones together and we’d go spearfishing or out bush chasing possums”

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

“Indigenous people hunt for food.”

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

“We go to get true bush tucker”

APY Lands, aged 18 to 39 years

Although it was acknowledged that cultural activities, such as hunting and foraging were physically demanding and kept them healthy, their focus was on how it kept them spiritually connected to their country, their community and kept their traditions alive.

“Living off the land makes my spirit happy”

Remote, aged 40 and over

“This is our country, we need to remember how to look after it and respect it”

Remote, aged 40 and over

Within remote SA it was mentioned that taking children out of town, away from trouble e.g. drugs and alcohol, and teaching them how to hunt and survive in the bush is a way of helping children realise their possible potential in sport.

“There is a lot of that. A lot of crime, a lot of drugs... That's why you need this to get them out of town to show them for a couple of days, for a week. Also, you can see as they interact with each other. Also, when they do that kind of stuff, that brings them closer into sports, they know how each other play, they know how much power they got in their legs. You know exactly what they can do and how much ... It's a good season. That way of getting to know them is a thing too, then you know what they can do in the sports world as well.”

Remote, aged 40 and over

Taking children on hunting trips and camping trips were additionally seen as being crucial to ensuring their traditional customs were passed on to the younger generation and were a

way for elders to pass on their knowledge and share their stories. This was particularly relevant within remote communities, but was also mentioned (to a lesser extent) within regional and urban communities.

“We go and we tell our stories and lessons to the younger ones, just as we use to do”

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

Overall, a key theme which emerged across the fieldwork was how physical activity and sport (either playing or assisting) was a source of pride within Indigenous communities and a key part of Indigenous people’s identity. This included pride in the sense of Indigenous people having a natural ability.

“As soon as we’re walking we learn to run with a ball, it’s who we are”

Urban, aged 40 and over

“It’s always been in our blood, that talent. We can pick something up and be able to master it within a few hours, or in the sporting realm...when you look at Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander people, they’re lucky enough to be blessed with both types of muscle groups, we can be good sprinters, and we can be long distance runners”

Urban, Intermediary

“Sports always been a part of our lives. (laughs) I think from you know ... sports was all we had like growing in a small country town, I grew up in Moruya down the South Coast. If we didn’t have sport, we’d you know, get into a lot of trouble. So we just yeah, we were always playing sport. Go from one sport to another, to another.”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

“We can run fast and for long periods of time, our kids swim like fish”

Remote, aged 40 and over

I think it’s going back generations. Just natural to them as well, I find. They’re just naturally talented at it, so they play it. And I think going back yeah know, to the olden days, a lot of the past, uncles, aunties.”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

Also consistent across all locations was that sport is key in bringing the community together in a positive way, where everyone can be themselves and helps maintain the connection amongst Indigenous community members.

“It takes a community to raise a child. Everyone goes to the games and looks after the kids. The players, aunties, uncles, volunteers. Thousands can come along. It’s our modern day corroboree.”

Urban, aged 40 and over

“Sport is a conduit for talking about culture and spirituality. Everyone needs a place to go sometimes and to have someone to talk to.”

Urban, aged 40 and over

## 6.1.1 Participation patterns amongst Indigenous Youth aged 15-17 years

This section provides context on current participation and behaviours towards sport and physical activity, specifically related to teenagers aged 15 to 17 years. Typically, young people of this age participate in a wide range of sports – rugby league and AFL (within SA and Victoria) for boys, and netball for girls being the most common. Touch football, AusTag, boxing and soccer were also very popular for both sexes. In late school years some youth start exploring more non-sport options, such as boot camp or going to the gym with friends or family members.

“I like boxing. The atmosphere of the small gym. It’s friendly and welcoming. You can do your own thing at your own pace and take breaks when you like.”

Urban, aged 15 to 17 years

“I was just sick of sitting around at home not doing nothing so mum said we’ve got this boot camp thing here on, and [name]’s like you should come it’ll be fun, so I went and everything. It was a fun thing to do with my mum. Yeah, and also because I hadn’t like been doing exercise for ages and I hadn’t been doing no sport or nothing.”

Urban, aged 15 to 17 years

At this age cycling and walking also become more common as a practical form of transportation, particularly in regional and some remote areas where public transportation is lacking. When describing sports and physical activities they participate in, teenagers would often omit these activities, as they classed them as transportation methods rather than recreational activities; enjoyment/recreation being a key part of their definition of sport and physical activity.

These late teenage years are a pivotal time for Indigenous youth in terms of engagement with sport. Many Indigenous youth participate actively in organised sport up until this age,



but then the appeal of other social activities is often strongly exerted by their peer group and this can cause some youth to disengage from active sport.

Yeah, I think it's the teenage years and when they've got friends that are off doing, I don't know. Hanging out with the boyfriends and the girlfriends. Hanging down at the mall. Down at the mall, doing, whatever they're doing. That's more fun than having to go and play sport when I'm not an elite level player. I'm not going to get recognised for anything, so why should I participate? I'm better off just going and having fun with my mates.

Urban, aged 40 and over

Additionally, during these years, some sports clubs become more serious and competitive, in team selection, which can take out the enjoyment of playing sports causing disengagement. This is something that sport clubs need to bear in mind in ensuring youths continue to be involved in organised sports.

“As you get a bit older as well, as you start to get towards 16 they [clubs] start to get more picky, really good players and they pick their players.

Yeah I think it's cause that's when the kids start to get more physically like, start developing and stuff. They get a bit bigger and physically fitter. And if you're playing club sports you can get association, you get association or picked for state.

And I think with footie, on the higher levels it's a lot more of a business. It's a business now, it's not as enjoyable. Like with the SAFL and NFL you know. And in rugby at the moment. Sometimes I don't even want to play cause I get told I have to play in certain grade when I don't wanna play in that, I want to play with a lower grade so I can enjoy it. Then it takes the enjoyment out of it. It used to be play for fun. And as you get to the higher levels it's a bit more serious and it takes the fun out of it.”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

A key theme which emerged from the research was that disengagement from sport at this age was also related to (or perceived to be related to) increased anti-social and harmful behaviour involving drugs, alcohol and smoking. The impact of this will be explored further in the discussion on barriers and decision-making.

“[on why others their age aren't participating] they take drugs and go out drinking”

Regional, aged 15 to 17 years

It is also this age when many teenagers are striving to play professionally, and are playing for (or attempting to play for) senior representative teams. For players from regional and remote areas this generally required travelling to different locations away from family and friends. For teenagers who are attempting to reach the next level of sporting competitions and do not succeed, this can have a major impact on their future participation, and may cause them to drop out of sport completely.

It is at this age that schools, community groups and families have a role to play in ensuring youth continue to be engaged and supported to participate in sport. Facilitation by family, schools, sports clubs is key in ensuring children (and their parents) take steps to stay engaged in sports at this age. This involves a variety of measures – encouragement, financial support and transport (as discussed further in the report).

## 6.2 The decision-making process – participation drivers and barriers

### 6.2.1 Drivers

The process of deciding whether to engage in sport, and specifically which sports, varies by age. Participation in sport starts at a young age (primary school). At school participation is primarily determined by parental choice as well as parents’ and siblings’ involvement in sport, the sports played by the extended family (cousins, uncles, aunts) and friends. Growing up around those who played sport from a young age is typically how their involvement in sport begins and strongly influences what sports they play.

“In today's sports, Indigenous people want to try and get somewhere with their lives and all that kind of stuff.”

**Where does that come from?**

“Maybe it comes from the parents. Just keeps telling them to do the stuff and it motivates them. At the end of the day, you might get selected for a high league level.

It basically who motivates you and who drives you. My parents, your brothers, cousins, your sisters, all that kind of stuff, if you're good at one specific sport. They just keep nagging you until you get it until you haven't had that mind set. Friends and family. They just motivate you.

It starts with your family and just builds up from there.

Let's just say if you were young and your parents tell you that you should play netball and you play netball for a couple of seasons and you really liked it, it's sort of like you got driven by family and as you grow up. You start getting passion for netball."

Regional, aged 15 to 17 years

"My brother played and then, when I was the right age, I guess, we naturally played together."

Urban, aged 40 and over

"My Dad boxed and my older brother who I really looked up to as well, he boxed too. So I guess I was following them as my role models"

Urban, aged 40 and over

"If it wasn't for my mum and aunts playing I probably wouldn't play either"

Regional, aged 15 to 17 years

Perceived benefits of sport and physical activity specifically related to children included teaching them discipline, social skills and preventing anti-social and destructive behaviour.

"It teaches them discipline, if they don't show up to training and work for it they can't play"

Regional, Intermediary

"Kids are always on the streets causing trouble because there's nothing for them to do out here, at least if they're playing sport they're occupied"

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

"It teaches [kids] commitment and discipline and teamwork skills"

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

"We had to play a sport. We weren't given a choice. This was the only way my mother could keep us off the street."

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

Sport also gives children something to work towards and aspire to, as many have goals to play professionally and it can open up opportunities for them such as being able to travel. Being exposed to professional Indigenous players was important, as they act as role models for children and reassure them that they can make it if they work hard enough.

“It’s something they can work towards, and seeing other Indigenous sports players lets them know they can do it if they work really hard”

Urban, aged 40 and over

Accessibility was particularly relevant for kids living within remote locations, where the activities participated in was driven by the facilities available (generally only football, basketball, netball and/or softball).

It was a wide spread belief within Indigenous communities that participating in sport and physical activity had many benefits and should be prioritised (for children and adults). When discussing the specific benefits, the most common themes which emerged could be classed under the categories of physical health benefits (e.g diabetes prevention, cardiovascular health), mental well-being (alleviates stress, improves mood), social benefits (competition, social skills, family togetherness) and pride (increasing confidence). Some respondents specifically mentioned that being physically active was important for Indigenous people due to poorer overall health outcomes within communities and a need to close the gap.

“It’s really important for our mob, with the higher rates of diabetes and heart disease”

Urban, aged 40 and over

An additional theme was that Indigenous people would often participate in physical activities for a practical reason such as transportation (e.g. walking) or just out of habit. These activities were generally not ‘top of mind’ when discussing physical activity and sport.

“We walk everywhere. Walkabout. We don’t even think of it as exercise. And spear fishing, we just say I’m gonna go bush”

Remote, aged 40 and over

“I just walk everywhere, cause right now I don't have a car”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

Overall, despite the numerous benefits of children participating in sport from the parents’ point of view, it was speculated that the main motivation for their children actively choosing to participate in sport themselves was simply to have fun.

## 6.2.2 Barriers

Barriers to participating in sport and physical activity varied by age and location, however, some recurring themes across the fieldwork included (in no particular order):

- lack of time due to other commitments, especially to family or community

- personal illness or injuries
- financial constraints
- access issues (transportation and availability of services)
- lack of cultural inclusiveness
- lack of motivation (feeling in a rut)

These barriers (plus more) are discussed in detail in this section.

Cost was one of the most frequently reported barriers to participation – both for adults and their children. Incurred expenses included seasonal costs, including the cost of seasonal enrolment/registration in sport, as well as buying sporting gear (especially football boots and uniforms). Financial stress on parents increased with having a greater number of children playing multiple sports. Even when costs were partly subsidised by clubs, parents would often still struggle to pay the remaining fees / additional costs. Relatively lower median incomes and a relatively high incidence of single parent families exacerbated these cost issues.

“Cause when I spoke with the guys a couple weeks ago, they said it's quite common for, if you've got a uh, a, you know, a kid who's quite sporty, that could be playing you know, rugby and AFL and basketball, for instance, so if you've got three or four kids, you know, that's, first of all, it's quite expensive, because you've got you know, three kids times three sports times three registration fees. Boots, outfits, and then you've got to find a way to kind of ferry them around. Get them, get them from one place to another.”

Urban aged 40 and over

“It may not seem that expensive but then you need to times it by 5 [children]”

Regional, 18 to 39 years

“And then you've got to take all your kids to the sporting event anyway, and then if there's food there you've got to spend that on food. They're like seven or eight dollars a pie mate. What they made of - gold?”

Urban, aged 40 and over

Children and teenagers who were playing at higher levels within representative teams were often required to travel away from home, especially those who lived in remote and some regional locations across all states. Being able to travel as part of a sporting team was generally perceived as a positive opportunity, but was also extremely difficult without funding to cover the costs. These trips would often involve extremely long drives (10 hours or

more) and/or plane and boat trips from communities, which were quite expensive. Therefore, somewhat paradoxically, the better children were at sports, the more challenging financial issues reportedly became.

“My boy, when he used to get picked to go away and that, I used to say to him, “I’d love you to go and play sports, I’d love you to go mix with other people and get to meet other young blokes and that. But because I was a single mother, you know and trying to get the money together to get him there, that’s what I’d done. I worked to get him there, because I knew that it’d break his heart for him not to get there, and that’s what I’d done to sacrifice for my son to go to any sports.”

Regional, aged 40 and over

The high cost of children’s sporting participation was often cited as a barrier to parents’ participation, with parents sacrificing their own activity so their children could play. Many parents felt that by spending money on their own participation they were taking funds away from their children.

“Everyone has to work together to get the kids there.”

Urban, aged 40 and over

“I’d rather make sure they’re able to play first”

Urban, aged 40 and over

“For me, it would be like, as a single parent, money and fees for my kids. Suppose that’s basically why I don’t really do much sports.”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

The only locations where cost was not a barrier to participation in sport and physical activity was in remote communities in central Australia (specifically APY Lands and Yuendumu). Within these communities cost was not a barrier as the majority of the sports programs within the community were free or externally funded, and participation for children was reliant on other factors such as their school attendance and behaviour. Furthermore, for adults the primary form of exercise within these locations were free outdoor activities, such as hiking and hunting.

“Kids get a wristband to show they attended school that day, if they don’t have a band they can’t access the swimming pool, ‘no school, no swimming pool”

### Remote, Intermediary

A lack of time was cited as a major barrier to participation for adults. The decline in sporting participation in early adulthood was exacerbated by the demands of employment and family. Increased responsibilities generally resulted in a lack of motivation to be physically active and respondents often reported that once they stopped being active they fell into a 'rut' which they found difficult to get out of and back into sport or physical activity.

"After three jobs, what I like to do, all I want to do is go and rest"

Regional, aged 40 and over

"I don't do anything. I used to but I don't anymore, because I work everyday"

Urban, aged 15 to 17 years

Within regional and remote Indigenous communities, geographical isolation also became an issue for local clubs. For remote and some regional communities, they often did not have adequate facilities or fields to play a competition. Therefore local teams were always required to travel and would not have any 'home games', despite neighbouring clubs expressing willingness to share the travel. Being required to travel for games increased the amount of time required for participation, increased the cost of participation and placed a larger burden on the organisers to arrange transportation. Within remote communities in central Australia four-wheel drives were generally required to travel between communities which increased this burden. The increased travel time to games (in remote and some regional locations) would additionally prohibit family members and the community from being as involved in the competitions and being spectators to the sports. This limited the sense of family and community togetherness, which was identified as a key driver of participation mentioned in section 6.2.1.

"They've got the netball courts and stuff here, but it's not in good condition...we had to get a bus to go back and forward, and it was even harder to get parents to come, because most of the parents got younger children as well, and babies...

...some people started to drop off. Especially the younger ones in the midgets, because my son was playing football too, and they said they was getting tired of travelling back and forth, and also, with the lack of parents coming, and their parents coming...

...[Neighbouring Netball club] said that they wanted to come over here one weekend. To make it easier for us, but we don't have any netball courts here available, where we could come and play. That was a very hard thing for us...

...it'll be a lot better if we can get netball courts here made somewhere. I think it was in the process of being talked about, but I reckon once we get courts and stuff here, we'll have more parents and more involvement in the community, with our girls, because all up in the season we've only had like 10 parents come over, in the whole season to watch them..."

Regional, Intermediary

"This year all of our games have been away games on the mainland, which costs thousands of dollars in transportation for all teams... it takes up so much time for the players and staff, especially once they're older and have more commitments."

Remote, Intermediary

Transportation as a barrier was additionally relevant for local games within urban, regional and some remote locations. Many areas lacked adequate public transportation and younger players had to rely on relatives or friends to assist on getting them to games and training if their parents were not able to. Transportation was particularly challenging for families with multiple children, and if taxis were required this contributed to the overall cost of participation.

"And also, cause with [name removed], me and all my other brothers and his older brothers, we played rugby as well so, it just makes it easy sometimes if everyone's playing the same sport, cause it's all in the same spot. We're all in the same place rather than, cause when we all played different sports, mom used to have drive us and sometimes we'd have to play half games like two different sports and we'd miss out on playing because we'd have to go to the other brother's sports and stuff."

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

"It's not a large community but you still can't walk to one end to the other, you have to rely on a car or taxis which are so expensive"

Remote, aged 40 and over

As children enter teenage years barriers to participating in sport and physical activity increase. It is during these teenage years that the concept of 'shame' becomes prevalent as an influence on decision making. In Indigenous communities the concept of shame is the sense of wanting to fit in and in particular being reticent to stand out from the crowd and thus exposing yourself to potential ridicule. This leads to a timidity in participating unless



accompanied by other members of one's family or peer group and emerged as a barrier to participation which continued into late adulthood.

"I reckon shame is a big thing in our mob, like you don't want to go out there and do something wrong with everyone watching"

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

"Yeah. And, um, both his sisters did it ... with, um, with me for a while. I went along with them, just to give them support because they wouldn't go by themselves. They're too shy and they, they always have this shame factor. You know, "No, Mum, I'm too ashamed. I can't do it by myself." "

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

Shame also became a large issue for Indigenous people trying to get involved in sport and/or physical activity for the first time or after a long break. This was highlighted as a key reason why Indigenous people felt it was so important to get their children involved in sport from a young age, as it is much harder to get involved later in life. Shame was also higher amongst respondents who felt they were 'out of shape', creating an unhealthy cycle where they would want to get fit, but feel they could not participate until they were able to keep up with others around them.

"I think there's a shame when you're a bigger person, trying to get out and exercise with other people"

Regional, aged 40 and over

"[why they wouldn't go to a gym] I'm just embarrassed. That's all"

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

Many women additionally felt less comfortable exercising with men around (particularly in remote QLD); due to cultural reasons around what was deemed appropriate as well as a greater sense of self-consciousness. Women-only boot-camps or gyms/gym times therefore had a large appeal amongst Indigenous women within these locations.

"[Exercising with a male] it could be completely harmless and they're even related to you, but people just look at you like you're doing something wrong"

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

Injuries and declining health as a barrier was also a recurring theme amongst older groups. This included a fear that they were no longer able to keep up with the competition and sports which were available.

“I’m 39 and I’m a big guy. I was going out to play football with the team but I said no 'cause I thought I'd have a heart attack.”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

“I'd like to be doing a lot of it, but the age won't let me...the mind wants to but the body won't go along with it!

Regional, aged 40 and over

“I used to play AFL, rugby, basketball, 10 pin bowling golf, netball. I’ve now retired from everything except golf and Indigenous dancing due to injuries to my knees and shoulders.”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

When prompted on activities that were less strenuous than club sports, such as yoga, pilates or gentle gym exercises, there was a feeling of exclusion, given that these were not sports or activities typically associated with Indigenous participation (i.e football, basketball, netball and/or softball). In remote north QLD, some respondents expressed a perception that these activities or classes were for ‘white people’.

“My daughter was going [to gym classes] but there was only white people and no one from our mob there to make her feel comfortable”

Urban, aged 40 and over

“There’s women’s yoga and pilates classes but it’s just the white women who do that”

Remote, aged 40 and over

“[Pilates] only the white people do it here”

Remote, aged 40 and over

Cost was again a barrier to organised fitness classes or gym activities which were not as physically intense as club sport. Many respondents from urban SA viewed gyms as an unnecessary expense given that parks in Adelaide offer gym equipment at no expense.

“[On joining a gym] It's like too expensive...memberships are ridiculous...it’s more than playing sports”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

“I was going to the gym last year but then I just couldn't afford it”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

“[Gym is] too expensive, it costs nothing to walk does it? Mostly the parks in our area have gym equipment. It’s easy, so you walk there and it’s your warm up.”

Urban, aged 40 and over

Non-inclusive practices emerged for some respondents as a barrier to participation. This included a perception of nepotism within community sports clubs, which resulted in certain families feeling left out of the process.

“Sometimes there’s lots of bitchiness in teams – families choose the teams only from their family. It’s killed netball here. Killed people’s motivation – adults and kids. The kids pick up on it and sense it”

Remote, aged 40 and over

### 6.2.3 Decision-making

All of the drivers and barriers discussed above are instrumental in the decision making-process around what sports and physical activities Indigenous people participate in (if any).

Amongst children, the ultimate decision on what sports and physical activities they participated in (if anything) was generally left up to them, with parents acting as facilitators by giving them the options. Children’s decisions on sport and physical activity were however strongly influenced by their family members and peer groups, as they would tend to play the same sports as their siblings, parents or friends at school.

“Yeah, I give them the option on what they want to do”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

In-school sport also played a key role in the sport and physical activity children decided to play outside of school. During school was when children would generally have the option to play a variety of sports casually (with friends or peers), and from this experience they would decide the sports they wanted to play competitively through a club.

Most parents reported that they did actively encourage their children to participate in sport, but they did not force them.

“We give them a choice, sister. It’s a choice you know. We don’t force anybody, or put pressure anybody. We just give them that opportunity or choice”

Regional, 40 and over

The overall theme was that when children were younger, very little encouragement was required and that they would just be active on their own without any parental intervention.

This changed as they entered into early and late teenage years when other ‘temptations’ (e.g social outings, social media and other screen time activities) became increasingly popular.

The decision making process differed greatly for adults and was highly dependent on the barriers discussed in the previous section. Older adults would often base their decisions on what they could fit in around their employment, family and community responsibilities. This often meant getting involved in activities they could participate in alongside their children, such as traditional dancing classes, sports they could play at the same time (e.g. both play Saturday games one after another) or activities they could do on their own time (e.g. walking).

“I have mother and daughters play, on my team...they love playing alongside their mother, with their daughter, and all that”

Regional, aged 40 and over

Additionally, in remote locations the sports that were available and popular were often dependent on the individuals available with the required skills to take responsibility for programs. For example, in one remote area there was a family who organised and set up a successful judo club which was very popular with the local children and flourished. However, when the family could no longer take responsibility for running the club – due to time and money barriers – there was nobody with the required experience and skills to continue the program to the same extent, and popularity of the sport diminished. Similarly, within another remote location tennis was really popular while there was a ‘white family’ who arranged and encouraged it. However, once the family moved on, popularity of the sport again dropped drastically. These are examples of how the choices of Indigenous people in remote locations to play sport are often framed by the preferred sports of those (often ‘white people’) who are willing / able to organise programs.

## 6.2.4 15-17 years

This section details the barriers and drivers to participating in sports and physical activity specifically related to 15 to 17 year olds.

While there was a high level of understanding of the health and social benefits of sport and physical activity, 15 to 17 year olds would rarely cite these benefits as a motivating factor. Instead, their primary motivation was more about the game itself and that it was fun; enjoyment being a key part of their definition of sport and physical activity.

As mentioned earlier, it is during teenage years that participation is impacted strongly by peers, and participation is negatively impacted by other temptations (e.g. social outings, screen activities – TV, Social Media etc).

It is also within this age group that decreased sport and physical activity can be due to increased anti-social and harmful behaviour (e.g. smoking, drinking and illicit drug taking).

A teenager within a remote community told his story about how he stopped playing Rugby League due to his smoking and drinking behaviour, as he could no longer keep up with his other team mates. He expressed regret at no longer playing and stated that he would like to get back into sport, but acknowledged that he first needs to address his drinking, which started through the influence of his friends.

By way of comparison, other teenagers of the same age who had continued to play sport, candidly discussed that if they were not playing sport and being occupied on weekends they themselves would be more likely to be involved in anti-social and harmful behaviour.

Parental encouragement and involvement was a key factor in teenagers continuing to participate in sport across all locations.

## **6.3 How to encourage and increase sports and physical activity participation. What are the key success factors?**

Given the reported barriers and drivers of participation discussed above, suggestions to encourage greater participation in sports and physical activity centred, not surprisingly, around the same key areas.

### **6.3.1 Provision of holistic programs that promote the participation of Indigenous families' and communities', overall healthy-living and cultural teachings**

The value of providing sporting and physical activity programs that provide a sense of inclusiveness in relation to the involvement of families and communities was seen as a critically important factor in attracting Indigenous people to participate and to sustain involvement. Such initiatives could be as simple as sporting clubs involving parents or extended family members in volunteer roles, the inclusion of parents within the games (e.g. mother-daughter games) or inviting members of the Indigenous community to meetings to ensure they are being considered.

If sporting programs were conducted by Indigenous community organisations, by definition these included a community component. Intermediaries frequently reported that there is a large amount of bureaucracy and red-tape to apply for funding and establish clubs and programs. Being able to reduce the processes required would facilitate the creation of more local Indigenous clubs or programs run through Indigenous organisations.

Sports and physical activity programs which included overall healthy-living programs (e.g. a focus on nutrition as well) were perceived to be of added value, particularly to educate children early on about the importance of eating the right foods, and the benefits of exercising or playing sports.

“I guess from my experience what I've noticed is a lot of the good sports programmes they'll have the ... they'll kind of promote healthy eating or something like that. It comes through ... it's not just promotion of healthy eating. It comes through education where a lot of the programmes that I've been in that are good, they won't just say, 'Eat healthy' , but they'll teach me why I need to eat healthy. They'll teach me about the foods that aren't good for me, why I need to exercise, why I need to keep playing sports, etc. It's just ... it comes back to the sustainability to sustain a healthy life style even outside of sports. In my experience it was in the SAASTA<sup>2</sup>.”

Urban, Intermediary

Programs that provide assistance with child care would also be beneficial for engaging those with children.

“So if we had sports that were kid friendly ... and we had options for child care and those kind of things, so that you can participate in sport, if you have small kids. Or we can organise, and then when if she wants to go and do something, she can bring them, and say, Auntie, can you have the kids while I go during this time. And then she can go and do her thing and not have the kids, you know, but so that she knows that this is going to happen on a regular basis, so ... then she could plan ahead for it. Exactly. Especially in this community. And if you don't have a lot of other family here that's able to help you out with child minding, that becomes a big, a really big barrier. Because you cannot be on the field playing sport ... with your kid going around out there by herself. (Laughing) Or someone on the sideline that's in your team, looking after them while you're on the field, or on the court.”

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<sup>2</sup> South Australian Aboriginal Sports Training Academy

Urban, aged 40 and over

Sports and physical activity programs which included overall healthy-living programs (e.g. a focus on nutrition as well) were also perceived to be of value for older adults who favoured holistic care plans for their health. It is important to ensure that Indigenous Australians are aware of 'non-standard' sporting and physical activity options that can be maintained throughout life and they can participate in despite injuries and chronic health conditions.

"I think that an issue as well is recognising that people are going to be interested in different things, but also something like, whether it's shooting or archery or whatever, that might be not something that everyone is interested in, but that's something that you can do throughout your whole life if you're aware of it as an option ... But if you're never given the option to do it, or you never know about it. Not everyone can or wants to play footy, not after you reach a certain age, you don't want to get knocked around and it plays havoc with your knees and back. And what about the older generation, you know, such as myself, I like to do some of swimming because it helps with my diabetes, it helps with my nerve pain. Keeps my back strong ... Maybe some light sports, something that's a little bit lighter."

Urban, aged 40 and over

"I used to play AFL, rugby, basketball, 10 pin bowling golf, netball. I've now retired from everything except golf and Indigenous dancing due to injuries to my knees and shoulders."

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

Within sporting clubs and programs that were aimed at children, the overall theme was that when recruiting and initially engaging kids, the focus should be on the game itself and the enjoyment that comes from playing. Once participation has been established, then overall healthy living aspects can be incorporated into the training, such as making sure players are drinking water rather than soft drink and eating fruit and vegetables to keep their fitness up.

"It's not something we focus on but it is something that's discussed in a free sense especially like food, healthy diet and stuff"

Remote, Intermediary

The encouragement and facilitation of holistic programs which include physically active traditional cultural practices and teachings can drive engagement and participation amongst Indigenous people of all ages - this was particularly evident in remote communities.. Such practices can be incorporated into current programs or be used as an alternative opportunity (compared to sport and non-sport activities such as going to the gym) to increase

participation in physical activity amongst Indigenous people in a way that celebrates their culture and educates the younger generations on local traditions.

### 6.3.2 The specific role of Sporting Clubs in supporting programs which empower and welcome Indigenous people

Sporting Clubs were seen to have a role in providing appropriately inclusive programs. While such programs did not need to be run by Indigenous people or organisations, it was seen as important that programs clearly embraced Aboriginal people and were run by people who were passionate and “in it for the long haul”.

A number of ways to ensure the inclusiveness of Aboriginal people were discussed throughout the research, but one of the main themes was that consultation with the Indigenous community prior to the establishment of large sporting clubs and/or associations was key. The easiest way to do this was to contact local Indigenous organisations for their recommendations. Community consultation was emphasised as being essential, as each Indigenous community has their own cultural protocols, which can vary largely even amongst nearby communities.

“There’s a reason they say [Aboriginal people] are the most researched but still the least understood people, we’re all so different everywhere you go”

Remote, Intermediary

Another way to ensure Indigenous people feel welcomed and are considered is to include a local Indigenous leader on the organisations management board and/or committee.

“The committee that was there were white...I think if we did have elders or aboriginal people on there, it would be more accessible for our people”

Regional, aged 40 and over

“The [Aboriginal person] that's on the committee would be getting it out to the aboriginal community and [the Indigenous community] would look at that and say well look there's a Murri there, so it must be all right, there's Murris in there running this show”

Regional, aged 40 and over

Other practices to ensure Indigenous people felt welcomed were acknowledging the welcome to country, displaying Indigenous artworks and plaques or some other signage acknowledging the traditional owners of the land.



“You'd make sure you have your flags up, first and foremost. Soon as a Murri sees a flag, they know that they're welcome”

Regional, aged 40 and over

“Some sort of aboriginal art on display, you know”

Regional, aged 40 and over

The above practices of inclusiveness would be a key step forward in breaking down barriers of what are perceived to be ‘white activities’ or non-inclusive programs, as discussed earlier under barriers.

### 6.3.3 Funding of programs

A recurrent theme throughout the discussions was the challenge of delivering sustained engagement due to limited financial resources of community organisations which often operate successful programs. If the programs cannot be funded in the long term, no matter how good they are, then the benefits will not be sustained in the long term. Programs also struggle to establish long-term intervention plans within communities as they often only apply for funding which is guaranteed up to a year in advance. Not knowing what (if any) funding they will have access to long-term impedes the impact they can have within a community.

Therefore ensuring long term funding of programs that encourage Indigenous participation in sports (whether these programs are run by Indigenous community organisations or mainstream sporting clubs) is key. In particular, Indigenous community organisations’ sporting and holistic healthy lifestyle cultural programs are important to getting older Indigenous people into a less sedentary lifestyle – however, funding is usually slim.

Thus, the provision of (long term, sustainable) government funding for such programs is key. Identification of these community organisations and programs so that funding can be delivered will be a necessary first step.

### 6.3.4 Assistance with costs

A number of suggestions were made to overcome the cost issues faced by individuals (especially those faced by parents supporting children to engage in sports) in urban, regional and some remote locations. These included:

- Providing transport assistance e.g. a bus to do a group pickup or scheduled car-pooling
- Free sports boots and uniforms.
- Subsidised registration fees.

- More transparency and ease of access around financial aid which is already available.

Apart from Government or AIS funding, the corporate sector was also identified as a potential source of financial support for grass roots sporting programs.

“We asked the nearby mine for support, and as it was such a community focused program they were happy to help out”

Remote, Intermediary

Other avenues for raising funds included community based activities such as barbeques and raffles. These events were not only important for revenue raising but additionally facilitated community togetherness outside of the actual competitions. These avenues for fundraising are unable to sustain large clubs long-term, but can assist in subsidising the costs for players, and/or go towards sports gear and refreshments for players.

“Our barbecues got very popular, and once we stopped them they kept asking when are you going to be having the barbecues again?”

Regional, Intermediary

There was some uncertainty amongst organisers of newly founded programs, as well as parents, as to what funding is available to Indigenous players and sports organisations.

“We need to know more about the kind of funding and support that’s available, we raise our own money but it’s not enough”

Remote, Intermediary

### 6.3.5 Transport

Providing transport to and from matches and training was widely mentioned as a particularly important factor for encouraging participation – not just because of the cost of transport mentioned above, but because of a number of factors that intersect to make it especially problematic. This includes juggling multiple children’s training and playing schedules, and the distance/time involved to get to games and training. Several people mentioned that sometimes the only way to get children to training sessions was to drive and pick them up themselves. Ironically, many parents reported that the time spent taking children to and from games and training acted as a significant inhibitor on having the time to participate in sport or physical activity themselves.

Solutions mentioned included the use of a mini bus to pick up local children, organising car-pooling which follows a schedule, therefore alleviating any shame associated with asking other community members for assistance. Providing funding to Indigenous community organisations who fund transport services might also assist.

### 6.3.6 Available services / facilities / infrastructure

As mentioned within the barriers section, adequate facilities and sporting fields are often lacking within regional and remote areas, and sometimes the outskirts of urban areas. In several cases, facilities which had been set up and used in the past, had fallen into disrepair having not been maintained; and the communities involved expressed disappointment looking at, for example, overgrown courts and pitches. The provision, improvement and maintenance of these facilities and sporting fields would make a large difference in increasing the variety of organised sports available.

“If we have a stadium, we can have the indoors. It doesn't matter whether it's 40 degrees outside.

We can take the competition back to the community.”

Remote, aged 40 and over

### 6.3.7 Passionate local engagement

Often the most successful programs had been developed over time by a passionate and highly engaged individual/s. The ongoing success of such programs was often contingent on a single person who had had sustained involvement in setting up and organising a program. Thus at the community organisation and club level it is not sufficient for funding to be provided, it is also necessary for resources to be made available to drive initiatives.

This could be assisted by providing funding, support and encouragement and networking amongst people in similar situations, as well as fostering the involvement of others within such organisations, so that program success is not so reliant on a single individual.

The importance of role models to Indigenous behaviour change is well known. This was reiterated in these discussion groups. It was repeatedly noted that, while it was good for young Indigenous people to see Indigenous sporting celebrities, it was just as/ if not more important, for young Indigenous people to be able to engage with local Indigenous people who were examples of leading happy and healthy lives. That is, the aspirational element of the role model could relate to living a healthy, physically active life, rather than needing to be a successful sporting star.

“You should see all of the kids that follow [local male] around, they look up to him and he gets them to go out bush, and chasing possums and staying out of trouble”

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

“Good to have the older ones out there and some of the younger ones look up to my big sister. A couple of years ago, she won the best and fairest overall in the community association so all the young ones look up to her ...[the younger ones say] ‘I could be like her, I could play like her, and how does she do that’ and that all comes under training and skills.”

Remote, Intermediary

### 6.3.8 Maintaining sport and physical activity participation amongst older adults

Throughout the research it became clear that participation in sport and physical activity declined with increasing age. The reasoning for this was explored in-depth with older Indigenous groups and the results have already been discussed (declining health, greater responsibilities, focusing on their children’s participation instead etc).

Older Indigenous groups often preferred less intensive activities, in a safe environment with others of a similar age and fitness level. The overall theme was that these programs were not as common within Indigenous communities which were often very sports focused. Moreover, where these activities were available (e.g pilates, yoga, gym programs) they were often perceived to be non-inclusive.

The promotion of more inclusive gentle exercise programs for older Indigenous people, who may lack fitness or be suffering from health issues, would encourage older adults to maintain some level of physical activity. An example of a program which has successfully achieved this (as measured by participant feedback and a high level of involvement) was a running / walking club established in a remote community. The club was a long-term program which catered to community members of all fitness levels. Members would start off walking a certain distance and pace that they were comfortable with, and then as part of the program they slowly increase their pace and distance over a certain time-frame. Members were split into groups which best suited their level to ensure it was still a social program for them, without any judgement around members’ capabilities; and no competition - only a shared goal of increasing their health and fitness.

“It’s great, so many people are involved now and you can just start walking at a really gentle pace, and slowly improve to whatever level you like”

Remote, aged 40 and over

“Nobody feels any shame, they’re just doing their own thing”

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

Female-only programs were also particularly appealing to older women within Indigenous communities (especially remote locations), and greater access to female only gyms and programs would allow women to participate in physical activities in a culturally appropriate manner, without feeling self-conscious.

## **6.4 What are the differences between men's and women's experiences and understanding of sport and physical activity?**

The qualitative research (as well as the data review) did indicate some clear differences in the sporting and physical activity behaviours and preferences between men and women. Women were more likely to play netball and softball, and often preferred female only gyms and gym classes, whereas men were more likely play football (all codes), boxing and training with weights at the gym. Within remote locations, digging for honey ants was common amongst women, but not men, and for outings into the bush it was viewed as inappropriate for women to join at times, depending on the occasion and/or purpose.

There was no discernible difference observed in how Indigenous men and women define sport and physical activity, and the perceived importance/role of sport and physical activities within the community. A case study on the experience of a female respondent and her three daughters is provided in appendix A (see Case Study 2).

## **6.5 What role can sport and sport clubs play in building social capital and community capacity? What are the experiences with sports clubs (positive/negative)?**

The experiences of Indigenous people with sporting clubs covered a wide spectrum, though were generally positive.

In particular, clubs that embraced and respected Indigenous culture were more likely to have elicited positive reactions than others. This is not to say that only clubs with all-Indigenous or majority-Indigenous memberships could be popular amongst Indigenous participants, but cultural awareness and inclusiveness were seen as key success factors in sustaining the engagement of Indigenous participants. Examples of this being done well included practices mentioned earlier, around saying the welcome to country and acknowledging the traditional owners. Additionally cultural awareness and sensitivity amongst coaches and organisers was

crucial. This included acknowledging the community and family obligations of Indigenous players, and allowing leniency when they were unable to play as a result of these commitments.

When Aboriginal people were openly welcomed and recognised in clubs, mixed clubs and tournaments were often viewed as more favourable than Indigenous specific programs. Programs which were openly accepting of Aboriginality and diversity were viewed as being key to breaking down cultural barriers and bringing people together from all backgrounds.

“This black and white thing is bull\*\*\*\*, just let them all play together”

Remote, Intermediary

“When you say only Indigenous people can play, it’s a fine line to being everyone separate, which we don’t want to go back to segregation, you over there and us over here”

Remote, aged 40 and over

However, Indigenous-specific tournaments (such as the Murri Rugby League Carnival in QLD and the Koori Cup in NSW) were still viewed positively as a way to show off the skills of the Indigenous community and as an overall celebration of Indigenous people.

“When you get all of the brothers together that competition is fierce”

Regional, aged 40 and over

“When you're playing amongst other brothers, you go more...yeah, it brings the best out of me”

Regional, aged 40 and over

There was additionally an emerging theme in some locations that although they didn’t necessarily desire an Indigenous-only club or program, there was need for a club or program which had a larger Indigenous ownership.

“We’ve never had something of our own here, not that the other clubs aren’t welcoming, but if we had something of our own to shape it would encourage more of us to be involved”

Urban, aged 40 and over

The difficulty with starting clubs with greater Indigenous ownership is having someone within the community with the necessary skills and availability to initiate and manage it on an ongoing basis. Finding and assisting Indigenous people who are able to take on these responsibilities, was mentioned as being important as respondents expressed views that it

can be intimidating going into largely 'white' programs with people with higher education levels.

"it feels like it's always us going to them and never the other way around"

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

"It can be intimidating when these people come with their high education"

Remote, aged 18 to 39 years

An Indigenous specific program which was spoken of very highly was the South Australian Aboriginal Sports Training Academy (SAASTA), a well-recognised program focused on sports and academic achievement in high school. A case study where two teenagers describe their experience with SAASTA can be found in appendix A (see case study 3).

"Yeah, from my experience with mainstream sports clubs, I joined because I just want to play sports. Whereas say SAASTA or indigenous based sports club, I would join for it to be ... I would play sport, but also to be ... to play sport with my community, be a part of the community, come together with my community. Where it's more ... there's more focus around it than say me playing sports, or a non-indigenous sports club, it's like more meaningful to me."

Adelaide, Intermediary

Negative experiences of racism and non-inclusive practices were expressed amongst respondents. These incidents, when they did occur, were generally not viewed as being the 'norm', but still had a large impact on respondents when they did occur and effected how clubs were viewed. One teenager spoke about incidences where they had received racial slurs. Racism needs to be addressed at a grass roots level as well as from the top. Respondents within an urban location, gave the example of a local football club which has an Indigenous support worker to assist. Furthermore, there were reports that when racial slurs were spoken, clubs had forced the perpetrators to write a formal apology to the victim. In one urban location, a father described the racism experienced by his Indigenous son within an Indigenous club. The son 'looks white' and, as a result, felt very self-conscious and sometimes ostracised. This led, ultimately, to him giving up the sport, even though he was very talented.

Despite these reported incidents, the overarching theme was that clubs were viewed as being positive and played a key role within communities in facilitating sports and physical activity programs. Joining sporting clubs was seen to provide a structure and support which is not present with casual games amongst friends. It also provides coaches with expertise and experience, which enables people (particularly children) to expand their skills and have something to work towards.

Communication and advertising from clubs was also raised as being very important to ensure that communities are aware of what is available. The primary form of communication for events amongst Indigenous people was often word of mouth (particularly within regional and remote areas). Other important tools for communication were social media, as the majority of respondents had some form of social media presence and were members of local community pages which provided updates on events within the communities. Additionally, clubs and organisations could send their message out via local organisations and schools, who would be able to inform those they felt would be interested in or benefit from the programs.

The success of clubs and sports programs was generally assessed by feedback and involvement from the local community, rather than just participation rates and the number of wins by a team. Intermediaries relied heavily on this consultation and felt if people were approaching them with positive feedback, asking for more similar programs and having a good time, then they knew the program was working. Intermediaries in remote communities in Central Australia also evaluated their programs with children on the impact they have on the children's behaviour outside of the program (e.g school attendance).

Finally, it is important to note that the role of clubs within a community was about more than just facilitating a sport or tournament; it was about bringing communities and families together, developing skills (in addition to athletic ability) and making connections to assist Indigenous people throughout their lives. In one urban area, an intermediary described how the club was able to provide advice, and link people in with experts, to help members and their families; for example, legal advice, financial advice and access to job opportunities.

“It’s more than a sporting club. We all get together”

Urban, aged 40 and over

“In the clubs, you become more, like, I guess, like a big family....because you grow up through the club”

Urban, aged 18 to 39 years

“There’s the game, but there’s so much else that comes off the back of it”

Remote, Intermediary

“You get mates for life”

Remote, Intermediary



## **6.6 What opportunities would Indigenous parents like for their children? What do adults think would enable and encourage their children to participate more?**

In general, as previously stated, Indigenous parents felt it was extremely important for their children to be involved in sport and physical activity, especially activities that their children enjoyed and could play alongside friends.

Overall, parents believed that sport and physical activity were adequately prioritised and facilitated within schools. There was, however, a lot of concern expressed by parents within remote and some regional areas that there were not enough opportunities for their children outside of school. This was due to either a lack of sporting clubs, lack of facilities (gyms, sporting fields) or programs which were accessible. This was often exacerbated by a lack of public transport for their children to be able to access what was available within their own or nearby towns.

There was also concern that Indigenous children from remote and some regional areas were excluded (or not prioritised) for elite sporting programs in larger built up areas, as they were not from that area. This initial exclusion then snowballed later in life when they would try again for elite sports programs, but were disadvantaged compared to those who had been involved from a younger age. Therefore, parents and intermediaries expressed a need for more local pathways for regional and remote children and teenagers into elite programs which are well advertised and easily accessible to Indigenous parents and their children.

## 7 What can Sporting Clubs do to increase sporting participation amongst Indigenous people?

A summary of things Clubs can focus on to increase Indigenous participation:

- Don't charge people to be involved, instead rely on fundraising from local businesses and events. This is really important for Indigenous people as the costs of participation for children often meant parents would sacrifice their own participation. This was consistent across all locations except for remote communities in central Australia (specifically, Yuendumu and APY Lands).
- Making Indigenous people feel welcome, safe and included. In mainstream clubs there is often a cultural divide or even occasional racism. Examples of lack of cultural appreciation include not understanding why players haven't shown up to training, particularly if they haven't due to family / community responsibilities. Additional examples include failing to properly acknowledge Indigenous custodianship of the land (by erecting signs or by having a 'welcome to country' in formal meetings) and a lack of consultation with the Indigenous community. Clubs don't need to have an Indigenous only focus, but they do need to make it clear that Indigenous people are welcome and respected.
- Focusing on the fun aspects of the game is instrumental for children, however for longer-term engagement a focus on overall healthy lifestyles is a key driver for older adults.
- Getting peoples 'mates' involved is very important. Long termed sustained participation of Indigenous people in sports is enhanced if being done with a friend or relative.
- Getting people initially involved requires word of mouth, social media is also really helpful for communicating with people and getting your message out there, holding local community events and start by getting people to just "throw a ball around". It's all about trying different things to engage with Indigenous people and get people out of their rut.
- Mentoring is very important. It's great to have role models and professional athletes to come out and speak to Indigenous people about healthy living and the opportunities which are available to them. Additionally, equally if not more important is to have local role models from the community, who children are able to interact with on a

regular and personal basis. Local role models are absolutely key to encouraging and maintaining local participation.

- Long-term funding is crucial, and can be extremely difficult to obtain. Additionally, the impact of grass-roots programs and clubs was impacted negatively by a lack of security around funding and clubs could often only make plans from one year to the next.
- Integrating with wider healthy living programs is useful, and can stress that players' training and fitness isn't all about what they do on the field - it's also about eating and drinking well. Programs which integrate Indigenous cultural teachings or elements are also very useful in driving participation amongst Indigenous people of all ages.
- Finally, evaluating the success of programs isn't just about the number of people participating, it's also about making sure they're all having a good time and having fun, and the whole community is involved. This is key to driving sustained engagement.

## 8 Conclusion

The research affirms the central role of sport and physical activity within Indigenous communities and the importance of sporting clubs and organisations to facilitate these opportunities. Increasing participation and overcoming barriers to sports and physical activities, for both adults and children was a priority amongst Indigenous people.

The encouragement and facilitation of physically active traditional cultural practices can drive engagement and participation amongst Indigenous people of all ages – this was particularly evident in remote locations. Such practices are an alternative opportunity (compared to sport and non-sport activities such as going to the gym) to increase participation in physical activity amongst Indigenous people in a way that celebrates their culture and educates the younger generations on local traditions.

Recommendations include ensuring that programs are culturally inclusive and respectful of Indigenous people, reducing costs, and increasing opportunities which are available within remote and some regional areas. While many issues related to sporting infrastructure, public transport and economic factors are beyond the remit of sporting clubs to solve, clubs can take some practical measures to improve participation amongst Indigenous Australians.

Two simple things sporting clubs can do include:

1. Create an environment that is welcoming to Indigenous Australians. Demonstrating acceptance of cultural diversity can be done through simple measures like putting up Indigenous specific posters and having welcome to country messages before important meetings start. That promotes a sense of inclusion and acceptance amongst Indigenous people – which is key to long-term sustained engagement.
2. Work with existing grassroots Indigenous community organisations to encourage Indigenous participation. Such organisations have the trust and involvement of Indigenous people, but are often short of funds. By connecting with community organisations sporting clubs can tap into Indigenous community members and networks and resources to build sustained participation in sports programs. Instead of reinventing the wheel, consider partnering with such organisations by providing funding or specialist personnel or resources (e.g. a football coach or a bus for transport) to work together and create great programs.

## Appendix A: Case Studies

### Case Study 1 (Participation in middle to older age)

#### A Case Study – Urban, aged 40 and over

*I am 63 years old. And I am pretty active now. Go to the gym 4 times per week, mainly doing weights and cardio, and also try to walk as much as I can. I also do a fair bit of fly fishing with my son-in-law. My diet is also something I am keeping on top of.*

*When I was young I did everything. I played rugby league with multiple teams and I was good too. Every team I played with I ended up being the captain. I took up boxing when I was a teenager and got into that because my old man was semi-professional and also because my older brother who I looked up to boxed as well. My old man passed away when I was nine and from then on my older brother was I guess more of a father figure for me.*

*Played tennis too and I was pretty good at it too.*

#### What happened?

*Life happened. I got married at 18 had my first kid at 19 and a second a couple years later. So I moved (from the South Coast of NSW) to Sydney and I was working two jobs to make ends meet. Rent to pay and mouths to feed. I worked as a courier by day – starting early and finishing in the afternoon and then I ran a photography business at night - doing weddings and things. The exercise and sport just went out the window. You put your own needs and your own fun second. That's what you do, isn't it? It's about doing what you need to for your family and the next thing you know you are spending all of your spare time on the weekend driving them (kids) to their sporting games and training! No time for yourself. Of course, once I'd moved away (from my community) I left my friends and family and team mates behind. You know, so even if I'd had the time for footy which I didn't, how would I find another team to be part of? You know, it's, I think, it's harder for Kooris. Harder to break into a new group. If you grow up in the community, with cousins and uncles and such, but you can't easily replace that in a new city. How do you break into the group? It's a confidence thing. Like shame, you know. You don't want to put yourself out there, you know.*

#### What did you do to turn things around?

*For me it is simple, I had a check-up with my GP about 9 months ago and he said "Dan, if you don't do something to lose weight, you are not going to be around much longer." That day I decided I am going to do something about this. My daughter had just had twin girls and I thought, what am I doing? Do I want to see them grow up or not? They are the*

*motivator for me. Am I going to see them go to school? Am I going to see them graduate? Within the first 3 months I lost 9 kilograms. I was morbidly obese and now I'm not any more. And the more weight I lose the easier it is to lose more. And the more things I can do. Before I couldn't walk without huffing and puffing. Now I have taken up fly fishing again. When you go fly fishing for the day you know you can walk for 20 kilometres, you know. And my son-in-law loves it too so that is a good way to connect with him and stay involved in my grandkids' lives. It's something we can share and have a bit of fun together. I guess you could say I have come full circle. I stopped doing footy and exercising when I was younger because of my family and what I needed to do to take care of them. Now, my family is the motivation for me to get my rear back into gear, so to speak.*

## Case Study 2 (Men's and women's experiences and understanding of sport and physical activity)

### A Case Study – Urban, aged 40 and over (Female)

*I'm 40 years old and have three girls of my own – all in school. I would like to do more but it is very hard, you know. The main thing for me is my weight, I'm quite overweight now, and that has a number of impacts. Firstly, it makes me less mobile, secondly plays havoc with my knees. When I was younger I played netball heaps. I was actually really good at it and loved it. I grew up on a (cattle) station near Dubbo and I also used to do competitive bull riding.*

#### And what about now?

*Now, I don't really do anything (in terms of sport or physical activity). It's hard. I don't have the money (to participate in organised sport), but also my health is not great which restricts me from doing a lot. I have mobility problems, which has led to me gaining a lot of weight. So I don't do anything anymore unfortunately. I guess I am not setting a real good example for my girls.*

#### What happened?

*I had a bull riding accident when I was nineteen. Real bad. Almost killed me. I ended up with a steel plate in my spine and another one in my leg. I have three girls of my own now and they do netball as well, but only at school. One of them is good. Has real talent I think, but I can't afford for her to do it outside of school.*

#### So lack of money is a problem?

*Yes, of course. You've got the registration fees and the uniform, shoes. It all adds up. And I have three girls and you can't support one and not the others, so by the time you add it all up. You have the away games and traveling there too. Petrol money. It all adds up. It's not just the money though. Because of my back I can't drive for long periods and in any case I can't afford to run a car, and the public transport on the weekends is terrible. Plus I am on a pension and can't work full-time, again because of my back. Everything compounds you see. Because of my back I am less mobile, which means I put on weight which I really need to lose. But the weight makes it even harder to get around. I feel like I am trapped a bit. How do I get out of the spiral – it's not easy to see. I am on a (disability) pension but I'm a single mum, girls Dad shot through, it was all too hard for him. That's how I ended up in Canberra because my brother works here for the government and he said come down here Sis, so that's how I'm here now.*

**What would help you get more active?**

*I am trying to walk more and build it up a bit you know. I think that is the way. But some days even that is hard. The key for me will be to lose weight. But I don't think I will ever be able to be like I was when I was young because of my back.*

**What about your girls? What support could you get for them to see them participate more?**

*Like I said, money is a problem. Transport is a problem. Uniform and shoes are a problem. I would like to see them be able to get the opportunities like other kids but it's hard to see, it's really hard to see... I certainly hope for something better than their Mum's experience.*



## Case Study 3 (SAASTA Experience)

### A Case Study – Urban, 15 and 17 year olds (Paired Interview)

I'm [respondent 1], I'm not currently in a football team, but I do SAASTA Academy at school. Year ten to year twelve, I'm year ten. I also do ice hockey at school, Ice Factor. I'm 15.

I'm [respondent 2] and I'm 17. I'm playing netball, but I don't play for a club, I just do SAASTA.

#### So SAASTA is a programme?

Yeah. It's an in school thing. First we did Frisbee, baseball, but the main ones is football Power Cup and netball SAASTA Shield. They're the ones we're graded on. Right now, what we've done in the past, we practise on football that whole term. Then lead up to Power Cup, we practise for that. That's football. Power Cup is all football games, which all schools go to, it's a big event for all the schools that have the SAASTA programme in it. It is really good, it's so much fun.

#### So it's a programme for Indigenous students?

Yeah Indigenous students at every school from around South Australia. You have to keep your grades and your attendance. You have to make sure attendance, you go to school and your grades are good, so you can stay in SAASTA and participate in all the activities. You get 200 SACE points in credit so you can pass. So you can pass year 12 at the end of the year.

#### Oh, so this goes towards your school?

SAASTA, the school programme in general, it is a choice. I don't have to be in it. Yeah, it's really good. They give you tutor as well for normal classes. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, normal school days, then Friday is the SAASTA day. SAASTA for the rest of the day. It's inside the school, it's just we have a Nunga room and it's in the school. I like it better in there. I feel more comfortable because you're with the SAASTA people. And you're around everyone that does the exact same stuff as you, and you all the same interests. It's really good. Yeah, yeah, you don't feel like you're lower, you don't feel like you're higher. We do booklets, and we have to finish them booklets and design our own guernseys. ... and design everything ourselves to get to the Power Cup.

We've already finished the Power Cup, so right now we're studying and doing booklets for our SAASTA Shield. Yeah, which is netball. That's coming up. So we have two days of the Power Cup at the Port Adelaide Football Club, the Port Adelaide one, where Port Adelaide obviously because they have a lot to do with it. That's why it's the Power Cup, Port Power. They run everything basically. So the Port Adelaide - Santos. The Port Adelaide Football Club, we go there for two days and play a bunch of football games and that, to see who wins and loses obviously. The two teams out of all of them, because you have to verse every team and build it up, and build it up to the last two teams that win. So there's a boys team and a girls team. Them two last teams, they get to play at Adelaide

Oval verse each other, and that's where we went. It was the best. Most girls, the girls in our class, none of them play football for a club, but we all love playing it at SAASTA.

#### **Why is that?**

We don't even ... like all the girls, we don't even get it. It's just we love doing it when we all comes together. We don't like playing for ... I wouldn't like playing for other club, because I wouldn't feel comfortable, but that's just me.

#### **Why do you do sport?**

Well the reason I do SAASTA was because [respondent 2] is in SAASTA, but then the reason that I want to stay in it and be in it, is just because I love being around the people in there, and I'm just happy when I'm with them. I don't think about anything else, I don't think about what I need to do, it's just like netball and get my booklet done and that, but it's nothing bad. I enjoy doing work in SAASTA and that, but with other classes I can say I don't really feel as comfortable as I do with them. There's more like I'm hanging out with brothers and sisters there.

#### **What are the barriers to being involved in more sports?**

The one thing that made me nervous when I was living with my mom was that bills, like with netball bills, that was a lot why I stopped playing. I was too embarrassed [of the registration fees]. That's why I love SAASTA because it's all free. They just pay for me to play. They give us summer uniforms and winter uniforms. They give us free football boots for Power Cup. Yeah, and it makes you feel good because it's expensive.

Like [respondent 2] was saying, no kids really feel like they're missing. And you feel good when you have all this uniform and all this stuff together as a team. You feel more confident, and better. You don't stress out about it. Because you know there's other people there, like, have gone through the same stuff as you, or something like that. They all get excited when there's free stuff, we all get excited as a team. It's funny. Even our school uniforms for school, it covers ... Our aboriginal teacher, I was cold and I didn't bring my jumper, and then she got me a winter uniform from SAASTA. So they don't let up, they don't make us go without whatever. Even with lunches, they pay for our lunches too if we need. They help us out when we really need it.

#### **What could encourage you to do more sports and physical activity?**

Power Cup, straight away when I finished Power Cup, I just had the mind set of I wanted to join a football team straight away. After we did it, I really loved ... that actually changed mind set of the sport a lot, the Power Cup and just SAASTA in general, because before SAASTA even started, I never really thought about joining a team or anything until [the Power Cup]. It just gave me the mind set of I wanna go out there and actually have fun, be in a football team. Also, just on weekends instead of just sitting at home and playing PlayStation or something, like go out and play a game, and know

that you've done something. Know that you've actually done some activity so that when we do get asked questions like this, "What do you do?" We can say we play football.

I just miss doing it. Like every Friday night, me and dad after school, get ready for netball and then go play my game. It was just a normal routine, and that's what I miss more than hanging around with ... Like, when I did SAASTA state, I found new friends that liked doing the same thing as me and then they came over more. I started hanging out with them, like people that are good to be around. I surrounded myself with people that liked the same thing as me.

**Thinking about an ideal sporting activity or other physical activity for you that you would be most interested in doing in the long term, what would that be?**

The sport I would wanna do in the long term would just be football, footy.

I just always wanna play netball. Or if I don't play netball, I'd be like a something to do with sport. A trainer.

Even a PE teacher.