AusPlay Focus

Women and Girls Participation

November, 2017

ausport.gov.au
The relationship Australians have with sport and physical activity differs on many variables, including gender.

This publication delves into the participation of Australian women and girls in sport and physical activity, and the difference between male and female patterns of behaviour. It uses AusPlay data collected from July 2016 to June 2017.

The Government is encouraging young women to take part in physical activity via the inspiring ‘Girls – Make Your Move’ campaign. The campaign targets girls aged 12-19 years, promoting physical activity and sport as fun with many positive benefits - inspiring, energising and empowering young women to be more active.

We continue to support more women to participate in sport and physical activity and into leadership positions in sport.

AusPlay: Participation data for sport
How active are Australian women 15+?

A Snapshot

A quick look at how much time and money adult women (15+) spend on sport and physical activity.

Physical activity frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3+ times a week</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ times a week</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a year</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average time spent per week on sport and physical activity

- **Sport**: 4.1 hrs
- **Non-sport physical activities**: 4.3 hrs

Average annual expenditure on sport and physical activity

- **Sport**: $560
- **Non-sport physical activities**: $828

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1. Average time spent per week on non-sport physical activities by those who participate in non-sport physical activities.
2. Average time spent per week on sport-related activities by those who participate in sport-related activities.
3. Among those women who pay to participate.
How active are Australian women 15+? A Snapshot

**TOP 10 MOTIVATIONS**

1. Physical health or fitness (81%)
2. Fun and enjoyment (40%)
3. Social reasons (26%)
4. Lose or maintain weight/tone (21%)
5. Psychological/mental health/therapy (19%)
6. To be outdoors/enjoy nature (16%)
7. Walk the dog (14%)
8. Way of getting around (9%)
9. Physio/rehab/physical therapy/post op (9%)
10. Hobby (5%)

**TOP 10 BARRIERS**

1. Not enough time/other commitments (28%)
2. Poor health or injury (29%)
3. Don’t like sport/physical activity (7%)
4. Disability (6%)
5. Not a priority (any more) (6%)
6. Looking after child/infant (5%)
7. Increasing age/too old (5%)
8. Physical job (5%)
9. Too lazy (4%)
10. Can’t afford it (3%)
How active are Australian women 15+?

A Snapshot

The chart below shows the participation profile across different ages and groups to identify key opportunities - how many females (%) have participated in the last 12 months and the average number of times participated weekly.

**Participation and Frequency:**
By age-group and other demographics

- The average weekly frequency for physical activity is 5.1 times per week. The average participation rate (last 12 months) is 89%.
- Participation rates for Indigenous women are the lowest.
- Women who speak a language other than English at home (LOTE) tend to participate less often on average.

Those in the top right section are the most active on both measures.

While women 55+ do not participate in higher numbers than some other age groups, those who do, participate more often.

This document focuses on women and girls participation patterns overall.

More research on the specific population groups of Indigenous, Disability and CaLD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) has been and will be undertaken by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC).

All ASC research data and insights can be found by visiting www.researchinsport.com.au
Overall women are as active as men

The common perception is that women and/or girls are less active than men and/or boys.

AusPlay data however, shows that girls and women are just as active as boys and men.
Women are more active in some areas

In fact, when it comes to non-sport-related physical activity, women have a higher participation rate than men.

Campaigns encouraging more women to take part in physical activity are welcomed and encouraged. The opportunity for sports is to understand women’s motivations and better cater to their needs.

*At least once per year
Women are more active in some areas

Women are much more likely to take part in non-sport-related activities such as gym/fitness and walking.

### Participation in recreational walking*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-17 years</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 years</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34 years</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44 years</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54 years</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64 years</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+ years</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*At least once per year

### Participation in gym/fitness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>39%</td>
</tr>
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<td>31%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54 years</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>23%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+ years</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*At least once per year
Women are less active in sport

However, it is true that women are less active than men when it comes to sport-related activities.

Participation in **sport-related** activities (sport)*

**Participation in team sport**

*At least once per year
Women are less active in sport

In particular both women and girls are also less active than men and boys in club sport.

Participation in club sport (Adults 15+)

Participation in club sport (Children 0-14)*

*At least once per year
So, are women less active?

Frequency

Women are just as active and participate as frequently as men overall.

Participation frequency by gender (Adults 15+)

FEMALES
- 1+ per year: 89%
- 1+ per month: 87%
- 1+ per fortnight: 85%
- 1+ per week: 82%
- 2+ per week: 74%
- 3+ per week: 63%
- 4+ per week: 51%
- 5+ per week: 41%
- 6+ per week: 32%
- 7+ per week: 26%

MALES
- 1+ per year: 89%
- 1+ per month: 87%
- 1+ per fortnight: 84%
- 1+ per week: 80%
- 2+ per week: 71%
- 3+ per week: 60%
- 4+ per week: 48%
- 5+ per week: 39%
- 6+ per week: 30%
- 7+ per week: 24%

Average Participation per week

FEMALES: 5.1 times per week

MALES: 4.8 times per week
So, are women less active?

**Duration**

The main difference lies in the fact that women’s active sessions tend to be much shorter on average.

This could be linked to the types of activities they most participate in (e.g. fitness classes, walking) and is a reflection of their lack of time for activities especially during the most busy periods of parenthood.

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Non-sport-related physical activities tend to be less intensive than sport-related activities. Women could benefit from more targeted sport products, given the more intensive and longer nature of sport-related physical activity.
What sports/activities are women (15+) playing?

A large majority of women are active in Endurance/Health or Fitness activities, such as walking, fitness/gym, swimming, running/jogging, cycling, yoga, bush walking or pilates.

Top 10 activities for women (15+)*
By population numbers and percentages

- **53.6%** Walking (recreational)
  Population estimate 5,405,226

- **36.8%** Fitness/Gym
  Population estimate 3,714,331

- **17.0%** Swimming
  Population estimate 1,719,598

- **13.7%** Running (incl. athletics)
  Population estimate 1,378,585

- **8.5%** Cycling
  Population estimate 855,231

- **7.6%** Yoga
  Population estimate 766,241

- **6.4%** Bush Walking
  Population estimate 644,906

- **5.5%** Netball
  Population estimate 553,687

- **5.0%** Pilates
  Population estimate 505,410

- **3.9%** Tennis
  Population estimate 395,757

*At least once per year
Meeting the physical activity guidelines (15+)
Frequency, duration and intensity

What are the physical activity guidelines?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE GROUPS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY AND DURATION</th>
<th>INTENSITY REQUIREMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-17 years</td>
<td>60 minutes+ every day (at least 7 times a week on average was used for our calculations)</td>
<td>moderate to vigorous intensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-64 years</td>
<td>Accumulate 150 to 300 minutes (2 ½ to 5 hours) of moderate intensity physical activity or 75 to 150 minutes (1 ¼ to 2 ½ hours) of vigorous intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both moderate and vigorous activities, each week. Be active on most, preferably all, days every week (at least 5 times a week on average was used for our calculations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+ years</td>
<td>30 minutes+ every day (at least 7 times a week on average was used for our calculations)</td>
<td>moderate intensity recommended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This is a simplified version of the Guidelines (focused on frequency, duration and intensity). It does not include guidelines for children aged 0 to 14, or guidelines revolving around muscle and bone strengthening activities. The detailed Guidelines can be found at: health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines

Who is meeting the guidelines?
By gender and age group

Direct comparisons between age-groups must be made with the knowledge that the Guidelines are different for different age-groups.
Meeting the physical activity guidelines (Adults 15+)

Frequency, duration and intensity

How many Australian women 15+ are active enough according to the guidelines?

- 35% Sufficiently active
- 53% Insufficiently active
- 12% Inactive

An estimated 13.1 million Australian adults overall did not meet the guidelines

- 6.6 million (65% of women)
- 6.5 million (64% of men)

Please note that meeting the guidelines (or not) is derived from AusPlay data using a number of assumptions and calculations:

- AusPlay collects participation data for more than 380 activities, including frequency of participation in the activity and duration of the last session;
- The ASC has classified all activities by level of intensity (moderate or vigorous). For example, ‘walking’ was classified as a moderate activity while ‘running/jogging’ was classified as a vigorous activity;
- Total time participated in each intensity category can then be derived, converted into a weekly form and standardised for comparison (10 minutes of vigorous intensity is equal to 20 minutes of moderate intensity activity);
- Finally both moderate and vigorous intensity total derived times of physical activity are categorised according to the above simplified guidelines.
How parenthood affects activity levels

Having a child affects many parents’ ability to lead an active lifestyle, particularly whilst their children are young. Perhaps surprisingly, the effect of parenthood on physical activity seems to be just as pronounced (if not more so) for men.

This may be because men are more likely to be involved in sport-related activities, and those activities tend to be of longer average duration.

How does parenthood affect activity levels?
(participate at least 3 times per week)

Younger family breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Composition</th>
<th>Female Participation</th>
<th>Male Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 kid</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 kids</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ kids</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Younger family most kids under 15 years
How active are Australian girls 0-14?

A Snapshot

Frequency
(organised participation outside of school hours)

- **AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR**: 73%
- **WEEKLY**: 62%
- **3+ TIMES A WEEK**: 21%

Participation in organised sport and physical activity outside of school hours*

*At least once per year

AusPlay: A focus on women and girls participation

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**FEMALES**
- 0-4 years: 46% (50%)
- 5-8 years: 82% (83%)
- 9-11 years: 90% (91%)
- 12-14 years: 81% (83%)

**MALES**
Are girls less active than boys?

The participation levels of girls and boys in sport-related activities are almost the same. However, as is the case with adult women, girls are much more likely to take part in non-sport-related physical activities.

Participation in organised out of school hours **sport-related** activities (sport)*

Participation in organised outside of school hours **non-sport-related** physical activities*

*At least once per year
Swimming is by far the most popular activity for girls. However, this is mostly learn to swim classes. Agility activities such as dancing and gymnastics are also very popular with girls.

Compared to women, girls are more likely to participate in sport-related activities including team sports such as netball, football and basketball.

**Top 10 activities for girls (0-14)**

By population numbers and percentages

- **Swimming**: 35.0%  
  Population estimate 795,778
- **Dancing (recreational)**: 15.4%  
  Population estimate 350,858
- **Netball**: 14.0%  
  Population estimate 318,967
- **Gymnastics**: 12.1%  
  Population estimate 275,492
- **Football**: 6.4%  
  Population estimate 146,061
- **Running (incl. athletics)**: 5.7%  
  Population estimate 128,651
- **Basketball**: 5.3%  
  Population estimate 119,301
- **Tennis**: 4.9%  
  Population estimate 111,738
- **Dance Sport**: 4.7%  
  Population estimate 106,814
- **Australian Football**: 2.6%  
  Population estimate 59,899

*At least once per year*
### Different activities for different life stages

**Top 5 activities (by age group and gender)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE GROUP</th>
<th>FEMALES</th>
<th>MALES</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4 years</td>
<td><strong>Swimming 36.9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Swimming 34.2%</strong></td>
<td>Swimming (learn to swim) is the dominant activity for very young children. Girls of this age are also participating in other activities such as gymnastics and dancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dancing (recreational) 12.7%</td>
<td>Football/soccer 9.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gymnastics 6.5%</td>
<td>Gymnastics 5.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dance sport 2.3%</td>
<td>Fitness/gym 2.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Running (incl. athletics) 2.0%</td>
<td>Running (incl. athletics) 2.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8 years</td>
<td><strong>Swimming 46.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Swimming 39.5%</strong></td>
<td>Girls 5-8 years old are still learning how to swim, and doing agility activities, but other sport-related activities like netball or tennis are starting to feature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gymnastics 21.0%</td>
<td>Football/soccer 26.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dancing (recreational) 20.9%</td>
<td>Australian Football 19.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Netball 8.9%</td>
<td>Cricket 10.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Running (incl. athletics) 8.6%</td>
<td>Rugby League 8.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-11 years</td>
<td><strong>Swimming 34.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Swimming 32.0%</strong></td>
<td>The peak of participation for girls is when they are 9-11 years old, with the variety of activities expanding to other team sports such as basketball, hockey, and cricket.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Netball 26.7%</td>
<td>Football/soccer 31.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dancing (recreational) 17.0%</td>
<td>Cricket 20.2%</td>
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<td>Gymnastics 14.0%</td>
<td>Australian Football 19.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tennis 9.1%</td>
<td>Tennis 13.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*At least once per year

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69% of parents of non-participating children aged 0 to 8 tell us that the reason their children are not participating in any activity is because they are too young.

Is this an opportunity to create more products adapted to these younger age groups?
Different activities for different life stages

Top 5 activities (by age group and gender)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE GROUP</th>
<th>FEMALES</th>
<th>MALES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-14 years</td>
<td>Netball 33.4%</td>
<td>Football/soccer 29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Swimming 16.4%</td>
<td>Australian Football 19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Football/soccer 12.7%</td>
<td>Basketball 16.1%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Cricket 15.6%</td>
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<td>Australian Football 19.7%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Swimming 18.4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Football/soccer 15.8%</td>
<td>Running (incl. athletics) 17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 years</td>
<td>Fitness/gym 42.0%</td>
<td>Fitness/gym 39.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walking (recreational) 32.9%</td>
<td>Running (incl. athletics) 19.6%</td>
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*At least once per year
Different activities for different life stages

25-34, 35-44 and 45-54*

By this stage, women seldom participate in team sports.

More than 4 OUT OF 10 WOMEN in this age group are taking part in fitness/gym activities and walking.

Other main activities include running/jogging, swimming and cycling, and around 1 in 10 are doing yoga.

55+*

More than 2/3rd of women at this stage are walking recreationally.

Fitness/gym is still a popular activity for a 3rd of women and more tend to turn to activities such as...

...TENNIS, GOLF AND FINALLY BOWLS FOR THE 65+.

*At least once per year
In summary

AusPlay data highlights how...

WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE AS ACTIVE AS MEN AND BOYS...

... both in overall participation and frequency of participation.

The types of activities that women undertake are, on average, slightly less intense and shorter in duration than men.

Any form of physical activity is good - messages on encouraging women’s participation could focus on investing a bit more time or to consider a wider range of activity options that suit their exercise needs.
In summary

AusPlay data indicates that overall...

**GIRLS ARE ALMOST AS LIKELY AS BOYS TO PLAY SPORT.**

However when they grow up, women are less likely to participate in sport than men.

Governments and the sport sector need to continue the *positive and empowering messages* to girls that they are capable of doing any activities or sports that boys can.

It is important that sports understand the reasons why women are less active in sport and modify their products to better cater to this important audience.

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In summary

The key motivations for women to be active are...

**PHYSICAL HEALTH, FUN AND SOCIALISING.**

Aside from young women participating in netball, women generally have low participation rates in team sports.

If team sports want to encourage more women participating, they need to review how they offer a quality experience that better meets women’s needs and create opportunities for women to exercise with friends in a fun environment. The social benefits of sport and physical activity are increasingly resonating.

Results from the Australian Government Department of Health’s evaluation of the 2017 ‘Girls Make Your Move’ Campaign recommend that a focus on the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ will be important for helping motivate young adult women (where the exodus from sport and team sports happens) who want to keep or increase their activity levels in the face of other growing prioritises and interests. To counter strong motivational barriers, the ‘why’ needs to be expressed in terms which resonate at a more personal level to boost relevance and reduce ‘distancing’ of themselves from the message. Given they are not always keen to try new things, their ‘how’ messages should focus on activities they already know but which may have been re-invented with new formats.

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About AusPlay

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) aims to make Australian sport stronger.

The AusPlay survey (AusPlay) is a key pillar of the ASC’s game plan to get more Australians participating in organised sport more often.

The ASC is helping sports to thrive in a rapidly changing environment. This starts with research and insights into participation trends.

AusPlay is a national population tracking survey funded and led by the ASC. It provides the sport sector with accurate and reliable information on Australia’s participation trends in sport and physical activity. AusPlay is an independent research project at the population level which measures all types of activities in a consistent and comparable way.

The three main objectives of AusPlay are to:

- Provide insights to help sports grow participation and track trends.
- Provide data that informs government investment, policy and program delivery.
- Identify and describe links between sport participation and other influential factors.

More information about AusPlay, including the methodology summary, survey questions, key terms and definitions, national tables etc., can be accessed via the ASC’s Sport Market Insights on the Clearinghouse for Sport website with direct access through researchinsport.com.au. Please use your Clearinghouse for Sport login for full access.
Any further questions about AusPlay (or queries for additional customised reporting/further analysis of the dataset) can be directed to Sport Market Insights at the ASC via: AusPlay@ausport.gov.au.