



Sport participation in Victoria, 2015

Research summary

About this research

Playing club-based sport accounts for almost a fifth of people's health-enhancing levels of activity (Eime, Harvey, Charity et al. 2015). Participation in organised sport is associated with better physical health outcomes, including lower prevalence of overweight and obesity and type 2 diabetes, and improved social, emotional and psychosocial wellbeing for children, adolescents and adults (VicHealth 2016).

The Sport Participation Research Project aims to provide a reliable measure of sport participation in Victoria, including trends over time, to inform decision making and investments by sport sector organisations relating to, in particular, participation initiatives and facility planning. This research will collate and analyse sport participation data over the three years from 2015 to 2017, reporting on annual participation levels and trends.

Understanding and addressing trends in organised community sport participation in Victoria will help to inform future planning by state sporting associations, governments, funders and promoters of sport participation, among others.

This research summary provides the consolidated analysis results of the 2015 sport participation data from 11 major Victorian state sporting associations: Australian football, basketball, bowls, cricket, football (soccer), golf, gymnastics, hockey, netball, sailing and tennis. It highlights key participation insights and recommendations for state sporting associations, clubs and associations, policymakers and funders of sport participation and future research.

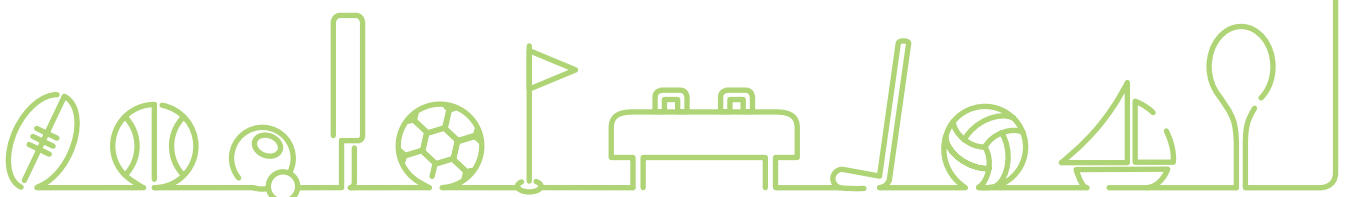
KEY FINDINGS

Analysis of consolidated data from 11 Victorian sports identified four key findings:

- sport participation is highest among young children (aged 5–14 years)
- sport participation rates drop significantly during adolescence
- sport participation rates among females are half of those among males
- sport participation rates are higher in regional Victoria compared to metropolitan Melbourne.

This 2015 data is a robust measure reiterating key trends in sport participation and will continue to be monitored over the coming two years of the project.

The research used participation data from 11 major Victorian state sporting associations.



At a glance: organised sport participation in Victoria, 2015

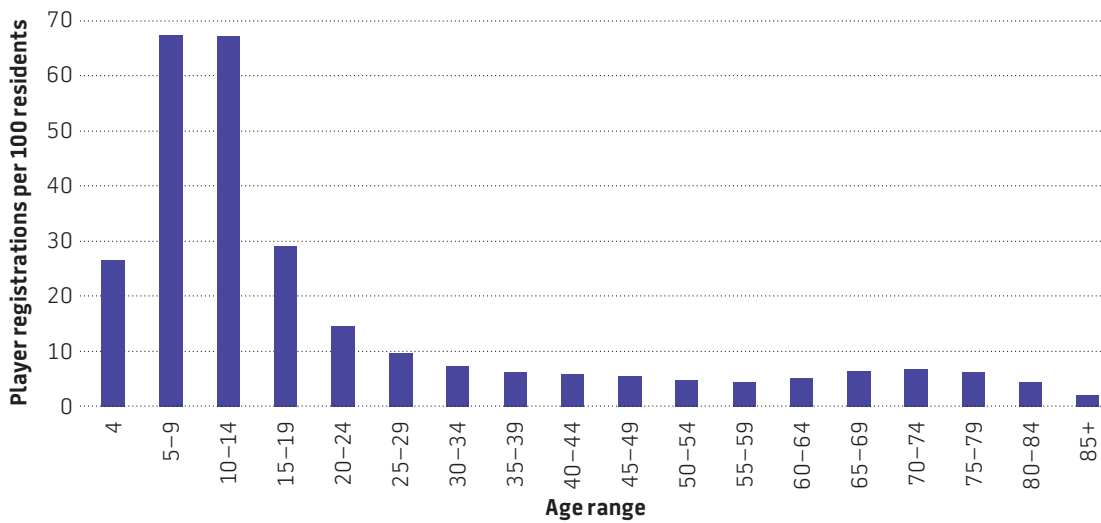
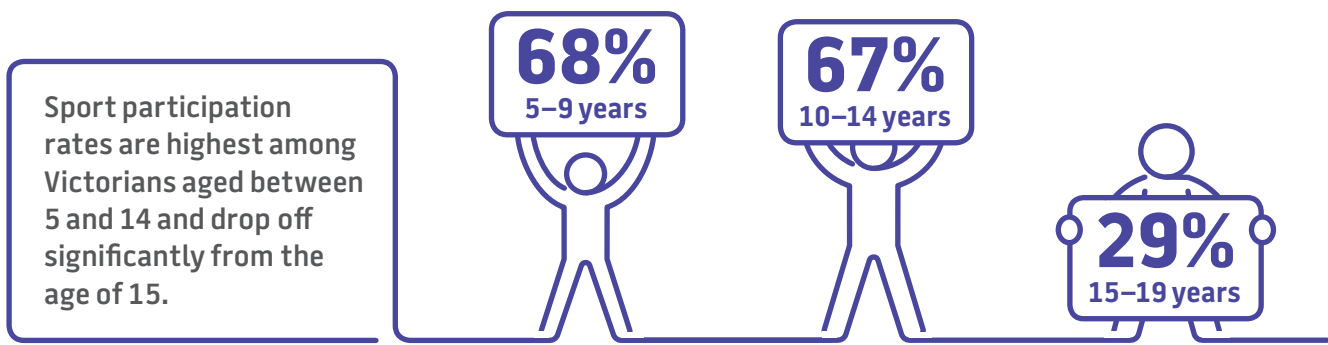


Figure 1: age-specific participation rates 2015, Victoria

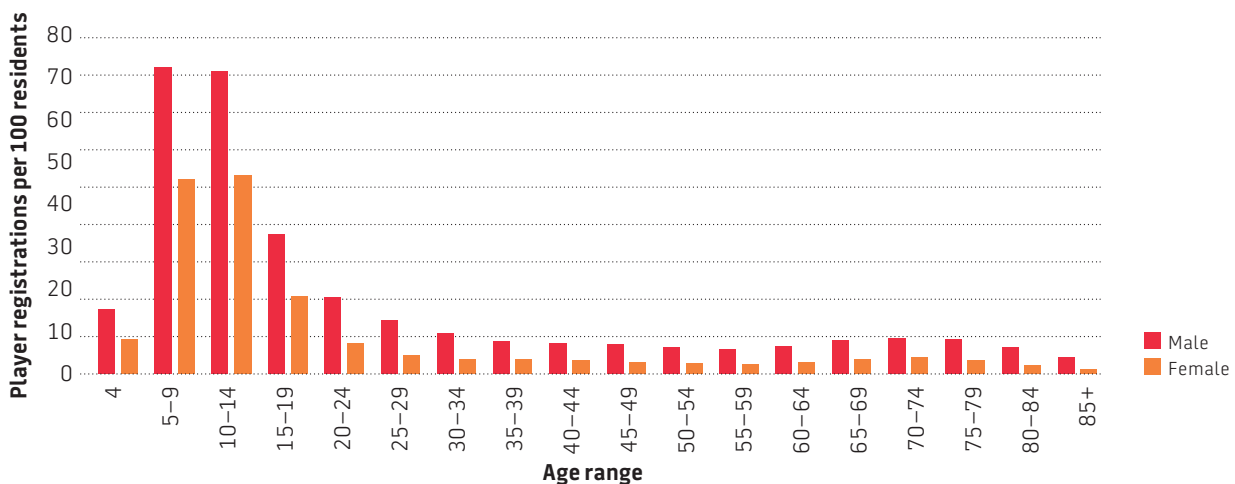


Figure 2: age-specific participation rates 2015, Victoria: by gender

Higher participation rates in sport were noted in regional Victoria, compared to metropolitan Melbourne.

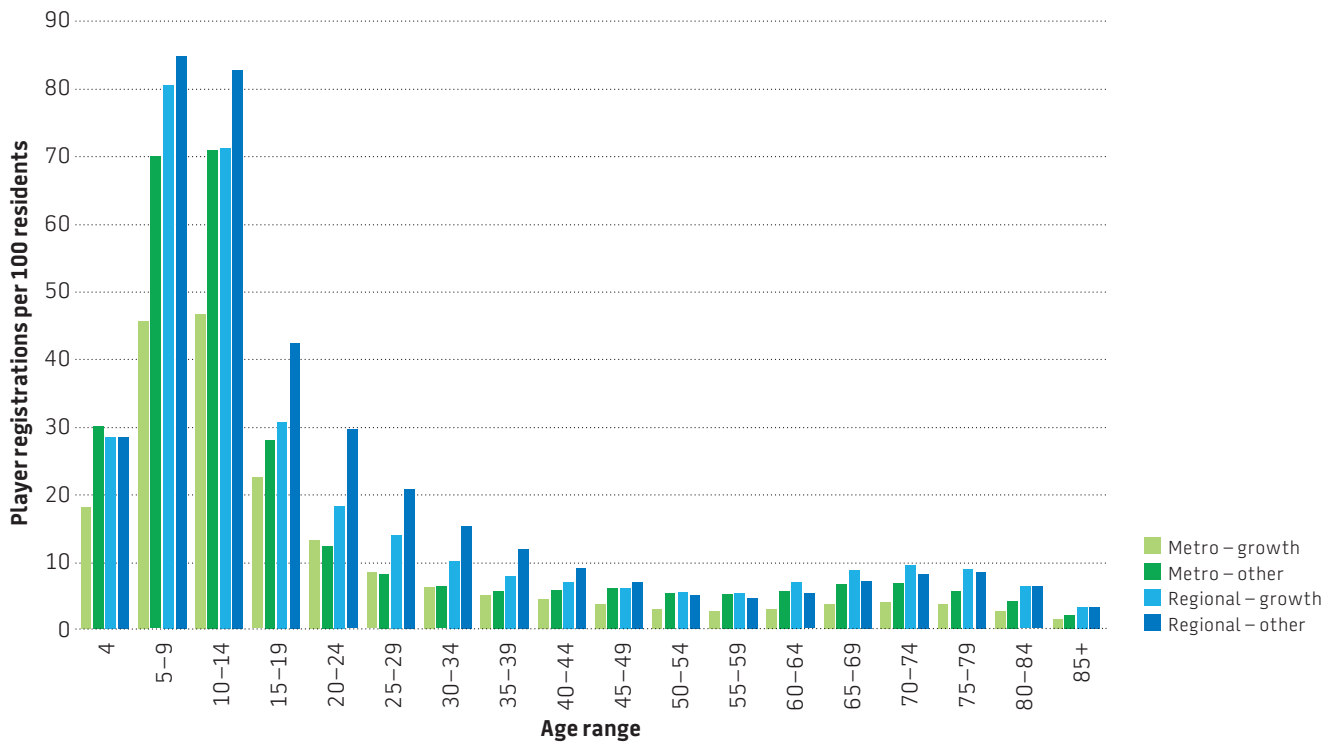
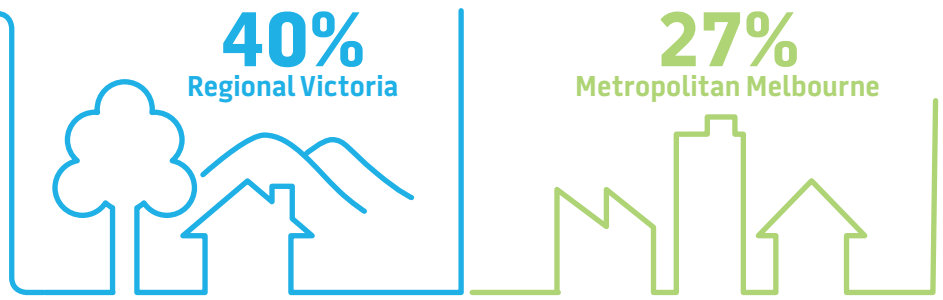


Figure 3: age-specific participation rates 2015, Victoria: by region

Note: metropolitan and regional ‘growth’ areas include locations of high projected population growth: see page 5 for further detail.

About the data

This analysis captures 899,349 ‘participants’, or players, aged four years and older who were registered with a Victorian community sporting club or program affiliated with one of the 11 state sporting associations involved in the research. This includes participants registered in:

- club competitions
- junior or modified sport programs (e.g. NetSetGO or AFL Auskick)
- social programs (e.g. Cardio Tennis).

The data excludes participants registered in school programs or school competitions.

Participation rates are expressed as a percentage of the estimated resident population for each age group as at 30 June 2014 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015).

Individuals who played multiple sports are included in the data for each individual sport, and are therefore counted multiple times within the overall total.

Reported rates are ‘registrations per 100 persons in the relevant population cohort’, but are presented as percentages for simplicity.

Discussion of key findings

Sport participation is highest among young children

KEY STATISTICS

- More than one-quarter (27%) of all Victorians aged four years participated in at least one of the 11 sports included in the project.
- Overall, sport participation rates peaked among those aged 5–14 years, with more than two-thirds of Victorians within this age group (67%) participating in at least one of the 11 sports.
- More than half (52%) of all players registered with the 11 sports were aged 5–14 years.

In Australia, a number of modified sports programs are offered to primary school-aged children (generally aged between four and 12 years old). These include programs such as Hot Shots (tennis), AusKick (Australian football), MiniRoos (soccer), in2Cricket (cricket) and NetSetGO (netball).

These programs engage children in play activities designed to develop fundamental motor skills and sport-specific skills for future participation. While they contribute to the high sports participation rates among Victorian children and can provide a pathway into club competitions, many children do not make this transition (Eime, Casey, Harvey, Charity et al. 2015).

It should also be noted that children within this age group often play multiple sports, and are therefore counted multiple times within the overall total, which may over-represent their participation rates (see notes regarding the data on page 3).

Sport participation rates drop significantly during adolescence

KEY STATISTICS

- From the age of 15, participation rates drop significantly: participation rates among the 15–19 age group are less than half of that among children aged 5–14 (29% compared with 67%).
- Among those aged 25 and older, fewer than 10% of Victorians participated in the 11 sports included in this research (see Figure 1).

While it is promising to see high sport participation rates for younger children, these rates decline considerably during adolescence.

Both the high participation rates among younger children and some of the drop-off in adolescence may, in part, be due to a sampling effect: younger children may participate in multiple sports but as they get older they tend to ‘specialise’ in a single, or fewer, sport/s.

However, this drop-off in participation also occurs at a time when children transition from junior or modified game formats to club competitions or elite sporting pathways. In the context of these transitions, there may be fewer opportunities for those with lower levels of ability and/or confidence (Eime, Harvey, Sawyer et al. 2016). The trend is also likely to relate to changing priorities during leisure-time as children move through adolescence and into adulthood (Eime, Casey, Harvey, Sawyer et al. 2015; Eime, Harvey, Sawyer et al. 2016).

Sport participation rates among females are half of those among males

KEY STATISTICS

- Participation rates were higher for males than females in all age groups.
- Overall, the male participation rate in these 11 sports was twice that for females (20% compared with 11%).
- The largest differences in participation rates were noted among children aged between 5 and 14 years: participation rates were about 80% among boys compared with about 50% among girls of this age.
- Despite these differences, the participation profile across the lifespan was similar for both males and females (see Figure 2).

The lower participation rates noted among females are likely due to a number of factors. First, while there is a growth in participation opportunities available for females, this research's sports sample includes more sports that are traditionally 'male-dominated' (e.g. Australian football, soccer and cricket) than traditionally 'female-dominated'.

Second, a perceived lack of time due to changing and competing interests and priorities along with work or study commitments have been reported to affect females' participation in sports from the time of adolescence. A lack of energy, perceived competence, family support and access to facilities also play a role. As this research reflects competitive, community club level sport participation, there is some evidence that females may be active in, or prefer, non-competitive physical activities such as dance, which is more popular among girls than boys, and therefore could relate to the lower rates by females (Eime, Casey, Harvey, Sawyer et al. 2015; Eime, Harvey, Sawyer et al. 2016).

At the broader level, sport policy currently encourages increasing total participant numbers, rather than specifically targeting the retention of participants of certain ages or gender (Eime, Harvey, Charity and Payne 2016). At the same time, media coverage is greatly skewed towards men's sport and provides limited coverage of women's sport (Eime and Harvey 2015), with women's sport receiving less than 10% of all sports coverage in Australian television news media, compared to 81% for male sport (Australian Sports Commission 2014).

In comparing metropolitan and regional sports participation rates, four distinct regions were identified:

- the 'metro growth' group includes seven local government areas (LGAs) containing the four growth corridors designated by the Melbourne Planning Authority.
- the 'regional growth' group consists of the LGAs containing the three largest regional centres (Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo) along with the four LGAs expected to experience high population growth in the period up to

Sport participation rates are higher in regional Victoria compared to metropolitan Melbourne

KEY STATISTICS

- For most age groups, participation rates were higher in regional areas (40%) than metropolitan areas (27%).
- The largest differences in participation rates by region were among those aged 5–14 years, with non-growth regional areas having almost double the participation rates of metropolitan growth areas (more than 80% compared with around 45%).
- Female participation was also much higher in regional than in metropolitan areas.
- The highest participation rates were recorded in non-growth regional areas: 85% among children aged 5–9 years and 83% among those aged 10–14 years.
- Boys in this group had participation rates of 97% (for those aged 5–9) and 94% (for those aged 10–14 years).
- The highest female participation rates were noted in these same areas: 5–9 years (72%) followed by those aged 10–14 years (71%).
- Regional growth areas had a high rate of participation for females aged 5–9 years (65%).
- The participation rates for children (14 years and under) in the metro growth areas are significantly less than Melbourne's established areas.

The higher rates of sport participation in regional areas compared to metropolitan Melbourne are likely to reflect the types of leisure-time activities available in different settings. For example, there are many different leisure-time physical activity opportunities in cities compared with a more limited choice in regional Victoria. This is consistent with other research that suggests major sports play a more important role in rural than metropolitan communities (Eime, Charity et al. 2015).

Participation in sport may also play a more central social role within regional communities, where it is considered a major contributor to social connectedness (Eime, Harvey, Charity, Casey et al. 2016).

Of particular interest is the difference in participation rates among boys and girls in metropolitan growth areas compared to non-growth regional areas, which is quite significant and warrants further research.

2021 according to Victorian State Government projections (Eime, Harvey and Charity 2016).

- 'metro – other' and 'regional – other' areas include the remaining LGAs in each category not designated as 'growth' (i.e. non-growth).

For further detail, including categorisation of all LGAs, see *Sport Participation Rates – Victoria 2015* (Eime, Harvey and Charity 2016).

Recommendations

State sporting associations

- Consider the needs of the target audiences in the design and development of new programs, and identify opportunities to test, pilot and refine sport participation products or programs with target groups. In particular:
 - ensure there are sport-related participation products or programs that meet the changing needs of people throughout significant life stages, from young children to older adults
 - design sport programs that build children's skills to support them transitioning from junior or modified formats into club competition formats
 - ensure that sport participation products or programs meet the particular needs and motivations of girls and women (e.g. providing opportunities that are social, flexible, non-competitive and consider child care options) – see [Female participation in sport & physical activity: a snapshot of the evidence](#) (VicHealth 2015).
- Support clubs and associations in providing welcoming and inclusive facilities for women and girls aligned to Sport and Recreation Victoria's [Female friendly sport infrastructure guidelines](#) (Sport and Recreation Victoria 2016).
- Continue to improve the quality and consistency of membership data collection and management, including online participant registration systems, so that data can be better used to monitor trends and inform strategic priorities.
- Consider your individual sport participation levels and profile, compared with that of the consolidated sector data results. Use this information to identify opportunities to increase participation or retention in your sport.
- Use data-driven, evidence-based decisions in day-to-day operations and strategic directions to increase participation, and in planning facility developments.

Sport clubs and associations

- Seek guidance and support from your relevant state sporting association and local council to engage the local community in sporting opportunities provided through your club.
- Consider partnering with other community groups who can help you access your target market and encourage participation through your club.
- Investigate the motivations of your target group and consider how you both provide and promote participation opportunities that support these motivations.
- In promoting your club, use images of a diverse range of people which are easily relatable to your club's target market.
- Consider offering new social or modified formats to play your sport, particularly those sport programs that have already been developed by your state sporting association.

Sport policymakers and funding bodies

- Maintain a strong approach to promoting population-based participation in sport in Victoria, while prioritising strategies addressing:
 - the drop in participation rates among the 15–19 year old age group
 - the lower participation rates among females
 - the lower rates of participation in metropolitan growth areas.
- Continue to provide new opportunities for women to become more active through participation in sport (e.g. VicHealth's [Changing the Game](#) program, VicHealth's [Active Club Grants](#)).
- Continue to support innovation that tests new ideas and concepts to engage more Victorians to access and participate in sport (e.g. VicHealth's [Innovation Challenge: Sport](#)).
- Support local sporting clubs to:
 - provide new opportunities to engage more people to play community sport through social/modified formats (e.g. VicHealth's [Active Club Grants](#))
 - improve their capacity to offer sport opportunities to their local community through accessing sports uniforms and equipment or increasing skills of coaches, officials and managers (e.g. Sport and Recreation Victoria's [Sporting Club Grants Program](#)).
- Encourage sporting organisations to provide welcoming, inclusive and accessible environments to support sport participation by a range of communities.
- Support alignment of sport policy and practice across state and local government and state sporting associations.

Researchers

- Analyse the sampling effect from this research to identify participants in single and multiple sports. Use this to create a stronger representation of participation rates across ages and the sector.
- Conduct a sport-sector study of retention in sport to investigate why people of different demographics drop-out of an individual sport and/or sports in general.
- Further investigate the reasons behind the significant difference between children's participation in metropolitan growth areas and regional non-growth areas in Victoria, as well as reasons for participation rate difference for children in metropolitan growth areas and Melbourne's established areas.
- Undertake research to better understand the needs, attitudes and motivations of specific target audiences in relation to sport participation, particularly for those not engaged or not regularly active.

References

This summary is based on two reports:

- Eime, R, Harvey, J & Charity, M 2016, *Sport Participation Rates – Victoria 2015*, Federation University, Victoria University.
- Eime, R, Harvey, J & Charity, M 2016, *Age Profiles of Sport Participants – Victoria 2015*, Federation University, Victoria University.

Copies of these reports can be found at:
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au or
www.sportandrecreationspatial.com.au

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VicHealth 2016, *Victorian participation in organised sport: research highlights*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

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