The Physical Activity and Sport Participation (PASP) framework- a policy model towards being physically active across the lifespan

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Background

The changing social and policy context in which sport is produced, delivered and consumed is considered as a foundation for proposing a new integrated framework that incorporates participation in sport with leisure-time physical activity more broadly.

Historically, sport policy has largely focused on competitive club-based sport and elite performance, and in line with this, talent development pathway models were developed and implemented. However, with increasing physical inactivity globally, these models do not apply to the general population. This is why we propose a population based ‘whole of sport ecosystem’ lifespan model - the Physical Activity and Sport Participation (PASP) framework.

The PASP framework can serve as a holistic policy and implementation guide for all of sport, including governmental physical activity and sport policy makers, sport governing bodies and clubs, for the ever-increasing range of private physical activity and sport providers and also health agencies.

The Physical Activity and Sport Participation framework

In presenting the holistic conceptual framework of PASP, we acknowledge that development of a high level of physical literacy is fundamental to leading a physically active life, and in turn increasing the likelihood of sport becoming an enjoyable leisure-time activity.

We have developed a framework founded on relevant research evidence that reflects the current (international) policy transition towards increasing population levels of physical activity (rather than focusing on elite sport performance outcomes and with a predominant policy focus on increasing sport participation). Sport, as outlined in this paper, plays an important role in that regard, but cannot be left with the sole responsibility to achieve population wide recommended levels of physical activity.

Higher participation in sport will be an outcome of improving people’s physical literacy and increasing overall physical activity levels. Only then, will sport participation increase and endure across the lifespan.

Research findings informing the PASP include the fact that:

- Many pre-schoolers are recruited into club-base sport, but the majority drop-out within a couple of years
- Young children are often active through non-organised physical activity or free-play
- In schools, children have the opportunity to play formal sport competitions or partake in physical education
- Participation in sport is most popular amongst children aged 10-14 years
- Many people drop-out of sport, specifically during adolescence
- Elite sport participants make up a very small proportion of sport participants
- Beyond the ages of 20+ few adults, and fewer older adults play club-based sport

In the PASP, we present two trend lines across the lifespan: a red line that highlights estimated current levels of physical activity and sport participation and a green line that envisions (aspirational) future levels of physical activity and sport participation. The framework can be best understood by moving from left to right – as we age from young to old. It depicts various life stages that are separated by developmental physical activity transition points as evidenced by research. These stages are early childhood, primary age, secondary age, adult and elderly. Each of these stages requires policymakers and strategies to focus on what is most likely to bring or keep people into sport. These foci move from modified sport offerings, to recruitment, to retention, to engagement.
Conclusion:
In recognition of the changing patterns of participation in physical activity and sport across the lifespan, the PASP framework can contribute to coordinated and integrated physical activity and sport policy development, which in turn can lead to strategies that tackle the global physical inactivity crisis.

We propose that the PASP framework can serve as a holistic policy and implementation model for both the whole of sport including governmental physical activity/sport policy makers, sport governing bodies and clubs, the ever-increasing range of private physical activity and sport providers and health (promoting) agencies. It remains critical in that regard, that measurement of participation and retention in combination with consumer behavioural data is used to inform and evaluate policies and strategies. In recognition of the changing patterns of participation in sport and physical activity across the lifespan, the PASP framework can contribute to coordinated and integrated physical activity and sport policy development, which in turn can lead to strategies that tackle the global physical inactivity crisis. Sport will remain an important player in that regard.

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