

KEEPING PARTICIPANTS IN COMMUNITY SPORT



Victoria's local sport clubs are not addressing the high churn rates of members in key demographic groups, a Victoria University researcher has found.

Associate Professor Rochelle Eime from VU's Institute of Health, Exercise and Sport led research into the state's 12 most popular sports. The study found relatively high drop-out rates among teenagers, and those aged over 30; while clubs are seeing increases in participation among the very young.

The Sport Participation Research Project aims to provide a reliable measure of sport participation in Victoria, including trends over time.

The Sport and Recreation Spatial program of research investigates sport and recreation participation and facilities, and associated health outcomes for evidence-based decision making across the sport and recreation sector. It is the largest repository of sport participation data in Australia with over four million sport participant records, and over one million annual records from across the whole of Victoria.

"We're providing the industry with research information related to participation, facilities and health so that the sport and recreation sector can plan, and so governments can look at policies and investment", says Associate Professor Eime. "Then, hopefully we'll get a more active and healthy population."

Prior to the research, the ability of the sport and recreation industry to make evidence-based decisions to improve participation, was limited by its lack of access to accurate and reliable data.

Key research findings

The research each year analyses one million sport participants aged four and over from the following Victorian state sporting associations:

Australian football, basketball, bowls, cricket, football (soccer), golf, gymnastics, hockey, netball, sailing, swimming and tennis.



Key findings showed that overall sport participation has increased; and that the peak age in sport participation is 5-15 years.

However, while 77% of all sports participants are aged less than 30 years, less than two per cent of Victorian adults over the age of 30 play in one of the key organised sports.

Demonstrating the swiftest age decline, the participation rate for 15-19-year-olds (33%) is less than half the rate for 10-14 year-olds (70%).

Examining gendered data, rates are twice as high for males than females in all age groups, overall equating to 21% of males and 11% of females.

Geographical data showed sport participation is higher in regional areas (21%) compared to metropolitan areas (14%).

Recommendations

Key recommendations include:

1. Consider the optimal age of entry into sport
2. Prioritise retention of adolescents
3. Continue to prioritise participation in sport for females
4. Develop sport products/programs and opportunities directed at various stages of the lifespan
5. Consider how people participate in sport if they have not acquired the fundamental motor skills when young

6. Highlight the potential benefits of participation in sport
7. Consider the capacity of the sport system in terms of infrastructure and volunteers
8. Investigate further the determinants of lower participation in metropolitan - growth areas compared to metropolitan - other areas.

Awards and recognition

The research team has been successful in a number of awards including:

- Winner Women in Sport award (2017). Outstanding contribution for increasing female participation in sport.
- Winner VicHealth Awards (2017), Research into action category.
- Winner Parks and Leisure Australia national research award (2017).
- Winner Parks and Leisure Australia (Vic/Tas) (2017). Research Project award.
- Winner Victorian Sport Awards (2016). Sport Development Initial of the Year.

Find out more at:
www.sportandrecreationspatial.com.au

Photo 1: Associate Professor Rochelle Eime and project participants.