

WHY DON'T OLDER ADULTS PARTICIPATE IN SPORT?



BACKGROUND

Australia is faced with an ageing population, and ageing is typically associated with a decline in health. Physical activity, and sport more specifically, can contribute towards improving physical, social and mental health. However, sport participation declines with age, and very few older adults participate in sport. Understanding reasons why older adults do not participate in sport, can inform strategies aimed at engaging them in sport for healthier individuals and a healthier nation.

There are many reasons why older adults do not participate in sport or why they drop out of sport. These have been categorised into personal reasons, social reasons and organisational reasons below. In this study, older adults are defined as adults who are aged 50 years or over.

PERSONAL REASONS:

Time Constraints

Older adults have competing priorities, such as caring for family members, and may prioritise their children/grandchildren's sport participation over their own participation

Physical Health Concerns

Older adults are worried that the risk of injuries increase as they age

Costs

Income is often spent on other priorities

SOCIAL REASONS:

Family Commitments

Older adults often do not play sport as they have families to look after

Friends Stopped Playing Sport

Older adults may stop playing sport if their friends stop playing sport

Working Patterns Changed

Working hours are becoming more flexible and people often work on weekends instead of playing sport

Lack of Social Acceptance that Older Adults Played Sport

Sport is perceived to be an activity for young people and not older adults

ORGANISATIONAL REASONS:

Sports that Specifically Catered for Older Adults

Some 'age appropriate' sports could be seen as boring or unattractive by some older adults

Lack of Playing Opportunities with Peers

There are sometimes few opportunities for older adults to play with, or against, their peers

Older Adults not a High Priority for Sporting Organisations

Older adults are often a lower priority than other younger age groups. Their needs are often not catered for due to a lack of organisational capacity

Non-inclusive Marketing

Marketing is usually focused on competition, rather than the fun and social aspects of sport

Marketing is usually targeted at younger age groups, that use graphics and photos that appeal to younger people



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HOW CAN OLDER ADULTS BE ENGAGED IN SPORT?

These strategies may help sporting organisations better engage older adults in sport. Some of these suggestions can be used in all sports, whereas some may be more sport specific.



ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES:

Introduce Rule Amendments

Reduce physical contact and exertion

Shorten match time

Produce Age Appropriate Marketing

Market the fun and social side of sport

Include people of different ages on marketing materials, including older adults

Introduce Flexible Sport Club Membership Options

Provide reduced senior membership prices

Encourage off peak play at discounted rates

Develop External Partnerships

Engage with external community partners to develop and deliver specific joint programs

Developing partnerships could help capacity building and/or knowledge transfer

REFERENCES

This information was summarised from two previous reports on older adults and sport:

- Jenkin CR, Eime RM, Westerbeek HM and van Uffelen JGZ. Why don't older adults participate in sport? Report prepared for the Australian Sports Commission. Victoria University, Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living (ISEAL), 2016.

- van Uffelen JGZ, Jenkin CR, Westerbeek HM, Biddle SJH and Eime RM. Active and Healthy Ageing through Sport. Report prepared for the Australian Sports Commission. Victoria University, Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living (ISEAL), 2015.

Citation for this factsheet: Jenkin CR, Eime RM, Westerbeek HM and van Uffelen JGZ. Why don't older adults participate in sport? Factsheet prepared for the Australian Sports Commission. Victoria University, Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living (ISEAL), 2016.

SOCIAL STRATEGIES:

Develop and Promote Intergenerational Sport Opportunities

Introduce opportunities where older adults can play sport within the same club setting as their children or grandchildren

Develop and Promote Age Specific Sport Opportunities

Introduce age specific competitions that are less physically strenuous

Introduce more social play opportunities



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