

Indigenous Australians' participation in sports and physical activities

Part 2, Qualitative research (ACT Report)

Prepared for:

Active Canberra and Australian Sports Commission

Prepared by:

Craig Young

Phone: +61 2 8912 5600

Email: Craig.Young@ORCInternational.com

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Executive Summary

ORC was commissioned to conduct research on participation in sport and physical activity amongst Indigenous people in the ACT region (including Queanbeyan). The research explored current participation levels and behaviours, key drivers and barriers to participation and the role of sport and sporting clubs within communities. The research was qualitative, with focus groups and interviews being with Indigenous people age 15 years and over. Additionally, interviews were conducted with intermediaries who are engaged in the organisation development of sports and physical activity programs which target Indigenous participation. Respondents were recruited by local Indigenous organisations which ORC partnered with for the research.

Overview of sports and physical activity participation in the Indigenous community in the ACT

Amongst Indigenous residents of the ACT and Queanbeyan in general, participation in sports and physical activity tended to decline with age. Typically, children of school age participated in a wide range of sports. In later teenage years, while some continued to be involved in organised sports, others changed activities somewhat, with some starting to take up sports like boxing or non-sport physical activity like going to the gym. Organised sports participation tended to continue into early adulthood, but with increasing numbers of people dropping out as age progressed. For adults (both young and older) non-sport activities like 'boot camp' and going to the gym, or more passive activities (especially walking) were popular and this often continued into later life.

Children participated in a wide range of sports – particularly rugby league for boys and netball for girls, but with touch football (AusTag) and soccer both very popular for both sexes. In teenage years going to the gym and boxing also become popular. Overall, it was felt that schools, community groups and families have a key role to play in ensuring youth continue to be engaged and supported to participate in sport. Intervention by family, schools and sports clubs is key in ensuring children (and their parents) take steps to stay engaged in sports.

The decision-making process – participation drivers and barriers

The process of deciding what sports are engaged in obviously varies by age. For younger school age children, the primary drivers were parental choice (which obviously often takes children's interest into account), but as children get older they have greater agency over their decisions, though the influence of parents and other extended family as role models remained strong.

Typically, up to the end of primary school children were strongly influenced by **parents' and siblings' involvement** in sport, the sports played by the extended family (cousins, uncles, aunts) and friends, as well as what is on offer in their community. Enjoying the game for the **team and social aspects** and for the love of the game itself were key motivators for children (especially) and adults. Competition, or to be the best was a motivating factor to some, but not most.

The **engagement of the Indigenous community** (the extended family and peer group network) was also a key factor in sporting and physical activity participation, with children and adults reporting being

more likely to participate in organised sports or activities like going to the gym or boot camp, if they were accompanied by family members or close friends. The decline in sporting participation in early adulthood was often exacerbated by the demands of employment, family and also ‘temptations’ (socialising, going out etc). As such, programs that focus on community/family involvement, have an Indigenous specific focus (enabling Indigenous youth to feel more comfortable) and help build and support resilience are likely to be more successful. Such programs were seen as important in overcoming **racism**, or **non-inclusive practices**, which could also be a barrier to participation.

Cost was reported as a further barrier to participation – both for adults and their children. The main costs cited were seasonal costs including the cost of seasonal enrolment/registration in sport as well as buying sporting gear (especially football boots and uniforms). Relatively lower median incomes and a relatively high incidence of single parent families exacerbated these cost issues. Another key barrier was **transport** and logistics – both getting to weekly training as well as traveling for weekend matches. This particularly challenging for families with multiple children. The cost issue was exacerbated for parents with multiple children playing sport, making it difficult to ferry children to multiple events.

For Queanbeyan residents there were a number of specific locational disadvantages that acted as participation barriers. In Queanbeyan it was reportedly very difficult to attend training in Canberra unless one had access to a car because the busses to Canberra stop running early in the evening. Some Queanbeyan residents complained that, compared to Canberra, Queanbeyan had relatively **poorer sporting infrastructure**. This was often coupled with a complaint that there were surely many Indigenous role models at the AIS in Canberra who could “come over the border and inspire the kids here (in Queanbeyan)”, but that this seemed not to happen. For Queanbeyan residents it was also frustrating that the catchment area for club sports excluded the ACT but included places much further afield in NSW.

Health problems were another key barrier mentioned by participants, especially for Indigenous people once they reached their 40s – particularly diabetes, back, knee and joint problems and being overweight.

How to encourage participation in sports and physical activity

Given the reported barriers and drivers of participation mentioned above, not surprisingly suggestions to encourage greater participation in sports and physical activity centred around the same key areas.

The value of **providing sporting and physical activity programs that provide a sense of inclusiveness** in relation to the involvement of families and communities, and address holistic health issues, was seen as a critically important factor in attracting Indigenous people to participate and sustain involvement in sport and physical activity. Such initiatives could be as simple as sporting clubs involving parents or extended family in volunteer roles to assist with sports training or organisation, or holding community social events. Pivotal in organising and running such programs was the active involvement of passionate and motivated sport and recreation officers or youth development officers.

Sporting clubs were seen to have a role in providing appropriately inclusive programs. While such programs did not have to be run by Indigenous people or organisations, it was seen as important that programs clearly embraced Aboriginal people and were run by people who were passionate and “in it for the long haul”.

A recurrent theme throughout discussions was the challenge of delivering sustained engagement due to limited financial resources of community organisations which often operate successful programs. If the programs cannot be **funded in the long term**, no matter how good they are then benefits will not be sustained in the long term.

Therefore **ensuring long term funding of programs** that encourage Indigenous participation in sports (whether these programs are run by Indigenous community organisations or mainstream sporting clubs) is key. In particular, Indigenous community organisations' sporting and healthy lifestyle programs are important to getting older Indigenous people into a less sedentary lifestyle – however, funding is usually slim. Thus, the provision of (long term, sustainable) government funding for such programs is key. Identification of these community organisations and programs so that funding can be delivered will be a necessary first step.

A number of suggestions were made to overcome the cost issues faced by individuals (especially those faced by parents supporting children to engage in sports). These included:

- Providing transport assistance e.g. a bus to do a group pickup, car pooling.
- Free sports boots and uniforms.
- Subsidised registration fees. In Queanbeyan reference was made to government provided vouchers that could be used to subsidise registration fees. However, few people were aware of this assistance, so raising awareness is an issue.

Both funding for such initiatives, but perhaps more importantly engagement/relationship building between government and organisations providing these services (in order to help identify which organisations need funding), is needed. Apart from Government or AIS funding, the corporate sector was also identified as a potential source of financial support for grass roots sporting programs.

Often the most successful programs had been developed over time by a passionate and **highly engaged individual/s**. Thus at the community organisation and club level it is not sufficient for funding to be provided, it is also necessary for resources to be made available to drive initiatives.

This could be assisted by providing funding, support and encouragement and networking amongst people in similar situations, as well as fostering the involvement of others within such organisations, so that program success is not so reliant on a single individual.

The importance of **role models** to Indigenous behaviour change is well known. This was reiterated in these discussion groups. There was also some frustration with the perceived limited number of sporting stars from Canberra / the AIS who visited Queanbeyan. It was felt that given the close proximity of these stars to Queanbeyan and how much of impact role models could make on youth, it was a shame there was not a more aggressive visitation program.

The key to recovering from **health issues** was in providing more funding/support for integrated community based healthy lifestyle / rehabilitation programs, as well as ensuring that Indigenous Australians are aware of 'non-standard' sporting and physical activity options that can be maintained throughout life. Education and awareness around connecting individuals with relevant services and advice would also help.

The role of sport clubs in building social capital and community capacity?

The experiences of Indigenous people with sporting clubs covered a wide spectrum, though were generally positive. In particular, clubs that embraced and respected Indigenous culture were more

likely to have elicited positive reactions than others. This is not to say that only clubs with all-Indigenous or majority-Indigenous memberships could be popular amongst Indigenous participants, but cultural awareness and inclusiveness were seen as key success factors in sustaining the engagement of Indigenous participants (saying a ‘welcome to country’ at meetings and signage acknowledging Indigenous custodianship of the land).

Holistic healthy living focused programs run by Clubs were seen as being important. Club assistance with navigating administrative processes could also be helpful in enhancing participation. Cultural awareness and sensitivity is also key in gaining the trust and respect and continued participation of Indigenous people.

What can ACT Clubs do to increase Sporting Participation among Indigenous People?

- Limit charging people to be involved, but instead rely more on fundraising from local businesses and events (e.g. BBQs, raffles).
- Making Indigenous people feel welcome, safe and included.
- Cultural sensitivity - it’s important to maintain a focus at an individual level as well as engage the community as a whole – this is best achieved by appreciating everyone’s personal circumstances and trying to accommodate those individual needs.
- Focusing on the fun aspect and the game is key for children, however for long-term engagement a focus on overall healthy living is a key issue for older adults.
- Getting peoples’ ‘mates’ involved is very important. Clubs don’t need to have an Indigenous only focus, but do need to make it clear that Indigenous people are welcome and respected.
- Getting people initially involved requires word of mouth, social media is also really helpful for communicating with people and getting your message out there, holding local community events and start by getting people to just “throw a ball around”.
- Mentoring is very important. It’s great to have role models come out and speak to about healthy living or domestic violence (not just football), but having local community members speak about the benefits of physical activity can be equally powerful.
- Long-term funding is crucial, and can be extremely difficult to obtain.
- Integrating with wider healthy living programs is useful, and can stress that players’ training and fitness isn’t all about what they do on the field it’s about eating and drinking well.
- Evaluating the success of the programs isn’t just about the number of people participating, it’s also about making sure they’re all having a good time and having fun, and the whole community is involved.

Conclusion

The research affirms the central roles of community, family and holistic healthy lifestyle programs, in helping to deliver sustained engagement in sport and physical activity programs amongst Indigenous people in the ACT. The adequate and sustained funding of such organisations and programs is key. Awareness raising, role modelling behaviour and the provision of financial assistance to help with the cost of transport and other costs are other key factors. Sporting clubs have a role to play too, and need to provide culturally sensitive, inclusive programs for Indigenous participants.

1 Introduction

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and Active Canberra engaged ORC International to conduct a research project on Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's participation in sport and physical activities. The study was designed to explore Indigenous Australians' sports participation behaviour and provide the ASC and Active Canberra with a deeper understanding of the drivers of that behaviour.

The ASC and Active Canberra sought this research to:

- inform their policies and engagement models
- help inform how the ASC's and Active Canberra's sport sector partners (National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) and their supply chain) may successfully and viably deliver sport to Indigenous communities and develop targeted sports delivery, for both products and services, and communication strategies and tools to more effectively encourage participation among Indigenous Australians residing within the Canberra and surrounding regions.

There were two phases to the research project:

- a data and literature review conducted in May 2017, which then informed
- a qualitative research phase conducted in June 2017.

This present report focuses on the results of the qualitative research phase specifically relevant to the ACT and Active Canberra. Detailed findings of the data and literature review are provided in a separate report, but to provide context for this report, a summary of key findings is provided in the next chapter.

2 Objectives

The purpose of the overall Indigenous Sports Participation Study was to research Indigenous Australians' sports participation and physical activity behaviour and help the ASC and Active Canberra understand the context, patterns and drivers of that behaviour.

The specific research objectives were to:

- **explore participation** in sport and physical activity among Indigenous Australians, including in metropolitan, regional and remote or very remote locations
- **identify and describe different segments** that exist within the Australian Indigenous population who are either participating or not participating
- **understand the perceived benefits** of sport participation for the Indigenous community, including but not limited to health and wellbeing, education, crime or anti-social behaviour, social capital, in particular the role played by club sport
- **explore the key drivers** – emotional, attitudinal, motivational – **and the needs and barriers** – both real and perceived – to participation in sport and physical activity within the Indigenous community
- gain a better understanding of how people in Indigenous communities **conduct decision-making** to participate or not to participate in sport, as well as what drives them to participate in other physical recreation
- identify **what would encourage** Indigenous Australians to become more active
- understand what the **participation opportunities** – both sport and physical recreation – are for Indigenous communities, and how/if they are tailored to suit their needs
- **understand which sports**, programs or products, and which avenues, including sport clubs, **work well** for Indigenous communities **and which don't**, and why
- **understand the drivers**, opportunities and challenges **for** sport and physical recreation **providers**, in relation to Indigenous communities and Indigenous Australians.

3 Data and Literature Review – Key Findings and Identified Gaps

Prior to conducting the qualitative research phase, analysis was conducted on data produced by the AusPlay survey, which is the ASC's Australian national population tracking survey of adults' and children's sport and physical recreation participation, and recent literature on Indigenous sport and physical activity participation was reviewed, in relation to a set of research objectives stipulated by the ASC.

3.1 Data analysis

While the sample of Indigenous AusPlay respondents was relatively small (481), which affects the overall reliability of the Indigenous population estimates and trends presented in this report, especially for segments within the Indigenous population, this was the first time that the ASC had useable data on Indigenous people's participation in sports and physical activities, at a national population level. Over time, as more data is collected through the AusPlay survey, more robust analyses will be able to be conducted.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' participation in sport and physical activity

The AusPlay data analyses found that, in keeping with previous research findings, **Indigenous people were less likely** than non-Indigenous people to have participated in sports or physical activities in the last twelve months. However, the AusPlay data suggested that Indigenous adults who did participate tended to participate more frequently and for longer session times. Although based on less reliable data, the findings also suggested that **participation rates and frequencies for Indigenous children may peak around the ages of 9-11 years old**, possibly even surpassing non-Indigenous children's participation during this age, then decline at a faster rate than non-Indigenous children's participation after the age of eleven.

The analysis of the AusPlay data also revealed that the most popular sports and physical activities were similar for both male and female Indigenous participants, and non-Indigenous participants, with recreational walking and fitness/gym topping the list for all groups of participating adults. Participation through organisations or venues was less prevalent for Indigenous adults than non-Indigenous adults; but higher proportions of Indigenous adults participated through sports clubs or associations. There were no clear patterns of participation in organisations or venues, or in sports clubs and associations, by age or sex of Indigenous participants.

Indigenous Australians' participation in sport and physical activity

Although overall participation rates were not significantly different for Indigenous men and women, they were slightly lower for men, on the whole, in contrast to ABS statistics from 2007-08 which reported higher participation rates for men. In the AusPlay data, women who had participated tended to participate more often than men, but participating men tended to have spent longer in their last session of sport or physical activity. For children, girls appeared to have lower participation rates than boys.

Small sample sizes made analyses by geographical area particularly problematic. However, Indigenous adults in the Australian Capital Territory appeared to have had the highest proportional

participation rates and participation through organisations or venues of the states and territories, but the lowest participation through sports clubs and associations when they did participate through organisations or venues. Conversely, Indigenous adults from the Northern Territory appeared to have had the lowest participation rates and the lowest use of organisations or venues when they did participate, but one of the highest rates of participation specifically through sports clubs and associations (alongside Indigenous adults in Tasmania).

Although also based on less reliable data, it appeared that the participation rates of Indigenous adults may have been lowest in outer regional and very remote areas of Australia, and that the rates of participation through organisations or venues and through sports clubs and associations dropped in remote and very remote regions.

3.2 Literature review

Perceived benefits of sport participation

A wide range of benefits were identified in the literature on Indigenous sport and physical activity participation. These included benefits to health and wellbeing, education and employment, the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour, and increased social capital. It was also suggested that regular, organised, group participation created opportunities which could be leveraged for other service provision (such as health services), that it had potential economic benefits, and could contribute to reconciliation of Indigenous culture in the wider community. Sports clubs and associations were generally viewed as particularly positive enablers of these benefits; however, authors cautioned against treating either sports and physical activity, or sports clubs, as some sort of 'magic bullet', noting that the benefits were inter-related, difficult to measure, and always occurring within a particular social and historical context which limits or enables the ability to achieve benefits, and influences the extent of the benefits and even how they are conceptualised or measured.

Key drivers and barriers to participation, and the decision-making process

The key drivers for Indigenous participation in sports and physical activity included, desire for fun or enjoyment, a perceived (often health or fitness-driven) need, a lack of barriers, perceived suitability (to personal requirements and preferences), and the existence of external, social support or encouragement. The main barriers fell broadly under the categories of: other commitments, especially to family or community; personal illness or injury; financial constraints; access issues; safety or comfort concerns; a different cultural construct of sport and physical activity; and racism. While the drivers and barriers to participation provided insights into some of the underlying factors influencing Indigenous participation in sports and physical activity, the subjective nature of decision-making and feelings of encouragement (or discouragement) to participate made these topics ideal for further exploration during the qualitative stage of this research.

Existing opportunities for Indigenous communities to participate

Macniven et al captured the details of 110 programs, operating in 2015, which aimed to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' physical activity levels, for health benefits. Their work significantly contributes to the understanding of the sport and physical activity opportunities for Indigenous Australians. There are, however, additional opportunities for Indigenous sport and physical activity participation, provided through programs and products which do not necessarily have a primarily health-benefit-based focus. Some mainstream sporting associations offer Indigenous program components, or have made efforts to introduce and document inclusion policies which

explicitly refer to the inclusion of Indigenous Australians in their sports. There are also a number of organisations which are specifically dedicated to providing sports and physical activities opportunities for Indigenous people, and numerous grass-roots programs and community initiatives, which are quite often run out of local youth and community centres.

Effectiveness of programs and products

To be effective in encouraging sustained Indigenous participation, the literature suggested that sports and physical programs and products encapsulate the following characteristics: ongoing relationship-building and community consultation and involvement, at all stages of development and implementation, including initiation and evaluations; local capacity-building, enabling long-term, sustainable control of the program; a tailored, flexible offer that is specifically designed for the needs and preferences of the particular community; a group, family or community, rather than individual focus; an environment which enables, not hinders, participants' cultural identity; a safe environment where participants feel welcome and supported; integration with healthy living programs, cultural learning and wider cultural experience; evaluations that take a more holistic, long-term approach and recognise benefits that may be difficult to quantify, rather than assessing separate, often short-term health variables; and long-term, reliable funding. Regular contact between experienced sportspeople and participants was recommended for sports programs, and it was advised that all programs and products encourage mentoring and modelling by older participants, and be promoted as games or sports, rather than as exercise or in terms of their desired outcomes (such as a fitness or personal health).

Provider-side drivers, opportunities and challenges

Opportunities exist for mainstream providers to continue to develop and apply inclusion policies, to recognise and embrace Indigenous cultures, and to expand the Indigenous components within their programs and products; and for any provider to increase the variety of offerings available to Indigenous Australians, or to address the absence of sport and physical activity offerings in some locations. Providers' main challenges arise from the inconsistent, changing policy and funding landscapes in which they operate, and in meeting the criteria for effective programs outlined above. Providing sports and physical activity programs and products to Indigenous communities requires time, effort and flexibility to work with the communities to ensure that the program or product is ultimately driven by the community, and that the particular needs and preferences of that community are met.

3.3 Knowledge gaps and recommendations

The research gaps identified in the data and literature review included the following issues for **exploration in the qualitative phase**:

- The decision-making process. There was a scarcity of literature focusing on:
 - how Indigenous people decide to participate or not participate in sports and physical activities; the decision-making process
 - what has worked to encourage Indigenous participation in sport or physical activity broadly, as opposed to encouraging participation within a particular program or product

- There being no recent, national data on sports and physical activity participation by Indigenous 15-17 year olds, as this group of respondents cannot be identified within the AusPlay sample¹
- An inadequate understanding of whether Indigenous women and men conceptualise and experience sport and physical activity differently to each other, or to non-Indigenous women and men, and whether this affects reported statistics
- A lack of findings on the potential relationships between Indigenous participation in sport and physical activities, and in sports clubs and associations, by remoteness
- Insufficient data to allow analyses of participation by further segmentations within Indigenous populations, such as:
 - sex within state or territory or remoteness areas, or remoteness areas within states and territories
 - participation rates throughout the lifecycle stages, particular for differently aged children, also by jurisdiction and/or remoteness category
- A requirement for more research to explore the role that sport and sport clubs play in building social capital and community capacity
- Few insights into the additional programs and products adults would like for the children in their families and communities (family-orientated and culturally connected activities are preferred, but which types would they like more of, for their children)
- Minimal coverage, in this report, of the drivers for providers of sports and physical activity providers.

Thus, the qualitative stage of this research focuses on addressing these questions:

1. (As context, provide an overview of sports and physical activity participation in the Indigenous community)
2. What are the participation patterns for Indigenous youth aged 15-17?
3. What is involved in the decision-making process to participate, or not to participate in sport and physical activities, how individuals decide whether or not to participate, and experiences of sport and physical activity?
4. What would encourage an increase in sports and physical activity participation? That is, what currently works and what doesn't?
5. What are the differences between men and women's experiences and understanding of sport and physical activity?
6. Sports clubs - What role can sport and sport clubs play in building social capital and community capacity? What are the experiences with sports clubs (positive/ negative)?

¹ In the AusPlay survey, only respondents who are aged 18 years or older are asked potentially sensitive questions, such as cultural background, as described in the *Methodology* section, on page 8.

7. What opportunities would Indigenous parents like for their children (family-orientated and culturally connected activities are preferred, but which types would they like more of, for their children)? What do adults think would enable and encourage their children to participate more?
- Across all these issues, what are the differences by state/territory or remoteness?
 - In conclusion, what are the key barriers and the key success factors for driving sporting and physical activity participation amongst Indigenous Australians (and specifically in the ACT context)?

4 Methodology

The project was carried out in compliance with ISO 20252 and membership requirements for AMSRO and AMSRS. Within the Canberra and Queanbeyan region four focus groups and six in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with Indigenous Australians aged 18 years and over. Additionally two interviews were conducted with Indigenous Australians aged 15 – 17 years old (conducted as a pair) and four IDIs were conducted with intermediaries engaged in the organisation of sports and physical activity programs which target Indigenous participation (see table 1 for a summary of the sample design). Fieldwork was conducted between 25 May 2017 and 23 June 2017. All participants received incentives valued at \$80.

Table 1: Summary of focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted

Location	15-17 year olds	18-39 year olds	40+ year olds	Intermediary Interviews	TOTAL
Canberra	2 IDIs	6 IDIs	2 FGs	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 10 IDIs
Queanbeyan	2 IDIs*	1 FG	1 FG	2 IDIs	2 FGs + 4 IDIs
TOTAL	4 IDIs*	1 FG + 6 IDIs	3 FGs	4 IDIs	4 FGs + 14 IDIs

*IDIs with 15 – 17 year olds were conducted as a pair

The majority of the respondents were recruited through local Indigenous organisations except for the six interviews with Indigenous Australians in Canberra aged 18 years and over which were recruited through Stable Research.

Discussion guides were developed in collaboration with the ASC and Active Canberra, in order to maintain consistency across focus groups and IDIs, and were informed by the findings and recommendations from phase one, as well as the overall objectives of the research (see appendix A and B for copies of the final discussion guides).

4.1 Analysis of findings

This research phase was qualitative in nature and hence, the results and findings are presented in a qualitative manner. This research approach does not allow for the exact number of participants holding a particular view on individual issues to be measured. This report, therefore, provides an indication of common themes and reactions among research participants rather than exact proportions of participants who felt a certain way.

The approach taken to reporting has been, wherever possible, to allow participant voices to be used as much as possible to demonstrate the research findings.

5 Key Findings

5.1 An overview of sports and physical activity participation in the Indigenous community

General Participation Experiences

To provide some context it is useful to reflect on the general sports and physical activity participation levels amongst Indigenous residents of the ACT and Queanbeyan.

In general, participation in sports and physical activity tended to decline with age.

Typically, children of school age participated in a wide range of sports – all football codes were played (especially rugby league), plus basketball for boys, and netball for girls. Touch football / AusTag was also very popular with both sexes, as was soccer. Cricket and golf were much less commonly played by children. Sports were played regularly at school as well as on Saturdays with training sessions usually held after school during the week.

“Sports always been a part of our lives. (laughs) I think from you know ... sports was all we had like growing in a small country town, I grew up in Moruya down the South Coast. If we didn't have sport, we'd you know, get into a lot of trouble. So we just yeah, we were always playing sport. Go from one sport to another, to another.”

Canberra, aged under 40

In later teenage years, while some continued to be involved in organised sports, others changed activities somewhat, with some starting to take up sports like boxing or non-sport physical activity like going to the gym.

Organised sports participation tended to continue into early adulthood, but with increasing numbers of people dropping out as age progressed.

For adults (both young and older) non-sport activities like ‘boot camp’ and going to the gym, or more passive activities (especially walking) were popular and this often continued into later life.

“Yeah, I do walking. With the kids. I go to the gym with my daughters.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

However, participation levels in organised sport often declined significantly after the end of the school, and again in the mid to late 30s. This often coincided with Indigenous people leaving their community for work or further study, and was associated with disconnecting from their established community/extended family with whom they had often participated in sport.

In addition to this dislocation, young adults also became much busier with work and young children often providing a break on physical activity and sports involvement generally.

“Yeah, life. You get older, you know, when you get out of sport you, you know you don't have all that time on your hands. You have to start thinking about having a career. Or if it's not a career at least it's something to support yourself, you know? When you get older, as you get older you move up. It's like, you have to sort of decide between what you want to do. Because when you're in high school you're carefree.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

“The biggest thing is just about time and money plus, you know, age as well, and what you do for a career. Whether that takes a toll on you, you know? Some people could be working in the saw mill or some could be in the office, you know? So um, it gets a little about the individual themselves and what they want.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

“But um, it just gets away from you. You give it (sport) up for a year, and that's it. Hard to get back into it. You go out having a baby. That's one of the hardest things to do. I know with seniors touch football that's what the adult comp is called, there'd, there'd be a handful of people that I could think of, the Indigenous people that play touch footie, at that age. You know, into their 40s. In their 20s and early 30s maybe, sure, but once the family comes along...”

Canberra, aged over 40

Having children was often reported by parents as being associated with having “no time” for sport themselves – ironically taking children to and from their sporting events and training was often cited as a major drain on having time to partake in sport themselves.

“It's a bit hard when you're driving kids to training and, I mean seriously I, before they started getting their Ps (P Plates), I'd live in the car five nights a week. I'd be all over the place. Living in cars, dropping off, picking up. And then I wouldn't really, unless I played at like 9 o'clock at night, netball would probably be the only thing I had a crack at.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

In middle age some adults make a conscious effort to get fit or take better care of their health and this is typically associated with a combination of activities like walking, going to the gym, or doing ‘boot camp’. A smaller proportion return to sports they played in their youth.

A Case Study – Dan’s Story

I am 63 years old. And I am pretty active now. Go to the gym 4 times per week, mainly doing weights and cardio, and also try to walk as much as I can. I also do a fair bit of fly fishing with my son-in-law. My diet is also something I am keeping on top of.

When I was young I did everything. I played rugby league with multiple teams and I was good too. Every team I played with I ended up being the captain. I took up boxing when I was a teenager and got into that because my old man was semi-professional and also because my older brother who I looked up to boxed as well. My old man passed away when I was nine and from then on my older brother was I guess more of a father figure for me.

Played tennis too and I was pretty good at it too.

What happened?

Life happened. I got married at 18 had my first kid at 19 and a second a couple years later. So I moved (from the South Coast of NSW) to Sydney and I was working two jobs to make ends meet. Rent to pay and mouths to feed. I worked as a courier by day – starting early and finishing in the afternoon and then I ran a photography business at night - doing weddings and things. The exercise and sport just went out the window. You put your own needs and your own fun second. That’s what you do, isn’t it? It’s about doing what you need to for your family and the next thing you know you are spending all of your spare time on the weekend driving them (kids) to their sporting games and training! No time for yourself. Of course, once I’d moved away (from my community) I left my friends and family and team mates behind. You know, so even if I’d had the time for footy which I didn’t, how would I find another team to be part of? You know, it’s, I think, it’s harder for Kooris. Harder to break into a new group. If you grow up in the community, with cousins and uncles and such, but you can’t easily replace that in a new city. How do you break into the group? It’s a confidence thing. Like shame, you know. You don’t want to put yourself out there, you know.

What did you do to turn things around?

For me it is simple, I had a check-up with my GP about 9 months ago and he said “Dan, if you don’t do something to lose weight, you are not going to be around much longer.” That day I decided I am going to do something about this. My daughter had just had twin girls and I thought, what am I doing? Do I want to see them grow up or not? They are the motivator for me. Am I going to see them go to school? Am I going to see them graduate? Within the first 3 months I lost 9 kilograms. I was morbidly obese and now I’m not any more. And the more weight I lose the easier it is to lose more. And the more things I can do. Before I couldn’t walk without huffing and puffing. Now I have taken up fly fishing again. When you go fly fishing for the day you know you can walk for 20 kilometres, you know. And my son-in-law loves it too so that is a good way to connect with him and stay involved in my grandkids’ lives. It’s something we can share and have a bit of fun together. I guess you could say I have come full circle. I stopped doing footy and exercising when I was younger because of my family and what I needed to do to take care of them. Now, my family is the motivation for me to get my rear back into gear, so to speak.

5.2 Participation patterns among Indigenous youth aged 15-17

In these teenage years participation patterns are often a continuation of earlier years, with school based sports and Saturdays sports (football and AusTag and netball) predominating.

Typically, children of this age participate in a wide range of sports – rugby league for boys, netball for girls. Touch football, AusTag, is also very popular for both sexes, as is soccer. In teenage years going to the gym and boxing also become popular.

These late teenage years are a pivotal time for Indigenous youth in terms of engagement with sport. Many Indigenous youth participate actively in organised sport up until this age, but then the appeal of other social activities is more strongly exerted by their peer group and this can cause some youth to disengage from active sport.

It is at this point that schools, community groups and families have a role to play in ensuing youth continue to be engaged and supported to participate in sport.

“They’re losing the kids from the grassroots. When they stop moving up, when they get to a certain level, they stop. Like Gracey’s got all these talented girls, they’re going to swim for a state school, and then they go, “Oh mum, I can’t afford to go to Wollongong this weekend, I’m going to play soccer instead ‘cause that’s just down the road.” Whereas if they start getting encouraged and they got access to all the, you know, financial and mental support and everything else to get to that next level, who knows where they’ll be? Otherwise they stop because there’s, there’s no one there to encourage them.

And you know what happens when, when, when the kids do that? They can get in that depressive state, what are they going to undertake? If they know that they cannot achieve something because there’s a barrier there, they’re going to go and have a cigarette. They’re going to go and hit on the rock. They’re going to go off and start drinking. I did it for many years myself. Still see it. I’m not preaching or anything, but that’s, that’s the path that they will choose. A lot of them will choose. Not all of them, but a lot of them. They know that all that’s stopping them to make that next step is money or equipment – for a kid with talent that can be very frustrating and depressing to feel like you could have made it but these things stopped you.

*They’re going to say, “Well f**k it. Me cousins over there doing it so ...” They’re going all right. They’re very impressionable at that age. They’re what? 15? 15’s probably the age where they’ll start doing that stuff, or 14. So you need a life coach, they need a mentor or whatever. A mentor, yeah a mentor. But you need a life coach. This is where you need those elite, high-profile sports persons to come in and talk, and deliver their presence and to pay them attention, to be that person, the person they can call on sometime.*

Share their story ‘cause not all the athletes on TV had it easy. Some of them could have been down and had it hard. Kids need to know that it’s hard, it is hard work and you’ve got to apply yourself in discipline. That you can’t just walk into something. So they need people to tell them their story.”

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

“Yeah, I think it's the teenage years and when they've got friends that are off doing, I don't know. Hanging out with the boyfriends and the girlfriends. Hanging down at the mall. Down at the mall, doing, whatever they're doing. That's more fun than having to go and play sport when I'm not an elite level player. I'm not going to get recognised for anything, so why should I participate? I'm better off just going and having fun with my mates. It's really hard. But they don't have to be an elite sportsperson to be, you know. That's the key message I think that needs to come out. That it's about, it's about fun, having fun, socialising. Part of a team, sense of community, belonging, good health, all that, you know?”

Canberra, aged over 40

In late school years some youth can start exploring more non-sport options, such as boot camp or going to the gym with friends or family members:

“I was just sick of sitting around at home not doing nothing so mum said we've got this boot camp thing here on, and Skye-Anne's like you should come it'll be fun, so I went and everything. It was a fun thing to do with my mum. Yeah, and also because I hadn't like been doing exercise for ages and I hadn't been doing no sport or nothing.”

Queanbeyan, aged 15 - 17

Intervention by family, schools, sports clubs is key in ensuring children (and their parents) take steps to stay engaged in sports at this age. This involves a variety of things – encouragement, education, financial support, transport etc (as discussed in the next section).

5.3 The decision-making process – participation drivers and barriers

The process of deciding what sports are engaged in obviously varies by age. For younger school age children, the primary drivers were parental choice (which obviously often takes children's interest into account), but as children get older they have greater agency over their decisions, though the influence of parents and other extended family as role models remained strong.

Typically, up to the end of primary school children were strongly influenced by **parents' and siblings' involvement** in sport, the sports played by the extended family (cousins, uncles, aunts) and friends, as well as what is on offer in their community.

“Um, my brother played and then, when I was the right age, I guess, we naturally played together.”

Canberra, aged over 40

“My Dad boxed and my older brother who I really looked up to as well, he boxed too. So I guess I was following them as my role models”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

“That’s just what my family do. We play footy.”

Queanbeyan, aged under 40

Enjoying the game for the **team and social aspects** and for the love of the game itself were key motivators for children (especially) and adults.

“My nine year old plays AFL, because he goes to West (school), and all his little mates are there so that’s what he wanted to play of course.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Competition, or to be the best was a motivating factor to some, but not most.

The **engagement of the Indigenous community** (the extended family and peer group network) was also a key factor in sporting and physical activity participation, with children and adults reporting being more likely to participate in organised sports or activities like going to the gym or boot camp, if they were accompanied by family members or close friends.

As children enter teenage years the concept of **shame** becomes prevalent as an influence on decision making. In Indigenous communities the concept of shame is the sense of wanting to fit in and in particular being reticent to ‘big note’ oneself or stand out from the crowd thus exposing yourself to potential ridicule. This leads to a timidity in participating unless accompanied by other members of one’s family or peer group.

“So if Johnny knows that his little mate Joey is going, he’s going to say, hey, mate, you know, let’s go out and grab a couple more of our friends, and the four of us go, and then it’s not so much of, you know, I don’t feel so anxious about participating with non-Indigenous people or, um, you know, I might go and grab a couple of mates from school and we all go together as a group because they’re not going to a new situation where they don’t know anybody, they don’t have any rapport with anybody, there’s no communication that’s already been set up with anybody.”

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

"You know Eva, I watched her one day and I just stood back and I was watching her. And she literally, 'cause of the girls and you know when you're on the sideline of touch, people are watching and talking. You're running on and off. But she withdrew 'cause some of the girls were anxious to get on themselves, so they're all pushing in front of her. So instead of going, "No, go on." She'd back off. So um, and I had to have a talk to her about that. You know, like so, and I felt it was just a bit of a shame and not feeling confident and she didn't have somebody else there with her, but now that she's sort of playing with another girl that I take out, another young girl, and a couple of the others, Indigenous girls, she seems to be quite a different person. So, um, that's what I would say."

Canberra, aged over 40

"Yeah, it's very different. Um, when I first started there, I wasn't included at all, I was kind of slow. I mean, a couple girls there would talk to me every now and then, but they didn't introduce me to anyone. So, I just kind of made my own friends. But I stuck with it. Yeah. Yeah it's better now. I been there a year, I think, now."

Canberra, aged over 40

"Yeah. And, um, both his sisters did it ... with, um, with me for a while. I went along with them, just to give them support because they wouldn't go by themselves. They're too shy and they, they always have this shame factor. You know, "No, Mum, I'm too ashamed. I can't do it by myself." "

Queanbeyan, aged under 40

The strong influence of the peer group/family can thus be both positive and negative – in encouraging and sustaining participation in the presence of the peer group. However, once removed from the peer group (for reasons of moving for study or employment or family move) it makes it much more difficult to reintroduce sport. This commonly resulted in a dramatic fall off in reported sporting involvement after the end of school, as Indigenous youth moved for further education or employment opportunities, and then started families of their own.

"They feel isolated, and they feel, well, that's that shame, shy factor that comes into play. Could be the best sports person there, in that, in that environment but, but mentally, they're, physically probably great ... but mentally they're not capable of breaking that barrier. Just introducing yourself, say, can be difficult for our young people. So there's some life skills also that a community based program could assist with."

Queanbeyan, aged over

40

“Okay. So one of the things is that uh, when kids finish at school, it's more difficult to stay involved in sport because first of all um, they've got less time because they're off looking for a job or they're studying something, but secondly they're no longer with the same group of kids, so the social aspect or the community aspect is really important, and so if you don't have that, you know, if you're used to playing basketball with your, with your cousins, but then your cousins move away somewhere because they finish school, ...”

Canberra, aged over 40

“If you're new to a place, you don't know anyone on the team or, or even where the teams are. Yeah. And once you leave school and you're out of that structured situation of doing sport ... it's a lot harder to keep yourself motivated and interested and find the time to do those things, because then life just starts to take over, you know.”

Canberra, aged over 40

Re-engaging to regularly participate in organised sport again is possible, but not typical.

“Now it's something I played when I was younger, but I think I stopped when I was about 16, 17. 'Cause I went away to university so I couldn't afford to do sport because I had to work to 'cause my parents couldn't pay. Started again when I was, um, 42. So, 26 years later. I still play the women's touch now throughout the year. I spent a lot of time with my kid's at the touch field. We pretty much live there. My daughter's also a touch player.”

Canberra, aged over 40

The decline in sporting participation in early adulthood was often exacerbated by the demands of employment, family and also 'temptations' (socialising, going out etc). As such, programs that focus on community/family involvement, have an Indigenous specific focus (enabling Indigenous youth to feel more comfortable) and help build and support resilience are likely to be more successful. One example of such initiatives involved holding a family event one weekend where people play football but family members of all ages are invited along – to help with training, officiate or just watch. Other examples include conducting a special event during NAIDOC week – to create a bit of a celebration as well as a sports carnival. A community-run health living program was also cited as a good example of this – it involved a sporting element with transport (a bus collection service), as well as a visit from a community nurse and a dietician.

Such programs were seen as important in overcoming **racism**, or **non-inclusive practices**, which could also be a barrier to participation.

“Well yeah. Uh, it's a part, you see it all over the TV. They're getting discriminated against. So our kids see that and they prefer to be with their

own, wouldn't they? You know? You wouldn't, you wouldn't find one Aboriginal child just go to one white team and say, "Hey, can I play?" I don't think, anyhow. I think that it's not even necessarily about overt racism or exclusion – though sometimes there can be racism. More like, a white team or a club not understanding our mob's issues. Like family problems sometimes or understanding money issues or sorry business maybe is why a kid is not at training, and having that sensitivity or cultural awareness to understand that and be flexible and inclusive. That is the key I think. We can tell pretty quick if that understand is there or not ..."

Canberra, aged over 40

"The best part about it is that they will know each other. Just from the Winnunga community and you know, anyone outside can come in and join but they're all comfortable and nobody feels shame. Like I thought I was going to have a problem with them coming into a gym. But once they got there and seeing who was participating and that, they know each other and they ... Then it's not an intimidating thing. It's not like some weird thing that other people go to. It's like oh well, there's a whole bunch of people here I know already so I'm comfortable with them."

Canberra, aged over

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Cost was reported as a further barrier to participation – both for adults and their children. The main costs cited were seasonal costs including the cost of seasonal enrolment/registration in sport as well as buying sporting gear (especially football boots and uniforms). Relatively lower median incomes and a relatively high incidence of single parent families exacerbated these cost issues.

"My daughter plays - it was 170 for her. That's for under 17's. And Charlie is 110. Yeah. The season only lasts, what? Five months. That's not like a whole year thing. 'Cause then they come the Summer's sports and then it's a whole new regime, for a whole different sport."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"I've got one grandson in football and one in basketball this year. But when they're both playing together, lot's of parents couldn't afford both of them. Well I was helping them out to keep their registrations up, 'cause the boys want to play and they just couldn't afford to ..."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"So, yeah, so how's that work, 'cause I when I spoke with the guys a couple weeks ago, they said it's quite common for, if you've got a uh, a, you know, a

kid who's quite sporty, that could be playing you know, rugby and AFL and basketball, for instance, so if you've got three or four kids, you know, that's, first of all, it's quite expensive, because you've got you know, three kids times three sports times three registration fees. Boots, outfits, and then you've got to find a way to kind of ferry them around. Get them, get them from one place to another."

Canberra, aged over

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"And most of the sports around Queanbeyan, when you want to go and join a team, particularly for most of the younger generation, if they're not working, they can't go and join a team because the fees that they have to pay to be able to play in there, some of them are ridiculous. Like if you go out to the indoor centre that's here, just to play one game one night of whatever sport it is, whether it's, um, soccer or netball or basketball or whatever it is that they've got on out there, or indoor cricket, it can be anywhere from \$11 to \$30 for that one night for the sport".

Queanbeyan, aged under 40

Not infrequently the high cost of children's sporting participation was cited a barrier to parents' participation, with parents sacrificing so their kids could play.

"But I mean, if you're paying for like, like, my daughter, my two daughters, when they play netball. Registration's 140 dollars each for weekends. So if I pay for her to play that doesn't leave the money for me to join the team to play."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"It's about taking time out for yourself. For you to be healthy. And that's always one of the hard things, you know. As a parent, you always put your kids first, and then you come second and then before you know it, you've got your health issues and stuff like that, so ..."

Canberra, aged over

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As well as seasonal set-up costs like registrations, uniforms and boots, recurring incidental costs like the cost of food at matches and fuel for travel were also made sporting participation hard to afford.

"And then you've got to take all your kids to the sporting event anyway, and then if there's food there you've got to spend that on food. They're like seven or eight dollars a pie mate. What they made of - gold?"

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Somewhat paradoxically, the better children were at sports, the more challenging financial issues reportedly become:

“You've got to understand too a lot of our kids are multi-talented. My son played league outside the school, played Union with the same school, Union outside the school with a club. Then they've got touch football, they've got cross-country. You know, then they've got athletics. So, everything's just on top because most black kids are not fluent in one sport, they are multi-talented. You look at the Australian uni team, they took the Australian Aboriginal touch football girls and put them in union and put them in league because they can adapt, the same as soccer. It's like um, the amount of money that you spend on [your daughter] for playing for the school and then playing outside the school, then running around trying to play for the Raiders as well as the Rouge (team) as well as the school, now it's all different uniforms, all different insurance payments, all different teams, and you're only there sitting on the bench you know? And as they get better, if they progress up, the further up they go the more expensive it all gets. Like, netball, I think, when [daughter's name] is playing netball, and playing state I think that was like, 7 hundred, 8 hundred dollars just to go away for a three day event. What an opportunity for my girl, hey? But, it was that expensive. And they did fundraising but that money's all divided between the teams. Yeah so, that might take 150 off and that's still 600 dollars and that doesn't even include you buying the shoes, the uniform, every other carnival that's every second weekend pretty much... So the further they go up, the more expensive it gets. And a lot of the time I didn't travel with her, 'cause I just couldn't afford it. So she'd go on the bus, cause they took a team bus, I became friends with parents that were super parents that went everywhere. But I wasn't one of them. I couldn't afford to be, which was heart breaking. This is the story for a lot of Koori kids with great talent. The better they get, the bigger the ask, the more the cost, the more the pressure on families. Can be hard to sustain.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Another key barrier was **transport** and logistics – both getting to weekly training as well as traveling for weekend matches. This particularly challenging for families with multiple children.

“What I used to find difficult with my three kids, one played, my girl played net ball, my two boys played football. One boy was at one ground, the other boy was at another ground and the girl was over this side, (laughs). So I had to, between me and my husband we had to split in very different ways. And sometimes I had to catch a bus because I don't, I wasn't driving then but yeah, we had trouble trying to get the kids to the main game. Things like that, as well.”

Canberra, aged over

40

"Yeah I suppose once you're busy to take the time to train or, or go to whatever. Sometimes it's even harder then because what if they've got a game in Cornell somewhere. That's a hundred kilometres away. Some people don't have the money to pay for the kids at the games and I sure don't.

Yeah, the cost of transport can be a killer. And usually 'cause they put games on the same day, you might have three kids playing on a Sunday morning and one is over in Gunghalin, and, you know, one at Whisper Hill and one's in Queanbeyan. The, the intermural (competition) doesn't take into account that you got um, kids all over the place."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"When I first moved up here, I stayed with a family, I went home every weekend for a whole year. Every weekend. I'd get in that car, with a partner and we drove back Friday night, Saturday, Sunday, and drive back Sunday. And sometimes you'd have a, a day off on the Monday but, I'm just going, "Oh my God. How'd I ever do that?" But that was because I missed my family so much."

Canberra, aged over

40

Both cost and transport became particular issues for those with multiple children or for those who were sole parents. The cost issue was exacerbated for parents with multiple children playing sport, making it difficult to ferry children to multiple events.

"The parents, the parents will tell you how much they struggle. Financially struggle, transport struggle. You've got one kid at this sport, you've got one kid at that sport, and one there and one there and one there."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

For Queanbeyan residents there were a number of specific locational disadvantages that acted as participation barriers. In Queanbeyan it was reportedly very difficult to attend training in Canberra unless one had access to a car because the busses to Canberra stop running early in the evening.

Some Queanbeyan residents complained that, compared to Canberra, Queanbeyan had relatively **poorer sporting infrastructure**.

"So whether you, you know, say, you want to play in Queanbeyan, they might not have an indoor cricket team for people under the age of 17, between the ages of, say, 14 and 17. So they've actually got to travel to Canberra, and it's not just anywhere in Canberra, they've got to go to the Indoor Cricket Centre at Lyneham. So those are the kinds of things, and because we don't have an indoor cricket centre, or we do, but it's not overly big, um, they may not be able to like access that service here."

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

This was often coupled with a complaint that there were surely many Indigenous role models at the AIS in Canberra who could “come over the border and inspire the kids here (in Queanbeyan)”, but that this seemed not to happen.

For Queanbeyan residents it was also frustrating that the catchment area for club sports excluded the ACT but included places much further afield in NSW.

“But even for selection for stuff. Like, we're here right here and the ACT's right there, we can't travel like, over there, because it's NSW. They have, they have a lot of rules and stuff that they support their children with and here, we have to drive to Wollongong for trials. If our kids want to progress and go up the ladder we start going to Goulburn, we start going to Wollongong, we make these trips to Bateman's Bay just to participate for New South Wales, to do anything like that. The travel time involved can wear you down and the further your kids progress, the longer the trips are. Whereas the ACT is like, just there, just over there! But we can't participate there, which is a shame, as it's just a man made border preventing it.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Health problems were another key barrier mentioned by participants, especially for Indigenous people once they reached their 40s – particularly diabetes, back, knee and joint problems and being overweight. While these health problems were often reportedly caused by lack of physical activity, they also contribute to an unfortunate feedback loop, where being overweight, having back problems, knee problems, and easily becoming short of breath were often mentioned as barriers to participating in sport or regular exercise.

“Um, at, at the moment my health is really bad. So, and with my diabetes and with my nerve pain, um, cause I suffer really bad nerve pain with the diabetes. Like, I can only walk uh, a small distance until your nerve pain starts to fire up.”

Queanbeyan, aged over

40

“I, I fractured me hip playing touch football, yes, playing touch football. I jumped over a player when I scored and I slid and crack, that was it, that was the last game that I played.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

But poor health, and the desire to overcome it, could also be a motivating factor:

“Like we have a lot of, um, coronary heart disease and diabetes and high blood pressure and that in my family. And my mother passed away at a

young age. So, I'm trying to do things to make sure that I'm healthy within myself. So that I don't have to be worried about that thing and then my kids don't have to be worried about, you know, "Is Mum healthy and is she going to pass away at a young age like Nana did?" ..."

Queanbeyan, aged under 40

"Because you start about working, if you're 30 or 35, like you've already been working for a while. 45's the age when all the chronic diseases and that start hitting too. So, you know, it, it goes, it can start younger, but 45 you know, on, that's been the chronic disease point. The diabetes and all the other issues. So that's a good, that's actually a really good point. So and again, this has been raised before, that you know, when you get a bit, I say old but more mature, um, you know, you start to have problems with your joints or your knees. You'll get a bit of back pain or whatever. It just don't work no more! (laughs) The more active you are ... the less likely you are to develop those chronic diseases but, that's why it's good that we're honing in now on the young, so that they don't end up ...Like their parents and their, and their grandparents."

Canberra, aged over 40

6.4 How to encourage an increase in sports and physical activity participation. What are the key success factors?

Given the reported barriers and drivers of participation mentioned above, not surprisingly suggestions to encourage greater participation in sports and physical activity centred around the same key areas.

Provision of holistic programs that promote the participation of Indigenous families' and communities

The value of providing sporting and physical activity programs that provide a sense of inclusiveness in relation to the involvement of families and communities was seen as a critically important factor in attracting Indigenous people to participate and sustain involvement in sport and physical activity. Such initiatives could be as simple as sporting clubs involving parents or extended family in volunteer roles to assist with sports training or organisation, or holding community social events.

"So have programmes that have community development officers, talking to the kids. You can have us at the table, but talk to the kids. What kids, what, what kids um, what sport, and it's good to have families. "

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"No, it is, absolutely it is. You'll find that with youth and, you know, with the younger generation that, um, they're more inclined to participate and actively be involved and not just show up if their family can go and watch them or if their family is involved. So if you've got a mom and dad, you know, mom might pick up the kids, dad might help the coach, you know, set up the all the equipment, you know, have a bit of a chat to the kids before they play, or even be there as a support person, someone they can talk to if you've got some issues ...because sport not only is it good for your mental health and your physical wellbeing, um, you'll find that when they do it in a, in a family environment that they're actually more open and they communicate better and then it just from there it springs up and makes their just their overall wellbeing, um, a lot better, and the older they get, the better they are with interacting when they either move out of a home or they get a job or they go to uni."

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

"But we as parents as well have got to play a role in our kids active lives, sports and that, and we have to show our kids as well that there is, there is another life like that besides staying home and doing stuff like, stuff like us parents did growing up. As well, so we do have to play, like we have a level of responsibility as well. So that's where, that's where I was going about make it more family orientated."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"When we have, um, parents that come in, and they might be like, oh, you know, my kid or my child is, um, or my nephew, my niece, my grandchild, um, has, you know, made it into their playing for regional, you know, representing the area, or it might be state, um, and they might ask for a donation.

So we give them a donation to go towards ...you know, it might be for transport, it could be to pay or their registration and insurance, um, because sometimes the parents, even though they want to go to and support their children, they can't always afford to go, especially if they've got, you know, a couple of kids who are doing the same sport or, um, they, that they need to take with them. So we, that's probably the only thing that we do for youth at the moment. Um, we do have a board of directors who are trying to procure funding for a designated sport and rec programme, and that programme will be divided into three groups, and those groups will be age-based, so we'll have under, we'll have youth up to age 24 ... and then we'll have 24 to, say, 50, and then over it, so that'll be like the mid-range people.

Um, and then we'll have a 50-plus. So, and it'll be things like, um, taking them to the pool to get, you know, it might be the older people that we take to the pool for them to, you know, you get a bit more mobility. It could be the younger ones where they turn around and say, "Well, on Saturday would you want to play soccer or would you want to do a netball tournament?" And then it's paying for their registration, it's, you know, getting the parents to come on

board with, you know, doing group pickups to get the kids to the venues where they need to play the sport.”

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

“Uh, I think that they just stopped midnight basketball. Yeah, they're trying to start it up again. It was a programme that used to happen here in Queanbeyan for all the kids.”

Queanbeyan, aged under 40

Pivotal in organising and running such programs was the active involvement of passionate and motivated sport and recreation officers or youth development officers.

“It was an Aboriginal corporation that ran it, they no longer exist for whatever reason, but that's what they had. So they started off as a very small organisation, and then they employed a youth worker and they employed, employed a sport and rec development officer. Those people were both trained, one was trained in youth work, one was trained in, um, sport development, and then that's what the development person then went on and did individual, you know, first aid, um, coaching certificates, um, and then learnt some games, like traditional games, so Aboriginal traditional games. Um, they then advocated on behalf of people who would come into the organisation and wanted to know about what kind of activities might be in Canberra, um, what age groups. So it was like a one stop shop where you go to and you find out all your information. They'd be able to help you with what's on, who's running it, um, transport, funding, um, family access, all that kind of stuff. It was fantastic. But, like I said, it doesn't exist anymore, but gee it was a good programme when it did. I guess they lost funding or something.”

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

“But you've got to have people out here that are community focused. That know how to talk to agencies and communities. Also, if you want to get the kids, I think, if you want to get the kids more involved, make it family-orientated. Get the families, get the mums, get the grandparents, get everybody involved. Even with the young sports days, even on the regular sport days, do that as a community.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

If sporting programs were conducted by Indigenous community organisations, by definition these included a community component and sporting programs or integrated “sport and healthy living” programs run by Indigenous community programs were reportedly very successful in generating sustained engagement while they were run (accessing reliable long term funding was often reported as an issue).

“Well, um, last year in April, we looked into funding the Healthy Weight programme. And it includes uh, each person and advice about portion control, things like that. But we are lucky enough to have three gym sessions a week. And they’re for an hour and they’re with personal trainers and the, these people that can’t afford to go to the gym, um, have never been in a gym, they are coming now and they’re losing centimetres and weight and they turn up every day and it’s just, because they could never access it. It’s, it’s a really great programme. They’ve got that, they’ve got an exercise physiologist there, too.”

Canberra, aged over

40

“We’ve always been involved in trying to promote healthy lifestyles ... you know ... to um ... keep in activities, whether it’s closing the gap, or ... or whatnot. Um ... we um ... we sort of try to get to the younger Aboriginal guys, so they can ... um ... they have something to do. Other than acting ... you know ... with a lot of the stuff in today’s society that sports sort of ... being active in any kind of sport reduces the risk of offending and coming into the justice system.”

Canberra, Intermediary

“As part of our services for our elders that we try in the community, um, we run a programme once a week to make them come down, and it’s a healthy, um, healthy living, healthy eating, slash, um, social activity program. So they come down and we’ve got a lady that comes from one of the local gyms. And she will sit with each person, um, and work out with them what their strengths are and what they need to work on in terms of making them more of a healthy person. So if we’ve got someone who comes along and they might have primary heart disease, um, they will work with them on what kind of exercise programme is good for them and how they can go about increasing what activities they do to support their healthy lifestyle. So the person that comes from that, that gym they’re a qualified personal trainer. Right. Okay. So they come along, um, and unfortunately, we only get the one lady who comes, and it’s only once a week, and it’s only for four hours. So it’s not an, uh, like a long period of time, um, or it’s not like two or three times a week. So it’s probably not as useful as what it could be if the programme was run, say, two days a week or three days a week. Um, and the kind of stuff they do is just, um, they might, if they’ve got a mobility issue, they might sit in, in the chair and then work out what kinds of exercises they can do sitting in the chair that doesn’t require them to stand for too long.

Some of them that have a bit more mobility, um, they might go for a walk around the block, a very slow walk around the block. Um, they might stand outside and do some slow stretches, um, that aren’t too strenuous on them. And then they’ll come in and then they’ll have a bit of a talk about what kind of foods they eat, um, how it can make, what, how they can make the food they eat, their everyday food a bit more healthy. So, not, so, for example, don’t get rid of having your sausages and mashed vegetables, but how to make that a

bit more healthier for them to eat so that they're cutting out their calories and fats. Yeah, so, it's quite practical and realistic. And it, it helps them because it's for the, it's for the age, slash, people who have a disability. So that's one programme that we're very proud of that we do here, and it's probably something that we do very well."

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

"I think just more indigenous group stuff. There, there'd be more interest, because you'd feel like, saying, like, you know, there's aboriginal people there, just like me, you'd feel more comfortable."

Queanbeyan, aged under 40

Programs that provide assistance with child care would also be beneficial for engaging those with children:

"Yeah. So if we had sports that were kid friendly ... and we had options for child care and those kind of things, so that you can participate in sport, if you have small kids. Or we can organise, and then when if she wants to go and do something, she can bring them, and say, Auntie, can you have the kids while I go during this time. And then she can go and do her thing and not have the kids, you know, but so that she knows that this is going to happen on a regular basis, so ... then she could plan ahead for it. Exactly. Especially in this community. And if you don't have a lot of other family here that's able to help you out with child minding, that becomes a big, a really big barrier. Because you cannot be on the field playing sport ... with your kid going around out there by herself. (Laughing) Or someone on the sideline that's in your team, looking after them while you're on the field, or on the court."

Queanbeyan, aged under 40

As Indigenous youth enter teenage years particularly, the issue of *shame* becomes relevant. As mentioned, to overcome this, programs (such as the examples mentioned on page 22 above) that focus on community/family involvement, have an Indigenous specific focus (enabling Indigenous youth to feel more comfortable) and help build and maintain resilience and self-esteem and self-confidence are likely to be more successful.

The specific role of Sporting Clubs in supporting such programs

Sporting Clubs were seen to have a role in providing appropriately inclusive programs. While such programs did not have to be run by Indigenous people or organisations, it was seen as important that programs clearly embraced Aboriginal people and were run by people who were passionate and "in it for the long haul". These efforts could involve things as simple and basic as recognising and respecting Aboriginal culture – by saying a 'welcome to country' at meetings and erecting signage recognising Indigenous custodianship of the land. Putting up posters that demonstrate support for the Indigenous community or Indigenous activities, promoting Indigenous involvement on club websites,

forms or brochures also make a difference. Such small efforts, consistently applied, are noticed and send a powerful message about inclusion. Providing assistance with filling out paperwork, organising transport or carpools to training or games can all go a long way to breaking down some of the barriers to participation. Recognising that Indigenous players or their families can require flexibility due to absences from training or games due to cultural reasons (e.g. deaths in the community or extended family) or family problem is also important. Engaging with local Indigenous community organisations is a good way for Clubs to understand what might work well in this respect.

Promotions and Funding of such programs

A recurrent theme throughout discussions was the challenge of delivering sustained engagement due to limited financial resources of community organisations which often operate successful programs. If the programs cannot be funded in the long term, no matter how good they are then benefits will not be sustained in the long term.

Therefore ensuring long term funding of programs that encourage Indigenous participation in sports (whether these programs are run by Indigenous community organisations or mainstream sporting clubs) is key. In particular, Indigenous community organisations' sporting and healthy lifestyle programs are important to getting older Indigenous people into a less sedentary lifestyle – however, funding is usually slim.

“We are discouraging our kids not to participate in their sport because they have, they don't have the financial resources to go further. This is the way the AIS, this is the way the funding boys should concentrate their moneys. They, it's 20 odd, 30 odd million. 20 odd then, if there's 20 million, 15 of that goes to admin. They have to restructure their, their strategies.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

“So, and then the other one is to do with community engagement programmes. Um, and then there's grants for housing, so indigenous social housing, and I can't remember what the fourth one is. But they fall through the cracks in a sense that it's not, it's a bit argy-bargy on the wording. So sport and rec programme, yeah, it does benefit health, and, yes, it does community programmes, and, yes, it does, you know, have a part of community access.

So it has all those little bits that it can tap into, but not enough for it to be effective so that it can benefit more than a handful of people.

So there isn't, um, and because we miss New South Wales and not ACT, New South Wales government doesn't have, say, a specific set of money that they set aside for sport and recreational, and because we're New South Wales we can't access ACT, even though there is only just the railway tracks that divide us.”

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

“So that's why when they have things here, um, we really do approach council and see like with the Queanbeyan City Council to see if they can help us,

whether it's even just a donation of, you know, using the Ovals for free, um, and then we try the other indigenous organisations. So we've got the local land council that we go and have a yarn with and see if they can help us out with some dollars, um, and then it's just sponsorship from local businesses. So we get a lot from the butcher shops, and they might be free meat ... you know, for barbecues and stuff like that. So, yeah, you know, or it could be the baker shop, local baker shop. And it's a shame because you see kids roaming around and you think to yourself, you know, why can't they be playing a sport at four o'clock in the afternoon or training for a sport instead of walking downtown and doing nothing, being a bit of a nuisance, or getting into trouble."

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

Thus, the **provision of (long term, sustainable) government funding** for such programs is key. **Identification of these community organisations and programs** so that funding can be delivered will be a necessary first step.

Assistance with Costs

A number of suggestions were made to overcome the cost issues faced by individuals (especially those faced by parents supporting children to engage in sports). These included:

- Providing transport assistance e.g. a bus to do a group pickup, car pooling.
- Free sports boots and uniforms.
- Subsidised registration fees. In Queanbeyan reference was made to government provided vouchers that could be used to subsidise registration fees. However, few people were aware of this assistance, so raising awareness is an issue.

"But even with the funding you gotta know how to access it like, recently the ACT government's just taken over sports grants, you can apply for up to \$200 for registration fees. But if you don't know how to get on a computer you won't know how to get it because the application's online. Everything's online completely. But not everybody in our community is computer savvy. So I meant, if you don't know how to use a computer then how do you get the funding for your kid?"

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"Support too like, when you take the kid away, the funding should be helping with the parents with the car, driving. Honestly 'cause you don't just send your child away you want to be with them to support them and, you know what I mean? Like, how many times have you jumped in your car to take them somewhere. The money comes out of our own pocket that then might help pay for the uniform or something. Understand that a lot of the Koori kids

travel with their families. I think there's just the bigger scene is the cost you know what I mean? Because anybody can get into a mainstream sport but it's just, do you have the money to pay for registration and uniforms and socks and, you know what I mean?"

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"The thing that we find to be most expensive for the youth is the insurance form when they join, and so it might cost them 50 dollars for a registration fee, but when they have to turn around and do, um, insurance for the team, it can actually turn out to be very expensive. Some of them could be to 300, 400 dollars. So, yeah, I mean it's not a lot of money for, um, it might be for an organisation, but, like I said, for the individual, um, it can greatly help them and then greatly improve the fact that they're not bored and they're doing something."

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

"Oh right, yep. Okay, so I guess in doing that, so you're, I guess so you've, you, you're providing the, the organisational support. You're providing the social and community aspect because it's all indigenous kind of kids. You're providing transport. And you're also providing some financial support because you're providing free gear for some kids who can't afford it. Oh, we just got a big bag of boots and you're done. It's good. Anybody who's got old boots can donate them. It's pretty good now. I've got a bus that picks them up that comes through, like a car or something like that. But they're a little bit older now so they can sort of mentor the younger ones. Now they sort of fill those shoes. It's really good."

Canberra, aged over

40

Both **funding** for such **initiatives**, but perhaps more importantly **engagement/relationship building** between government and organisations providing these services (in order to help identify which organisations need funding), is needed.

"One thing too, I'm probably going to regret saying this ... But one thing too, and this is from experience, to encourage our kids in sport financially, why does the AIS not play a role in this? They should. They're, they're, the AIS is great at supporting elite sport and top level sport people, but why do they fund just elite sports people? When I think about how much good could be done if just a little of that elite sports money trickled down here over the border to support our kids, well..."

But you have to reach the national level before they help you with money. And it's only certain approved activities they fund. Or otherwise they reject the claim. But how our kids get to that level in the first place, even with all the natural talent they have? They've got to play in the local region. In the local comp, in the regionals. But we are discouraging our kids not to participate in their sport because they have, they don't have the financial resources to go further to start. What I'm saying is a little bit of grass roots funding will go a long way. Water the grass roots, and grow a big tree!"

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Apart from Government or AIS funding, the corporate sector was also identified as a potential source of financial support for grass roots sporting programs.

"You know, you know what you should do? Going out, this is what the sports commission should do, say that Sony pays for all that, they get to contribute their dollars towards encouraging our youth to, to participate in sport. Because Sony Play Station they play a major factor in why our kids are not playing sport! Why they're indoors. So true, so true. Mm-hmm. They've got to be hitting up those big, those big, big companies to put a percentage away for sport. Especially with Indigenous sport. That's' gotta be a good news story all round right. Make the bureaucrats in Canberra and the big end of town feel good about helping out some local kids. Win, win I reckon."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Transport

Providing transport was widely mentioned as a particularly important factor for encouraging participation – not just because of the cost of transport mentioned above, but because of a number of factors that intersect to make it especially problematic: cost, juggling multiple children's training and playing schedules, distance/time involved to get to games and training. Ironically, many parents reported that the time spent taking children to and from games and training acted as a significant inhibitor on having the time to participate in sport or physical activity themselves.

To a lesser extent the same point was made in relation to spending money on sports (children's needs came first). In Queanbeyan, a common complaint was that if training in Canberra it was difficult to travel there from Queanbeyan mid-week due to a lack of public transport between Canberra and Queanbeyan after about 6pm.

Solutions could include awareness raising regarding available transport options, plus potentially the addition of extra public transport. Providing funding to Indigenous community organisations who fund transport services might also assist.

“Transport is also such a big issue. If you have a community development officer and an indigenous community development officer that's focused on the region and their specific role is to, and they have the transport, say they have a bus, and their specific role is to develop certain sports within that region but also have, have transport available for it, that is the key I reckon.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Available services / facilities / infrastructure in Queanbeyan

While sporting infrastructure in Canberra was reportedly good, there was a perception amongst Queanbeyan residents and intermediaries that both the variety and quality of sporting services on offer in Queanbeyan was inferior to what was available “over the border” in Canberra.

“The geographical area, yeah we get punished. We got the border of ACT over there, they got all the facilities, they got everything. We go, up, down the mountain, other sides of the cloud, east coast. That's where all our funding, aboriginal, our work as aboriginal, that's where all our funding, aboriginal fares, and community state funding, that's where it's all going. So the east coast, and all the ACT funding is all ACT.

Unfortunately, because of our geographical location, nothing filtrates. If it, if it does, it might go to the wrong area. And that's where all the funding is heading. We're, we're here in a very bad location.

But even for selection for stuff. Like, we're right here and ACT's right there, we can't travel like, over there (to the ACT), because we're NSW. They have, they have a lot of rules and stuff that they support their children and here, we have to drive to Wollongong for trials for second place. If our kids want to progress and go up the ladder we start going to Wollongong, we make these trips to Bateman's Bay just to participate for NSW, to do anything like that. Where ACT is like, just there, a stone's throw away.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Provision of more and better sporting facilities in Queanbeyan is obviously a major funding task, but current lack of services is seen as a significant source of frustration. Lack of ability to access AIS facilities or role models was specifically mentioned.

“Local man, local services and local programs are needed. The last activity the kids had here, well besides the skate park, was ten pin bowling. They have no youth focused programme, no youth facilities here in Queeny.

You want our kids to play sports and stuff? There's not one programme here for our children to do. The only thing the kids have got is the local swimming pool. And maybe the skate park and the youth centre. Other than that they've got practically nothing, but mainstream sports. And it costs money to go into them sports. Queeny suffers a bit actually from being, in some ways from being next to Canberra. It's the idiots in the council, that's what it is. Should be focused more on what our kids need.

There's a perception there's probably a perception that well, oh, well it's kind of in Canberra, right there over the border. But actually you can't access it ... Just 'cause, just cause it's there, doesn't mean our kids can access it – the facilities or the funding. So they (Canberra) need to be held accountable too. They're not even meeting us halfway. They're not even doing anything. And yet they're the first to complain about our kids walking in the streets, what do they expect the kids to do?

It seems quite wasteful to me that there's, that you've got something like the AIS in Canberra, 15 minutes away, 20 minutes away, and yet the community here cannot see any benefit out of the people over there, let alone get access to the facilities.

Do we have access to those AIS facilities? Can we take our kids over there? No, we can't. And they're the top athletes there, take them through the process, take them through what they do, inspire them! If they did it'll stick to the kids, but they don't which is a shame.”.

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Passionate Local Engagement

Often the most successful programs had been developed over time by a passionate and highly engaged individual/s. The ongoing success of such programs was often contingent on a single person who had had sustained involvement in setting up and organising a program.

Thus at the community organisation and club level it is not sufficient for funding to be provided, it is also necessary for resources to be made available to drive initiatives.

“But also there's that, you know, that one hour stuff, that's what some people want to give in these roles. That's good, but not to drive a program seriously. One hour won't cut it bud. Unless you really feel committed and you, you're used to that structure within the community and have support from the

school too, and the school that you go to as well, that plays a big role in program success.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

“It helps them break down the barriers because we find that a lot of our kids today, unfortunately, suffer from anxiety ... and they suffer from depression ... and they suffer from a sense of not belonging to anywhere ... whether it's the community where they feel they don't belong, whether it's family, you know, disconnected from their family, um, or where they've got to say, okay, well, um, if we don't have transport to get out child to play sport, we need to find somebody who we trust and the child trusts, and they can do a pickup, pick up the kids like a parent might go and get, you know, three or four kids to take with their child, um, or an organisation like ours, um, has the capacity to go and buy a bus and then have it as a community bus where ...

... we can use it to transport people to and from sporting activities because that's one of the biggest barrier is not only is it cost, um, but it's actually getting, getting someone there to and from.”

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

“I run cricket. I've been running cricket there even though it's community cricket, consisting of four indigenous teams. We'll have 60 to 70 people participating, 10, 11 up to 50, 55. It's 20/20, but every time they're down there, but you know, they'll be 60, 70, 80 people there some times. I kick it off in end of November and we play the grand final in early March. First weekend in March. And I've been running that now for five years. And the only place where I can get help is Winnunga (Aboriginal Community organisation) and I'm 60 now so I won't be able to do it much longer. No funding from government, no funding from Council. This cricket had been running for well over 20 years, but because the elbow's going now there's nobody to do it, to take over from me. No doubt about it. There's nobody there to take it over.”

Canberra, aged over

40

This could be assisted by providing funding, support and encouragement and networking amongst people in similar situations, as well as fostering the involvement of others within such organisations, so that program success is not so reliant on a single individual.

The reduced role of regional development sports officers was also raised as an issue that needed to be addressed:

“And also remember, I haven't seen him around for years, but just when I finished school about 20 years ago, up until about 5 years ago, they used to have the regional development officers driving around to your little athletes, to your rugby league games, to your grand finals, you know? You don't seem them cars anymore, you don't even hear about these people. If you don't go out and find it yourself.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Role models / QBN

The importance of role models to Indigenous behaviour change in the wider health promotion area is well known. This was reiterated in these discussion groups. It was repeatedly noted that, while it was good for young Indigenous people to see Indigenous sporting celebrities, it was just as important for young Indigenous people to be able to engage with local Indigenous people who were examples of leading happy and healthy lives. That is, the aspirational element of the role model could relate to living a healthy, physically active life, rather than needing to be a successful sporting star.

Having said that, in Queanbeyan there was also some frustration with the perceived limited number of sporting stars from Canberra / the AIS who visited Queanbeyan. It was felt that given the close proximity of these stars to Queanbeyan and how much of impact role models could make on youth, it was a shame there was not a more aggressive visitation program.

“I think, and that you know, you mentioned something very interesting about um, access to, you know, to role models. Because Canberra's like, there's a lot of, like, not just elite athletes but there's a lot of big, big, big stars in, just over the border in Canberra that could play a big part of encouraging our young kids.

I'm talking about internationally renowned people, and recognised around the world. But they do, they have, have in their contracts they have to do community engagement, to some degree. But a lot of what I've seen is very perfunctory, if you know what I mean. I've said them breeze in, they'll say, they'll send a newsletter out and say, four Raider's players are coming, go and meet the Raiders and there will be just one guy there on the day, because why? The other three couldn't be bothered? One of them will show up. And 20, you know, 20 or 50 little kids running around all trying to meet him. A little bit of effort from those guys could add a lot of inspiration to the little fellas around here, but they have to make the effort and show up.”

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

Health problems

The key to recovering from health issues was in providing more funding/support for integrated community based healthy lifestyle / rehabilitation programs, as well as ensuring that Indigenous

Australians are aware of 'non-standard' sporting and physical activity options that can be maintained throughout life.

Education and awareness around connecting individuals with relevant services and advice would also help.

"I think that an issue as well is recognising that people are going to be interested in different things, but also something like, whether it's shooting or archery or whatever, that might be not something that everyone is interested in, but that's something that you can do throughout your whole life if you're aware of it as an option ... But if you're never given the option to do it, or you never know about it. Not everyone can or wants to play footy, not after you reach a certain age, you don't want to get knocked around and it plays havoc with your knees and back. And what about the older generation, you know, such as myself, I like to do some of swimming because it helps with my diabetes, it helps with my nerve pain. Keeps my back strong ... Maybe some light sports, something that's a little bit lighter."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"There need to be programmes and activities for older people as well. This is where our community engagement development activity comes in, I don't give two eggs what you call the officer, but you someone at the grass roots in the community organising programs and raising awareness of them."

Those sort of positions need to be properly resourced, which is another way of saying government funding or grants."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"And it'd help too, if young ones see their parents and grandparents doing something like that, healthy living, healthy eating, physical exercise, then the kids going to support and be involved too and want to do it too. So when the young ones get older and stop playing footy themselves they realise there's other avenues to stay healthy. Provide role models from the community for the young ones to follow. That's the way."

Queanbeyan, aged over 40

"It's just about education and awareness. It's just that ... you know ... providing the information to people that ... you know ... if you're a ... are going to smoke and if you're going to drink and you're going to do this and you're going to do that ... you ... you're already ... um ... at risk of ... dying earlier. So, um ... you know ... if you do these things and this is what will happen. So um like eating fruits and drinking water and stuff like that, your chances of living longer are

better. (laughs) And um ... and providing advice like that for free needs to be part of a program too."

Queanbeyan, aged under 40

6.5 What are the differences between men and women's experiences and understanding of sport and physical activity?

While the qualitative research (as well as the data review) did indicate some clear differences in the sporting and physical activity behaviours and preferences between men and women, in general, there was no discernible difference observed in how Indigenous men and women think of (define what constitutes) sport or physical activity.

Having said that, this was a qualitative study of limited scope – findings from the wider national study may elicit additional insights in this area.

A Case Study – Janice's Story

I'm 40 years old and have three girls of my own – all in school. I would like to do more but it is very hard, you know. The main thing for me is my weight, I'm quite overweight now, and that has a number of impacts. Firstly, it makes me less mobile, secondly plays havoc with my knees. When I was younger I played netball heaps. I was actually really good at it and loved it. I grew up on a (cattle) station near Dubbo and I also used to do competitive bull riding.

And what about now?

Now, I don't really do anything (in terms of sport or physical activity). It's hard. I don't have the money (to participate in organised sport), but also my health is not great which restricts me from doing a lot. I have mobility problems, which has lead to me gaining a lot of weight. So I don't do anything any more unfortunately. I guess I am not setting a real good example for my girls.

What happened?

I had a bull riding accident when I was nineteen. Real bad. Almost killed me. I ended up with a steel plate in my spine and another one in my leg. I have three girls of my own now and they do netball as well, but only at school. One of them is good. Has real talent I think, but I can't afford for her to do it outside of school.

So lack of money is a problem?

Yes, of course. You've got the registration fees and the uniform, shoes. It all adds up. And I have three girls and you can't support one and not the others, so by the time you add it all up. You have

the away games and traveling there too. Petrol money. It all adds up. It's not just the money though. Because of my back I can't drive for long periods and in any case I can't afford to run a car, and the public transport on the weekends is terrible. Plus I am on a pension and can't work full-time, again because of my back. Everything compounds you see. Because of my back I am less mobile, which means I put on weight which I really need to lose. But the weight makes it even harder to get around. I feel like I am trapped a bit. How do I get out of the spiral – it's not easy to see. I am on a (disability) pension but I'm a single mum, girls Dad shot through, it was all too hard for him. That's how I ended up in Canberra because my brother works here for the government and he said come down here Sis, so that's how I'm here now.

What would help you get more active?

I am trying to walk more and build it up a bit you know. I think that is the way. But some days even that is hard. The key for me will be to lose weight. But I don't think I will ever be able to be like I was when I was young because of my back.

What about your girls? What support could you get for them to see them participate more?

Like I said, money is a problem. Transport is a problem. Uniform and shoes are a problem. I would like to see them be able to get the opportunities like other kids but it's hard to see, it's really hard to see... I certainly hope for something better than their Mum's experience.

5.6 What role can sport and sport clubs play in building social capital and community capacity? What are the experiences with sports clubs (positive/ negative)?

The experiences of Indigenous people with sporting clubs covered a wide spectrum, though were generally positive.

In particular, clubs that embraced and respected Indigenous culture (refer to some examples on page 32) were more likely to have elicited positive reactions than others. This is not to say that only clubs with all-Indigenous or majority-Indigenous memberships could be popular amongst Indigenous participants, but cultural awareness and inclusiveness were seen as key success factors in sustaining the engagement of Indigenous participants.

“Because all of the guys at the Club, they've got mates. It's just all about friendship really. When you've got mates that are ... um ... you know you've got indigenous mates and non-indigenous mates and people just want to play for you together. We accept everyone. That's a great Club for Indigenous players then. Doesn't have to be just Aboriginal players.”

Canberra, Intermediary

“Better you know cultural awareness across the Club ... across the board. Um ... learn some more culturally appropriate ... um ... programmes ... and basically ... um ... more training and more opportunities for training sessions and community members to participate ... to be involved in I guess.”

Canberra, Intermediary

“Knowledge and appreciation are ... look unfortunately there's still a little racism around and because someone's different ... and I'm not just saying Aboriginal people, but we've got a multicultural community. And if you're a minority group, you're different and you're already an outcast so ... um ... that ... that's a big issue in itself. I guess look, just to acknowledge everyone's different ... um I think ... you know in ... in ... in our ... in our day and age, we've got so many different nationalities. I think people of different background and culture ... I think um ... we should acknowledge it and we should show that we uh ... if we don't you know believe in their religion or whatever, we ... we respect that.”

Canberra, Intermediary

Rather, it was generally recognised that clubs that were openly accepting of Aboriginality and diversity in general were seen as welcoming and friendly environments for Indigenous people. Feeling comfortable, as noted before, is a key consideration in ongoing participation. Where an effort is not made to be inclusive of Indigenous people, this was seen as likely to generate disengagement.

“Things around financial support, transport, um, a bit of awareness raising, so that people know what sort of things are on. Um, but also I guess uh, issues around uh, kind of social aspects and community aspects of the people that you're playing with. It's quite important, I think. In the community here. Um, and finding a way to make that kind of all come together. 'Cause it seems that, that the way, you know, when that works well, like with the programme you're running, you know that, that eliminates those different barriers.

Yep. So it's not just about funding, either. It's the funding but then it's someone to organise it too. Funding, passion, empathy and understanding for what our mob need. Self-confidence building and that healthy living stuff too, holistic program. Include the families, include the community. And make sure people are aware of what you are doing and have that awareness.”

Canberra, aged over 40

Holistic healthy living focused programs run by Clubs were seen as the most successful:

“Well, it ties in, because we're ... we want our boys fit ... you know ... like in ... to help give them the edge over people. Staying fit, it's not just about training, it's about eating healthy, it's about ... you know ... drinking water instead of soft drinks and things like that. So, um ... it all links in. Holistic program. Oh,

yeah. Look, you just have to have the right people run it ... if you want to get to a wider community, you've got to make sure that you're tapping into the right people who have access to their ... the wider community."

Canberra, Intermediary

Club assistance with navigating administrative processes could also be helpful in enhancing participation:

"And then just like ... I ... I've been through the application just so I could help people do it and the application was like 18 pa ... you know 8 pages long. You have to provide all of this different information ... um ... and then you know ... it's ... and then just for like \$200. It was like ... man those are like paper overload and a lot of people just didn't bother doing it, because they didn't have access to or a computer, or they didn't have forms and stuff like that, so. Way too many guidelines. Clubs can assist with that stuff too."

Canberra, Intermediary

Clubs also need secure funding to survive and continue to provide good programs.

"Um ... yeah ... we need continued sponsorship for the Club to survive ... to ... through whatever avenue to succeed. Because, we don't make money ... like we ... we don't have a brand, we're not out there selling ... you know ... the things that we do is ... we do a barbecue on a weekend and ... you know ... we'll probably make a couple hundred dollars each weekend. And we have like seven or eight home games. So, um ... when you're ... when the clubs costing \$30,000 to run for the year ... that ... that \$2,000 isn't really going far is it? (laughs). So, yeah ... and the other thing with that too ... like when you know ... there's always grants, or there's always some kind of um ... government initiative. But, there's way too many guidelines."

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

Cultural awareness and sensitivity is also key in gaining the trust and respect and continued participation of Indigenous people:

And um ... okay, this person's usually turns up late to training all the time. So, what do you do as a coach or as a leader in the team? You give them a call, ask them what was going on. Um ... you know they could have ... some reason, maybe their car broke down, or their mom couldn't take them, or they had a falling out with the person who takes them to training.

Queanbeyan, Intermediary

6.7 What opportunities would Indigenous parents like for their children? What do adults think would enable and encourage their children to participate more?

In general, Indigenous parents were primarily concerned for their children to be engaged in sporting and physical activities that their children **enjoyed**. The specific activity itself was not important. Especially while children were young, sports were often preferred based on parental preference or being “what everyone around here plays”.

Being **part of a team** was also mentioned as important.

As a longer term benefit parents also mentioned the desire to inculcate **healthy living/good health** behaviours in their children.

Other mentioned benefits included:

- to be involved with community and family,
- to maximise their children’s potential to achieve in sport.

In teenage years, parents were more likely to mention motivators like

- to develop self-confidence / resilience and overcome shame; and
- to avoid involvement in crime.

6 What can ACT Clubs do to increase Sporting Participation among Indigenous People?

A summary of things Clubs can focus on to increase Indigenous participation:

- Don't charge people to be involved, instead rely on fundraising from local businesses (this is really important for Indigenous people).
- Making Indigenous people feel welcome and safe. In mainstream clubs there is often a cultural divide or even racism. Examples of lack of cultural appreciation include not understanding why players haven't shown up to training, particularly if they haven't due to family / community responsibilities. Needs to have a high appreciation and knowledge of different cultures (not just Indigenous).
- Focusing on the fun aspect and the game is key for long-term engagement, so healthy lifestyles and getting fit is a part of it and very much in the mind of coaches and organisers, but for the players it's all about the game. Especially if it's something they can do well it builds up their confidence, which is key.
- Getting their mates involved is very important. Clubs don't need to have an Indigenous only focus.
- Getting people initially involved requires word of mouth, social media is also really helpful for communicating with people and getting your message out there, holding local community events and start by getting people to just "throw a ball around". It's all about trying to get people out of their rut.
- Important to maintain focus at an individual level as well as engage the community as a whole – this is best achieved by appreciating everyone's personal circumstances and trying to accommodate those individual needs.
- Mentoring is very important. It's great to have role models come out and speak to about healthy living or domestic violence (not just football) or have senior players from a local club come out to speak to the players and give them advice, as well as play a few games with them. This can be really helpful in generating initial interest in the game.
- Long-term funding is crucial, and can be extremely difficult to obtain. For example there was a \$200 allowance available for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players but there were massive 8 page forms to fill out so many people just gave up.
- Integrating with wider healthy living programs is useful, and can stress that players' training and fitness isn't all about what they do on the field it's about eating and drinking well.
- Evaluating the success of the programs isn't just about the number of people participating, it's also about making sure they're all having a good time and having fun, and the whole community is involved.

7 Conclusion

The research affirms the central roles of community, family and holistic healthy lifestyle programs, in helping to deliver sustained engagement in sport and physical activity programs amongst Indigenous people in the ACT. The adequate and sustained funding of such organisations and programs is key.

Awareness raising, role modelling behaviour and the provision of financial assistance to help with the cost of transport and other costs are other key factors. Sporting clubs have a role to play too, and need to provide culturally sensitive, inclusive programs for Indigenous participants.