

April 2020



# VCOSS submission to the Active Victoria Refresh

---

VCOSS welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Active Victoria Refresh. VCOSS is the peak body for social and community services in Victoria. VCOSS supports the community services industry, represents the interests of Victorians facing disadvantage and vulnerability in policy debates, and advocates to develop a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

Health and socio-economic status are linked. People on low-incomes are more likely to have a long-term health condition or chronic illness, and have a shorter life expectancy.<sup>1</sup>

People from low-socio economic backgrounds, including children, are also less likely to participate in sport and recreation activities, potentially impacting their health and wellbeing.

There are a range of barriers to low-income families participating in sport and recreation, including cost of sport memberships and equipment, poor urban design and lack of green spaces in some local communities.

## Close the equity gap in participation

We would welcome the Active Victoria strategy strengthening the focus on equity in Sport and Recreation Victoria's role.

VCOSS recommends an additional measure of success for the strategy related to the gap between high-socioeconomic families and low-socioeconomic families participating in sport and recreation. If more people are physically active, but the increase is mainly in higher income households and areas, the inequity gap may grow.

## Provide low-income communities space for sport and recreation

Access to green space is an important determinant of health. People are more likely to engage in physical activity if they have easy access to public parks and green spaces.

But where people live can determine their access to green space.

Melbourne has the lowest proportion of green cover of all Australian capital cities.<sup>ii</sup> Low-income households are disproportionately located in the areas with the least green space.<sup>iii</sup> Victorians who would gain the most from the wellbeing benefits provided by parks are most likely to miss out.

About 135,000 Melbourne households have little or no access to parks within 5km, which deprived around 340,000 Victorians of open space during the stage four COVID restrictions.<sup>iv</sup>

Investment in parks and recreational spaces should prioritise areas of Melbourne and regional Victoria with low green space to improve equity. The Victorian Government's Pocket Parks program is a good example of a program supporting green space development in high density and priority areas.<sup>v</sup>

### **Build on existing programs that encourage children to participate**

Participating in extra curricular activities including sport can improve physical activity, mental health and social skills,<sup>vi</sup> as well as improve school attendance, academic achievement and social and emotional wellbeing.<sup>vii</sup>

However, families struggling to make ends meet and afford the costs of schooling struggle to pay for club memberships, equipment and other costs of sport and recreation.<sup>viii</sup>

The Victorian Government's new Get Active voucher program is a welcome announcement and a great step. But the program still requires families to make purchases and then apply for reimbursement. This process excludes families without money to pay up-front.

Removing the need for up-front payments for approved purchases would allow the scheme to assist more Victorian children to get active. The scheme could also be extended to more children and other types of recreational activities, for children who would prefer alternatives to organised sport.

### **Makes sporting clubs and activities inclusive for all**

Sporting clubs are about more than just physical activity. They can be important community hubs, providing people with a sense of belonging and contribute to people's overall wellbeing.

They should be inclusive spaces, where everyone has the opportunity to participate and have a positive experience. But children and adults with disability are less likely to participate in sport related activities than other Victorians.

The Active Victoria strategy should focus on building inclusiveness of sports clubs and activities, through a range of mechanisms including improving accessibility, tackling stigma, developing mentoring programs, modifying programs and activities and identifying different ways community members can be involved.

Many public spaces and sporting facilities remain fully or partly inaccessible for people with disability, mobility needs and older people. Parks and recreation spaces will not promote community cohesion and inclusion if they are poorly planned, do not meet physical accessibility requirements, are hard to access via public transport, are poorly lit or make people feel unsafe.

Communities should be engaged and consulted in designing spaces. This will make sure spaces are inclusive and fit-for-purpose while reflecting local need and matching the rhythms of community life.

### Open schools and sporting facilities to community

Community groups can struggle to find appropriate, accessible and affordable facilities to run programs or provide recreation activities.

Schools are already places where community members come together and engage with each other. They often have sporting and recreation infrastructure.

Schools can capitalise on existing infrastructure by extending their use out of school hours to organised sport and recreation groups and local community organisations. Sporting facilities, like ovals and clubrooms, could also be opened to the community outside of club hours.

Some people also prefer individual activities, or alternatives to organised sport. Consideration should be given to taking this further to enable the use of facilities for unorganised sport and activities so members of the local community and those who are less likely to be part of a local group can gain access to community infrastructure.

**For enquiries please contact Policy and Research Manager, Brooke McKail at [brooke.mckail@vcoss.org.au](mailto:brooke.mckail@vcoss.org.au).**

**A fully accessible version is available online at [vcoss.org.au/policy](https://vcoss.org.au/policy).**

---

<sup>i</sup> ACOSS and Cohealth, *Poverty and inequality makes us sick*, 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Climate Council, *Clean Jobs Plan*, AlphaBeta, July 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> Resilient Melbourne, *Living Melbourne: Our metropolitan urban forest*, 2019.

<sup>iv</sup> A Lakhani, D Wollersheim, E Kendall and P Korah, *About 340,000 Melburnians have little or no parkland within 5km of their home*, ABC News, 12 August 2020.

<sup>v</sup> DELWP, *Local parks: Investing in green space for local communities*, 9 September 2020.

<sup>vi</sup> The Song Room, *Bridging the gap in school achievement through the arts: summary report*, 2011; ABC, *Don't Stop the Music*, 2018.

<sup>vii</sup> A Collins and M Adoniou, 'Learning music early can make your child a better reader', *The Conversation*, 8 November 2018.

<sup>viii</sup> Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission, *AusPlay Focus – Children's Participation in Organised Physical Activity Outside of School Hours*, April 2018