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Understanding Sport Participation for 18-24 year olds:

An Exploration of Issues, Motivations,
Barriers and Trends

Developed for the Sports Federation of Queensland (QSport)

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Understanding Sport Participation for 18-24 year olds: An Exploration of Issues, Barriers and Trends

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Executive Summary

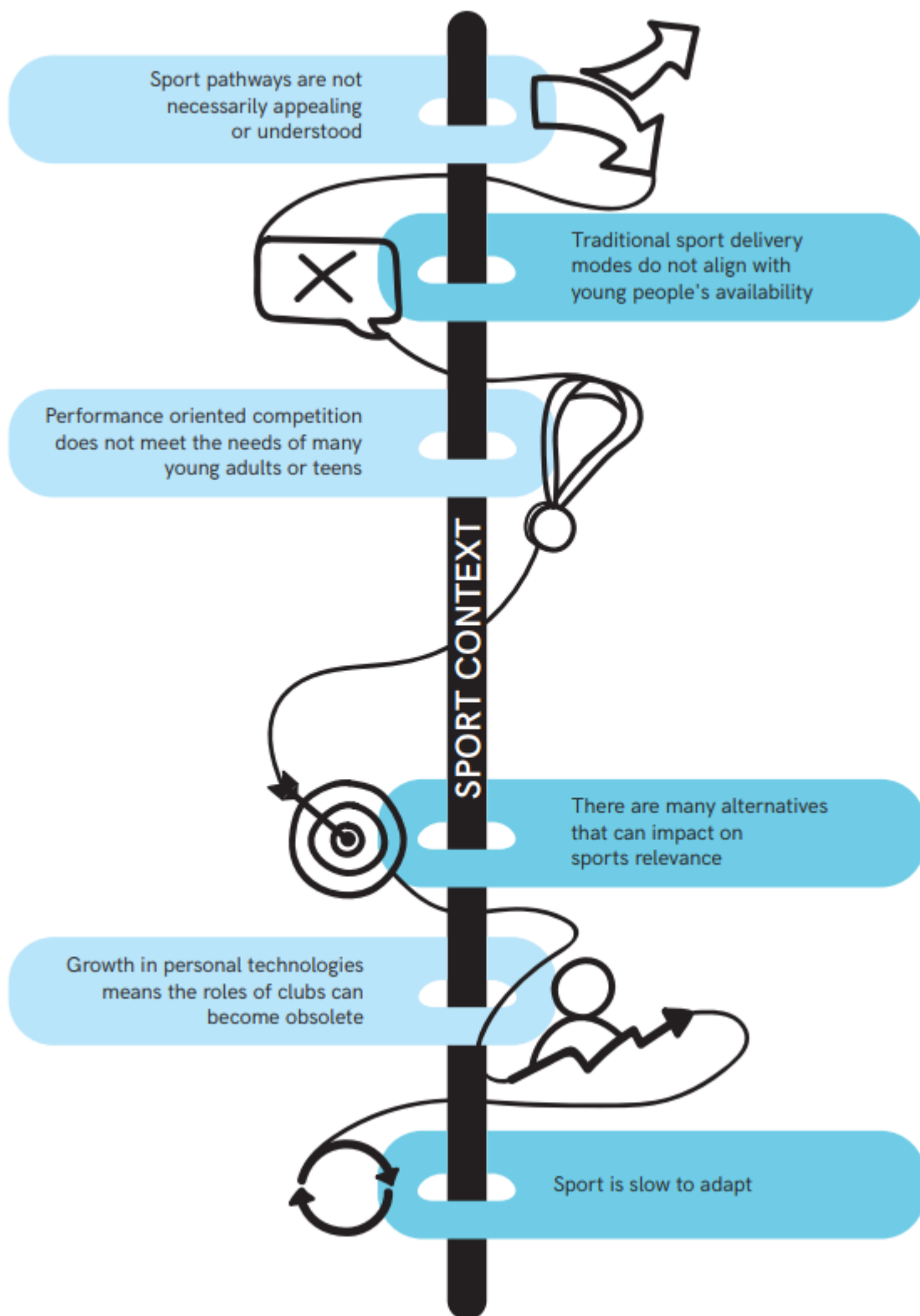
This research was commissioned by QSport to explore current understandings and insights into sporting participation of young adults aged 18-24 years. A combination of recent research from AusPlay Participation Data for the Sport Sector (e.g. ASC, 2017a), State Sporting Organisation and Club feedback revealed there was an immediate concern relating to the drop off and drop out rates for this age group that had not sufficiently been explored or understood in actionable ways. In response, desktop research and industry engagement workshops were undertaken to examine:

- the evidence relating to participation patterns and sporting interests of young adults;
- the context within which young adults choose their leisure, physical activity and sport engagement; and
- potential responses of good practice or interventions to help attract, retain or support this age group remain or engage in sport.

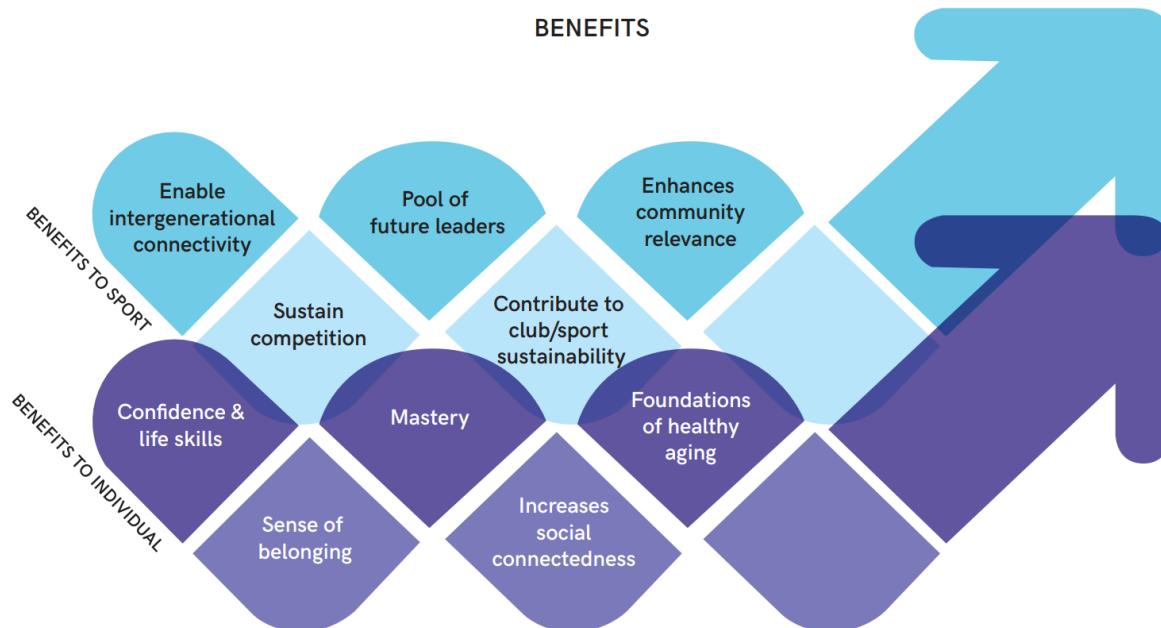
The research revealed notable findings for understanding and addressing the decline in sport participation for the cohort of 18-24-year-olds. These include realisations that,

- There are real leaks in the sport pipeline, and adult participation in sport and recreation peaks at 15-17 years of age;
- There is a 'fault line' in organised sport participation around 17-19 years of age as young people enter into emerging adulthood and move from the protection and opportunity of school-based sporting participation to greater freedoms and adult commitments;
- The transition to adulthood is complex and marked by significant milestone events that impact on the opportunity and desire to continue or begin in organised sport;
- Sport is just one of a range of physical activity and lifestyle choices available to young adults and while they may move away from organised sport, they are often still physically active;
- There is no single factor or characteristic that leads young adults to disengaging or remaining in sport, rather a combination of factors influence participation including stage of life course, gender, age, environmental conditions (e.g. facilities, access), and individual variables (e.g. perceived benefits, costs, social supports, education); and
- Fun, socialising, performance and enjoyment remain consistent motivators for sport regardless of age or stage of life.

While many of these factors are personal or social, the research also demonstrated that the structures and functions of sport and sport organisations can also actively impact on young adult sport participation. A snapshot of key understandings relating to the [Australian sport structure and context](#) reveals that while sport participation may be one of the three core foci for the Australian Sports Commissions Corporate Plan for 2017-2021, the delivery of grass roots and performance level sport is impacted by:



Going beyond the challenges of individual choice and sport structures, the report also investigated how organisations and clubs are endeavouring to address and redress the decline in 18-24-year-old sport participation. Both desktop research and workshops with club and State Sporting Organisation representatives showed there are distinct benefits to young adults and sport from attracting and sustaining this cohort's membership. Examples of these benefits include:



The data collection and analysis demonstrated that to attract and retain young adults in/ into sport requires an understanding of,

- 1) **why** this cohort might participate +
- 2) the factors that **intervene** in making or keeping sport a priority +
- 3) determining the activities, circumstances, environment and/or cultures that **enable** and support their participation.

Merely focusing on one part of this equation, will prove insufficient to meeting the needs of young adults; or matching their needs and circumstances to the resources and opportunities that can be provided by any sport or club.

Specific examples of interventions and actions that can enable and encourage were identified (refer to Table 3) and included:

- Making decisions **informed by** young adults, not just **for them**;
- Creating **welcoming** and social environments;
- Offering a range of **different sport pathways** of participation including elite, competitive, social, casual, as a coach/ official, or into governance or administration roles;
- **Actively asking, involving** and empowering young adults into positions of authority and responsibility within the club;
- Introducing **alternate payment options** to
 - a) make sport more affordable and
 - b) match young adults multiple commitments (e.g. pay as you play, 2 for the price of 1 membership);
- Setting more **flexible playing times** and schedules;
- Holding **short competitions** that focus on social experiences;
- **Communicating with** young people as adults, and through forums where they communicate (e.g. social media, peer networks, visual platforms).

The following report details information on the generalised constraints, motivations, enablers and opportunities for sport in understanding and attracting the 18-24-year-old cohort. Importantly it includes examples of club and sport solutions to the challenges of sport drop off and decline, and highlights that while young adults may exit organised sport, they continue to be interested in sport and physical activity. This interest maintains a window to engage and capture their participation across the life course.

Finally, the analysis of the data showed there are some **basic principles** that can readily be applied to attract and sustain membership and participation. Each club and sport can benefit from finding their ways to apply these in practice.

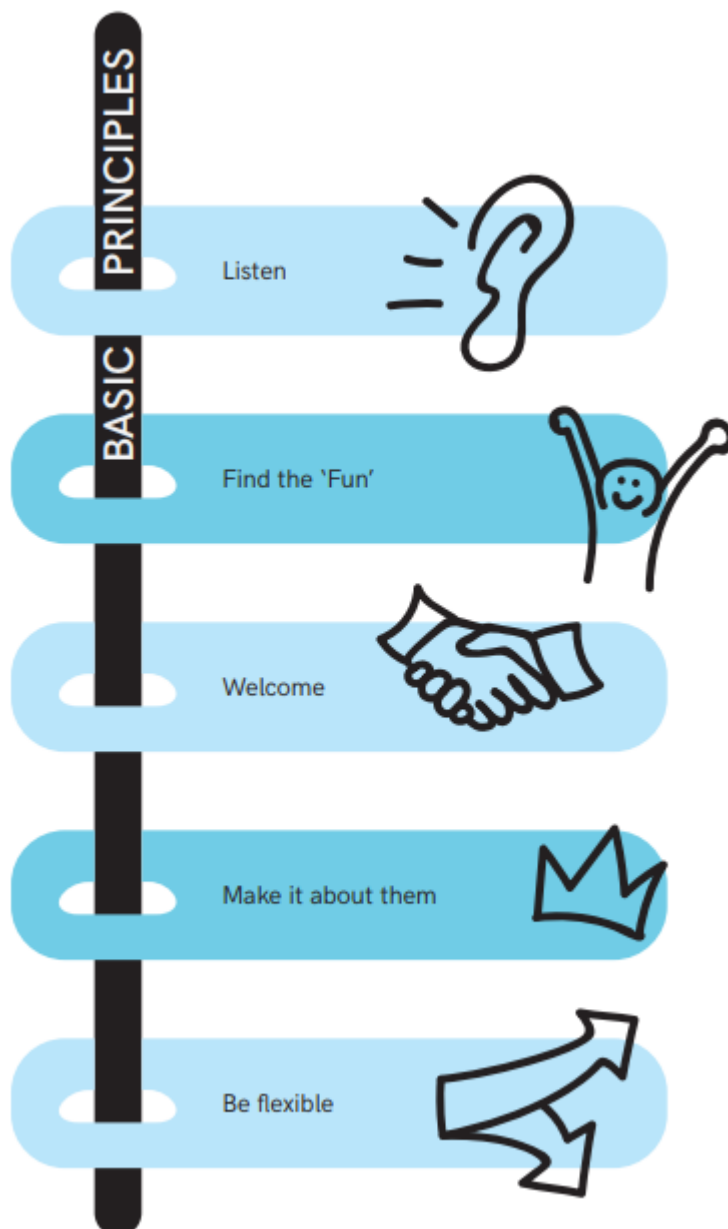


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1.0 Focus and Triggers for the Review

This report represents the findings of a project aimed at understanding the sporting participation patterns and interests of young adults (18-24 year olds) and including identification of potential good practice, interventions or models that might help attract, retain and/or support this age cohort to remain or engage in sport. Developed to examine the current evidence base examining young adult participation in sport and physical recreation, the project involved a number of stages including:

- desktop analysis of domestic and international research and practice relating to participation for 18-24 year olds in structured or organised sport (Identify and Inform);
- four workshops (three in regional Queensland) with Clubs and State Sporting Organisations to discuss key research findings and implications, and to explore possible responses to declining young adult participation (Engage and Empower - proactive, developmental engagement), and
- development and sharing of potential models of good practice to support effective engagement and ongoing participation with sport for 18-24-year-olds (Produce – collaborative insight).

The triggers for this project are multiple but include the intersection of the staged releases of findings from the AusPlay Participation Data for the Sport Sector; and QSport member feedback relating to current challenges and trends related to club and sport participation. Both these sources affirm the need to inform and action concerns relating to member and sport participation decline.

As evidenced in the AusPlay data and supported by other research into sport participation both in Australia and overseas, 'adult'¹ participation in sport peaks in the age range of 15-17 years, with a rapid decline in participation as people age, especially as they reach age 45 and above (e.g. Physical Activity Council, 2017; Sport England, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2015). Compounding these findings, the AusPlay data affirms the frequency of participation in **sport** by adults (and children) is predominantly insufficient to meet basic health guidelines of recommended physical activity of at least 3 times per week (ASC, 2016). Of particular note for this review, 2017 Australian data reveals that participation in sport or sport-related activities (only) in the year January 2017-December 2017 was undertaken by just **39% of 18-24 males**, and **19.4% of 18-24 year old females**. These figures represent **substantive drop-out rates away from sporting activities** as 15-17 year olds report participation rates of 60% (females) and 61.7% (males) (ASC, 2017a).

During the same time period, **non-sport related physical activity participation increased** for 15-17 year olds for both males and females, with females demonstrating the more significant growth (i.e. males 15-17: 7.3% non-sport related activity to 13.8% at 18-24; and females 15-17: 7.9% non-sport related activity to 29% at 18-24) (ASC, 2017a). Trend data demonstrates this is not an anomaly with the growth in adult participation in NON-SPORT related physical activity continuing to increase from the age of 18-24, and maintaining a growth pattern through 65+ (ASC, 2016; 2017). This reminds us

¹ The Australian Sports Commissions (ASC) and the Australian Government define adult for the purposes of sport and recreation participation as anyone aged 15+ (inclusive). Age cohorts for adults include 15-17, 18-24, then in ten year increments.

that people do not necessarily cease to be physically active as they age; rather they make alternate choices outside of the organised sporting club and structured forms of participation.

Concerns about youth and young adult 'drop out'² are identified by clubs and State Sporting Organisations (SSO's) in Queensland as issues of immediate concern. Informal engagements with QSport members over the 2016-2017 period reveal that SSO's are concerned about the challenges of maintaining participation levels for youth and young adults. Of particular note have been the 18-24 year age group, confirming the insights of the AusPlay data. While there are also very real concerns relating to other age cohorts (for example 12-14 year olds), no one project can address the breadth of the life cycle, and the age group of 18-24 does show the largest decline in sport participation. It is the loss of this age range that also most impacts on the development of elite athletes (ASC, 2016), and may impact on the future volunteer workforce (e.g. officials, administrators).

This data continues to confirm decade long concerns that participation in formal sport is generally, if only incrementally, declining, and provides some alerts for the sports sector. Importantly this type of data reminds the sector of the need to better understand the triggers and constraints that factor in young adult's participation in sport. More expansively, it highlights the relevance of better understanding how to **maintain and re-engage** people to continue in their sporting participation, rather than accept or expect that membership and sport participation will decline. When we note the success of other physical activity models (for example parkrun), we anticipate there is scope to remind the sector of what is currently known about sport participation – issues, barriers, trends, success factors; to identify models of good practice; and to expand on this foundation to identify and/ or develop a range of tools that can be used by SSO's and/ or clubs to support effective engagement and participation in sport.

2.0 Methods

The literature and data used in this review comes from a broad range of sources inclusive of evidence based research as well as industry, government and lead agency studies exploring possible methods to address the challenges of declining sport participation. The inclusive and selective nature of this search is intentional, helping to broaden the range of potential solutions to the problem, and gauge the industry response and priorities relating to participation challenges.

What was evident in the review was that while the statistics in the Western world are similar in indicating a reduction in young adults participation in organised sport, there is actually an absence of research specifically exploring an understanding of sport participation among those who fall in the 18-24 (or similar) age range. While there are examinations of the experience of children and sport, and some focus on youth up to the age of 16 or 17, the majority of the research in sport does not address the specifics of the young adult cohort, nor the differences experienced depending on a

² The concept of drop out is not always clearly used. Research has demonstrated that drop out from one sport may mean people are taking up another sport and not that they have left sport in general. This is particularly true during sampling periods of sport participation, but can also play a role for sporting young adults who may need to specialise their sporting attention by this time (Cote & Vierimaa, 2014).

young adults life path³. Subsequently, the following review draws broadly on health, life course, leisure and physical activity research, as well as sport specific studies in order to examine the context of participation for this age range.

In addition, feedback was sought from representatives of Sporting Clubs, Associations and State Sporting Organisations in order to discern their understandings of the impacts and possibilities for attracting and/or retaining young adults in their sport. This group were accessed through four workshops undertaken in May/ June of 2018 and included the participation of 64 individuals representing 19 sports, two regional Sports Federations, Sporting Wheelies, Deaf Sports and Recreation Queensland, and staff from Sport and Recreation Services (Queensland Government) and local councils. The workshops were held on the Sunshine Coast, Townsville, Toowoomba and Brisbane.

The combined information from the desktop review and industry workshops revealed a consistency of commentary relating to why youth and young adults drop out of sport and/or physical activity. It is the commonality of messaging across clubs, state and national sport agencies, academic research, and theoretical and applied disciplines that provides a level of confidence in the presented findings. However, with priorities increasingly focused on the imperative to drive up participation in organised sport as provided through clubs and associations, there still remains a need to prioritise research to qualitatively explore patterns, reasons and experiences of young adults in sport, and the incentives and initiatives that promote participation in sport.

2.1 Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this report that need to be prefaced for the reader. These include:

- The construct of **sport is broadly defined and applied in the literature** as a catch all to variously describe everything from organised community sport (provided or enabled by community volunteers and associations), to elite sport (professional and/or international competition), school sport and the gamut of physical activity that is undertaken for health or recreation. This fluidity of definition means that an understanding of the experience of organised, structured sport with a competitive intention as provided by Sport Clubs and Associations, and administered through State Sporting or National Sporting Organisations, is neither detailed nor singularly represented in this report;
- To identify the impacts of transition to young adulthood in any depth, the author sought understanding through the **physical activity literature**, which includes understanding of sport participation, but not exclusively;
- The review includes insights gleaned through meta-analysis and systematic reviews, as well as Government funded or Peak Body Policy documents and research. These may be coloured by **political and funding imperatives**;
- Much of the research available focused on **one types of young adult** (e.g. university or further education students), is based on self-reported behaviour (which is susceptible to

³ While the sport data is thin, there is a focused pool of research that lies in physical activity, psychology and health literature that does focus on this cohort and the changes that occur in the transition from school to adulthood.

bias), or offers cross-sectional insights and **not longitudinal information** based on single individuals over time. Subsequently, accurate patterns of sport participation during the period of transition in and through various pathways of young adulthood are not readily captured;

- For the sake of understanding, the experiences of 18-24 year olds are presented as a collective, but participation in sport does vary by age, gender, region, socio-economic status, ability, ethnicity, education, the nature of the sport played etc. The **nuances of difference across these variables is identified but not sufficiently defined** in this review.

Efforts were made to acknowledge and mitigate these limitations but they do represent areas of further refinement to enhance the data available in understanding sport behaviour and patterns.

3.0 Context and Insights – A Snapshot of Understandings

Life is Dynamic & the Sport Pipeline is Leaking

- The greatest drop off rate of participation in organised (i.e. club provision, sporting or non-sporting associations) sport and physical recreation in Australia occurs in early adulthood between the ages of 18 and 24 (ASC, 2016, 2017);
- While 18 years of age is the age of legal adulthood, the transition to adulthood is complex, involves developmental changes and milestones and the ages of 18-24 are often viewed as a period of ‘emerging adulthood’ with many young adults not fully independent or transitioned. The period is marked by milestone life events such as finishing school, starting full time work, entering committed relationships, leaving home, getting married or becoming a parent; but the order and timing of these changes can occur over an extended transition period and the order is variable (e.g. Arnett, 2007; Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2014; Rowe, 2012a; Shanahan, 2000);
- Transition moments in life influence participation and for 18-24 year olds this relates most generally to the move away from compulsory schooling to further or higher education, or work. Life transitions can be a catalyst to sport participation drop out (e.g. Kwan, et al., 2012);
- Sport is competing for young adults time with non-sport activities and within a world pervasive with rapidly evolving technology that blurs the boundaries between passive interest, playing, doing, watching and engaging (Rowe, 2012a);
- The needs and wants of consumers are changing, and traditional models of sport may not be relevant or current (ASC, 2015b) especially for this cohort;

Sport’s OK, but Not a Priority

- It is well documented that participation in sport provides a range of physical, psychological and social benefits (e.g. cardiovascular health, weight control, decreased risk of diabetes, more positive mood states, social adequacy, increased self-esteem, life satisfaction etc). Despite positive returns, these benefits are not necessarily the reasons why people play

sport, nor do they necessarily inspire people to participate in organised sport (Crane & Temple, 2015; Gucciardi & Jackson, 2015);

- Sport is just one of a range of leisure and lifestyle choices that are available to young adults and both competing demands and emerging opportunities make it more difficult for sport to find and maintain its market share and a relevant image (Rowe, 2012a);
- Participation in non-structured physical activity may prove more appealing as these activities can be done independently, at any time, on an occasional basis, and offer a wide range of potential options (ASC, 2015a; Boston Consulting Group, 2017);
- Lifestyle sports may better reflect 18-24-year olds emerging identity and desire for freedom, autonomy, competence and self-determination;

18-24 Year Olds – Not all Same, Same

- There is no single factor or characteristic that lead to young adults disengaging or remaining removed from sport; rather a combination of factors influence participation (brightpurpose, 2012);
- Young people are not homogeneous. While age and life stage may be in common, personal disposition, early socialisation to sport, gender, socio-economic status, disability, country of birth, aboriginality and culture all influence sport participation (ABS, 2008; Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006; ASC, 2017a; Birchwood, Roberts, & Pollock, 2008; Crane & Temple, 2015; Joshi, Jatrama & Paradies, 2017; Yang, et al., 1999);
- Fun and enjoyment are consistent motivators for sport, regardless of age or stage of the life course (e.g. Bollok, et al, 2011; Foster, et al., 2005; Kwan, et al., 2012);
- Males are more motivated by mastery and competition/ ego, while females are more motivated by appearance and body physical condition (Molanorouzi, Khoo & Morris, 2015);
- Intrinsic motivations (originating from the self) are considered more important for sustaining sport and physical activity participation (e.g. pleasure, competence motives). While extrinsic motivations may drive adoption, intrinsic motives support sport maintenance (Bollok, et al., 2011; Molanorouzi, et al., 2015);

Sport has Foundations that can Stick

- Club and team-based sport have been posited as enabling better psychological and social health outcomes than individual types of physical activity (Eime, et al., 2016), with sport participation for adults leading to better psychological health such as reduced stress and distress (Eime, 2013);
- People who participate in sport as adults, also played sport as children (Jones, Millward & Buraimo, 2011);
- The subjective elements of how one feels about playing sport (e.g. social, communal, diversion/escapism, achieved potential) is more telling on participation and positive experience than the functional conditions of the facilities, infrastructure, access or even customer service (Rowe, 2012b);
- Key to supporting sport participation is the need to provide positive experiences of sport and to minimise harm – both personally through how sport engages with individuals, and communally through sport delivered with integrity and fairness (e.g. ASC, n.d.; McPherson, et al., 2017; Mulholland, 2008).

4.0 Why do we care if they play sport?

It is generally accepted that participation in sport and physical activity in general can contribute favourably to individual's academic achievement, psychological well-being, and physical health. Numerous research and policy documents affirm that participation in sport can reduce the incidence of chronic disease, build confidence and self-esteem, can enhance a sense of community and assist people in developing social relationships and a sense of belonging (e.g. Allender, et al., 2006; ASC, 2015a; Bull, et al, 2004; Crane & Temple, 2015; Zarrett, Veliz, & Sabo, 2018).

The combination of physical, social and psychological benefits are compelling and the import of sport participation is identified across the life span, with active sport participation identified as making positive contributions to:

- reducing rates of childhood and adult obesity,
- offering a forum for the development of positive friendships and support that benefit emotional and mental health,
- enhancing subjective wellbeing,
- establishing physical literacy and the mastery of fundamental movement skills,
- reducing risk factors associated with some diseases and health problems, and
- healthy aging, as young and old benefit from improved balance and coordination, enhanced cognitive functioning, and social connection (Eime, et al., 2010a; Johnstone & Millar, 2012; Mulholland, 2008; Rowe, 2010).

These positive returns can also be specifically tied to the community club sport sector with some Australian research demonstrating that adults 15+ who participate in physical activity *through sport clubs* are significantly more likely to achieve the recommended levels of physical activity than those who do not (e.g. Giles-Corti & Donovan, 2002); and that participation within sport club settings may enhance the health benefits of physical activity, especially in terms of mental well-being and life satisfaction (Eime, et al., 2010a). These latter findings were identified through a comparison of adults participating in sports clubs, walking groups and those who attend a gym, and the results affirm the notion that the social engagement of club sport can enhance social connectedness, support and peer bonding.

The weight of evidence demonstrates the potential personal and social benefits of young adults actively participating in organised or club sport. This includes its potential a) contribution to building enhanced physical, social and emotional health, b) role as an intervening factor in reducing the likelihood of negative behaviours (e.g. lower take up of smoking, less antisocial behaviour) (Mulholland, 2008; Pate, et al., 2000), and c) to enhance social connectedness (Hoye, Nicholson, & Brown, 2015).

From the perspective of sport itself, sport participation and sport adherence for the cohort of 18-24 year olds is also important for successful sport performance and elite sport development. For many sports (excluding those considered to be early specialisation sports), the age for peak competitive performance is dominated by young adulthood, ranging from 20 years (e.g. swimming), to 27 (athletics), to older for endurance events (e.g. 39 for endurance cycling) (Allen & Hopkins, 2015). This finding is supported through current Australian sporting representation with the average age of

the 2018 Australian Winter Olympics Team being 25, with 43% of the team aged 23 and under (AOC, 2018).

5.0 The 18-24 year old cohort

The period of transition into adulthood is a time of critical life passage. During this period the majority of young people transition out of high school, and the moves toward independence begun in adolescence, consolidate. Young adults' dependence on parental support often lessens, they adapt to changing social environments as they progress to further study or work, they take on new responsibilities, and experience change in their living arrangements (e.g. Horn, Neill & Pfeiffer, et al., 2008; Kwan, et al., 2012). Equally, adolescent development experts postulate that during the life transition from childhood, to adolescence, and into early adulthood, young people labour toward industry (doing meaningful work), are establishing their identity (who they are and within their communities, exploring alternatives), and are looking for intimacy (romance, friendships, connections) (Erikson, 1968). These developments are not age confined, or necessarily sequential, but they are contextual, and systems theory suggests that adolescent development (often considered to last up to the age of 21), is the product of the intersection of mutual elements (i.e. biological characteristics intersecting with daily experiences and settings) (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008). Such a dynamic system requires youth and young adults to make continuous adjustments and the phases of development often include moodiness, self-involvement, the search for independence and risk taking behaviour as boundaries are tested (Dotterweich, 2006).

During the transition to young adult, physical, cognitive and psychological changes continue, though perhaps more gradually than during adolescence. Young people may experience gradual weight gain (Cole, 2003), experience overactive motivational and emotional brain functioning that impacts on optimal decision making, have limited self-control, and be oriented to not focus on long term consequences (Steinberg, et al., 2008). By comparison, as young adults mature, they also:

- Become more sensitive to potential costs associated with behaviour,
- Are open to new experiences,
- Develop impulse/ self-control,
- Are less influenced by rewards associated with their behaviour,
- May take longer to decide on a course of action,
- Experience personality maturation and identity consolidation, and
- Have decreased in alienation and aggression.

Sources: Arnett, 2010; Roberts, Walton & Viechtbauer, 2006; Schwartz, et al., 2013a; Stroud & Breiner, 2015

It is within this context that sport strives to retain or attract young adults to participation. This is a complex challenge as the changes that are part of transition are fluid and dynamic; and they may not fit within a traditional sport model of participation. Thus, to support sport participation with this cohort, there is a need to acknowledge, accept and accommodate the processes of change. These include multiple emotional, social and environmental adjustments, a period during which a reasonable proportion of young people become more at-risk for a range of health risk behaviours

including smoking and binge drinking (Kwan, et al., 2012), and the reduction in healthful behaviour such as sport and physical activity.

5.1 The Social Environment

There are five major role transitions generally attributed to young adulthood, namely leaving home, completing school, entering the workforce, forming a romantic partnership, and transitioning into or moving toward parenthood (e.g. Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012). While these may be considered 'norms' only for some in the community, they do provide a structure and insight into roles and historical markers of change, even as the timings and sequencing of these events become more unpredictable (refer to 5.1.2).

For example, there is an increasing social commentary that young adults do not leave the family home for independence in the same way as the past, rather they are remaining in the parental home for longer, and/or are boomerang children who leave, but return to reside with their parents. Census data in Australia indicates that the proportion of 20 -24 year olds living with parents grew from 41.4% to 43.4% between 2011 and 2016. This is likely a reflection of rising housing costs, and an increase in casualization of the workforce, but is also a reflection of a purported change in lifestyles, as modern children no longer progress just from childhood to teen to adult; but from childhood to tween, teenager to young adult, kippers⁴ to adulthood, career-changer to downager (McCrindle Research, 2016). Where in the past there was a pipeline from school to work, to marriage, to parenthood, today social norms have adjusted, as have economic conditions and advancing technologies⁵.

Other factors help to define and illustrate the context within which emerging adults are maturing:

- This cohort are also on the leading edge of the Screenage which since 1997 has seen people spend more time on digital devices than in human face to face interactions (McCrindle Research, 2015),
- For some the body is less private and more a form of social marketing (Schwarz, 2013),
- Role models tend to celebrities not teachers or Prime Ministers (Schwarz, 2013), and
- Perceptions of emerging adults (18-25) are that they are stereotypically (if not accurately) viewed as being less hardworking and more narcissistic and promiscuous than young adults of the past (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2014).

Where these are generalisations, there are common trends in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and Australia, that factor into how young people experience the world, and how we view their attitudes and behaviours. Specific findings in Australia captured through Australian Census data, provide further insight into what young adults are doing, and how this has changed over recent decades.

⁴ Kids in Parents Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings

⁵ Economic and technological change impact on available resources and the timing and access to communications but have also changed the types of available employment options, the import of level of education, and lengthened the transition from school to work etc (Schwarz, et al., 2013b).

5.1.2 Australian Census Data

ABS, 2017a

- As of May 2017, Australian ABS data revealed that the majority of 15-19 year olds (84%) were enrolled in some form of formal study, with the number of women enrolled in formal study slightly higher than that of men. This number declines to 44% for 20-24 year olds.
- As of May 2017, 89% of 15-19 year olds were fully engaged in education or employment. This number declines to 75% for persons aged 20-24 years (ABS, 2017a);

ABS, 2004

- As youth move from the teen years into the twenties they are more likely to live in larger towns and cities;
- As at 2001, Queensland youth people had the highest mobility rate across the states/territories at 59%;
- In 2001, 15% of 15-24 year olds in Australia were born overseas, with 29% coming from a main English speaking country;
- At the same time, 59% of all youth were living with their parents, as dependent students or non-dependent children. The proportion of young adults living in the parental home in the 20-24 age group has increased since the 1980s. Young women were more likely to be living outside the home than young men; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth were more likely to live outside the parental home than all youth (43% compared with 31%) (ABS, 2004).

Colouring in these findings, Australian Social Trends data from 2013 reveals the notable generational changes that have been occurring. For example,

- In 1976, 67% of 24 year olds were married, nearly three-quarters of young adults living with a partner (74%) had children, 5% had a bachelor degree or higher, there were more young men (17%) in higher education than women (10%) and only about one in ten employed young adults worked part time;
- In 2011, 14% of 24 year olds were married, around half of those living with a partner (42%) had children (52%), 25% had a bachelor degree or higher and there are more young women (28%) in higher education than men (25%). One in three young adults work part time (ABS, 2013);
- Young people today are more culturally diverse than ever before with over half (53%) of young adults born overseas and 27% were born in Asia; and
- While more young people are delaying moving out of the family home (24 years of age, not at 22), this age cohort move house more than other age groups (ABS, 2013).

These statistics are indicative of general patterns of who Australians are, and the social and behavioural changes in how people are living, where they are living and how they are spending their time. An interrogation of the ABS data also reveals that while Australia's population is growing the proportion of the population who fall in the age range from 18-24 is decreasing as the ageing population increases (ABS, 2017b).

5.2 18-24 year olds - Variations

As mentioned, young adults are not homogeneous. While there are common patterns it is also important to consider variations in patterns of sport participation and the assumed points of similarity and difference. For example, a recent study of the profiles of sport participants according to age, gender and geographical region undertaken in Victoria, explored membership of seven key sports (Australian Football, Basketball, Cricket, Hockey, Lawn Bowls, Netball and Tennis) (Eime, et al., 2016). When the data was integrated and analysed collectively, the pool of registrants numbered more than 520,000 representing a substantial research pool. Findings from this research revealed:

- Age - the majority of registered sports participants were aged less than 20 years (64%), with 15-19 year olds making up 15.3%;
- Gender - while males made up the larger proportion of registered members, the gap in gender representation narrowed during young adulthood (18-29 years) (20.4% male/ 17.5% female);
- Region - there were higher proportions of metropolitan registered sport participants engaged between the ages of 4-12 and 19-29; but higher proportions of non-metropolitan registered participants engaged during adolescence (14-18 years) and later adulthood (30+).

The reasons for these variations are not clear, however it is often identified that community sport in regional Australia is a social connector, offering a sense local identity, status and/or increasing community cohesion (Eime, et al., 2010b; Mugford, 2001; Tonts, 2005); and may be related to the lack of choices of activities in rural and regional areas (Eime, et. al, 2016).

Other research validates broader variations experienced in sport participation based on socio-economic status and culture, family background or parents' interest in sports (e.g. EPPI Centre, 2010; Matrix Knowledge Group, 2010; Mulholland, 2008; Zarrett, et al., 2018), or level of ability/disability (ASC, 2010). While not specifically addressing 18-24 year olds, a study of women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in Australia revealed a number of barriers not identified elsewhere in this report affecting CALD groups. These include experiences or concerns relating to:

- Socio-cultural issues: Racism, discrimination, dress standards (for women), gender roles, family responsibilities;
- Access: language, facilities, transportation; and
- Affective issues: cultural priorities (Cortis, Sawrikar & Muir, 2009).

These barriers exist in addition to others presented in 6.0 and expand our understanding of how some young adults are challenged not just by age or transition, but culture, social expectations and access.

6.0 Constraints and Barriers to Sport Participation and Engagement

In the last two decades a range of research and social commentary have been presented to explore and explain the participation patterns and drop-out rates of young people from sport, especially in the Western world. These include research and insights undertaken from psychological, sport psychology, youth development, behavioural studies, leisure studies, education, and life course

theoretical foundations (e.g. Birchwood, Roberts, & Pollack, 2008; Bollok, et al., 2011; Carlman, Wagnsson, & Patriksson, 2013; Gucciardi & Jackson, 2015); as well as industry-based guidelines, policy documents and social critiques on to how to engage children and young adults more effectively in sport (e.g. ASC, 2015a; Kennedy, 2016; O’Sullivan, 2015). While the majority of primary research and policy tend to focus on the issues confronting children and youth (e.g. 6-16) or adults (15+), there are some indicators to the reasons for emerging adult’s not participating in, or leaving, sport.

As illustrated in Table 1, an overview of constraint research reveals the reasons for drop out, or lack of participation vary and include some common elements across the age spectrums, as well as some priority reasons in different cohorts or life phases. The most complex of these in terms of issues and changing context appear to be the 18-24 year age bracket:

Table 1: Barriers and constraints to participation in sport

Cohort	Barriers, Reasons for Sport Drop out	Sources
Collective: 5-19 year olds Majority of study participants were male (89%) <i>Constraints are listed in order of frequency</i>	Intrapersonal Constraints – Lack of Enjoyment (not having fun), Low Perceptions of Physical Competence, Intrinsic Pressures (e.g. stress), Perceptions of Negative Team Dynamics, Becoming Too Big/ Old to Participate (e.g. gymnastics); Interpersonal Constraints – Pressure (from coaches, peers, family members), Other social Priorities, Having Other Things To Do, Pursuit of an Alternative Sport, Sport sampling; Structural Constraints – Time (for travel, training), Injuries (esp. gymnastics), Cost (travel, registration), Organisation (e.g. poor facilities, structure of club)	Crane & Temple, 2015: Systematic review of literature of drop out from sport. Review covers 43 publications from Europe (23), North America (17) & Australia (3)
7-17 year olds	Preference for indoor activities Low energy levels Time constraints Social factors – peer pressure, parental preferences Social constructs of sporting ‘ability’	O’Dea, 2003: Australia - semi-structured in-depth focus group interviews with 213 students, 34 schools; Clark, 2012
17-21 year olds	Leaving secondary school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of continuity of sport/ access • Move to further study or employment (demands, new geographic areas, social life) Lack of time (study, part time work) New leisure (e.g. take up smoking, girl/boyfriend)	brightpurpose, 2012 A qualitative study of sports participation amongst 14-21 year olds. Report for Sport Wales
18-24 year olds	Belief of a lack of fitness to return to sport Time pressures Competing priorities Previous negative experiences of sport Stage of life change/ shift in identity Further education/ work commitments Enshrined expectations – move on from sport & play/ Taking on responsibilities of adult	e.g. Birchwood, et al., 2008; brightpurpose, 2012; Foster, et al., 2005

18-24 year olds Australia only: In weighted order of response	Not enough time/ too many other commitments (42.9%) Don't like sport/ physical activity (12.2%) Poor health or injury (9% - but with high relative margin of error) Too lazy (5.3% - but with high relative margin of error)	AusPlay Survey Results July 2016-June2017 <i>Barriers were identified by non-participants in the AusPlay survey i.e. had not participated in organised sport or physical activity during the last 12 months</i>
Adults 18-50	Previous negative school experiences (relevant to those up to early 30s) Anxiety in unfamiliar surrounds Lack of social network Identity conflict Lack of role models	Allender, et al., 2006: Systematic review of peer reviewed & gray literature on UK children and adult reasons for participation or non-participation in sport
Collective results Adults 16-74	Lack of time Not sporty (esp. women) Nowhere to go No people to participate with/ go alone Health (disabled respondents) Too tired	Foster, et al., 2005: systematic review of quantitative & qualitative studies of sport/ physical activity participation &/or attitudes

In essence, what is notable is that constraints are complex and impacted by both immediate and distal circumstances, as well as individual's personal preferences and characteristics. Equally, decisions to stop sport are not necessarily intentional, nor determined at the ages of 18-24 (Bauman, et al., 2012; Birchwood, et al., 2008). Rather, the breadth of theoretical research demonstrates that participation fall-off during this age cohort is related to the mix of life transition, sport experience, success and support that has occurred in a person's preceding years. For example developing **attitudes and socialisation to sport** can be (negatively) impacted by:

11-12 year olds **From various and playful to structured and repetitive:** Transition to secondary school and the shift in school sport, PE focus and approach. Where primary school experiences are broadly considered to be more play focused and fun, filled with variety and engagement, high school tends to focus more on 'traditional sports', and skill development. Young children who do not feel competent disengage; those who seek variety may be bored by the repetition of sports.

14-16 year olds **Independence, Proficiency, Expectation, Choice:** For those who have continued in sport this is a time of increasing expectation and a focus on excellence, not fun. Sport development focuses on technical drills and increasing proficiency. Simultaneously there are multiple life changes outside of sport/ changing social habits including relationships/ social life/ increasing aim for independence, and a focus on final years of schooling and performance. Choice may need to be made between sport or social life, or academics and sport.

16-18 year olds

Opportunity & Priority changes: The well-established life structures change – for example, young people leave school, enter further education and/or employment. This cohort may move geographic areas and leave known clubs and venues; social engagements may become more integral.

In certain circumstances, it has been identified that other reasons why 18-24 year olds quit sport and/or sporting clubs are because of:

- Lack of money/ expense of playing or venue fees,
- Priority to study or work,
- New opportunities, new choices,
- (Perception of) inflexibility of structured club training and competition,
- Quality of facilities (e.g. quality of change rooms can actively turn off girls in particular), and
- Sport injury (e.g. sources: Birchwood, et al., 2008; brightpurpose, 2012; Matrix Knowledge Group, 2010).

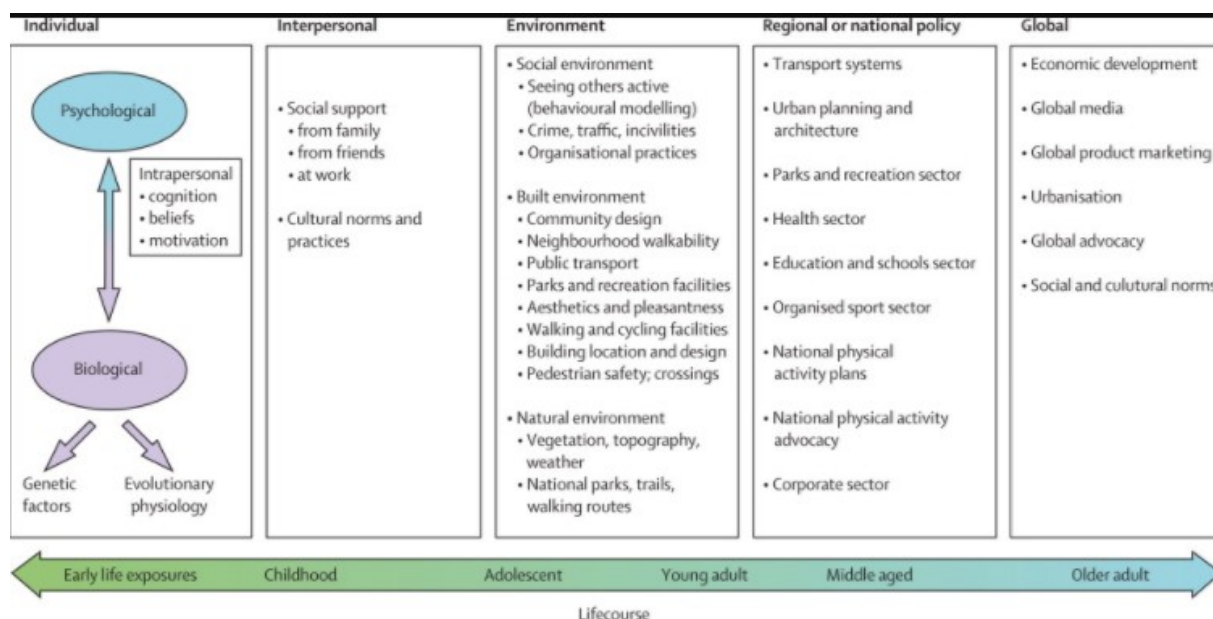
These lists are not exhaustive, nor can all reasons identified in other countries or cultures be readily or uncritically transferred to the Australian landscape. What this review has endeavoured to do, is ascertain commonly cited reasons identified through primary or secondary research into the constraints or barriers faced by young adults and in the life phases immediately preceding and following 18-24 years. From this base, we can begin to see the foundations that may have been laid for the 18 year old self, and the implications and evolutions for the adult self. With this understanding it is then possible to be more critical and intentional in exploring attitudes and behaviours, contexts and dispositions relating to sport participation; and identify evidence-based responses to addressing participation drop out concerns.

6.1 The Experience of Girls & Young Women

It is increasingly recognised that the experience of girls and women in sport differs from that of males, yet a range of systematic studies into sport participation reveals that most studies tend to represent overwhelmingly male study groups (e.g. Crane & Temple's 2015 synthesis of 43 studies), and that attrition rates for girls are higher than for boys (e.g. Sabo & Veliz, 2014).

As indicated in [Figure 1](#), there are a range of factors that influence participation regardless of gender, age or ethnicity. Not all of these are well studied, and not all can be influenced by any one community, sport or club, but it is the combination and interaction of such factors across all levels that likely play an intervening role for different communities, with varying frequency, and different impact (Bauman, et al., 2012).

Figure 1: Adapted ecological model of the determinants of physical activity, Bauman et al., 2012



When considering girls and young women, there is increased evidence of a difference in the experience of females (in and with sport) from that of males, and the **growth in the gap between genders** in sport and physical activity participation as young children reach adolescence and young adulthood, help to quantify this difference (refer 1.0, 5.2). The reasons for this gap remain complex and multi-layered but research has identified differences exist for a range of social, political and structural reasons including:

- expectations for girls to conform with popular ideas of beauty,
- fear of appearing overly masculine from playing sport,
- lack of ‘real life’ role models,
- the nature and style of girls physical education uniforms, and/or
- the pressure to manage body image and deal with changing identity (e.g. Cox, Coleman & Roker, 2006; Foster, et al., 2005).

In the UK, Cox, et al.’s (2006) study of aspects of sport participation for 15-19 year old girls highlights there are differences in motivation and participation based on perceptions of self as sporty, or not⁶ (e.g. brightpurpose, 2012), and that those who do not currently participate in sport report non-participation reasons that include:

- Sport no longer being compulsory during and post school,
- They had less time,
- They felt self-conscious,
- Were part of social groups who did not participate in sport,
- Were anxious about their appearance.

⁶ This is true for males and females.

In general, women and girls report more barriers to sport and physical activity than men and boys and these barriers cover a range of personal and environmental factors:

- **physical** issues such as lack of fitness or physical literacy,
- **psychological** factors such as low physical confidence or self-efficacy,
- **interpersonal** barriers that may include low familial support for female engagement in sport or lack of peer support,
- **programming** barriers such as little/less variety or sport choices, limited female-only opportunities, commitment requirements, and/or
- **social, sporting or cultural mores** including limited positive feedback, male dominated sporting cultures, few role models, concern about being seen as unfeminine or lesbian, and contradictory marketing messages (e.g. male athletes as the norm, female as secondary) (Fink, 2015; Johnstone & Millar, 2012; Sport England, 2009, 2015; Staurowsky, et al., 2009).

Longitudinal Australian research on women's health (n= 11,695) has also revealed that young, adult women (22-27 years) experience a range of biological, socio-demographics, work-related and lifestyle variables that impact on their physical activity. Those who reported the **lowest participation levels** in sport and physical activity within this random sample were:

- Born in Asia, and **not born in Australia**;
- Have **lower qualifications** than those with University or higher degrees;
- From **lower socio-economic** groups;
- **Married** or living with a partner;
- **Drink alcohol rarely** or never, than those who are considered low risk drinkers (Uijtdewilligen, et al., 2015).

What is clear is that for women and girls, there are a host of factors personal and environmental, cultural and structural, historical and current that impact on their attitude, behaviour, expectation and opportunity to play sport. While these are overcome or of minimal import to *some* girls and women (e.g. the self-determined sporty achiever, with access, talent, social support networks and high sporting self-efficacy), there also remain gendered constructions within sport, cultures and society that amplify and differentiate constraints for females (Bailey, Wellard, & Dismore, 2005; Staurowsky, et al., 2009).

7.0 Motivators and Drivers of Sport Participation

As with constraints and barriers there are a suite of motivating and enabling factors for sport. An understanding of the breadth and inter-relationship of these factors is useful for determining effective mechanisms to intervene or engage emerging adults in participation. Though not complete, the following motivations have been found that support sport participation:

- **Childhood encouragement and childhood participation** in sport has been found to have a strong positive effect on sport engagement (Bollok, et al., 2011; Johnstone & Millar, 2012; Matrix Knowledge Group, 2010; Smith, et al., 2015);
- **Proximity to sports facility** can impact on sport engagement, but lack of supply of facilities impacts only on a minority as a reason *not* to participate in sport (Matrix Knowledge Group,

2010). Evidence indicates that sport facilities do make a difference, but may only enable those who are already predisposed to participate in sport (Birchwood, et al., 2008);

- Research out of the UK has revealed that young adults who are **media rich** (e.g. have access to the internet, watch relevant TV programs, watch 2 hours of television a day, and have a radio), are more likely to participate in sport though this correlation deteriorates with age. While media consumption is generally viewed as having a negative relationship with sport participation (as it is assumed it is used as a substitute for playing sport), specific forms of TV viewing may act as a complement to engagement. However this likely reflects existing interest in sport, rather than a causal relationship between TV viewing of sport, and playing (EPPI Centre, 2010). That being said, research modelling has intimated that improved access to media *may* have a positive effect on engagement, and media based promotional campaigns may be effective in increasing engagement (EPPI and Matrix Knowledge Group, 2010);
- There are different motivations between sports and for those who play team sports or individual sports. For example, team sport participants tend to be more motivated by **winning** than their individual sport peers, and are motivated by the **companionship/affiliation** of sporting teams (Bollok, et al., 2011). Individual plus bowls participants have been found to be more motivated by **enjoyment** and **competence** motivations (e.g. Frederick & Ryan, 1993; Molanorouzi, et al., 2015), and racquet sport participants in local, recreational clubs have identified **mastery** as a dominant motive (Molanorouzi, et al., 2015).

The scale of diversity in motivations mirrors the complexity of barriers emerging adults confront, some of which are outlined in Table 2. As with constraints these are presented covering ages pre and post 18-24 to illustrate change and to inform the trajectory of sport motivations, not just a cross-sectional view.

Table 2: Motivators and Enablers of Sport Participation

Cohort	Motivators, Enablers of Sport	Source/s
Collective: 5-19 year olds	Enjoyment – fun, pleasure Sense of achievement , pride, psychological enhancement Physical sensation – feel good Improved competence / sport performance/ learning & improving skills Clear the mind Relaxation / distraction from worries	Biddle, 1999; Crane & Temple, 2015; Merkel, 2013; O’Dea, O’Sullivan, 2015 <i>Some studies suggest that relaxation & health/ weight control become more important at the upper end of youth (16-19)</i>
17-24 year olds	Health benefits Weight management / concerns about body shape (girls) Social interaction Enjoyment / fun Fear of missing out (FOMO) Task mastery / success e.g. competition, contest, victory & beating own benchmark – males	Bollok, et al., 2011; brightpurpose, 2012; Cox, et al., 2006; Foster, et al., 2005

	Social drivers e.g. social acceptance/ approval, healthy living, better appearance - females	
18-24 year olds Australia only: In weighted order of response	Physical health / fitness (75.1%) Fun/ enjoyment (57.4%) Social reasons (37.1%) To lose weight/ keep weight off/ tone (15.3%) Psychological/ mental health/ therapy (15%) Hobby (12.1%) To be outdoors/ enjoy nature (10.1%) Way of getting around (8.2%) Walk the dog (7.1%) ⁷ Performance or competition (6.6%)	AusPlay Survey Results July 2016-June2017 <i>Variations between male and female respondents indicate that fun and performance were more important to males than females; where physical fitness, mental health & losing weight were more often noted by females. Social reasons were similar (37.4% male, 36.9% female)</i>
Adults 18-50	Enjoyment Support networks Sense of achievement Skill development Medical sanction	Allender, et al., 2006: Systematic review of peer reviewed & grey literature on UK children's and adult's reasons for participation or non-participation in sport
Collective results: Adults 16-74	Health benefits – e.g. weight management, social interaction Concerns about body shape – especially girls Fun , enjoyment Social interaction	Foster, et al., 2005: systematic review of quantitative & qualitative studies of sport/ physical activity participation &/or attitudes

While motivations represent the intrinsic and extrinsic reasons why people *might participate* in sport, on their own they are not sufficient to understand why people *do participate* in sport. To understand this requires a deeper understanding of the benefits gained (which can be motivations), and the factors or circumstances that impede, enable or support sport adherence (e.g. norms, socialisation, job role, coach/ peer support, perceptions of competence etc) (Gucciardi & Jackson, 2015).

Stage of the life course, gender, age, environmental conditions (e.g. facilities, access, policy), individual variables (e.g. perceived benefits and costs, social supports, education) and desired outcomes (e.g. Foster, et al., 2005; Molanorouzi, et al., 2015) all play a role in influencing sport participation. Others suggest that an individual's **experience of sport as a child/youth**, level of **early**

⁷ The AusPlay data captures information on motivations for sport and physical activity therefore it may be assumed that the responses of walk the dog, to be outdoors in nature and a way of getting around are exclusive to general physical activity.

sport socialisation, amount of **perceived autonomy, competence and behavioural control**, and/or the level of sport specialisation may impact on sport participation motivations for emerging adults (e.g. Birchwood, et al., 2008; Gucciardi & Jackson, 2015; Russell & Limle, 2013; Yang, et al., 1999).

8.0 Sport Structure

There are multiple perspectives, factors and stakeholders involved in creating the opportunities, inspiring the interest, providing the resources, and delivering the experience of sport. In Australia, National and State Sporting Organisations (NSO's, SSO's) coordinate, develop and administer key competitive sports including the development of sport programs, coaches and officials, assist in talent identification and promotion of their sport. Clubs and Associations provide and administer the frontline delivery of sporting competitions events, manage volunteers and develop the skills and abilities of athletes.

At a national level, federal sport policy is executed through the national sport agency, the ASC. This organisation establishes funding and service agreements with NSO's to support their activities aligned with ASC strategic objectives and government aims (Hoye & Nicholson, 2011); and to (historically) develop elite/ high performance sport, not mass participation (Green, 2007). In 2012, the ASC released *Australia's Winning Edge* to promote high performance in sport. More recently, it has released *Play.Sport.Australia*, to articulate how it can play a leadership role in growing sport participation (ASC, 2015a).

The ASC Corporate Plan for 2017-2021 identifies **participation** as one of three core foci i.e. high performance, participation and sport industry growth. For participation, operational intentions include:

- investment to NSOs to build participation base,
- leadership for participation strategies, planning and operations,
- sharing high-quality information and data to inform decision making (e.g. AusPlay data), and
- focusing on younger Australians through Sporting Schools program (ASC, 2017b)⁸.

An understanding of the layers of structure in sport is relevant for this review as it is clear that decision making, policy and programs are not determined at any one level. The intersection of national, state and club based priorities and contexts will impact on interventions to enhance and/or retain participation of young adults.

8.1 A Helicopter View of Sporting Context in Australia

One of the roles played by the ASC is the collection of data and evidence to inform policy and practice in Australian sport. A review of some of the research conducted through and for the ASC reveals some additional (or reconfirming) insights into the general and specific considerations of

⁸ This Corporate Plan remains relevant until the completion of the National Sports Plan being developed by the Minister for Sport. To note, a focus on promoting sport and physical recreation activities may be supported by the housing of the Office for Sport under the Department of Health, allowing sport to be positioned as part of the overall health agenda (this began under the Rudd Government).

participation in sport in Australia, at grass-roots and performance levels. An overview of these includes national recognition that:

- Existing **sport pathways** are not necessarily appealing or understood by potential participants,
- **Performance-oriented competition** products do not meet the needs of many teens,
- **Changing work patterns**, including for young people, mean that traditional sport delivery modes may not appeal nor align with the availability of potential participants. For example, people spend longer at work, have less time for recreation, and spend less of their recreation time on physical activity. Sport formats that require hours for participation and multi-week commitments and training do not fit time-poor lifestyles,
- Questions exist as to the **relevance of sport** to the culture, interests and attitudes of all segments of the population, especially young adults and youth, and particularly given the breadth of **alternate leisure and entertainment options** available,
- While some sports are growing and/or successfully commercialising, others **struggle for exposure and funding**,
- **Physical education is increasingly marginalised in schools** and there are less teachers trained to deliver school sport programs,
- The growth in **personal technologies** mean people can create or join online sport or physical activity communities outside of club structures, and track their fitness goals through tracking technologies and training support apps, without access to club coaching,
- **Sport is not quick to adapt**. There is a fragmented and disparate management model for sport in Australia with complex, federated governance which weakens ability to adapt to change,
- Sport as a sector, and clubs in particular demonstrate a **shortage of key skills** in, for example technology and data management, especially among volunteers (Sources: ASC, 2015a; ASC, 2015b; Boston Consulting Group, 2017).

9.0 Insights from the Sport Sector in Queensland

The findings of the desktop research resonated with the industry representatives who took part in the regional workshops. Through these engagements a number of data collection points were established. These were aimed at seeking insight into clubs and associations current awareness relating to:

- assumptions held about 18-24 year olds and their participation in sport;
- perceived benefits that can come to sport and individuals from young adults participation; and
- identified barriers for their sport and sport in general.

An overview of their responses is included to demonstrate both the informed viewpoints of sporting clubs and organisations; as well to affirm the local relevance of the desktop research findings to the Queensland context.

9.1 Assumptions

A range of assumptions were identified including reflections on the nature and structures of sport, as well as the life circumstances and proposed expectations of young adults themselves.

Sport Assumptions

- Our sport is too structured and **slow to change and adapt**,
- Too much of our **focus is on getting results**. We can't have everyone elite, but we have not yet raised the potential and delivery of recreational sport participation,
- Our sport structures are **restrictive** and make it difficult for young adults to transition to different sports,
- We have **minimal focus on capturing the non-interested** or non-active markets,
- It's a challenge to transition from boys/ girls competition to adult and the physicality that comes with that. They **need to play as adults, with adults**,
- A lot of our youth sport is **delivered through schools** (e.g. rowing, waterpolo, rugby union) and it is fully enabled there. Clubs require young athletes to take on more personal responsibility,
- There is **no such thing as 'social'** in some of our sports.

Assumptions about Young Adults

- They want to embrace **independence** – throw off what they have always done and try something new. That includes their sport,
- Young adults can't **afford** the time to commit, or the financial expense of sport,
- The **dream** has probably gone – they have realised they won't be a star and reality has kicked in,
- They are **no longer being pushed**, or driven or supported by parents or by school, and they don't know how to adapt to that,
- They like to opt in and opt out. Do things in their own time and with full **flexibility**,
- Some are afraid of the potential of **injury** and the impact that can have on their job/ apprenticeship etc,
- Even young adults with money have lots of **other choices** of where to spend it – including drinking,
- They often have **moved** and will be in a new location. Maybe nervous or uncertain about joining a new club.

The assumptions of the group included a realisation that many clubs or sports were struggling to identify how to respond to change and that 18-24 is just one part of the continuum of lifelong sport participation. While sport representatives acknowledge they anticipate many of their *high performance* players might stay, they understand this is not universal and that the loss of participation falls for both talent-identified and 'a-grade' athletes and general members within this age group.

9.2 Benefits

To assist the sporting groups to be able to develop actions and solutions that might impact on sustaining membership for the cohort, the workshop attendees were asked to identify what they

saw as the benefits that could be achieved both for the sport and for the individual young adult, from playing sport. Several generalities were identified in response to these questions including:

Benefits to Sport

- **Future Leaders** - builds our knowledge pool and pool of potential volunteers, coaches, officials, administrators and committee members
- **Technical currency** – this cohort are tech savvy and sport benefits from these skills and building new social interactions
- Keeps the sport and club **relevant**, provides role models/ mentors for younger players/ members, more willing to adapt and bring in new ideas, gives us access to a wider social media presence
- Increased **financial sustainability** – money from membership, more opportunity to apply for funding and grants/ sponsorship, more chance to upgrade/ build new facilities
- **Sustains competition/s** – the more people that play, the more teams and players you compete against, the more options we can offer
- **Validation** – participation numbers allow for growth and validation of paid staff, events, programs etc
- **Prestige** – our club has maintained this age group and our community across the age spectrums
- **Connection** - intergenerational involvements gives us connection with all parts of the community and promotes sport for life
- **Performance** – we need the pool of athletes in this age range for elite selection

Benefits to Individual

- **Belonging** and part of community
- **Life Skills** – empowerment, leadership, team work, communication, social, resilience, flexibility, committee work, responsibility, conflict resolution etc
- **Mastery** and increased self esteem
- **Social** – broadens social interactions, friendship groups, a chance for inclusion
- **Networking** – connectivity with others in club, team, community
- **Pathways** – can create opportunities for work and supplementary income (e.g. coaching, officiating)
- **Health** – physical, psychological, wellbeing and lifestyle
- **Confidence**, competence, connection, character
- **Travel** – chance to explore other places through travel for sporting competition.

10.0 Interventions and Possible Activities to Support Participation in Sport

The existence of sport clubs, competition or broadcasting is not enough to guarantee sports success, its appeal or its reach into the community. While Australia is regularly touted as a ‘sporting nation’ (e.g. ASC, 2015, 2017; Boston Consulting Group, 2017; Nicholson, et al., 2011 etc) and is considered an international human right, it is the effective delivery and opportunity for ‘good’ and relevant sporting experiences that are required to meet individual and community requirements; and provide the foundation for growth in participation. While sport is ubiquitous in Australian society, there is a decline in participation that occurs after the age of 17 and questions remain as to how to best:

- Support continued participation in organised sport?; and
- Build the participation base so more people join, re-join or retain their sporting activities?

The answers to these questions are still emerging but the analysis of this research project suggests these may include:

- Understanding the **determinants** of sport and physical activity – that is, who are participating and what qualities or shared attributes might these individuals/ cohorts share?;
- Examining the **constraints** that impact on particular cohorts (e.g. 18-24 year olds) participation and non-participation, and instigating management programs, policies and practices that might mitigate these,
- Determining the **motivations** and needs satisfactions that support the maintenance or adoption of sport participation to influence attitudes, behaviours and norms relating to organised sport, and
- Identifying **successful interventions** across the spectrum of sport. For example, political and sporting policy, service delivery, sport structure, infrastructure design and maintenance, and media/ marketing messages.

The following sections draw on research and policy documents cited to identify potential interventions that may have relevance in attracting and retaining emerging adults in sport. The range of actions listed is extensive but only indicative. This is because the contextual factors impacting on sport, sport participation, sport relevance and currency are disparate and solutions are rarely proven. Thus, the following offers some insight into actions that can be trialled or introduced from Policy, Program and Service Delivery perspectives to attract, retain and engage young adults in sport for recreation, not just performance participation.

10.1 Sport Structure

Some of the solutions to maintaining athlete and participant involvement in sport appear to reinforce the very things that lead some young adults to leave sport. For example, Balyi & Hamilton's (2004) influential Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) of participant development is representative of a number of similar frameworks focused on developing athletes. At their foundation is an intention to guide how to best produce greater numbers of performers capable of achieving at the highest level in sport, and building a platform for coaches and participants on all levels. Sensibly recognising that it takes time to develop and optimise potential, the model proposes a series of stages relevant to both early specialisation (e.g. gymnastics, diving, figure skating, table tennis) and late specialisation sports (most other sports) and it encourages progressive challenge as people get older (Stafford, 2005). Athlete development progresses through five or six phases namely:

1. FUNdamentals,
2. learning to train (late specialisation only),
3. training to train,
4. training to compete,
5. training to win and
6. retaining.

Phases 5 and 6 are targeted to young adults aged 18+ for boys and 17+ for girls with the goal for phase 5 being to maximise fitness and sport specific skills, and promote performance; while phase 6 focuses on retaining athletes for coaching, officiating and sport administration.

While this progression makes descriptive sense to drive athlete development and performance outcomes, the modern policy shift brought on by the decline in sporting association membership seeks to drive **sport participation not just build performance** (ASC, 2015a). To increase participation requires a shift in how sport participation and athlete development are considered (e.g. Bailey, et al., 2010; Cote & Vieramaa, 2014). For example, this shift may include:

- **recognition of individual differences** involved in attaining performance or participation; and/ or
- **accommodating for diverse individual motivations and circumstances** that affect sport participation.

The challenge of applying LTAD in a more diverse client environment is that it offers a **linear insight** into athlete development that assumes a progressive and incremental approach of athlete development. However, what this and similar models do not illuminate or potentially assist are,

- a. how to capture participation in sport when this progression may not be linear or normative, but more **fluid** or horizontal (Gulbin, et al., 2013); or
- b. how to accommodate to different forms of participation including **recreational, varietal or serial engagements**.

Table 3 provides some alternate or complementary approaches that can be taken to assist in expanding the athlete and participant pathway beyond a performance focus including introducing a focus on inclusive and social play, enabling and encouraging development of *sufficient* competence at any age, and supporting alternate member contributions than just player focused (e.g. committee member, coach, manager etc).

10.2 Sport Policy

Policy in sport can have a significant impact (intentional and unintentional) on participation. Through policy it is possible to determine and define the relationship sport has with young adults and the opportunities for progression and engagement. Equally, policy can prove to be detrimental to participation when it fails to consider the circumstances of different markets and the invitation or opportunity people identify to participate in personally meaningful and supported ways. A review of some national and international policy determinations indicates that the approach taken by sport and sport decision makers may need to adjust if it is to accommodate and recognise the specific needs of young adults:

- Modelling of different policy implications in the UK has suggested approaches that focus on removing barriers to engagement are most likely to increase engagement. For sport this may mean a focus on **removing personal barriers** more than a focus on policies to promote interest in sport (Matrix Knowledge Group, 2010);
- There are gaps in understanding of the experience of sport in a changing and dynamic socio-economic environment; therefore, there is benefit in investing in understanding the needs and satisfactions of *different* population groups. While there is market segmentation

research for adults and young people (ASC Market segmentation for sport participation adults, 2013) there remains a paucity of specific research that differentiates **determinants of sport** for 18-24-year-old young adults; and the factors that enable and encourage sport adherence;

- Policy focus in other jurisdictions is moving to understanding and **increasing the quality of the experience of sport** to support participation growth and retainment, rather than focusing on facility design or effective management (e.g. governance) (Rowe, 2012b);
- Enhancing people's knowledge of the health benefits of physical activity or sport may not positively impact on increasing sport participation (Troost, et al., 2003). In essence this is a reminder that **knowledge and behaviour are not necessarily aligned**;
- To influence behaviour and attitudes we need to **understand the desired outcomes of emerging adults** and use this understanding to form a framework to direct resources for Clubs and Associations to change in sustainable ways;
- There is evidence suggesting the process of actively planning for physical activity, provides a bridge to engaging in physical activity. With 18-24 years olds experiencing increased independence, the enabling of **active planning** is considered a potentially important strategy to promote sustainable strategies to initiate and maintain emerging adult participation (Li, et al., 2016).

10.3 Seeking Solutions – SSOs, Clubs and Associations

Both the literature and the sport industry workshops revealed a series of perceptual, structural and administrative adjustments that may support 18-24 year old participation. An overview of these reveal there are diverse potential interventions that can be implemented or trialled to suit different sports, regions and target segments of the 18-24 year old market. The following (Table 3) represents an amalgamation of research and industry practice/ proposals to attract, retain, support or enable young adult participation, bearing in mind the known barriers and triggers for leaving sport.

Table 3: Interventions to promote 18-24-year old sport participation

Dimension of Change	Enablers for Sport Participation	Club/ Sport Solutions
<p>Structural & Sport Awareness – Understand and Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise and promote the value of friendships and social groupings. Young people who stay in sport tend to build their social lives around their club and their friends and social supports comes from clubmates (e.g. brightpurpose, 2012); • Clubs need to be welcoming and inclusive, offering participants both enjoyment of the sport, and social support (Eime, et al., 2010a); • Macro life shifts for this cohort result in lack of time and energy and alternate life priorities and sport may not be able to reshape these transitions. However, sporting clubs and SSOs can influence issues relating to poor access and poor organisation that do not accommodate to young people’s lifestyles; • Accept that life changes and sporting clubs need to identify, promote and maintain an open door for sporting participation for 18-24 once the substantial life transitional factors are more readily managed; • Everyone plays sport on some level for the fun. Sporting clubs have some perception challenges of not being seen as fully inclusive; and struggle with coping with the multiple and varied demands of potential and actual members. Determining who the target is for any club needs to be a priority in order to determine how to attract and retain member participants. Turn up and Play may be one option for enabling fluid engagement in a social setting; • Remember, there is no one solution fits all to enable and encourage participation in sport. A dynamic approach to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the objective of growth of this age group front of mind, not as an after-thought or nice to have. We need to focus on them. • Introduce social games, not just serious competition. This may mean NSO’s/ SSO’s have to change insurance etc requirements to accommodate short term, casual, social participation • Ensure there are competitions and social games for this age group not just move them only to adult • Introduce social club events, happy hour/ drinks after the game. Have these designed by the age group, for the age group • Provide free wifi. Keeps young adults connected and can support social media engagement while they are playing, involved in the sport • Provide job opportunities to our young adult members – e.g. coaching, officiating younger players/ teams; outsourcing their skills with schools • Introduce payment plans for membership e.g.

participation is required to meet the cultural, contextual, community and individual differences of 18-24 year olds and to support their lifecourse and sporting transitions.

- Manage the basics:
 - **Ask** what your 16 – 24 year olds want or need from their sport (length and time of season, training, games, rules, clothing requirements);
 - Identify and increase the **'fun'** components of your sport and club for 18-24 year olds;
 - Provide a **welcoming** and supportive environment (e.g. open door for social and competitive members, skill development clinics to build competence, activate social aspects – define these with young adults);
 - Provide **pathways** for participation – elite, competition, social, coaching, volunteering, governance – and learning opportunities;
 - **Adjust ways to play** (e.g. twilight, mid-week, short competitions];
 - Consider young adult member fee/ equipment/ travel **costs** to mitigate for emerging life expenses and independence;
 - **Refine sport policy** that may negatively impact participation and relevance (e.g. no train, no play);
 - Find ways to retain non-playing members (e.g. focus on **fitness, friendship** and **skills**, not competition);
 - **Build connections** between junior and senior teams (e.g. senior coach interact with juniors, shared training opportunities, personal invitation to senior pre-season games and trials/ role modelling, senior squad coach junior grades) (Adapted from DSR, 2011; JVA, 2016).
- Pay as you play
- Two for one membership
- Tailor your membership rates e.g. introduce a rate for under 24's as a buffer to progressing from youth to adult membership
- Play now, pay later
- Free for first year
- Day pass membership
- Offer **reward programs/** loyalty returns for young adults and all volunteers e.g. reduce membership costs, free ticket to end of season social event/ awards celebration/ party
- Actively **work with** our clubs and **administrators** to highlight the benefits of keeping or attracting young adult members – and how we might need to change
- Enhance **connections** with feeder schools and build connections **between schools and clubs** so players have somewhere to go when they leave school
- **Shrink the social playing region** so travel distance is contained for a while
- Establish and promote **codes of conduct and behaviour standards** understood across all club members so people feel comfortable at their club

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change the rules to enable participation – e.g. no train, no play
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop programs, competition schedules and sporting opportunities informed by 18-24 year olds predominant motivations and that intervene in constraints e.g. promote fun and enjoyment, autonomy, control; adjust traditional sport scheduling to meet time commitments, include teams organised based on friendship not just talent, provide opportunities for those with lower levels of sport competency, etc. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Less emphasis on competition – just do it, ○ Provide classes/ training for beginners and existing friendship groups, ○ Motivate emerging adults to participate with their peers, ○ Provide free and reduce rate trial/ taster/ introduction and development sessions, ○ More programming of fun sport activities with reduced competitive element, ○ Reduce the regulation and convention – learn from alternative/ life sports which have less rules and codes of participation; • Consult and involve youth and emerging adults in the design and delivery of services so they can shape them rather than having things done to them; • Be intentional – <i>keep young people engaged and/or re-capture the interest</i> of those who have left. Informing this is a need to understand not only what impacts on 18-24 year olds who have been part of the club, but also those who have not joined. For example, would young adults benefit from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information that might impact positively on their participation? (e.g. point of decision prompts to join a club, play a sport, meet new people etc) ○ Social support and social structures to be involved? • Introduce tiered competitions so young adults can play with like-minded peers/ friendship groups • Change the scheduling of sport to suit the time poor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Flexible times, lots of games, short games, short season • Focus coaching on social engagement, not just on skill development/ technical skills • Offer entry level players education and skill development, so people know they can come and develop enough skill to play and don't have to be experienced • Profile young adults in the club and to the public. Build them as role models • Talk TO young members – what do they want/need • Understand why young adult members stay as well as why they leave • Introduce Festivals and Events in locations that appeal to the segment – location does matter and coastal surf is great • Incentivise participation – prize money as winning the social competition rather than a trophy • Own more equipment so we can support social and occasional participation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Game or sport skills to build their competence and/ confidence? ○ Enhanced facilities, resources or access within the sport/club? (Kahn, et al., 2002). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Include young adults in decision making – give them responsibility in the club and allow them to fail without deep recrimination
<p>Communications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote the sporting capital to be gained from playing sport and remaining in sport – i.e. what social, psychological and physiological competencies does your sport support that can motivate participation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider and articulate through action and messaging how (your) sport promotes self-worth/ self-esteem (confidence in the self), self-efficacy (perceived competence), self-image (valued, roles); social connection (wide network of community and friends) across a range of social locations; and condition, health, strength, physical, emotional and cognitive attributes; ● Tap into young adult’s regret on giving up sport and offer pathways in (e.g. brightpurpose, 2012) and intervene so their lapse from sport is not self-perpetuating. Invite emerging adults back across multiple pathways – player, administration, coaching, governance; ● Replicate the essence of what is working with other cohorts e.g. make sport for 18-24 year olds the norm, not the unusual. Show this cohort playing, sustaining, contributing, engaging, performing in sport – through marketing, through media, through word of mouth, through relatable people. Have your sport played where the cohort are – go to them (e.g. This Girl Can Campaign); ● Communicate with emerging adults where they communicate – social media, peer networks, visual platforms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use social media to leverage into the young adult market ● Support our young adult members to market sport to their peers through the channels they use ● Use social media groups to keep young people connected, even if they are not playing – keep them part of the interactive community ● Accept that young adults might not be participating in the core business for a while but offer connections so they know they can come back (e.g. invitation to attend, social media group, short term volunteer for event) ● Know OUR sporting capital – and communicate this in age appropriate ways ● Show them involved – use the faces and language of young adults involved in all aspects of sport so it is relatable e.g. social, high performance, coaching, volunteering, managing etc

Conclusion

Both the desktop research and industry engagement revealed there are a range of reasons why young adults drop out or disengage with sport, but it also demonstrated this age group continue to be interested in sport and physical activity in general. While there are life course and emerging priorities that intervene in participation and sport membership, there are also actions that sporting groups can take that can help to intervene or enable young adults to continue participation on some level, or remain open to re-engaging in organised, structured sport in the future.

Through the workshops it was evident that many clubs were seeking the 'answers' or solutions to prevent sport drop out for 18-24 year olds. Equally it was clear that others were actively endeavouring to retain their member groups or change the internal structures that could amplify sport drop away (e.g. no train, no play; membership costs moving from child to adult at 18; lack of sporting pathways post age 16). Some of the change these clubs and sports were trialling are highlighted in Section 10 of this report. Time will tell how effective they are, but it is clear that just having an idea to solve one problem may not be enough to redress the wider, generational fall away that we see for this age group. Rather, interventions need to also consider how to attract and secure the participation of 14-17 year olds so there are more members being maintained to begin with; and how to re-engage and sustain 25-34 year olds so that lifelong participation may become more of a sporting norm.

The overarching results of the research indicated that rather than there being any specific interventions that might represent the panacea for sporting participation or membership, there are basic principles that can be applied to attract, support and sustain membership in general. In essence these can be represented through nine key points:

1. **Listen** – talk with and engage with the groups you want to attract
2. **Be flexible and nimble** – offer options that suit the commitments of the cohort & accommodate to ongoing change
3. **Find the 'fun' quotient** – we are all motivated by fun
4. **Welcome** – make this real & inclusive
5. **Revitalise the social**
6. **Provide opportunities to contribute** – participation and membership don't have to be just defined by playing
7. **Mix it up** – twilight games, mid-week, shortened competitions, mixed gender
8. **Make it about them** – not just about the sport or tradition
9. **Extend concessions** – child rate (paid by parent) to adult rate (paid by self)

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