



# *Executive Summary*

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**T**oday, nearly one in four Australian people were born overseas, representing new arrivals from over 200 countries. This melting pot of cultures and identities has made an invaluable contribution to business, politics, society and sport.

Sport is an essential part of Australia's identity. It has long played an important social and cultural role, acting as a social glue to bind communities and individuals together.

But to members of Indigenous communities it can be much more than this; it can be a vital pathway to improving their social and economic well-being. Sport can also be very important for people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, helping them to become involved in the community and interact with people from different backgrounds.

Sport can break down barriers in ways that other areas of society can struggle to match, by encouraging participation, integration and diversity. It also plays an important role in creating 'social capital' by developing connections, openness and respect between different individuals and groups. This can lead to better understanding, cooperation and social cohesion within communities.

However, people from CALD backgrounds remain under-represented in the numbers participating in sporting organisations and competitions, and the range of sports participated in. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also not represented proportionally in sporting organisations, and very few have represented at the elite and national level.

While there is a plethora of information available on the general number and characteristics of Australian people who participate in sport and recreational activities (including age, gender, frequency and type of participation), very little data focuses on the ethnic or cultural background of participants. Without reliable information about who is playing what sports in Australia – and why those sports are or are not attracting Indigenous or CALD participants – it is difficult to determine what specific programs need to be developed to increase the participation rates of different groups. Sporting organisations need to make this data collection a priority.

There are a significant number of barriers faced by Indigenous and CALD people with regards to participation in sport. One critical element is the experience of, or the potential for, racism and discrimination; something that denies participants the right to be treated with respect, dignity and fairness and to participate in an environment that is fun, safe and healthy. Sporting organisations that have comprehensive policies to address discrimination, harassment and vilification and that provide a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere have a far greater chance of attracting participants from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Some significant barriers to participation identified by the report include:

- Lack of access to sport and facilities due to remote geographical location
- the exclusiveness of the current structure of some sports
- lack of familiarity with sporting clubs and environments and available services/activities

- lack of understanding of the rules of some sports or lack of confidence in physical ability to play certain sports
- arriving in Australia from countries without structured community-based sport
- potential threat or experience of discrimination or racism
- feelings of isolation
- language barriers
- lack of financial resources for activities and equipment
- lack of role models working in and playing the game
- absence of effective public transport
- family or cultural communities may take priority over sport, and
- barriers for young women within their own communities and from sporting organisations.

In view of this, the report examines the existing policies, programs and strategies to combat racism in sport that have been developed by 17 national sporting organisations; federal, state and territory government departments; selected non-government sporting agencies; and federal, state and territory equal opportunity commissions. The project also outlines the wide range of existing projects which seek to encourage participation of Indigenous and CALD community members in sport. In addition, the report includes the available baseline data on the participation in sport by members of Indigenous and CALD communities.

The report recognises that racism in sport still exists. To tackle this, federal, state and territory government agencies are working on a range of strategies, initiatives, grants and projects, in collaboration with sporting organisations and other agencies, to combat racial prejudice and encourage diverse participation. The main strategies being implemented on a national level include the Australian Sports Commission's (ASC) Harassment Free Sport strategy and the Indigenous Sports Program, as well as the online information and training program *Play by the Rules*.

Consultation and collaboration between all stakeholders is the key to breaking down barriers, building trust and ensuring sustainable, productive mutually-beneficial relationships and outcomes.

The report reveals that while many sporting organisations have dedicated Indigenous sporting programs, some have yet to develop specific initiatives to promote Indigenous participation in sport. The ASC's Indigenous Sports Program (ISP) plays an important role in this area and works closely with 16 national sporting organisations to increase participation, infrastructure and skill development in Indigenous communities. The centrepiece of the program is a national network of 50 Indigenous sport development officers working within each of the state and territory departments of sport and recreation.

The ISP, along with state and territory sport and recreation departments and equal opportunity/anti-discrimination boards, support this by delivering sport-specific cross-cultural awareness training.

Some sports surveyed for the report, such as soccer and wrestling, have had no problems encouraging participation from people from diverse backgrounds, due primarily to these sports rich 'ethnic' roots. Many others, such as the Australian football and rugby league, have put in place comprehensive programs to reach out and engage people from CALD

communities. However, other sporting organisations surveyed have not developed specific initiatives to promote an inclusive environment, or if they have, they have done so on an ad-hoc basis.

Those national sporting organisations that have not already done so should consider implementing dedicated Indigenous and CALD sports programs to promote a greater diversity of participation, and allocate appropriate time, staff and resources to these programs. They should also consider employing specific Indigenous and CALD development officers to develop and implement relevant programs.

National sporting organisations should also look at using role models within their sport to promote the health and social benefits of sport, as well as the importance of standing up to racism. Special sporting days and promotional events that celebrate the sporting contributions of people from diverse backgrounds could also be built into the calendars of national sporting organisations.

These recommendations support the directions currently being taken by most national sporting organisations. These sporting bodies realise that their long-term future is dependant upon encouraging participation from people of all backgrounds, irrespective of their age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion or ability.

Many sporting organisations are making a greater effort to engage Indigenous and CALD communities in their sports. They (along with state associations and clubs) are also beginning to understand that their programs and strategies are unlikely to succeed if they have not identified and addressed the potential barriers to participation in their sports, and taken steps to ensure that their sporting clubs and associations provide a welcoming culture.

All sporting organisations surveyed now have a range of member protection policies and codes in place to address concerns and complaints of discrimination, harassment, vilification, child abuse and other inappropriate behaviour. In addition, all codes are encouraged to implement the ASC's Harassment Free Sport strategy resources, state sport and recreations departments and anti-discrimination agencies training programs and *Play by the Rules*.

To ensure that their members are protected from harassment, discrimination and inappropriate behaviour, national sporting organisations, state associations and local clubs should audit their current policies and ensure that there are adequate processes in place for effective complaint handling. This includes ensuring there are policies to deal with racial abuse by spectators at sporting events.

The benefits for sporting organisations in stamping out racism in sport and encouraging greater cultural diversity are significant. They include:

- increased membership base and more funds for club activities
- the opportunity to increase the number of skilled or gifted players in a club
- more potential volunteers or administrators
- lifting the profile of a club in the local community and beyond
- learning more about other cultures
- more spectators and increased social benefits associated with new members and their family groups
- assist new arrivals to settle in

- raise the awareness of the benefits of sport in culturally diverse families, and
- builds relationships between cultures.

The significance of these actions in helping to build improved relationships, community understanding and social cohesion between the diverse groups in Australia should not be underestimated.