

# "CHANGE STARTS WITH SPORT"

**THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE  
BENEFIT OF INCLUDING PEOPLE  
WITH DISABILITY IN  
COMMUNITY LEVEL SPORT  
(STAGE 1)**

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# Executive Summary

The local sports club sits at the heart of many communities across Australia. A casual look through any community club website will find some version of the sentiment that ‘all are welcome.’ Given this attitude, it is unsurprising that social policy actors have championed the use of community sports clubs as a vehicle through which a range of policy objectives can be obtained (Jeanes et al. 2018).

Yet, for a sizable portion of the community, the claim that ‘all are welcome’ does not apply. Although one in five Australians have a disability, the most recent data suggests that they are not as active as people without disability (Sport Australia 2021). This exclusion that people with disability (PwD) encounter is reflective of a wider pattern of marginalization that they experience across a variety of socio-economic contexts.

The leadup to the Brisbane 2032 Paralympic Games provides an opening to examine the benefits of local sport for whole communities, the way policy in that arena is implemented, and areas of opportunity for policy makers to improve access to local sport for PwD to generate immediate and flow-on social and economic benefits. This study provides an evidence base for future research by the Melbourne Disability Institute and others into the public and private benefits of inclusive community sport.

## **Methodology and findings of the study**

This report begins with a review of academic literature, Australian government databases and reports addressing benefits and barriers to participation in community sport for PwD. Four broad themes linked to the overarching private and public benefit of community sport emerged in the review. The themes are:

- **Healthier People**
- **Building Economic Pathways**
- **Building of Social Networks**
- **Building Inclusive Communities**

From here the report moves to explore the process by which inclusion policy is developed and implemented. We found that ‘inclusion’ is more than simply inviting PwD to participate in community sport by adapting institutions, spaces and activities designed by the historically dominant group. Indeed, ‘levelling the playing field’ involves both removing bumps and filling holes. It is about changing the underlying assumptions that originally excluded PwD in the first place (Northway 1997) and building the capacity of local sporting clubs to welcome PwD and to recognise the value of their involvement.

We then explore the specific mechanics of inclusion policy implementation. Our research suggests that much of the responsibility to implement inclusion falls on the ‘policy influencer’ who exists in the community sport club. The willingness of that person to shoulder the significant responsibility of driving inclusion is a key factor in determining the success of a program. The final section of the report presents a range of barriers that which prevent the inclusion of PwD along with suggested strategies under the title ‘what can change’ to mitigate them.

These strategies form the basis of our options for policy makers that are presented in the conclusion of the report. The final section of the report presents a range of barriers that which prevent the inclusion of PwD along with suggested strategies under the title ‘what can change’

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### **Relevance to the Sector and Policy Makers**

Investment in inclusion programs for local sport is of potential significant value to the Australian community. Recognition of the health and social benefits of participating in sport and sporting clubs for PwD is growing, but the socio-economic benefits of inclusive local sport for both PwD and the whole community are underexplored. Understanding the public benefits is important in funding environments where different interests compete for resources and attention.

The benefits of including PwD described in this study - the private and public social, health as well as economic value that sport provides - are directly aligned to the objectives of governments at all levels across Australia.

Although there is much that government is already doing to increase participation opportunities for PwD in community sport, the Brisbane 2032 Paralympic Games presents a unique opportunity to focus awareness and resources. Using the momentum provided by the Games, PwD, policy makers, disability organisations and sporting bodies have the potential to change the narrative of disability in Australia (Walsh 2021). Crucially, the lead-up to the Games can serve a dual purpose of celebrating the achievements of some PwD as elite athletes and promoting the rights of all PwD to be part of their community beyond their ability to 'inspire' others and 'overcome' their disability (Young 2014). As such, the Games are not a silver bullet, but they do offer a policy window for enhancing a culture of community-based inclusion for PwD.

From our study we suggest a variety of possible options for policy makers which can be pursued:

- Allocate funding to promote codesign between disability service organisations and state sporting bodies.
- Invest in research that explores the specific barriers associated with PwD who come from diverse backgrounds which prevent them from participating in community sport.
- Given the employability skills that can be learnt in a community sports club, encourage the participation of PwD in off-field roles by partnering with organisations with disability-specific networks and expertise.
- Recognising the capacity building function of sport, prioritise the allocation of more funding in NDIS plans that reduces barriers associated with accessing community sport.
- Awareness raising campaign about the right of all Australians to access community sport under the UNCRPD.

This study is just the beginning. Our intention in Stage 2 is to conduct interviews with administrators involved in the implementation of programs to provide a more complete picture about the process of including in local sport. The popularity of community sport in Australia means that it provides a natural environment where friendships, health and life-skills can be cultivated for PwD. Community sports clubs provide services which create a range of opportunities for inclusion to be promoted. Correctly implemented, including PwD in the local sports club can assist in combatting the marginalisation that often characterises the experience of having a disability in Australia creating a more welcoming and stronger community.

# Introduction

Approximately 15% of the world's population have a disability (<https://www.wethe15.org/>). In Australia, studies have revealed persistent poor quality of life for people with disabilities, including high levels of poverty, social exclusion, isolation and risk of violence, low levels of income and labour market participation, and unequal access to health and education compared to Australians without disability (Olney 2021; Olney & Dickinson 2019; Krnjacki et al. 2016; Milner et al. 2014). People with disabilities (PwD) are also less likely to participate in sport, recreation, and leisure activities than people without disability.

According to the latest figures published by Sport Australia (2021):

**53.2% of adults with a disability participate in organized or non-organized sport at least three times a week. This is significantly lower than adults without disability who participate in physical activity three times a week (65.3%).**

Considering this, the first part of the report contends that, by closing the gap in sport participation, the benefits that arise can assist in addressing other areas of inequality between PwD and wider society. The literature search undertaken identifies 4 main benefits. These are:

- Healthier people
- Building economic pathways
- Building social networks
- Building inclusive communities

Our argument aligns with the view expressed in Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (UNCRPD) which enshrines the right of people with disability to participate in sport (UNCRPD 2006). In this sense, sport is recognized by the UN as a mechanism through which development goals can be pursued.

Australia's obligations under the UNCRPD have shaped its sport policy to make inclusion a priority. For example, one of the four areas of focus for the Federal Government's Sport 2030 plan is participation. Specifically, the aim is to "make Australia the most active country in the world" (Sport 2030 p.7). The guiding philosophy that underpins this initiative is that "inclusive societies are successful societies" (Sport 2030 p.6). This reinforces our argument that empowering PwD to participate and contribute more to their community has society wide benefits.

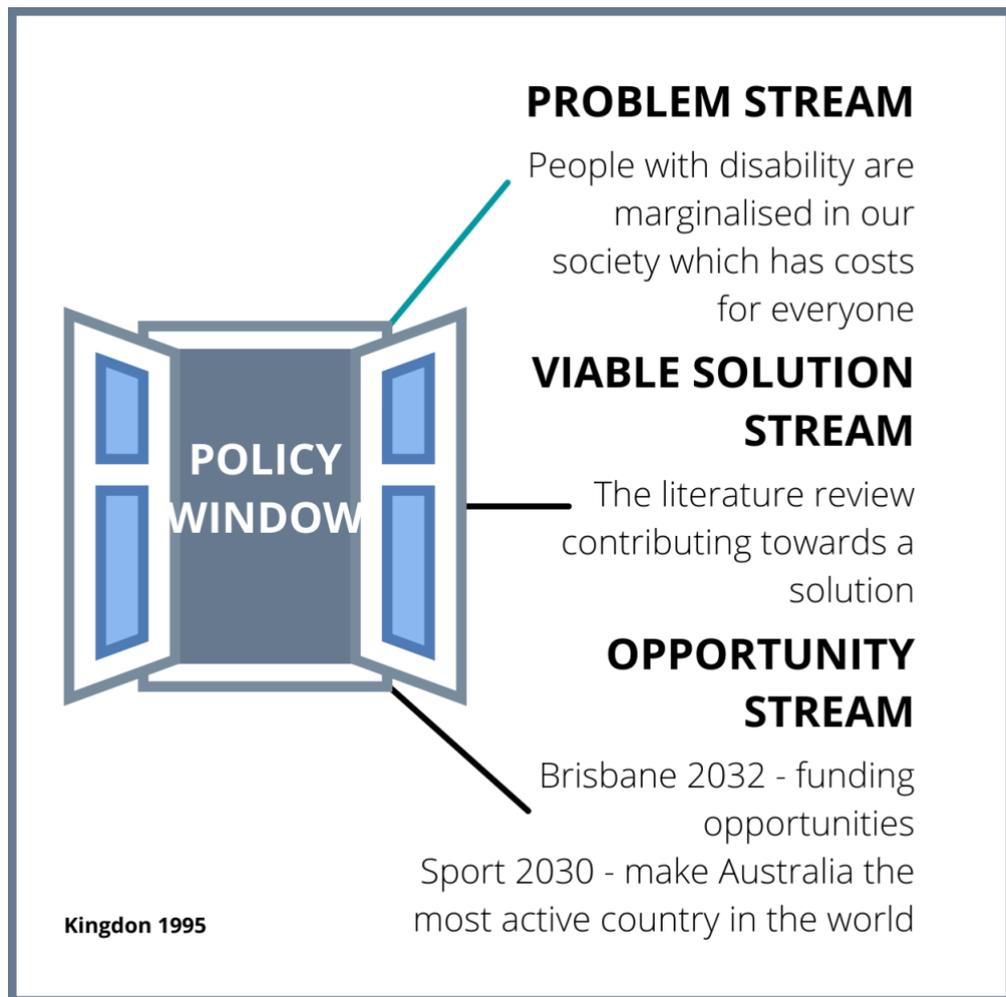
Following an explanation of these benefits, the report will shift focus to explaining the mechanics of inclusive policy implementation. Our research suggests that the strongest indication of inclusiveness is the extent to which the choice and control of PwD is prioritised, diversity is embraced, and disability stakeholders are engaged in program formulation.

The final section will explore some of the barriers that exist for PwD in engaging with community sport. Each barrier is coupled with suggested options for policy makers and community sporting organisations. This links with the wider purpose of the report to provide the basis for further research that will lead to changes in inclusion sport policy. Following Kingdon's multiple streams approach we think that there is a clear window of opportunity for policy makers to address inclusion of PwD.

In Kingdon's approach there are three 'streams' that contribute to the opening of a policy window (Kingdon 1995). The first of these is that "attention lurches towards a certain problem" (Cairney and Jones p.40). In the context of disability this problem is the marginalization that PwD live with and the

negative flow on effects this creates. The second is that there is a viable solution which policy makers can deploy. The synthesizing of available research, which is the goal of this project, provides the foundation for the development of a solution. Finally, Kingdon’s approach requires that policy makers have the “motive and opportunity” to turn the solution into policy (Cairney and Jones p.41).

With Brisbane 2032 just over a decade away, there will be increasing public focus on the home Paralympic and Olympic games. Brisbane 2032 provides a clear opportunity that, it is hoped, will motivate policy makers to explore ways that the games can be used as a policy lever to promote other social goods. As a result, it is crucial that the foundations be established now to construct a solution which can capitalize on the momentum created by the games. The other opportunity is the intention of the Federal government to make Australia the ‘most active country in the world,’ a goal that will need to prioritise the inclusion of PwD if it is to be realised (Sport 2030 2018).



## Methodology and Structure

This report will take the following structure to discuss and analyse the different aspects of the public and private benefits of the inclusion of PwD in community sport. The sources for this report will focus on academic literature, Australian government databases and reports commissioned by a variety of state sporting bodies, federal and state governments.

- Background literature review outlining the private and public benefit of community sport for PwD.
- An outline unpacking the concept of 'inclusion' and explaining the process by which an inclusive sport policy program is implemented.
- A review of literature surrounding the most common barriers associated with the implementation of inclusive sport programs.
- Focus on where policy effort and investment in community sport can produce public value.
- Conclusion and options for policy makers.

## Key Concepts

### Disability

Historically, the medical model of disability has been the dominant paradigm through which society has regarded people with disabilities. This view locates the 'problem' of disability within the individual. However, the development of the disability civil rights movement and its academic arm, disability studies, has challenged this 'medical model' with the 'social model' of disability. According to Northway, the social model of disability sees individuals as disabled by their physical and social environment which acts as barriers 'preventing their participation in society as equals' (Northway 1997).

As such, there is no fixed definition for disability. The definition that this report will use is the critical-realist view developed by Tom Shakespeare. Shakespeare defines the experience of disability as 'the relationship between factors intrinsic to the individual and extrinsic factors relating to the wider context in which she finds herself.' In other words 'people are disabled by their bodies and by society' (Shakespeare, 2006).

### Ableism

Although the definition of ableism has undergone many changes, the most cited version that I have observed during my literature search is the following given by disability scholar Fiona Kumari Campbell:

"a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body that is projected as the perfect, species typical and therefore fully human. Disability as a result, is a diminished state of being human (Kumari-Campbell, 2009).

# The Benefits of Community Sport

## Benefit: Healthier People

### Physical health benefits

There are a range of benefits that accompany exercise. These are universal and transcend all markers of 'disability.' It is the firm commitment of this paper that everyone has something to benefit from community sport irrespective of the 'complexity' of their disability. On this premise, all efforts should be made to make adjustments that will allow PwD to participate in sport.

People with disabilities tend to have:

- Lower cardiorespiratory fitness
- Lower levels of muscular endurance (Wedgwood 2011)
- Higher rates of obesity (Labbe et al. 2019)
- Difficulties with fine and gross motor skills (Bhat et al. 2011)

Regular exercise has been shown to reduce these as well as decrease the rate that a chronic disease spreads in an individual leading to an overall improvement in health (Murphy and Carbone 2008).

The health benefits for the individual are as follows:

- Increased aerobic endurance
- Decreased rates of obesity (Khan et al. 2006)
- Decreased chance of death from cardiovascular issues
- Decreased risk of Type 2 Diabetes
- Reduction of possibility of developing some cancers such as colon and breast cancer (Khan et al. 2006)
- Increased Bone density and muscular strength which can protect individual from falls (Wind et al. 2004)

### Psychological wellbeing

The social aspect of community sport means that there are a significant number of psychological gains to be made in the process of involving more PwD.

- Greater sense of self-esteem (Richardson et al. 2017; Petry et al. 2009)
- Sense of purpose (Lindeman and Cherney 2008)
- Perceived physical competence (Lindemann and Cherney 2008)
- Increased independence (Anderson 2008)
- Coping abilities (Richardson et al. 2017), resilience in the face of defeat or difficult competition
- Reduction of stereotypic movements (such as rocking back and forth) (Gabler-Halle et al. 1993)
- Reduction of maladaptive behaviors (Gabler-Halle et al. 1993)

### Public health benefits:

The prevailing logic that underpins the connection between public health and economics posits a variety of 'ripple effects' produced by a healthier individual who is engaging in community sport. These include:

In 2008, it was estimated that physical inactivity costs Australia \$13 billion dollars in healthcare (Sport 2030 p.13). As a result, less strain will be placed on the healthcare system the more involved people with disability are in sport (Deloitte 2011).

More people able to participate in community life (more money being injected into local community) (Deloitte 2011).

### **Benefit: Building Economic Pathways**

The community sports club is where many individuals obtain their first form of work. Whether as umpires, coaches or working in the canteen, community sport provides a safe environment wherein individuals can learn both hard and soft employment skills. These 'employability skills' form key criteria that job candidates must satisfy in order gain employment (Job Jumpstart 2021). In a study conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics the workforce participation of PwD was 30% less than people without disability (Disability and Labour Force Participation 2020). Involvement in community sport provides entry level opportunities for PwD to build employability skills. Devine's study of PwD athletes in Fiji found that participation in sport resulted in the economic empowerment of the athletes because they achieved a heightened sense of confidence (Devine et al. 2017). This was echoed by an American study which found strong qualitative evidence that being physically active as a PwD was a factor in gaining employment, promotions, and work satisfaction (Krane and Orkis 2009).

Outlined below are some common roles in the sports club which encourage the development of employability skills:

- Assistant coach-communication
- Player-teamwork, self-management
- Umpire-Problem solving
- Administrator-taking initiative
- Canteen assistant-planning and organising, managing stress

However, the research base exploring the participation of PwD in off-field roles is limited in Australia. Studies in the US and the UK have found that the participation rates of PwD in volunteering ranges between 5-6% in events such as the London Paralympic Games. According to Kappelides et al. significant barriers around training, institutional prejudice and suitable opportunities impede the increased participation of PwD as volunteers (2018).

A program conducted by the Monash City Council provides a notable exception to this trend. In late 2020, the City of Monash developed the Integrated Practical Placement program to provide young people with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to gain training in the community sport and recreation sector. Using sites under the administration of the City of Monash, such as the Oakleigh Recreation Centre and the Monash Aquatic and Recreation Centre, as a 'hands on classroom' the program gives students the opportunity to access entry level diplomas.

To implement this the City of Monash partnered with WISE Employment. WISE is a not-for-profit organisation which assists PwD to find work. As an organisation they serve as job coaches throughout the integrated practical placement. Previous WISE programs have seen an 80% success rate in participants being able to gain employment (City of Monash 2020). In relation to local community sporting clubs, which are primarily volunteer driven, a full WISE program would likely be too time consuming. Nonetheless, organisations such as WISE could act as valuable consultants for national sport organisations or their state sport branches to develop training courses that were attuned to the needs of PwD.

### **Hidden Jobs**

Additionally, participating in community sport as a PwD leads to the expansion of that individual's social network. Research conducted by the Australian Government has found that one fifth of available jobs are not formally advertised (Job Jumpstart 2021). These 'hidden jobs' are

usually based on word of mouth or other informal modes of advertisement. Considering this, the expansion of a PwD social network through participation in community sport increases the likelihood of finding career mentors and work opportunities.

### **Public economic benefit**

The primary economic benefit to sports clubs is, by making themselves more accessible to PwD, they increase their member base. This creates the possibility for increased revenue which will allow for the purchase of better equipment, facilities, and services for club members. These considerations relate to the 'business case' for inclusion that Spaaij's study describes as a primary motivator for clubs embracing inclusion (Spaaij et al., 2014). Additionally, Kappelides study argues that, with the decrease in volunteers, PwD are an 'untapped resource' who, with a few adjustments, could become a reliable source of volunteers. Consequently, the inclusion of PwD provides an opportunity for clubs to manage volunteer shortages (Wicker 2017).

The ongoing Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (henceforth known as the RC) recommends that government "invest in initiatives and programs that provide education, training and support to create inclusive practices across all sectors" (RC p.21). This aligns with our view that sport is a sector where investment could be directed.

## **Benefit: Building Social Networks**

### **Building social skills**

On a personal level, Slee argues that there are a range of behaviours expected in everyday social settings that PwD find challenging. PwD are:

- Less likely to choose behaviours that will help them to have a good relationship with others in each social situation.
- Less likely to be able to solve social problems.
- Less likely to work out what will happen because of their behaviour.
- Less likely to make allowances for their other listeners in conversation.
- Less able to manage complex ways of getting along with others, such as using persuasion negotiating, not giving into peer pressure.
- Less able to adjust to new social situations.
- More likely to get rejected by classmates/peers (Slee,1996)

Social skills are crucial because they allow people to participate in daily routines (Woods & Weatherby 2006). They also promote independence, increase social acceptability, and improve the persons quality of life. In this sense, sport provides a medium where these skills can be practiced and honed in a safe environment.

As Slee indicates, it can be difficult for people with disabilities to find common ground with others. Yet, research has shown that playing sport can enhance relations with peers (Taub and Greer 2000), expand social interactions and initiate other social activities for children (Blinde and McClung 1997). These skills are important because of their transferability into other domains of life. Although there is further research needed in this area, this creates the possibility for professionals to use sport as a tool to overcome issues relating to generalising the skills practiced in the clinic room.

## **Role models**

In their study outlining the impacts of wheelchair rugby (murderball) Lindemann and Cherney note that the sport provides a way for PwD of different ages to connect (2008). In this environment of informal peer support tips are shared relating to the navigation of everyday challenges that they might face. There is a sense of community where the older more experienced players provide guidance to younger players. Anderson's study of adolescent girls produced similar findings noting that the presence of strong role models at a formative period in a young person's life is crucial for building self-esteem (Anderson 2008).

## **Benefit: Inclusive Communities**

### **Safety**

The ongoing RC has illuminated the ways that PwD are often cast towards the fringes of society. It notes that PwD are more likely to feel unsafe in their home and more likely to experience violence compared to people without a disability (RC 2020).

Sporting clubs provide a meeting place where different social demographics, who might not otherwise interact, encounter one another. This is significant because it provides a sense of community which, as the Royal Commission has shown, is often lacking for PwD. Considering the statistics relating to experiences of violence by PwD, the community sports club provides a safe space and a way to 'check in' with the member.

### **Demystification of disability**

Besides safety, the main social public benefit to be gained from including PwD in community sport is that it leads to the 'demystification of disability.' The mystification of disability relates to the constructed assumptions, values and beliefs produced by ableism that render the PwD as 'other.' According to the UN's Sport for Development and Peace, participation in sport deconstructs disabling pictures of PwD as passive, inactive and lacking capacities (SDP IWG 2008). The de-mystification of disability can be explained by Allport's contact theory. Allport's view is that "social contact will improve relationships between members of majority and minority groups" (Mckay 2018). Allport's theory has been corroborated across numerous contexts ranging from individuals from the LGBTIQ+ community (Herek and Capitanio 1996), different racial groups (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006) as well as individuals with disabilities (McManus, Feyes and Saucier 2010).

To corroborate this, changes in attitude towards PwD have proven to be most successful in meaningful grassroots community interaction. Whilst large scale media campaigns have a key role in raising awareness, theories of change such as community based social marketing (CBSM) have "demonstrated that initiatives delivered on the community level" are more likely to result in enduring behaviour changes (Kleeman and Wilson p.18). In the context of sport, separate research by Lesley-Ogden and Sidiropoulos et al. (2016 and 2015). Has found significant changes in perceptions of disability where disabled and non-disabled participants undertake the same activity. This lends credibility to our focus on community sport as a sector where government should be investing resources to promote a positive image of disability.

The reason that this is a public benefit is because it creates a more harmonious society where individuals are likely to feel more included and valued. The repercussions of this are deeply connected to the public health and economic benefits that we have outlined in this report.

# How are inclusion programs implemented?

## Getting 'inclusion' right

Barton's definition of inclusion describes it as "responding to and celebrating diversity in dignified ways as well as seeking to empower all members" (Goodley and Runswick-Cole p.274). This emphasis on empowerment and celebration of difference conflicts with the traditional view of 'inclusion' which tends to see it as being synonymous with 'integration.' Broadly speaking, Northway describes integration as the mixing of previously segregated groups into equal membership of society. Understanding the difference between integration and inclusion will provide the background to understand what 'true' inclusion entails.

The problem with integration is that it tends to promote assimilation. This is problematic because integration retain many able-bodied standards of 'normality.' The problem with this form of 'inclusion' is that it does not promote a re-evaluation of values nor the underlying structures that originally produced those values. Hammond picks up this thread noting that sport tends to include the most 'abled of the disabled.' Essentially, sports clubs will look to include participants whose disability requires as few adjustments as possible (2018). These efforts are increased if it is revealed that the individual is talented at the sport. For example, a child with autism might be excellent at running in mainstream competition. This is 'inclusion' in the most limited sense of the word.

Given that simply involving PwD does not entail inclusion our literature search has yielded a series of guidelines that begins to clarify what inclusion looks like:

- Inclusion is context sensitive meaning that there is no single, all-encompassing example of inclusion because it can change depending on someone's disability.
- Inclusion prioritizes the creation of structure and policies that aim to give PwD control and choice over the fulfillment of their needs (Department of Human Services, 2002).
- People have a sense of belonging where their contributions are valued (Department of Human Services 2002).
- Inclusive clubs involve PwD and relevant stakeholders in the development of programs (Inclusion Club, 2021)
- People's rights are respected, and they can act if they are discriminated against (Kleeman and Wilson 2007)

Cast in this light, it is understandable why inclusion scholars, such as Black and Williamson (2011), insist on presenting inclusion as a spectrum.

The inclusion spectrum is a model developed by Ken Black which outlines the major categories of inclusion that a sport can seek to adopt. Crucially, it is important to recognize that all these options are considered to promote the principles of inclusion:

1	Specially thought for and designed for people with disabilities and practiced in various times and spaces
2	Parallel Activity: Disabled athletes may need to train separately with disabled peers to prepare for a competition (see Black and Williamson 2011).
3	Disability Sport Activity: Reverse integration whereby non-disabled children and adults are included in disability sport together with disabled peers.
4	Open (inclusive) Activity: ‘Everyone does the same activity with minimal or no adaptations to the environment or equipment; open activities are by their nature inclusive so that the activity suits every participant. (Black and Williamson 2011).
5	Modified Activity Activities designed for all, with specific adaptations to space, tasks, equipment and people’s teaching (e.g., Baskin, Unified Sports program).

### The rhetoric-reality gap

Throughout Australia an increasing number of national sporting organisations (NSOs, such as Basketball Australia, Hockey Australia, Swimming Australia) have adopted inclusion policies.

Hockey Australia’s Inclusion Policy provides a typical example of the general sentiment contained within such a policy:

**“We’re passionate about helping people lead happy, healthy and active lives. Hockey Australia celebrates diversity of sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, intersex status, ability, skill, cultural background, ethnicity, location, religious or political beliefs or life stage and welcomes everyone, exactly as they are” (Hockey Australia 2021).**

The key insight to understand is that there is a gap between the sentiments that an organisation expresses through inclusion statements and the realities of that policy in the context of a local sporting organisation. Rather than being a linear process, the implementation of a policy, according to Ball, is always being “contested and changing, in a state of becoming, ‘was’ or ‘never quite was.’” Part of the reason for this is because of the textual nature of policy there are many readers who will create many different readings (Ball 307). As a result, Braun asserts that context needs to be taken seriously by sporting organisations looking to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive policies (Braun 2011). This is because policies enter different resource environments, clubs with different histories and with a variety of members who have a range of views and priorities.

From the literature available in the realm of policy enactment in local sporting clubs, there are a range of policy actors contained within any given club that can aid or detract a club’s inclusion project. The diagram below highlights these key actors and how they interact with each other. It is important to recognize that inclusion policy is not always a ‘top-down’ process. Often, the policy influencer will approach the club or sporting organization to pitch their idea for an inclusion program (Next Page)

# INCLUSIVE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION



## NATIONAL/STATE SPORT ORGANISATION

In consultation with disability inclusion specialists, federal sporting agencies and legislation a national sporting organisation will develop an inclusion policy for their association



Top down approach



## DISABILITY INCLUSION SPECIALISTS

Provide valuable resources and consultation to clubs surrounding the implementation of an inclusion program. More importantly, they are well connected with the local community and can assist in making sure that people with disability and their carers are aware of the club program. These can range from organisations such as Disability Sport and Recreation Victoria to local schools.

## CLUB POLICY INFLUENCER

This actor is the lynchpin for policy implementation. Campbell (2004) notes that these actors have a broad range of social networks at their disposal allowing them to work across different organisational fields. They are responsible for delegating tasks, pitching ideas, creating strategy, liaising with SSO's and disability service providers.

## PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Engaging with likely participants, finding out their specific needs. Placing athletes at the centre is crucial

## BOARD/CLUB GOVERNING BODY

Responsible for allocating funds and generating club-wide support

## GUARDIANS

If people with disability are unable to articulate their needs - conferring with guardians

## COACHES

Important that coaches receive some form of disability awareness training, ideally facilitated by disability inclusion specialists

## BEWARE THE POLICY CRITIC

Actors in a club environment who might be skeptical about an inclusion program. They will often cite one of the barriers to support their claim

# Barriers to inclusion in community sport and ways to address them

This section sets out some barriers and facilitators around inclusion in community sport for people with disabilities, and suggested policy interventions to promote inclusion in each context.

The case for change spans a continuum from encouraging changes in the individual (micro), incentives to assist process change (meso) and systemic change (macro). Studies have demonstrated that “facilitators and barriers tend to have a mutually exclusive relationship, where there was one the other would not be present” (Shields and Synnot 2016). This section seeks to clarify ways in which governments can adjust the balance in that relationship to support and/or facilitate inclusion of PwD in community sport to serve the public interest. Considering this, we have included suggested policy interventions to alert policy makers to areas where adjustments in policy and practice can both immediate and longer-term impact. It is important to recognise that the barriers which effect some PwD will not affect others with disability. The experience of being ‘disabled’ changes based on age, socio-economic status, culture, and geographic location (to name a few).

Barrier	Type of problem	Example intervention	Responsibility	Associated Theme
Negative attitude towards disability	Attitude, system	Increased Disability awareness training	All stakeholders	Demystification of disability
Parental/guardian concerns	Attitude, system	Active involvement of parents in program creation	Club administrators	Demystification of disability
Club and administrator concerns	Attitude, system, processes	Disability awareness training	Disability Service Providers State Sporting Organisation	Demystification of disability
Participation vs Performance	attitude	Providing a range of participation opportunities (social team)	Club administrators	Building social networks, Building economic pathways
Poorly advertised programs	System, attitude	Development of database with clubs offering inclusion programs and improved connections with disability service providers	Government Disability Service Providers	Building economic pathways, Building social networks
Financial cost of participation	System	Increased funding from government bodies such as NDIS and APC	Government	Healthier people, Building economic pathways
Intersectionality	System, attitude	Further research into the specific barriers that exist for minority disability groups	Government, Disability service providers	Demystification of disability

### **Barrier: Negative attitudes to disability**

Bills' (2019) research found that students with a disability are four times more likely to experience verbal or physical abuse. Ableism can present itself in a variety of ways within a sporting environment where there can be significant emphasis placed on results. This view stems from the idea that to be 'disabled' is synonymous only with 'lacking.' Particularly amongst children, bullying of PwD is far more pronounced and can have debilitating effects on a participant's self-esteem. It could lead them to disengage with the sport and curtail opportunities for further exercise in the future based on negative associations with community sport. Many of the barriers that are listed in this section will have some form of ableism at their base. It is important to recognize that, just as it is with other 'isms' (racism, sexism, classism), there are different levels of severity associated with ableism.

### **What can change: Increased meaningful interactions with disability**

At the start of the paper the Paralympics were identified as an opportunity that could support a campaign to encourage policy makers to increase spending and awareness about disability sport. Part of the reason for this is the Paralympics provides an opportunity to present PwD in a positive and active light (IPC 2018).

However, the extent to which this is true has been questioned by many disability activists and scholars for a range of reasons. These include the Paralympics perpetuation of 'super-crip' and pity narratives as well as the problematic classification system (Peers 2009, Braye et al. 2014). Thus, when we are talking about changing negative perceptions of disability it is not enough to rely on the Paralympic Games and the widespread exposure this gives to certain types of disability. In conjunction with the games, on the ground, community-based initiatives that put people into direct contact need to be prioritised. These will serve to actualize the abstract messages of media campaigns around diversity. The model advanced by Community Based Social Marketing discussed in the previous section reinforces this.

In his paper on changing attitudes around disability Murfitt notes that having experiences with PwD is crucial. The criteria set out in their paper suggests the importance of an equal relationship between mentor and mentee, getting to know each-other and working towards a mutual goal (Murfitt 2006). Consequently, community sport provides an environment where these conditions can be satisfied.

### **Barrier: Parent/guardian concerns**

Parental hesitancy can form a barrier for PwD to participate in sport. Hammond and Macdougall describe this as the 'cotton wool ball' style of overprotective parenting which can create barriers for the participation of a PwD (2020).

### **What can change: Parental involvement**

The clearest way that the potential barrier of parental/guardian concern can be overcome is by community sporting organizations involving them in the formation of inclusion programs as much as possible. An example of this approach can be found in Hockey Victoria providing Participation Information Sheets to all guardians before the beginning of an Access All Abilities program. The purpose of this document is to give coaches a better understanding around the needs of the players that they will be coaching (see image below).

# Participation Information Sheet

Getting the most out of this program.

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Gender Identity:**

**Type of Disability (optional):**

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Playing hockey with other children can be beneficial in many areas of a child's development. Apart from learning the fundamental hockey skills the AAA Hockey programs are designed to benefit our hockey stars in the areas of communication, social and motor skills, fitness, self-esteem and resilience.

Please help us get to know our new hockey stars so our staff can adapt the sessions to best suit them. Please tick all that apply, or add as needed.

**1 How does your hockey star communicate?**

- Spoken language
- Signing
- Pictures
- AUSLAN
- Other..

**2 What is the way your hockey star learns new things?**

- Simple and short instructions
- Visual demonstration
- Repeating instructions and actions
- Other

**3 Is there anything that we need to be aware off?**

- Previous injury:
- Current interests (i.e. dinosaurs, or AFL team)
- Behavior related to the disability:
- Is there a need for extra support? Please explain:

**4 What do you hope your child will get out of this hockey program?**

- Hockey skills
- Communication skills
- Social skills
- Physical skills
- Improved self-esteem and resilience
- Other

### **Barrier: Club and administrator concerns**

Coined by John and Wheway, 'polite discrimination' is the attitude of club administrators which prevents PwD from accessing sport opportunities based on health and safety fears (2004). This view arises from the 'Tiny-Tim' narrative of fragility and vulnerability that has historically been applied to PwD. A logic which has resulted in their exclusion from the activities of 'mainstream' society.

Polite discrimination is undergirded by the inappropriate way that some community sport is designed which excludes PwD. This relates to the 'integration vs inclusion' debate that we outlined in the previous section where "coaches view their role as 'adding' disability to their existing programs" (Hammond p.311).

### **What can change: Investing in club coach education**

The attitudes of club administrators to inclusion are crucial for the success of any program that aims to include PwD. The leadership they provide in promoting the culture of inclusion is essential for setting the tone which encourages coaches to take inclusion seriously (Jeanes et al. 2018). Often the concerns of administrators relate to a lack of knowledge about how they could potentially adapt their club to make it more inclusive. Kappelides notes that, rather than seeing 'disability' as synonymous with ideas of 'deficit,' administrators need to switch their attention to the "potential ability of participants (Kappelides 2019). Guidance in obtaining this mindset can be facilitated through disability awareness programs such as those conducted by Play by the Rules and Special Olympics Australia.

### **Barrier: Participation vs Performance**

With its emphasis on a narrow sense of 'ability' there is a fundamental tension between sport and inclusion of PwD (which aims to celebrate diverse abilities). Although community sport clubs, particularly at the younger junior levels, tend to emphasize participation over results there are multiple areas within a sporting context where performance can be prioritized (Spaaij et al. 2014). For example, a coach increasing the bench time of a player with a disability against a better team in the competition.

The general rule is that the more a club prioritizes performance (a trend which emerges the older a player gets) the less likely conditions will be suitable for encouraging participation (Jeanes et al. 2018). Whilst there are safeguards to this, such as having two teams with the second team being a 'social team,' such possibilities are not always available to clubs and depend on access to resources.

This creates an environment where only the most abled of the disabled are included in sport while those with (so called) severe disabilities are excluded. Hammond's study (2018) demonstrated that those who are most likely to be included in a sporting context are the ones most able to adapt to the sports conventional sense of normalcy. This illustrates contexts where performance remains the key focus of a sporting club.

### **What can change: Recognising that people want different things out of sport**

Already I have provided examples that clubs have deployed to navigate the performance participation tension. Whilst there is a tension, participation and performance are by no means mutually exclusive (Jeanes et al. 2018). Obtaining an appropriate balance between both ends of the continuum is possible with clear communication between parents, players, coaches, and club administrators.

### **Barrier: Financial cost of participating in sport**

Across a variety of sports there are added costs for PwD to participate. Costs include: adapted equipment, transport and extra support staff. This can prevent PwD (or carers acting on their behalf) from engaging in community sport.

For sports such as wheelchair basketball, quality mobility devices are usually more than \$8000. This only increases for individuals with more complex disabilities with motorized powerchairs generally priced at around \$15,000 (<https://www.pushmobility.com.au/products/strike-force-power-wheelchair-soccer-guard>).

Additionally, the example of the equipment for wheelchair basketball provides an insight into the 'practical' challenges that PwD face. These challenges are sometimes misunderstood or not accounted for, particularly by administrators or policy makers without a disability.

### **What can change: Expanding financial aids to assist participation in sport**

One important conclusion to draw from the barriers is that engaging PwD in the development of strategies to encourage participation in sport is crucial. The perspectives that they offer enable sporting organisations to attain a more complete picture of the structural obstacles that PwD face in sport participation.

The second facilitator that can undermine the barrier of cost is the prevalence of not-for-profit organisations who provide grants for individuals to access adapted equipment. One example of this is START foundation. START provides grants to individuals with amputations to access prosthetics that enable them to participate in sport (START 2021). Despite the difference these organizations make, there can be no doubt that they are always constrained by what funding they are able to generate themselves or secure from the Federal Government.

In support of this, governmental bodies have a key role to play in lessening the financial burden of PwD participating in community sport. The two that I would like to focus on are Sport Australia and the National Disability Insurance Agency (Federal organization which manages the National Disability Insurance Scheme).

### **National Disability Insurance Scheme**

The NDIS is an insurance scheme designed for people born with or who acquire a permanent and significant disability. The role of the NDIS is to fund reasonable and necessary services that relate to a person's disability that help them to perform everyday tasks of living. There are two categories that a person in the NDIS can obtain funding which relates to sport. The first is capital, which provides support for an investment as assistive technology or adapted equipment. The second is capacity building where the service is deemed to be a support that "helps a participant build independence and skills" (NDIS 2021). Within these categories there are specific types of services which relate to different aspects of a participant's life. The services and supports most relevant to community sport are:

- Assistance with social and community participation
- Improved health and wellbeing

This report has provided overwhelming evidence that community sport is able to advance these goals of the NDIS. Considering this, we argue that government should promote the use of NDIS plan funds to encourage sports participation. Additionally, government should raise awareness about these funding categories amongst clubs and their state

sporting organisations. This could create opportunities for clubs to offset the cost of including PwD if the adjustments can be claimed under the NDIS participants funds.

### **Sport Australia**

One of the targets for Sport Australia's 2030 Plan is to increase philanthropic funding for sport. The Federal Government has committed to working with national sporting organisations to help sport get better access to the \$12 billion Australian philanthropic market (Sport 2030 2018). Given this commitment, we suggest that the funding of inclusive sport opportunities for PwD should be a key priority in this area

### **Barrier: 'Not our core business,' the cost of being inclusive for community sports clubs**

There are two main costs associated with embracing inclusion as a sports club. These are club facilities and resources associated directly with an inclusion program. The barrier created by club facilities and the need to embrace the principles of Universal Design has been widely acknowledged (for example Kappelides 2019). Moving from this, sporting clubs, like all organizations, have a limited number of volunteers (or workers), resources and time. The provision of an inclusion program is viewed by policy critics as distracting from the 'core business' of the sporting club (Jeanes et al. 2018). The specific costs of an inclusion program depend on a variety of factors. Nonetheless many of these costs can be lessened by local government grants or assistance from paid professionals from the state sporting organisation.

Government grants are widely available for community sporting clubs to make applications. Because sport is viewed as a vehicle for a more inclusive society there are a variety of options available:

### **Local Government**

Darebin City Council's funding guidelines for 2021/2022 has a funding stream that focusses on programs aiming to promote inclusion as well as minor facility adjustments (<https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/Recreation-and-events/Libraries-and-leisure-facilities/Sport-and-leisure/Sports-club-hub/Sports-grants>).

### **State governments**

Through Sport and Recreation Victoria, the Ramping Up Sport for Local Sports Infrastructure Program delivers facility adjustments for sporting clubs (<https://sport.vic.gov.au/news/articles/ramping-up-support-for-local-sports-infrastructure>) (Department of Human Health and Recreation 2017)

### **Federal Government**

Grants are primarily given to state sporting organisations rather than to individual clubs

Despite these initiatives which can alleviate financial or resource constraints, the issue of time and volunteers remains. From our literature review we found that there was an expectation that the policy influencer would dedicate considerable time writing grant applications, recruiting coaches, and working with relevant stakeholders. Considering that the goal of inclusion programs should be to cultivate a culture of inclusivity that is not dependent on the efforts of one individual, this strikes us as a formidable challenge. The high rotation of volunteers at a community sports club has the potential to disrupt an inclusion programs momentum where the policy influencer is the key driver. As such, creating a culture of inclusion which is not contingent on a single individual is the key to the sustainability of a program.

### **Barrier: Poorly advertised programs**

According to a study conducted by Shields, many PwD and their guardians were unaware of the existence of inclusive sporting programs in their area. Typically, programs were found out by word of mouth through networks of other parents of children with disabilities (Shields and Synnot 2016). This can be a severe limitation particularly if a PwD is older or if they live in a different geographic location from where they go to school.

### **What can change: Making sporting organisations more digitally savvy**

In its Sport 2030 Plan the Australian Government has committed to a more “digitally connected Australian sport sector to streamline operations, share knowledge, drive efficiency and make interactions with sport simpler” (p.61). This aim is highly relevant to addressing the lack of awareness about inclusive sports programs in the local community. It is crucial that the issues that PwD face in sourcing suitable sporting opportunities are considered in the creation of more accessible, intuitive, and comprehensive online platforms. Building on this, another change that should be investigated further is the expansion of an ‘inclusion’ database. Currently there is the Government’s Disability Gateway which provides resources and further information about inclusive sport opportunities. The problem at this stage is that it is too small and not comprehensive enough in covering all areas of the country. Encouraging national/state sporting organisations to advertise their inclusion programs on the site would provide another mode of accessibility for PwD to engage in sport. Furthermore, policy makers should explore platforms, such as ‘Clickability,’ which allow service users to leave reviews and recommendations about how an organization could improve service delivery.

### **Fostering closer partnerships with disability organisations to better raise awareness of inclusion programs**

Disability service organisations are invaluable because they have connections and experience working with the community of PwD. The established links that disability organisations have with the community would enable better advertising of sport programs.

It is important that community clubs, and their corresponding state sporting organisations, look to work with them in creating inclusion programs. Following the conclusions of Hammond et al. study in Canada, government funding should be made available to allow state sporting organisations to work in collaboration with disability organisations using them as consultants in program design and implementation (2020).

### **Barrier: Intersectionality**

Amongst disability scholars there is widespread recognition that PwD are ‘doubly oppressed’ when they are a-part of another minority group (Halliday 2000). For example, one of the few studies exploring the barriers facing PwD from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds found that challenges around language/culture were accentuated by intellectual disability (Kappelides et al. 2021). Furthermore, in relation to Indigenous Australians, the Australian Bureau of Statistics notes that 24% of Indigenous Australians are living with a disability (ABS 2018). Concomitantly, the health outcomes of Indigenous people are lower than the rest of Australia. Understanding this, recent investments have sought to target increasing the participation of Indigenous PwD in sport. Currently, the Australian Paralympic Committee (APC) cites ‘anecdotal evidence,’ rather than any sort of study looking at the barriers that Indigenous PwD face. Given that the APC wants to increase its Indigenous athlete representation there needs to be further research on the community level about what barriers exist for Indigenous athletes (Outback Academy Australia 2021).

One area where there is an established research base is the participation of women with disability in sport (Anderson et al., 2008, Rolfe et al. 2012, Halliday 2000). Social norms around weakness, dependency and passivity which are typically attached to women have been exacerbated by disability leading to significant barriers to participation (Hammond and Macdougall 2020).

### **What can change: Further research**

The main conclusion to take from this section is that there are added challenges for PwD who identify as being a-part of other minority groups.

Additionally, there are current gaps in the literature which mean that the specific barriers that groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait or LGBTIQ+, face are relatively unknown. Given that it stands to benefit from a more active Australia, there is incentive for government to invest in research that looks at the specific barriers facing these groups. This could provide the basis for policy adjustments that aim to cater for the needs of PwD from minority backgrounds.

## **Conclusion**

Too often the experience of living with a disability is characterized by exclusion isolation, begrudging tolerance and prejudice (see Kumari-Campbell 2009). Whilst the situation is improving more work needs to be done to address these issues. The title of this report 'Change Starts with Sport,' conveys our view that community sport can be used to help address the marginalization that PwD face. Simultaneously, the study demonstrates a clear benefit for community sports clubs making it a 'win-win.' Consequently, this paper has built the case for further investigation into the role of community sport in promoting inclusion.

The recent announcement of Brisbane as the host city of the 2032 Paralympic and Olympic Games has been a motivator for the report. Disability activists, such as Kurt Fernley, have flagged the event as an opportunity for PwD, allies and policy makers to change the narrative of disability in Australia (Walsh 2021). Whilst this report has advised caution in seeing the Paralympic Games as a 'silver bullet' for disability issues, it has maintained that the Games can be used as a lever to promote the wider goal of inclusion.

Based on the findings of this report we have identified five key areas of focus that provide 'options for policy makers.' These will assist in eroding the current barriers that impact inclusion, allowing PwD and community sports clubs the opportunity to access the benefits we identified at the beginning of the report.

## **Options for policy makers**

Government should allocate funding to promote codesign between disability service organisations and state sporting bodies. By investing in relationship building between service providers and state sporting organizations a more comprehensive inclusion strategy can be created. Involvement of inclusion and disability experts increases the likelihood of impactful inclusion programs (Hammond et al. 2020). The other benefit of this is that it has the potential to ease pressure on the policy influencer working in the context of a community sports club which has finite resources.

- Invest in research that explores the specific barriers associated with PwD who come from diverse backgrounds which prevent them from participating in community sport.

- State sporting organizations encourage PwD to participate in off-field roles by partnering with organisations such as WISE. This will encourage inclusion leading to further economic participation and open pathways for entry into the sport industry workforce (Sport 2030, 2018).
- Recognising the capacity building function of sport in a range of socio-economic domains, prioritise the allocation of more funding in NDIS plans that reduces barriers associated with accessing community sport.
- Awareness raising campaign about the right of all Australians to access community sport under the UNCRPD.

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