

# A Sporting Chance

Why Sydney needs  
a rethink on sport



Committee  
for  
Sydney

# Acknowledgment of Country

The Committee for Sydney acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples as the traditional custodians of the land. Sovereignty was never ceded: this was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.



Image: Deadly Runners

Deadly Runners is a not-for-profit founded by marathon runner Georgia Weir in NSW. The program gives First Nations people access to free professional coaching, in an eight-week program, supporting them to go from zero running experience to running five kilometres without stopping. Many runners will go on to accomplish greater distances including half and full marathons."

# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
Our vision is for a city full of people playing sports they love	10
This report investigates disruption to a system that reaches almost all Sydneysiders	10
There are just not enough places to play to meet demand	12
Survival of the fittest: Elite pathways over participation	20
Insufficient coordination across the system	21
The time is now	24
<b>Sport in Sydney is being rocked and reshaped in seven ways</b>	<b>26</b>
Storming the field: Fast population growth	30
Crowding out the competition: Increasing urban density	32
Washed out: Losing ground to extreme weather	36
A bigger pool: More sports to play	40
Armchair fans: Declining youth participation	46
Stuck on the sidelines: A long way to go on inclusivity	50
Squeezing under the salary cap: Public budgets under pressure	53
<b>Learning from the best: Sydney and the world</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Next steps</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>90</b>



# Executive summary

## Why Sydney needs to rethink the way it plans, funds and delivers community sport and active recreation



**Sport and active recreation are so deeply entwined in the way we live in Sydney, such critical constituencies for political power and influence, and so plainly visible in daily life, it's almost unimaginable the system could break down. But it's a reality we have to face.**

Large-scale changes to population, culture, climate, built form and sport itself are disrupting a system that touches virtually every Sydneysider – an enormous network of players, fans, volunteers, administrators, organisations and infrastructure that is under growing pressure:

- Greater Sydney's population is projected to reach 5.7 million by 2031 and 6.3 million by 2041**, placing even greater pressure on sport facilities that are already stretched
- Sydney's housing growth is necessary and welcome, but every rezoning intensifies competition for land**, and sport rarely wins that competition unless it has been planned in from the start
- Community sport in Greater Sydney is already losing ground to extreme weather**, with more washed-out fields and dangerously hot days steadily eroding the time and places available to play, and growing awareness of the impacts to ocean-based sport
- The nature of participation itself is shifting**, as people move away from traditional club structures toward more flexible, informal activities – often competing for the same contested public spaces
- Physical activity levels are falling among young people and particularly girls** – with consequences rippling across physical and mental health, educational attainment, community cohesion and productivity
- Declining participation is also concentrated in groups the system has consistently failed to serve well** – older, LGBTIQ+, disabled, culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- The instinctive response, to simply invest more in sports facilities and programs, runs into public budgets that are more constrained than ever.**

Cutting across all this are system-level failures that have long held the sector back: a cultural fixation on elite pathways at the expense of broad participation, fragmented policy and investment across Greater Sydney, and a system that is being asked to do more with less.

Taken together, these factors are not simply adding pressure to a system already under strain, they are fundamentally changing the terms on which that system must operate.

Yet being active is already a big part of the 'vibe' that draws visitors to Sydney and keeps us here. The fandom that is increasingly central to elite sport's business model grows on suburban ovals and school courts, in community pools and local clubs. And community sport's social, health and economic impacts are valued in the billions.

Those impacts could be far greater. But incremental responses to structural problems are not enough. What's needed is a fundamentally different way of working, moving beyond the patterns that have held the sector back to transform not just individual failure points, but the system as a whole.

With just six years until the Olympic and Paralympic Games are again staged in Australia, we have a rare opportunity to benefit from surging interest and investment in sport, but we can only do that if the systems around sport and active recreation in this city are positioned to translate that interest and investment into active participation.

This report is designed to build alignment on the challenges and opportunities facing sport, as the starting point for an ongoing program of policy research and advocacy – set out in the final next steps section.



Willowdale Sports Precinct, in Sydney's southwest, includes a full size cricket field, facilities for AFL, rugby and soccer, clubroom, kiosk and change rooms. Community calls for plenty of shade and safe access at all hours flowed through to the design of the facility, with dark corners designed out, and a playground designed for all cognitive and physical abilities. It was delivered by Stockland, Campbelltown City Council, GML Heritage, Sam Crawford Architects, Aspect and Lymesmith.



# Thank you

This report was developed through the Committee for Sydney's Sport Program. The Sport Program is supported by Campbelltown City Council, Cox Architecture and News Corp Australia.



*News Corp* Australia

We thank the many organisations and individuals who contributed their expertise and time to this work. Alongside deep professional insight, many if not most of the people consulted have relevant personal experience – as passionate amateurs, parents, coaches or fans, through to time playing in national teams and as elite athletes – all that experience and expertise helped shape this work.

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# Introduction

## Our vision is for a city full of people playing sports they love

When Sydney's population reaches 6.3 million people in 2041,<sup>1</sup> sport and active recreation will be woven into the fabric of daily life across every neighbourhood and every stage of life – from children discovering the joy of movement to older Sydneysiders staying strong, connected and independent well into their later years.

Participation will be at record levels, not because we pushed people to exercise, but because we built systems that genuinely fit the way Sydneysiders live – diverse in what is on offer, accessible regardless of background or budget, and above all, fun.

The results will be tangible and measurable, a city with markedly better physical and mental health, communities with deep roots and a sense of belonging, young people whose engagement in sport lifts their confidence and classroom performance, and a workforce that is more energetic, resilient and productive as a result.

None of this will have happened by accident. The complex web of clubs, facilities, organisations and public institutions that surrounds sport and active recreation – hidden in plain sight for too long – will have been recognised for what it always was: one of the most powerful tools our city has to drive positive social change. By 2041, Sydney will be using it deliberately, ambitiously and effectively.

## This report investigates disruptions to a system that reaches most Sydneysiders

At some point in our lives, we all cross paths with sport and active recreation – whether it's high school soccer, lawn bowls, bushwalking and run clubs, wheelchair basketball and powerchair football, netball, weekend cricket, tennis camps or touch football.

With countless players and volunteers, fans, administrators and officials, codes and associations, leagues, state and national sporting organisations, games and facilities, government agencies and councils, walk-up games and informal running groups, almost all Sydneysiders will interact with this sector across their lifetimes.



Basketball is booming in the Hills Shire but limited by the lack of indoor courts. The local association runs nine courts across three separate facilities, turning away a reported thousand players every year. Across NSW, more than 55,000 would-be players are stuck on waiting lists or switching sports due to a 330-court shortfall identified by Basketball NSW.

Image: Hills Hornets basketball club



**“For communities that miss out, the impact is in missed opportunities for kids to find their sport, places for people to gather, pressure valves for the stress of urban life.”**



Image: Sydney Stingers

Sydney’s swimming pools face a compounding crisis as ageing facilities reach end of life across the city, with direct impacts for drowning prevention and learn-to-swim access, as well as organised aquatic sports like water polo. For example, Willoughby Leisure Centre closed in 2022 for a planned upgrade, but asbestos and building material issues inflated costs and construction time by two years. With ad hoc and politicised planning processes, complex funding structures, and cost shifting to councils, the risks disincentivise efforts to address the growing shortfalls.

Most Sydneysiders have some anecdotal experience of the system failing – when games have been washed out, long waiting lists to get into over-subscribed clubs. But there is a growing awareness that the system itself is struggling to operate at a sufficient sale.

The purpose of this report is shifting the policy conversation from anecdotal observations and piecemeal interventions, to evidence-based insights to inform long-term structural reform for this crucial system.

### **There are just not enough places to play to meet demand**

Sydney is falling behind on the foundational infrastructure of an active city: places to play. As the city has grown, delivery of new sport and recreation facilities, from ovals and courts to pools and skateparks, has not kept pace. In some parts of Sydney, supply is already insufficient to meet current demand, let alone the needs of a city heading towards 6.3 million people.

The shortfall is already here, it’s just unevenly distributed. More established suburbs often have older, legacy facilities – grass ovals built for cricket, soccer and rugby, and Olympic-sized pools from a different era of city-building. But the parts of Sydney that have grown fastest through urban renewal tend to have the highest population densities and least space for new facilities. And while some greenfield communities built over the last two decades were planned with sport infrastructure in mind, many were not.

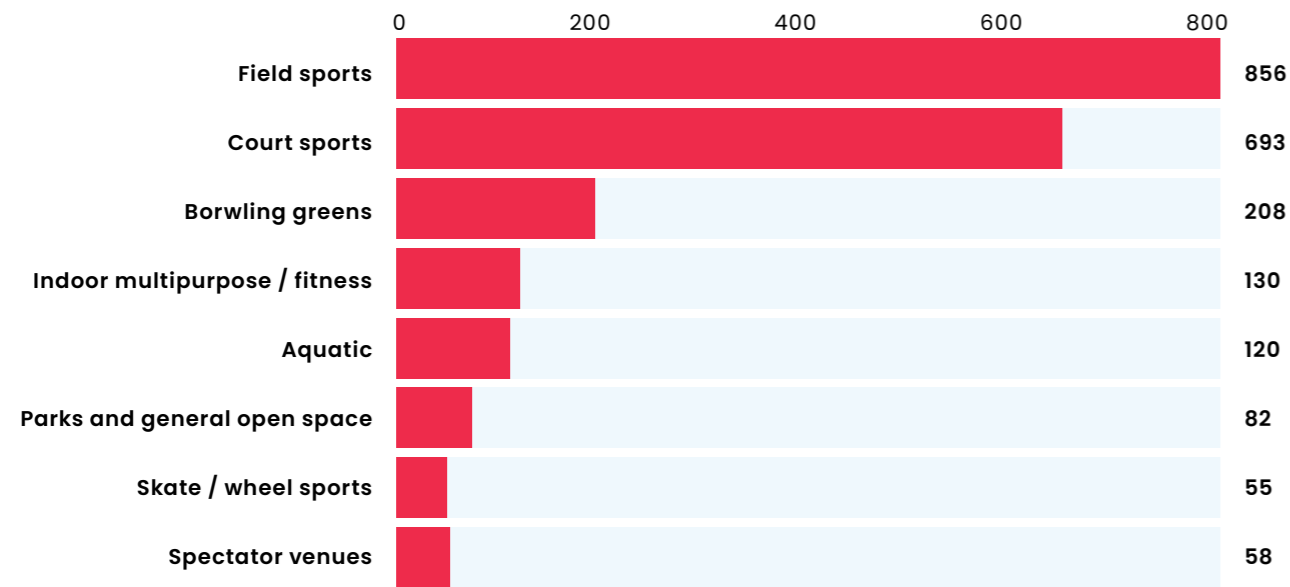
The consequences will compound over time. Once a suburb is built, retrofitting larger facilities – ovals, sporting complexes, aquatic centres – becomes extraordinarily difficult and expensive. Land is scarce, costs are high. For communities that miss out, the impact is in missed opportunities for kids to find their sport, places for people to gather, pressure valves for the stress of urban life.

Getting ahead of this problem – in the suburbs still being built and the corridors still being planned – is one of the most effective actions Sydney can take to support the health and wellbeing of its growing population.



**“Most Sydneysiders have some anecdotal experience of the system failing – when games have been washed out, long waiting lists to get into over-subscribed clubs.”**

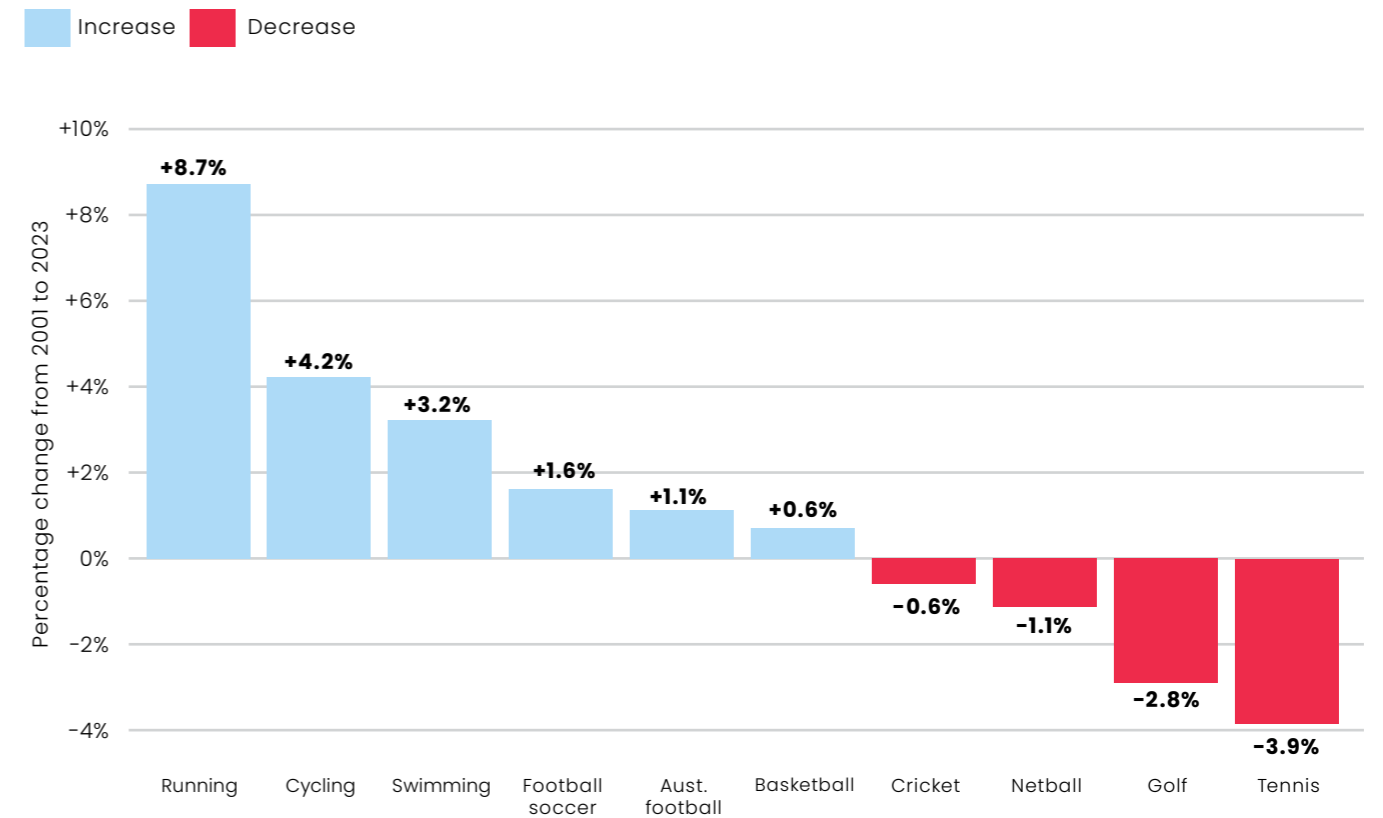
**Figure 1. Field sports and court sports dominate Greater Sydney’s facility stock**



Public sport facility type provision across Greater Sydney (estimate of 2,202 facilities, count by primary category).

Source: NSW Spatial Collaboration Portal<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2. In the past two decades, running and cycling saw the largest increase in popularity, while tennis and golf saw the steepest decline**

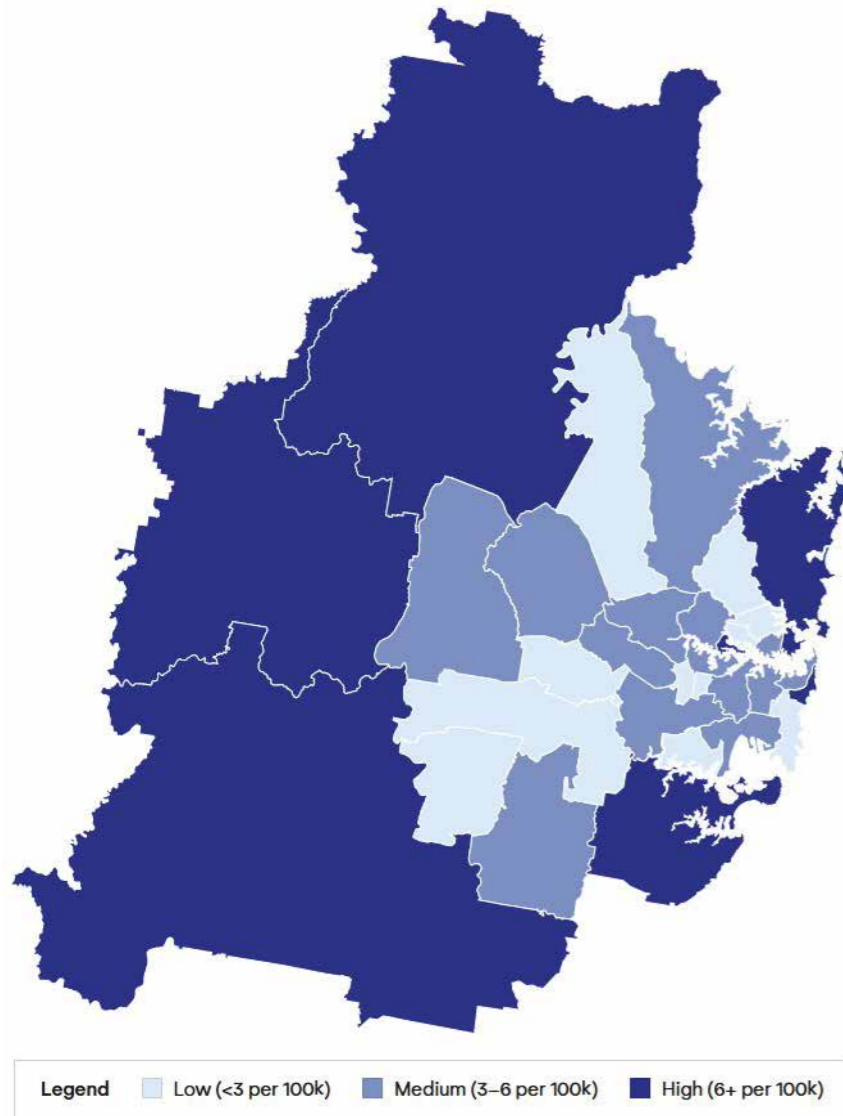


Figures show the percentage point change in the share of survey respondents who reported participating in each sport between 2001 and 2023. Data sourced from ERASS (2001–2010), ABS Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation survey (2011–2014), and AusPlay (2015–2023). Each survey had a sample size of around 20,000 respondents, cross-period comparisons are indicative only.

Source: NSW Spatial Collaboration Portal<sup>3</sup>, Ausplay<sup>4</sup>



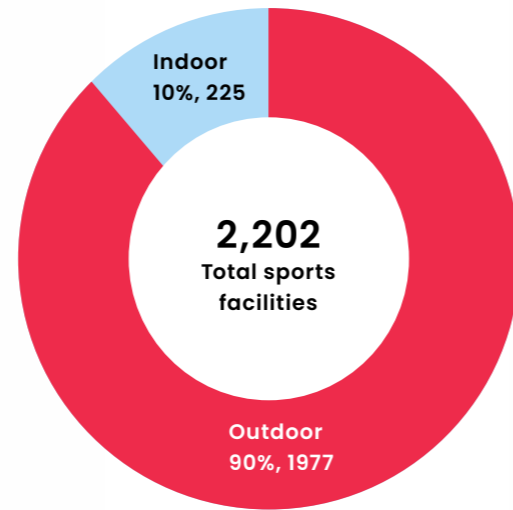
**Figure 3. Just 10 per cent of public sports facilities in Sydney are indoors – and provision is lowest where it matters most**



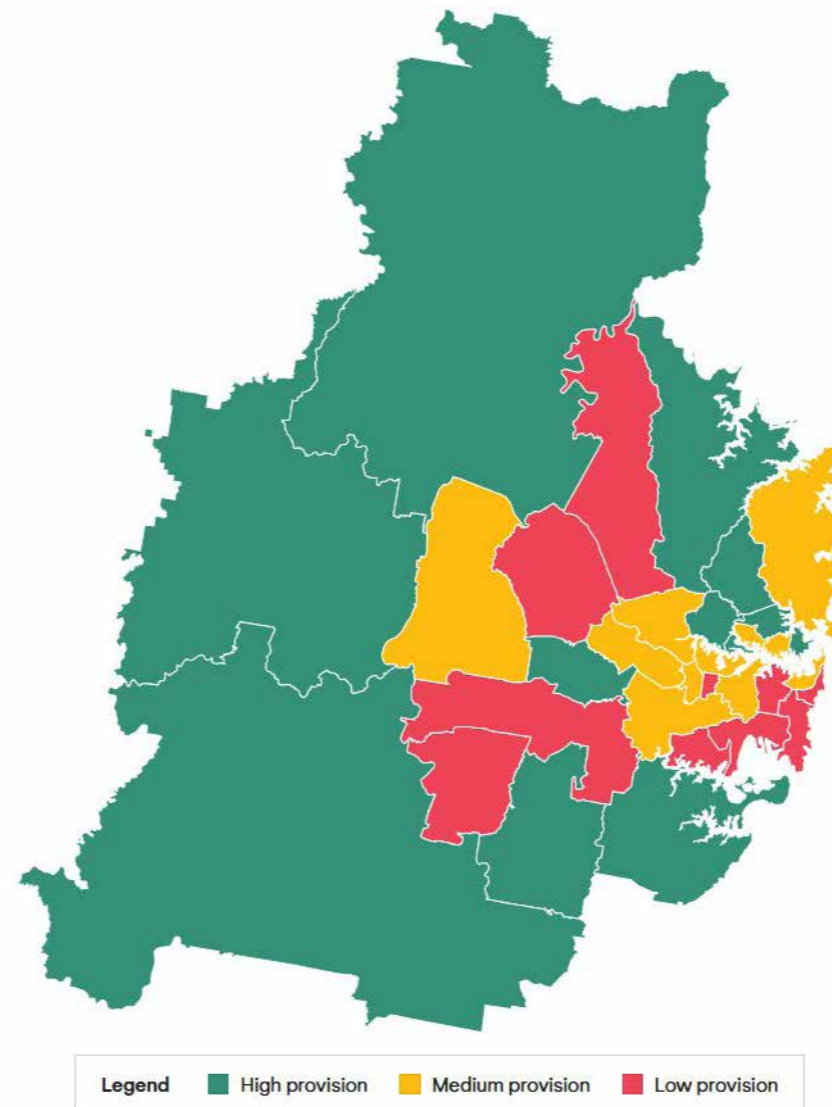
Map of indoor public sports facility provision: Liverpool, Camden and Fairfield record fewer than three indoor facilities per 100,000 residents.

Source: NSW Spatial Collaboration Portal<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 4.**



**Figure 5. Public sports facility provision is not even across Greater Sydney**



Map of public sport facility provision by local government area (facilities per resident). Provision of facilities across Greater Sydney varies by a factor of nearly five, from 1:1112 in the Blue Mountains to 1:5185 in Liverpool.

Source: NSW Spatial Collaboration Portal<sup>6</sup> (detailed table in Appendix 1)

The Sydney Convicts, Australia’s first gay and inclusive rugby team, and the most successful club to have competed in the Bingham Cup, the World Cup of gay rugby. They are one of the few clubs to welcome everyone from novices up, providing a rare opportunity for novice players to join the sport.



Image: Sydney Convicts



**“As bowling club membership declines, these well-connected sites represent an underutilised locational advantage”**

**Figure 6. One in five public sports facilities in Sydney have little to no public transport access**



Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL 1-6) of sports facility types in Greater Sydney shows 18 per cent of Greater Sydney’s public sports facilities are situated in areas with little to no access to the public transport network (PTAL1). For courts and fields, the proportion is even higher at 20 per cent. However, 34 per cent of bowling greens have very high public transport access (PTAL 6), the highest share of any facility type. As bowling club membership declines, these well-connected sites represent an underutilised locational advantage. Repurposing them for multi-sport or indoor use would leverage their connectivity to serve a broader community. Geographic dispersion and poor existing public transport links add to the barriers to participation that disproportionately impact Sydney’s west and particularly southwest.

Source: NSW Spatial Collaboration Portal,<sup>7</sup> Public Transport Accessibility Level (2024 data, 4-5pm interval)<sup>8,9</sup>



Image: Football NSW/Walking Football NSW

Walking Soccer is simple – no running, no contact and otherwise the same rules. It aims to help older adults stay active, with the confidence to try something new, and importantly feel part of something. Organised by South Western Sydney Local Health District, Walking Football NSW, councils and community groups, weekly sessions in Wetherill Park, Lurnea and Bradbury end with a shared morning tea that turns exercise into a social outing.<sup>73</sup>





**“The assumption that sport is about producing champions – rather than developing people and communities – is costing us”**

### Survival of the fittest: Elite pathways over participation

Australia’s sport culture is geared around the survival of the fittest. Built up over generations, the assumption that sport is primarily a pathway to elite performance is so deeply ingrained that it’s strange to imagine a different way of doing things. From coaches, clubs and sideline parents pushing players to higher grades – whittling away those who don’t make the cut – to media coverage, political debate and public funding decisions focused on producing champions, the broader benefits of mass participation are routinely discounted.

The funding reflects that cultural bias: Australian governments spend an estimated \$1.4 billion annually on sport,<sup>10</sup> with weighting tilted to elite competition and top tier broadcast sport rather than the community participation that touches most people’s lives.

Yet the returns from grassroots sport are extraordinary. Australian sport generates an estimated \$29 billion in net health benefits each year through reduced healthcare costs and lower early mortality.<sup>11</sup> Youth sport alone creates around \$5 billion in annual benefits through improved cognitive development, better results at school, higher lifetime earnings and stronger life skills.<sup>12</sup> Playing community club sport just once a week is estimated to deliver \$5,932 in social benefits per participant, per year.<sup>13</sup> Across NSW, the combined annual social, health and economic value of sport and physical activity has been estimated at \$34.7 billion.<sup>14</sup>

The cultural assumption that sport is about producing champions – rather than developing people and communities – is costing us. The World Economic Forum warns rising physical inactivity could erode up to US\$1.6 trillion in annual revenue from the global sports economy by mid-century.<sup>15</sup> A culture that focuses resources on elite competition at the expense of the active many is ultimately undermining the foundation the entire system depends on.

However, there is great potential in these numbers, too. If we can address the long-term challenges laid out in Section 2, it would deliver a significant and measurable return on investment – and one our current funding settings are failing to capture.

### Insufficient coordination across the system

Sydney’s sport and active recreation system suffers not from a lack of effort, but from a lack of coordination. The capability and commitment are there, what is missing is the coordinating architecture to bring it together.

The result is a patchwork: sport investment and planning delivered across 33 separate council plans, alongside various state agency and education sector initiatives, state sporting organisations and clubs, each operating largely in isolation. No single body has the mandate or the mechanisms to marshal all these efforts toward a shared goal. Administrators are left managing complexity rather than driving impact.

This is not a new problem and that is what makes it so serious. Over the past 25 years, a succession of federal strategies and frameworks have promised to boost community participation through coordinated investment in facilities and programs.<sup>16-19</sup> There is good work underway in NSW, with strategies addressing participation, women and girls, public space and outdoor play.<sup>20-24</sup> But a pattern of fragmented effort has persisted, with attempts made at addressing the coordination gaps, but not sustained – such as the Future Needs of Sport Infrastructure

Study, first announced in 2014, and the District Sport Facilities Plan, initiated in 2018, which both drew in significant data from sport, government and community stakeholders, and then reportedly failed to deliver meaningful outputs back to those same sectors – beyond inefficiency, this erodes the trust future coordination depends on.

Sport clubs and codes, peak bodies and councils face the same structural problem from their side – investing in programs and facilities without the system-level intelligence to know where effort is most needed or how to avoid duplication. Coordination is not solely a government responsibility; it requires all actors to operate with greater transparency and shared purpose.

Grassroots sport and active recreation are inherently place-based and should be guided by participatory or community led approaches. However, a more effective model for the system would organise planning and investment on a regional, catchment basis – accounting for population distribution, participation trends, travel patterns and competition catchments – rather than administrative boundaries. That shift would improve both resource efficiency and access equity, and give every actor in the system a clearer line of sight to collective outcomes.



### Opening the school gates is harder than it looks, we have to make it easier

Opening school grounds and facilities, including designing new facilities to meet requirements and partnering to hit funding targets, is a key opportunity. Most of Sydney's existing 1,388 public schools have sports fields, courts and halls. They're often big sites and centrally located, close to public transport links. But while opening school gates may seem like low hanging fruit, most of these facilities were designed for school use – played at prescribed times during the day – and this sets up serious obstacles to broader community use that need to be addressed:

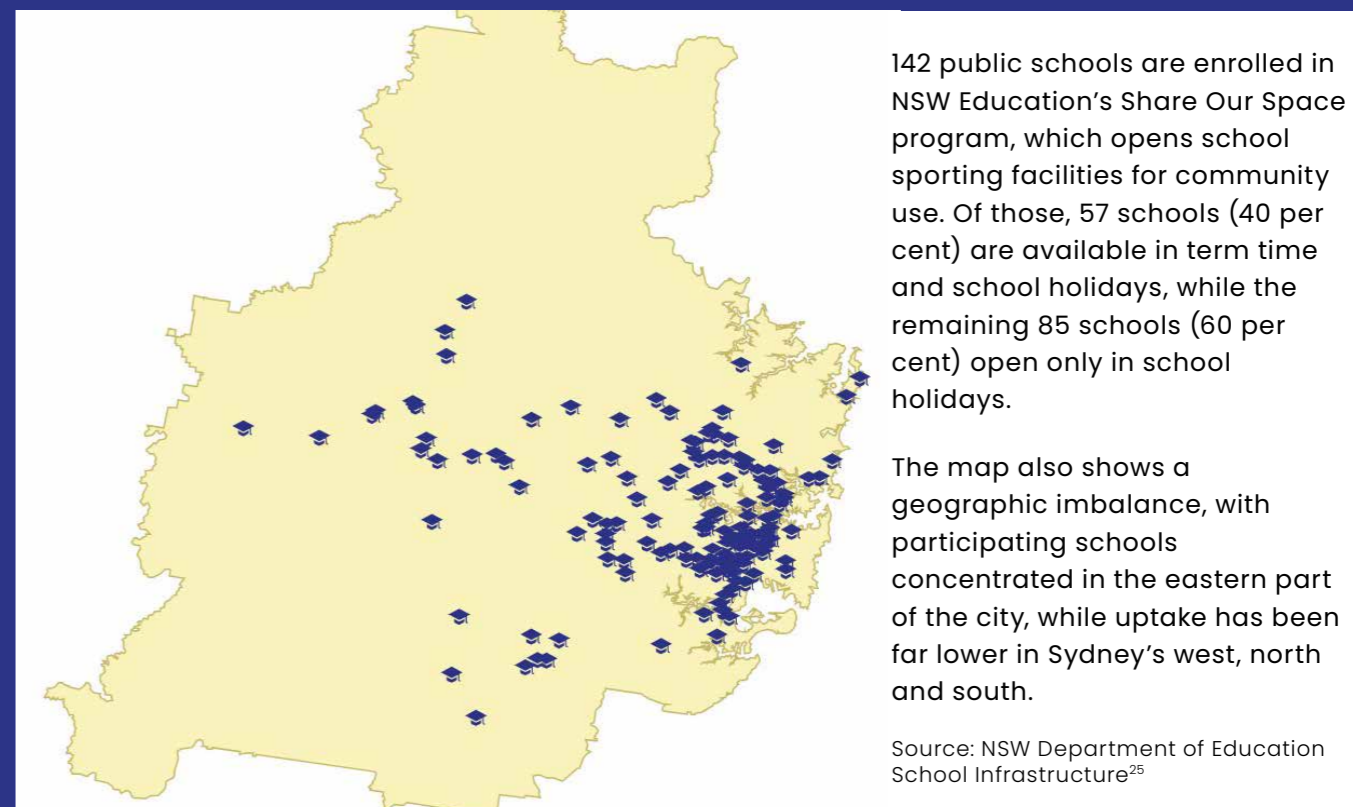
- Minimal if any lighting – upgrade for evening training or competition
- Low-quality playing surface, irrigation and drainage – upgrade for expanded use
- Changerooms for children – renovate for older players or spectators
- Generally, just one field or court – limits competition use
- Indoor halls lack air conditioning or standalone secure access – upgrade for indoor sport

- School access is managed with a range of licensing agreements, but application is inconsistent and reliant on school principals – need durable policy frameworks for long-term partnerships
- Decision makers are school principals – stabilise policy environment for long-term partnerships
- Limited maintenance budgets – funding commitments are essential
- Councils typically required to take responsibility for after-hours access – tends to limit facilities to bookings (such as football academies) rather than informal community access.

The opportunity here is that Greater Sydney's schools offer a geographically distributed network of sites that could absorb demand more immediately than any other portfolio – if supported by targeted infrastructure investment.

National coordination through the newly established National Open for Play Working Group, which draws on state and territory education and sport department leaders, aims to bring together the policy and system levers to explore what is practical, sustainable and scalable nationally and within each jurisdiction.

Figure 7. Distribution of participating public schools in the Share Our Space Program (142 participating schools as of 2025)



The existing sports field at St Ives Park Public School was upgraded to include AFL goal posts, two Australian Standard floodlight towers for training to extend its use into the night, playing surface upgraded to training quality and equipment storage installed. Importantly it included a commitment to ongoing maintenance of the park. By addressing these typical limitations to expanded play on school grounds, as a partnership between School Infrastructure and AFL NSW/ACT, the project opened a significant new training facility in a key part of Sydney for the code.





Image: Wanderers Fives, Rooty Hill

### Natural vs synthetic turf

The playing surface is a key point of failure for sports fields, so getting it right is crucial. Players and their families see clubs with access to synthetic fields receiving an advantage in wet weather, while opponents worry about the impact on heat, game play and the environment. At heart, the question is how to get the balance right between making better use of the spaces we have without losing things we value. This is a contentious and fast evolving technical and policy domain, with guidelines developed by the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure in 2025<sup>26</sup> (informed by earlier reports from Office of Chief Scientist<sup>27</sup> and Colliers Ethos Urban/Otium<sup>28</sup>). Emerging case studies include fields delivered with synthetic and natural surfaces, as well as hybrids such as Sutherland Shire Council's trial of synthetic surfaces in high traffic areas such as goal mouths and cricket pitches.

### The time is now

With just six years until the Olympic and Paralympic Games are again staged in Australia, we have a rare opportunity to benefit from surging interest and investment in sport. But we can only do that if the systems around sport and active recreation in this city are positioned to translate that interest and investment into active participation.

In developing this report, we have considered the systems around community sport and active recreation in full so we can understand the issues and opportunities, and work towards structural and targeted reforms that are able to unlock all that potential for a healthier, more connected society.

While the downside of major disruptions detailed in the following section, which are fundamentally changing the terms on which sport operates, is clear – the reality of serious system failure in such a centrally important sector also creates an undeniable case for positive change.



Image: Inner West Roller Derby

Roller derby – a full-contact, high-speed sport built by marginalised communities – has carved its own rebellious path away from mainstream sport. The sport holds body positivity, self-expression, and community over performance, as core values. Its governing body mandates inclusive practices such as pronouns on uniforms and gender-neutral officiating language. At a time when trans and gender-diverse athletes face growing exclusion from mainstream competition, roller derby has become one of Sydney's most affirming and accepting sporting communities.





# Sport in Sydney is being rocked and reshaped in seven ways

A city adding hundreds of thousands of residents, shifting in its demographics, and changing in how people live and work will place fundamentally different demands on the system in 2041 than it does today:

1. **Rapid population growth**
2. **Increasing urban density**
3. **Growing climate disruption**
4. **Vastly more sports to play**
5. **Declining youth participation**
6. **A long way to go on inclusivity**
7. **Public budgets under pressure.**

This means the challenges facing sport and active recreation in Greater Sydney are not fixed problems waiting to be solved. They are changing, growing and compounding in their impacts. Understanding the scale and shape of that pressure – and getting ahead of it – is what this section sets out to do.

Case study:

## Run My Way

Organisations: Transport for NSW,  
Office of Sport NSW, Arup

Run My Way survey data shows perceptions of safety are a crucial factor for women choosing to run. Half the women surveyed had experienced harassment on a run (compared to 14 per cent of men), 70 per cent said they had felt unsafe while running (29 per cent for men), and 95 per cent said their sense of safety influences their running habits. As well as surveying 5000 runners, the project used workshops – ‘runshops’ – as part of public consultation.

It's a good example of different parts of government working together, and showcases a growing trend of moving beyond traditional consultation to get real insight into a key community. Comparable programs include formal youth voice mechanisms at the UK's Youth Sport Trust and child consultation in Norway's national policy development. Others include diverse participant advisory panels. Co-design with underrepresented groups. Systematic input from recent dropouts. These kinds of accountability structures that change the way organisations plan, prioritise and operate.

Source: Office of Sport/Transport for NSW/Arup





Image: WP Titans

Case study:

## Wentworth Point Titans

Location: Wentworth Point

Organisations: WP Titans, Office of Sport, City of Parramatta

Fast urbanising Wentworth Point lacked sports fields, so local mum Heba Aly (Olympian and coach of the Australian Handball Federation) took matters into her own hands, holding training sessions in a concrete carpark. In 2022, a 60sqm area of synthetic turf was laid down to provide a playing surface for the WP Titans Sports Club, which now run programs in soccer, basketball, handball, AFL and touch football. Urban precincts like Wentworth Point need sport facilities to be provided, but this example shows pop-up facilities, as simple as a synthetic surface, can be an effective measure in enabling active recreation.





## 2.1 Storming the field

### Fast population growth

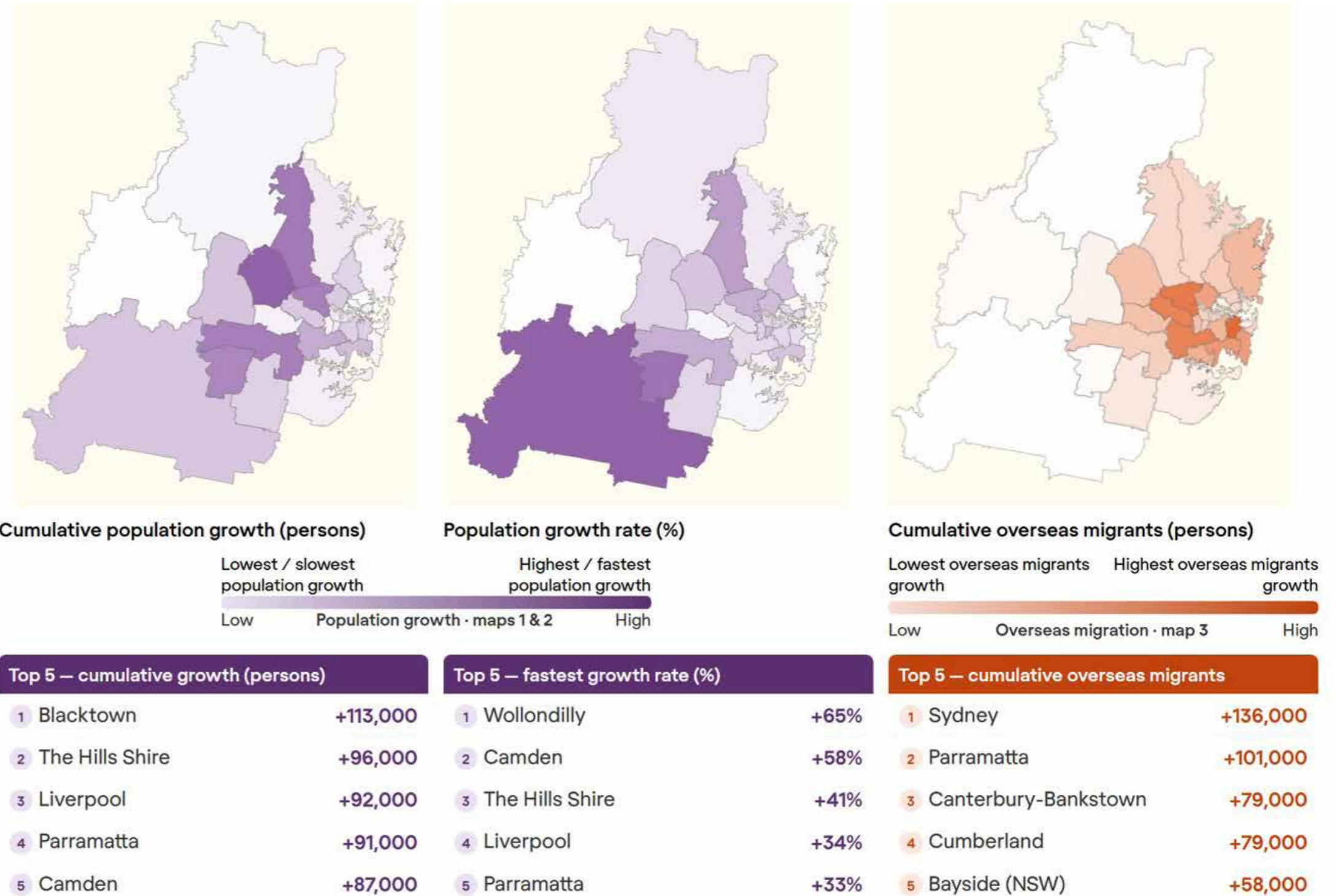
With Greater Sydney’s population projected to reach 5.7 million by 2031 and 6.3 million by 2041, the challenge of providing new sporting facilities will only continue to grow.

Much of this growth will be concentrated in fast-growing local government areas, including Blacktown, Hills Shire, Liverpool, Parramatta and Camden, attracting young families and couples. This demographic profile will drive a continued shift toward apartment living and generate increased demand across transport, schools, health services and social infrastructure.

Between the years 2025 and 2041, Blacktown will add the highest number of new residents (113,000 new residents, or 25 per cent), while outer growth corridors will experience the most dramatic proportional change, particularly Wollondilly (41,000 new residents, or 65 per cent) and Camden (87,000, or 58 per cent). These high-growth areas will require proportionally greater investment in community infrastructure – particularly sport, active recreation facilities and the broader services needed to support rapidly expanding communities.

Overseas migration is heavily concentrated in Sydney’s inner and middle-ring areas. First and second-generation migrants already make up 51 per cent of the Greater Sydney population.<sup>29</sup> With many multicultural communities moving away from organised sport to informal activities, increasing pressure to facilitate at low or no cost, planning for culturally diverse participation preferences, multilingual engagement and accessible community sport will be essential to engaging and meeting the needs of these rapidly growing communities in organised sport. With so much growth coming from migration, sport offers an opportunity to support strong community connection and social cohesion.

Figure 8. Sydney’s west will experience the largest population growth



Population growth and overseas migration by local government area (2025 baseline projection to 2041) – cumulative growth by number of people rounded to thousands (left), growth rate by percentage (centre), and cumulative overseas migration by number of people rounded to thousands (right).

Source: Planning NSW<sup>30</sup>



## 2.2 Crowding out the competition

### Increasing urban density

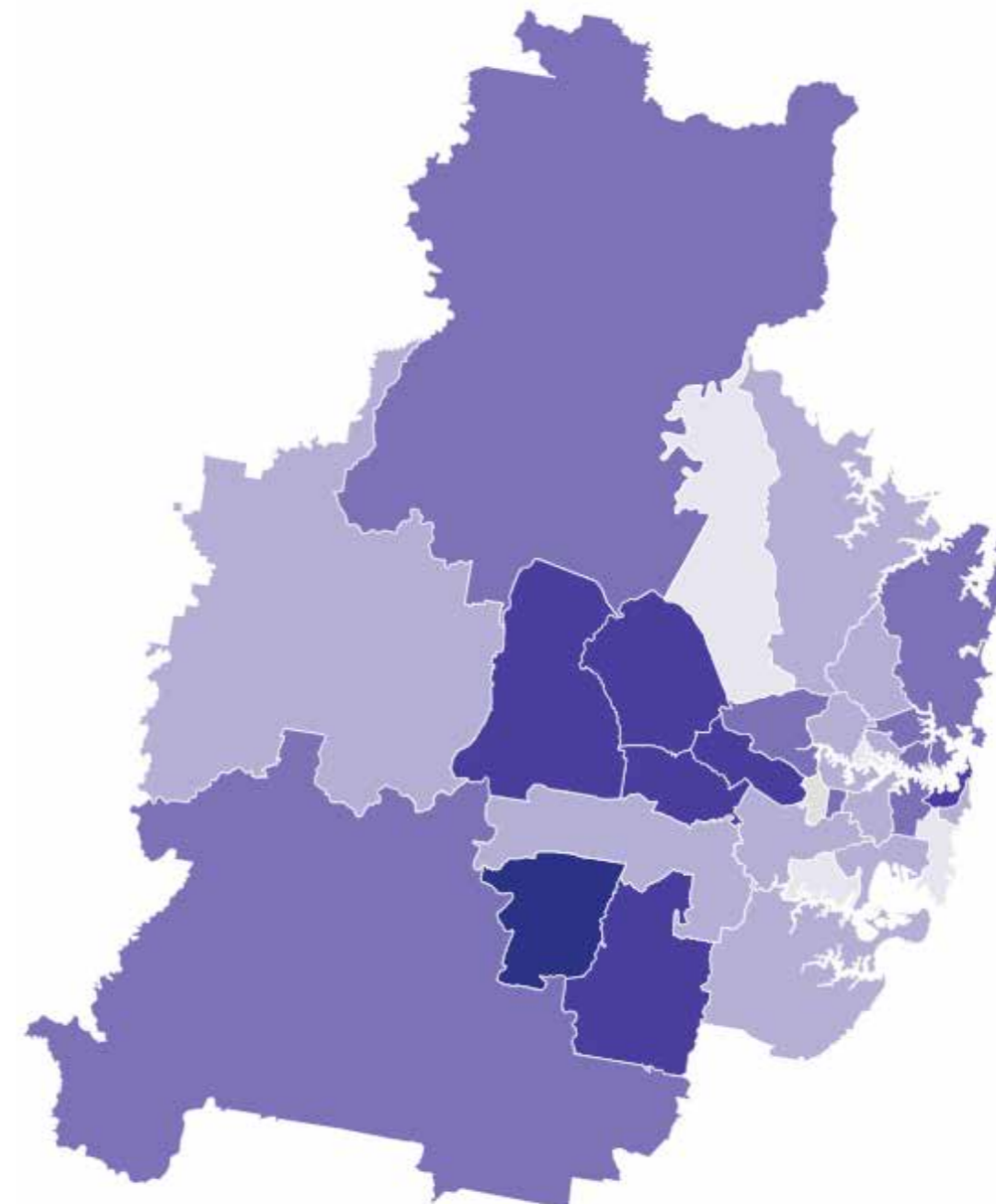
Sydney’s housing growth is necessary and welcome, but every rezoning intensifies competition for land, and sport rarely wins that competition unless it has been planned in from the start.

In a rising market, the commercial return from residential or mixed-use development almost always outbids community infrastructure – unless planning rules, developer contributions or early land reservation make sport a non-negotiable part of the equation. Land values across Greater Sydney grew 4.7 per cent between 2024 and 2025 alone,<sup>31</sup> and as transit-oriented precincts and new growth corridors are activated, that pressure will only intensify.

Once land is built out, it is difficult to recover. Delay means the best-located, best-condition sites are gone, and what remains tends to be flood-prone, encumbered or contaminated, adding ongoing cost and constraints. Fast-growing Western Sydney councils face this most acutely, absorbing the city’s population growth from a smaller base of existing facilities and with less room to catch up.

But the opportunity is also very real. Growth areas have a higher proportion of young families, the very communities with the greatest demand for active recreation. Plan sport infrastructure in from the start, and sport investments can take advantage of value uplift and delivery pathways, rather than losing out. Density itself becomes an opportunity, with the design constraints of dense urban environments driving creative solutions to these problems – from multi-sport vertical facilities and rooftop courts to shared-use spaces that serve schools, clubs and the broader community across the week.

Figure 9. Greater Sydney land values grew by 138 per cent on average between 2015 and 2025



Land value growth rates by local government area (2015 to 2025), including residential, commercial, industrial and rural, show Sydney’s land values increased by around 138 per cent on average over the course of 10 years. Camden’s land values grew a staggering 367 per cent, while Cumberland and Campbelltown grew by around 200 per cent. In the final year (2024 to 2025), Sydney’s land value grew by 5 per cent, signalling underlying pressures are not easing. With major facilities delivered over five-to-15-year timelines, escalating land values are a serious factor.

Source: NSW Valuer General, historical land values. Detailed growth rate table in Appendix 2.





### Sydney in three councils: how development history shapes provision

The ongoing evolution of Sydney's urban form means some communities have more sporting facilities than others. Comparing three local government areas highlights this starkly:

- In Sydney's north, Willoughby City Council has been grappling with these issues for a century. Noted as a progressive council on delivery of sports grounds in the 1920s<sup>32</sup> it was struggling to acquire open space by the late 1930s<sup>33</sup>. With post-war planning designed to deliver residential development while protecting and providing open space as part of subdivision patterns, it was again seen as an exemplar for provision of sporting space<sup>34</sup>. Today, Willoughby has a sports facility for every 1,226 people, but with significant density building around the CBD, will again need to balance the acquisition of land for recreation uses.

- Across the harbour, in the City of Sydney, more residents have moved into an area that had for many decades been seen and planned for as a predominantly commercial and industrial area. While the area has invested in sports facilities, including open space, aquatic centres and indoor facilities, there is one sports facility for every 4,799 residents.
- Provision of sport facilities varies even in growth centres in the west. In Campbelltown City Council area and Liverpool City Council area, there is one sport facility for every 1,335 residents, while nearby Liverpool has one facility for every 5,158 residents.

Source: NSW Spatial Collaboration Portal<sup>35</sup> (detailed provision by local government area in Appendix 1)



Case study:

### Bob Prenter reserve

Location: Macquarie Fields

Organisations: Campbelltown City Council, AFL NSW/ACT

Bob Prenter Reserve is a new regional level AFL ground in Sydney's southwest, built in partnership between the NSW Government, Campbelltown City Council and AFL NSW/ACT.



## 2.3 Washed out

### Losing ground to extreme weather

Community sport in Greater Sydney is already losing ground to extreme weather, and the infrastructure meant to support it is struggling to keep up.

Across four AFL community seasons in Greater Sydney from 2022 to 2025, wet weather ground closures forced the cancellation of 2,616 matches – 11 per cent of all fixtured games. The pattern repeats across winter codes: more than half of NSW’s football fields lack adequate drainage, rendering them unplayable after heavy rain.<sup>36</sup> Experienced individually, these are inconveniences; at city scale, they are structural vulnerabilities for community sport.

Heat is an equally growing threat. Research shows Australians are spending more time exercising in conditions that exceed moderate, high and extreme heat stress thresholds.<sup>37</sup> Sydney’s west is already experiencing more days when summer cricket simply cannot be played safely. Smoke from bushfires adds another layer of unpredictable disruption that planning and scheduling cannot easily accommodate.

There is growing awareness of the impacts that climate change may have on ocean-based sport. Intense storms, murky ocean conditions and increased shark activity have led to hurried relocation of beach nippers

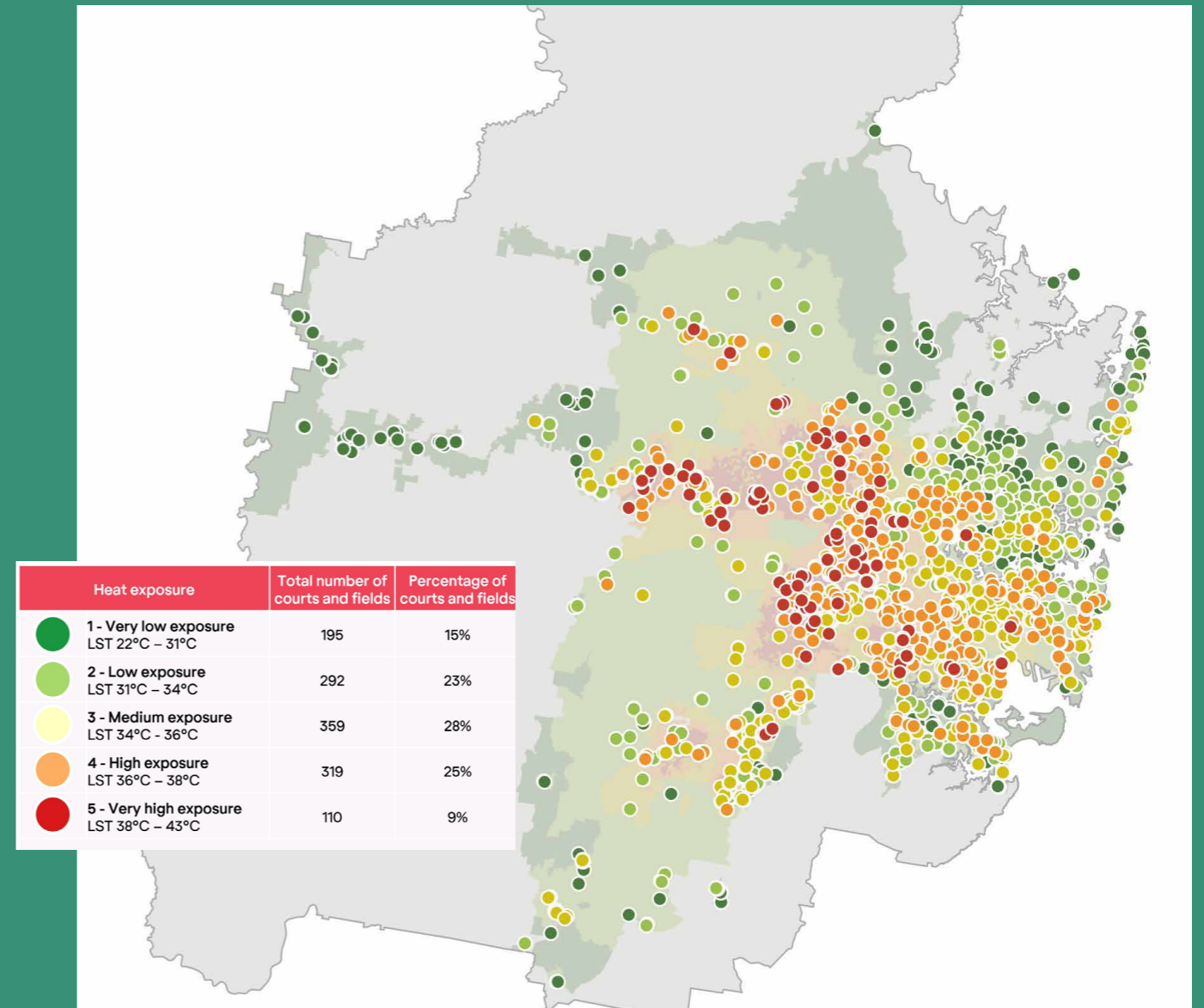
programs to inland waterways, delays to major events such as the Cole Classic, and increased reliance on aquatic centres.

The human cost falls hardest on families with children. Cancelled and rescheduled events create cascading burdens – additional travel, lost registration fees, disrupted routines – leaving kids disappointed at exactly the age when lifelong habits are formed. Junior and school competitions, the most critical pipeline for lifetime participation, are disproportionately bearing the weight of a system that wasn’t designed for the climate it now operates in.

Looking ahead, adaptation to climate impacts will bring its own complications. More play will shift to cooler early mornings and evenings, increasing pressure on already-strained lighting and noise-sensitive neighbours. Greater reliance on indoor facilities will expose the chronic undersupply of covered courts and multi-sport spaces. And some sports face existential threats to their traditional venues – beach volleyball at Brighton-le-Sands and Manly, for example, is vulnerable to coastal erosion and the broader impacts of a changing shoreline.

The question is no longer whether climate change will reshape community sport in Sydney. The question is whether the city’s infrastructure investment will keep pace – or whether the gap between what the weather demands and what facilities can deliver will simply keep growing.

Figure 10. Nearly one-in-10 outdoor sports fields in Sydney are too hot for children to play in during summer



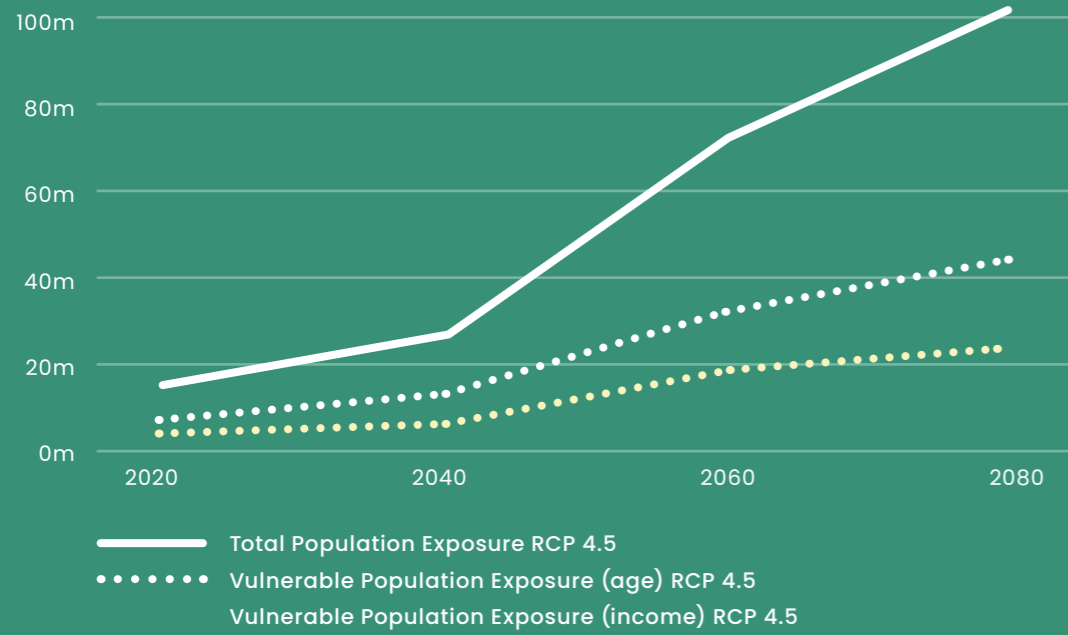
Around nine per cent of Sydney’s existing outdoor courts and fields will become unsafe for children to use in summer, under these projections, with the highest concentration in Western Sydney.

Note: LST measures surface heat and is not equivalent to the ambient air temperature experienced by players, so values cannot be directly compared. To support interpretation, this analysis applies an indicative assumption of a 7°C difference. With no national standard for heat impacts on sport, this uses Football NSW guidelines of 32°C or above as being unsafe for competitive play for children, and 37°C or above for adults<sup>40</sup> (the construction industry applies a 35°C stop-work threshold<sup>41</sup>). POI dataset (n=1,813 courts & fields with valid LST + HEI data).

Source: Facility location, NSW Spatial Collaboration Portal (2025),<sup>38</sup> Heat Exposure Index (with data points Land Surface Temperature and Heat Vulnerability Index) NSW DPHI (2022),<sup>39</sup> with summer daytime satellite images (October 2015–April 2016).



Figure 11. Collective heatwave days experienced in Western Sydney (RCP 4.5)



Western Sydney will experience a projected sharp jump in the average number of days over 35°C, rising from 10 days in the period 2010–2019 to 20 days in 2070–2079.

Source: Committee for Sydney/Burning Money<sup>42</sup> ('collective heatwave days' calculates the total number of heatwave days experienced by a population by multiplying the number of heatwave days by the number of people exposed to them)



Ample field lighting enables an evening game of soccer at Ashfield Park.

Image: Committee for Sydney



Image: Independent UK<sup>44</sup>

### Growing awareness of legal risks

A 2024 report from the Environmental Defenders Office and advocacy group Frontrunners identified areas of increasing liability for sporting organisations, including personal injury, contractual implications, financial impact disclosures and reputational damage, and set out a series of recommendations.<sup>43</sup>

Boards and other governing bodies are increasingly expected to review and update policies to keep players and other participants safe, and to manage climate-related disruptions where they may affect agreements such as broadcasting contracts.



## 2.4 A bigger pool

### More sports to play

More than 600 different sports are now played across Australia. What we play, how we play, when we play and who plays are all changing faster than the systems designed to support them. This growth is happening simultaneously across multiple fronts, each increasing the pressure on the spaces and facilities that were designed for a different era of sport.

The largest single growth area has been informal, often individual activities in public places. Runners, cyclists and personal trainers out at dawn, late-night dancers alongside ICC Sydney, skateboarders on handrails and stairs. With these activities taking place in the same parks, paths and foreshores where others walk dogs, picnic or commute, rising urban density is intensifying the inevitable friction between uses. Unlike organised sport, this loose collection of activities has no powerful advocates or peak bodies to represent it in planning processes – making it systematically underrepresented despite its scale. As spontaneous activities expand – fast-growing run clubs are the most visible example, bringing with them questions of approvals, liability and neighbourhood impact – that invisibility becomes increasingly costly.

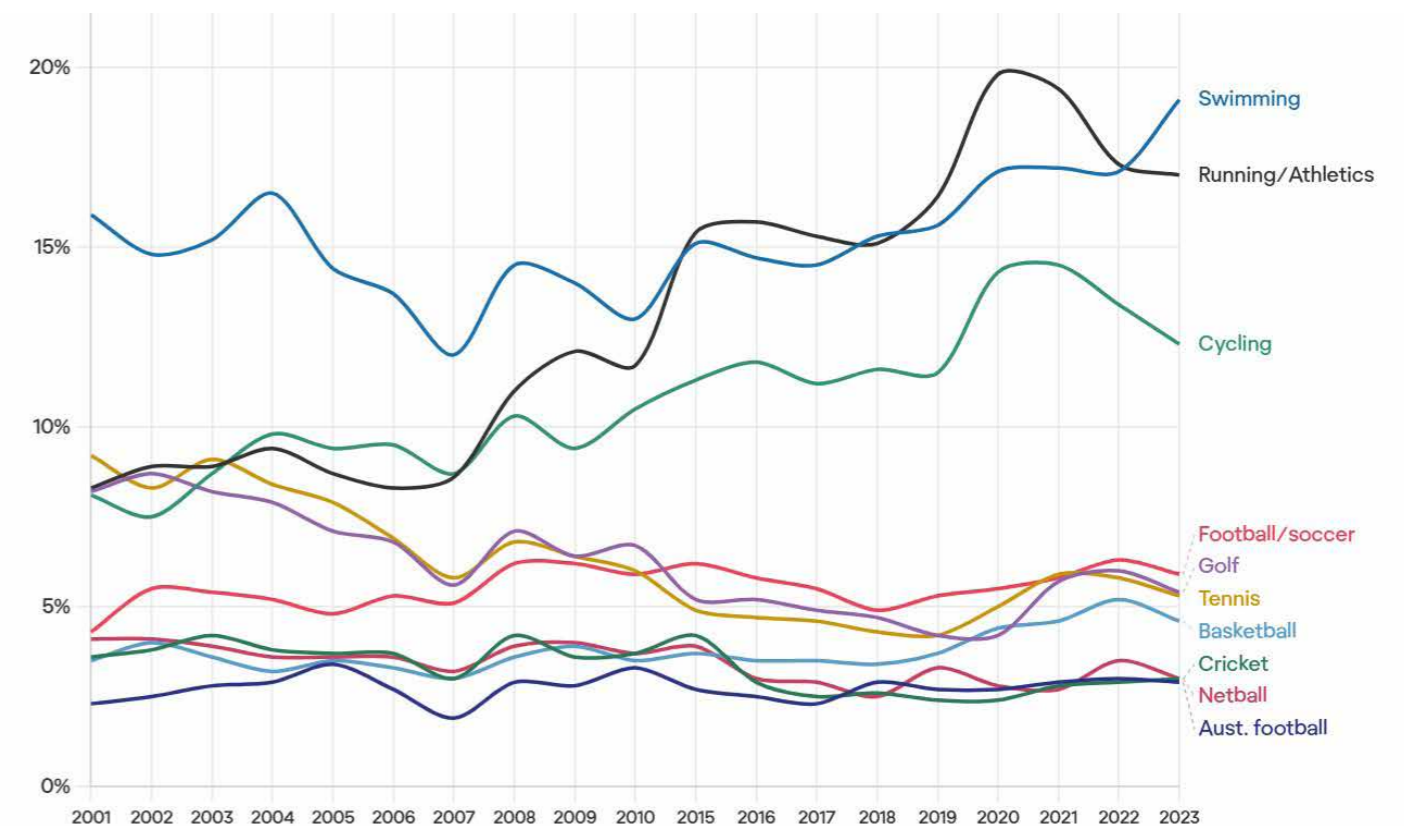
Emerging sports with specific facility requirements represent a different but equally urgent pressure. Basketball,

pickleball and badminton are among the fastest growing participation sports in Sydney, yet all three depend heavily on indoor courts that are already in short supply – and cannot currently be delivered with developer contributions. Unlike informal recreation, which can at least adapt to available public space, these sports have nowhere to go when facilities run out. These activities are already building a head of steam, but what about the activities Sydneysiders will discover in years to come.

Traditional codes are adding to the competition from another direction. Winter and summer seasons that once had clear boundaries are now starting earlier and finishing later – in some cases moving to year-round training, if not competition. The same ovals, fields and courts that used to sit idle between seasons are now used almost continuously, with clubs and codes increasingly in conflict over access.

Taken together, these shifts – more activities, more participants, more specific facility needs, longer seasons – are straining a system built around a narrower and more predictable version of sport. Heavy, continued use of sports facilities also leads to conflict, as the lack of downtime gets in the way of maintenance, improvements and ‘rest’ periods to allow fields to recover. Planning, programming and infrastructure investment that doesn’t account for this will keep trying to solve yesterday’s problems while tomorrow’s go unaddressed.

Figure 12. individual sports that use public space – such as running – while participation in organised sports like tennis and netball has declined



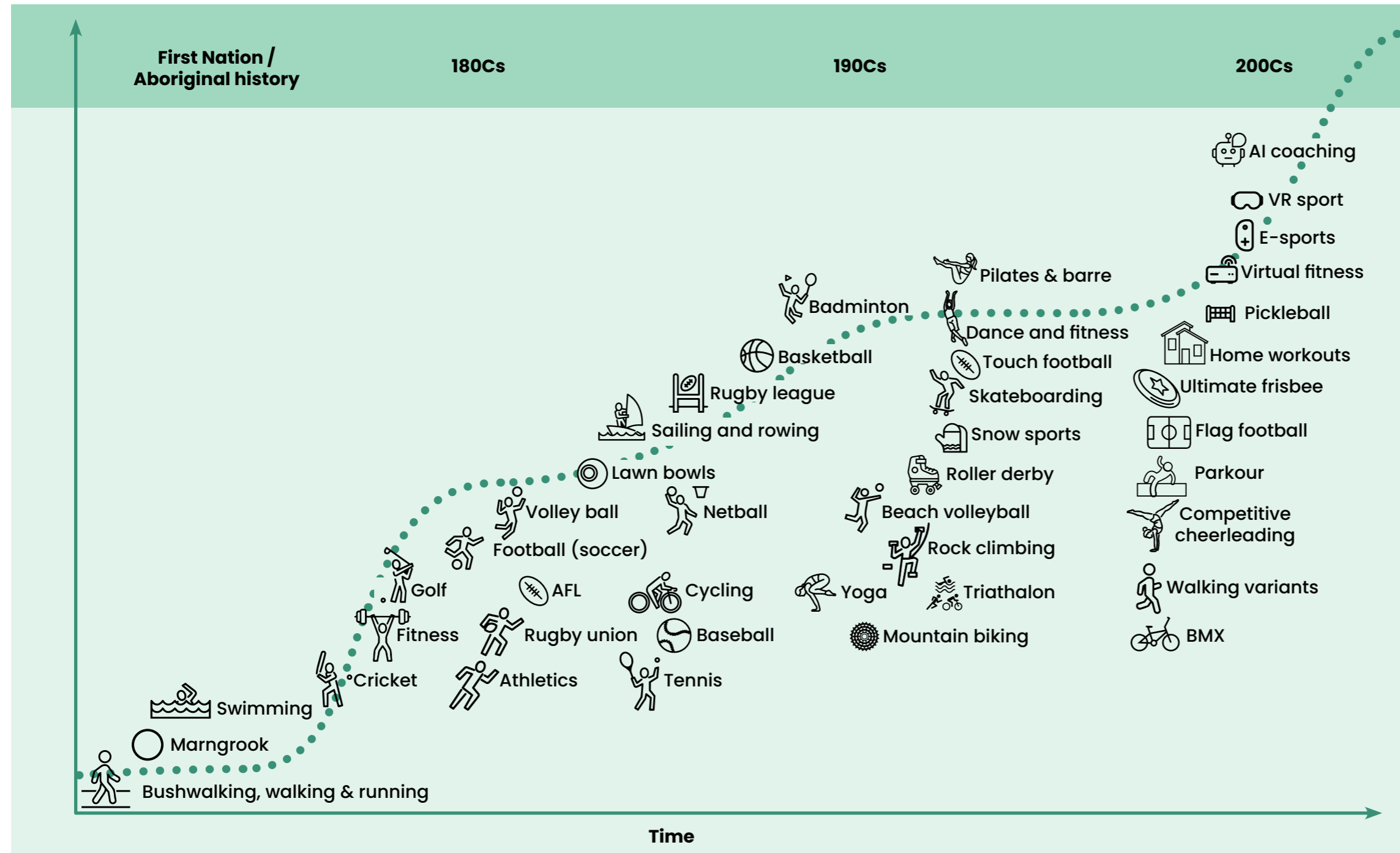
Top 10 sports participation rates by percentage of population that participates in each sport (2001-2023).

Source: Ausplay.<sup>45</sup> Figures represent the percentage of survey respondents participating in each activity in the prior 12 months. Data sourced from ERASS (2001–2010), ABS Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation survey (2011–2014), and AusPlay (2015–2023). Cross-period comparisons are indicative only due to methodological differences between surveys.



Figure 13. A timeline of sports played in Australia

Number of sports



Australia's sporting landscape continues to evolve, shaped by factors such as a growing multicultural population, the recent impacts of Covid-19 and rapid digital innovation.

Sources: Dr Keith Rathbone, Macquarie University, including reputable secondary sources and Trove



## Rise and shine: the rise and rise of Sydney's morning economy

Early morning fitness is having a moment. Beach volleyball at Brighton-le-Sands and Manly, run clubs on the Nepean River and Bay Run, boot camps and bike riders in Parramatta Park.<sup>4546</sup> Before the worries of the day, Sydney's parks, paths, pools, rivers and beaches provide an egalitarian, inclusive opportunity for play, activity and connection. Post-Covid, hybrid workdays allow more space for early morning activity, and as the city gets hotter, mornings offer a safer and more comfortable time for outdoor exercise.

The rise of the morning economy is the most visible aspect of a broader trend towards spontaneous and flexible, informal activities, generally close to home in public places like parks, paths and beaches. It's physically impossible to miss, with people running, dancing, swimming, cycling and training in public places in every part of the city.

Because of the sheer diversity of activities, the data is far from comprehensive – but the trend can be seen in running, cycling and swimming's rapid participation growth (see Figure 12)<sup>47</sup> as well as the move away from membership of organised clubs.

Enabling technologies, such as WhatsApp groups and wearable tech are a factor, and ever busier city lives leaving less space for organised sport. It's not just about fitness, it's about connecting with friends and living a great life. But research shows the benefits of investing in better public place design, with residents of neighbourhoods designed to encourage physical activity more likely to remain active, and individuals living in walkable communities demonstrating lower average obesity rates.

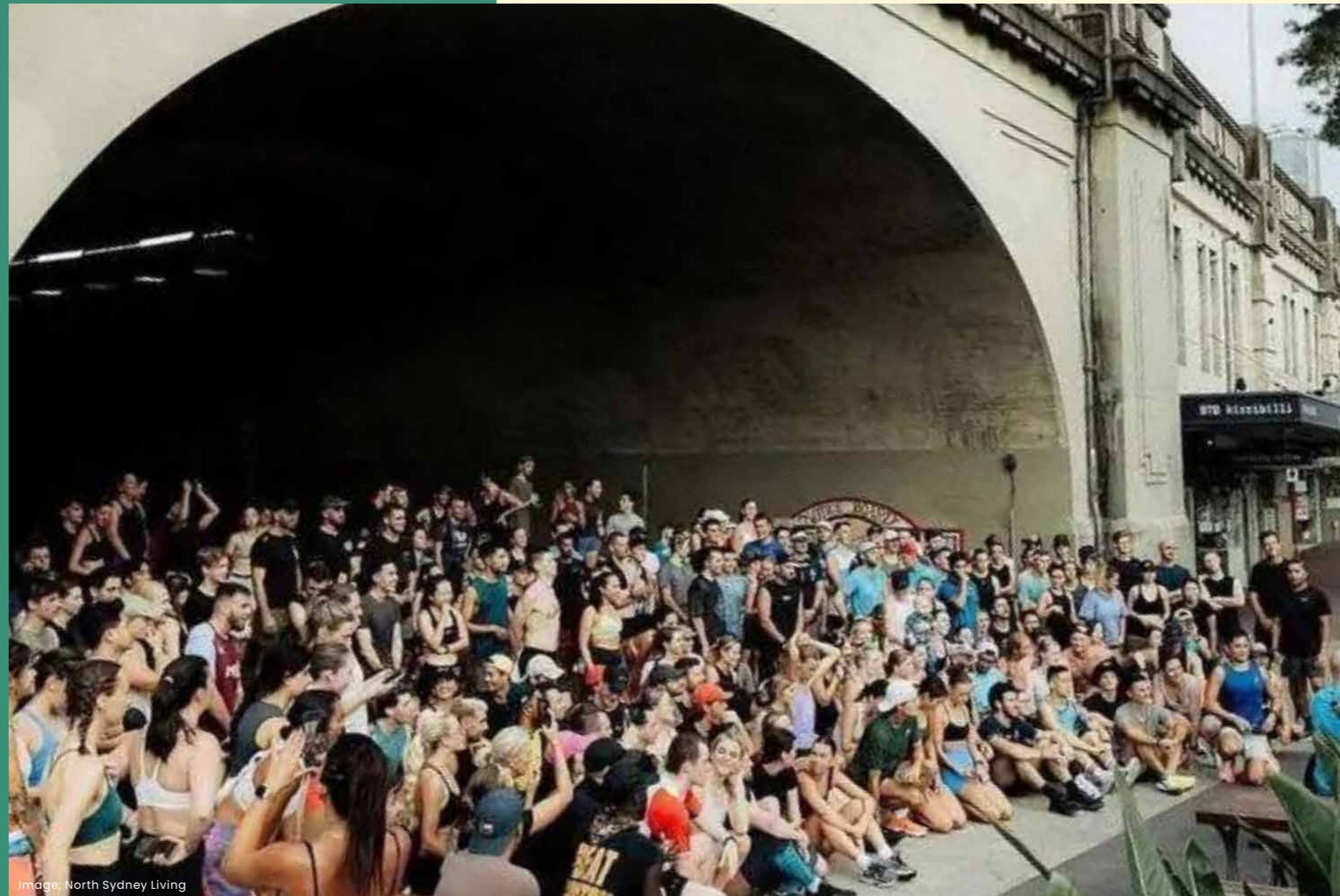


Image: North Sydney Living

Sydney's biggest run club (motto: "Run, walk, pastries") started with a few friends who could barely run across the Harbour Bridge, and has grown into the 10,000+ member Unofficial Run Club.



Image: Red Bull

Martin Place: an elite sporting facility? From the 10-stair and the 'shotgun' handrails at the top, down to the four-stair (affectionately known as 'the pit') at the bottom, Martin Place is a global skateboarding icon.



## 2.5 Armchair fans

### Declining youth participation

Despite the common assumption that Sydneysiders have sport in their blood, participation across the city tells a more complicated and concerning story – one of gradual adult improvement, accelerating decline among children, and persistent, deep inequity in who gets to participate at all.

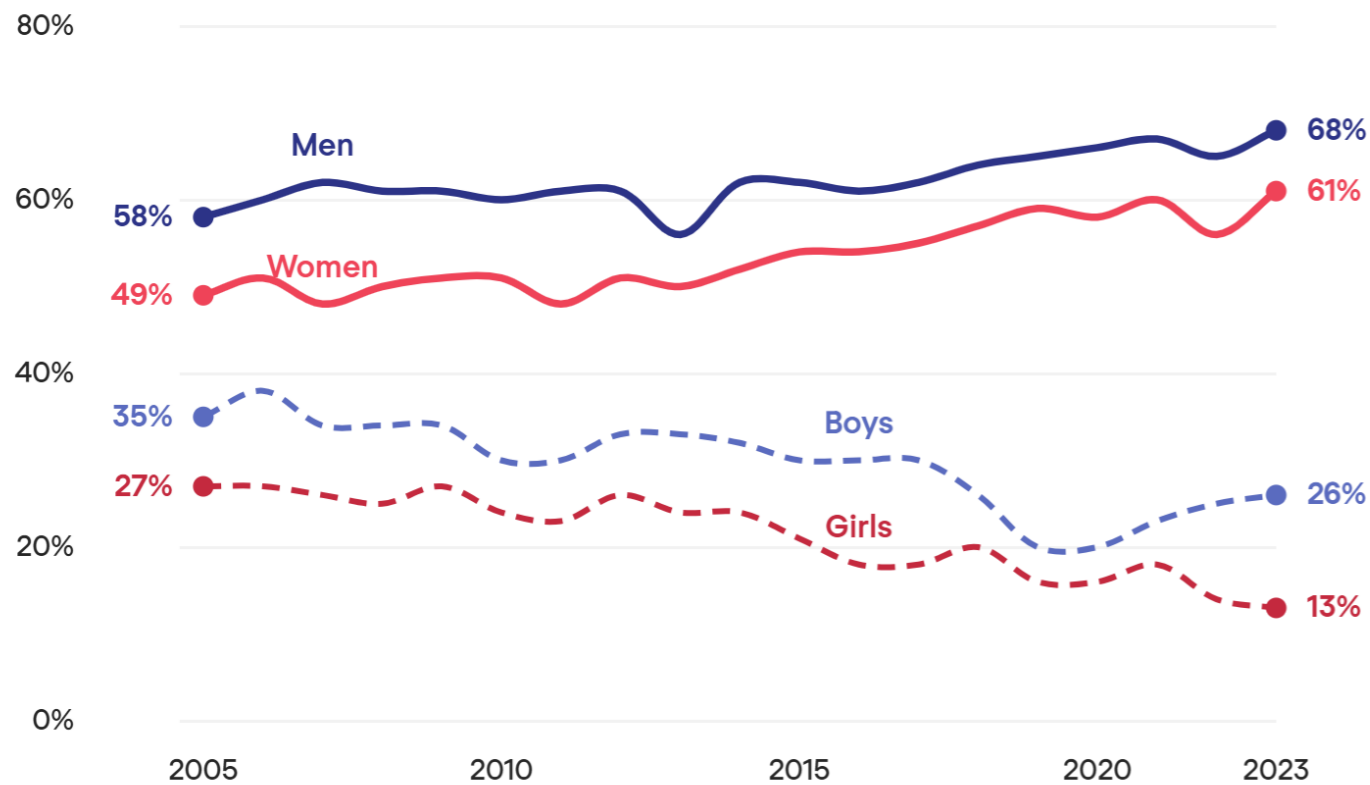
Adult activity levels have risen slowly over the past two decades, a modest but real improvement.

However, children have moved sharply in the opposite direction. A range of pressures, including toxic sideline behaviour, game-day violence and a culture of hyper-competitiveness from an early age are stripping sport of the enjoyment that keeps young people engaged, and simultaneously turning away the volunteer officials and

coaches that community sport depends on. Rising costs put participation out of reach for roughly 1.5 million young Australians, and access remains deeply unequal across socioeconomic lines. Changing family structures, time pressures, gender and cultural barriers, and the growing competition from screens and digital entertainment compound the problem – producing a generation at risk of disengaging from physical activity at a critical stage of development.

Under national physical activity guidelines, children aged five-to-17 need at least one hour of moderate or vigorous activity each day.<sup>48</sup> In 2005, 31 per cent of children met that threshold. By 2023, that figure had fallen to just 20 per cent – a decline that represents hundreds of thousands of young Sydneysiders missing out on the physical, cognitive and social benefits that active childhoods deliver.

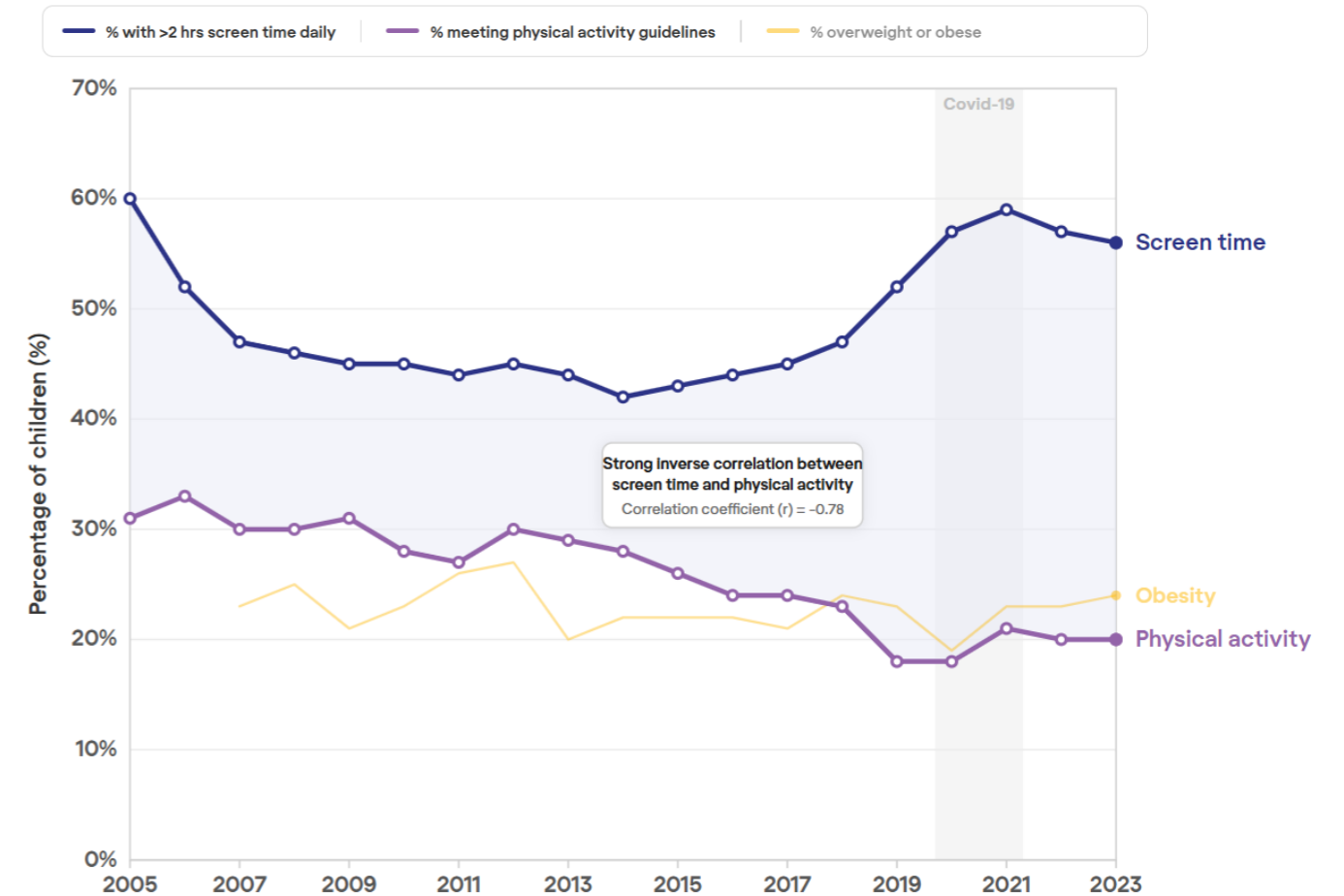
**Figure 14. While adults became more active over 20 years, children are left behind: in 2023, just one-in-five children met activity guidelines, with girls persistently trailing behind boys**



Percentage of adults and children meeting physical activity guidelines in NSW, based on minutes of exercise in a week (2005–2023).

Source: Health Stats NSW physical activity 2005–2023<sup>49</sup>. For further information on barriers to participation, refer to Appendix 3

**Figure 15. As screen time rose, physical activity fell – a strong and consistent inverse relationship**

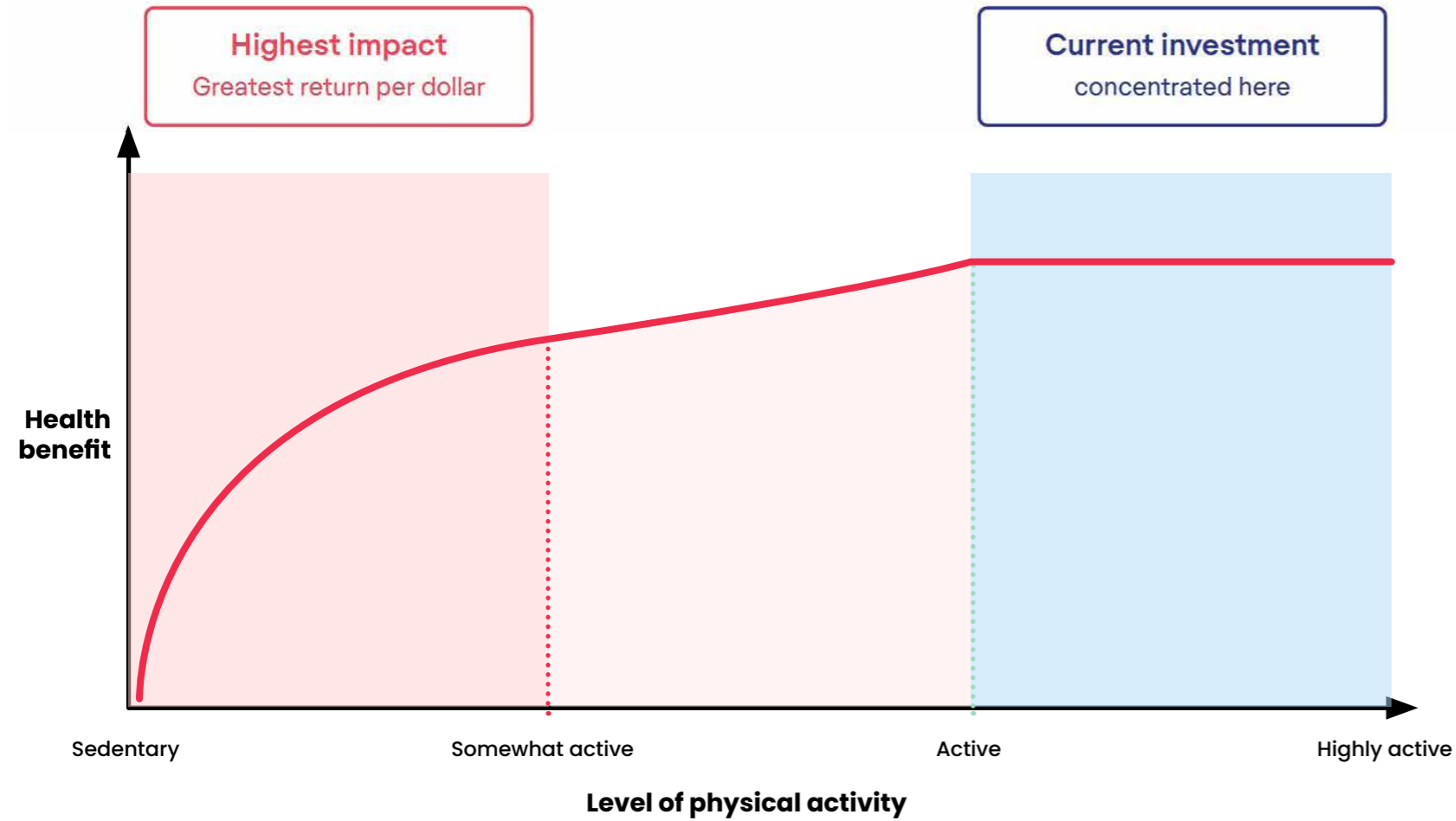


Data on physical activity, screen time and obesity rates of children aged five to 17 in NSW shows a strong inverse correlation between screen time and physical activity, moving in near-perfect opposition ( $r = -0.78$ ). Obesity rates fluctuate independently and do not closely track either metric over the same period.<sup>50</sup>

Source: Health Stats NSW physical activity, screen time and weight status for children, NSW 2005–2023<sup>51</sup>



Figure 16: Small changes in physical activity can prevent death



The steepest part of this illustrative curve tells the most important story. Moving someone from sedentary to somewhat active produces a dramatic improvement in health outcomes – far greater than any equivalent investment at the top end. Yet sport and recreation funding continues to flow toward the already active. Redirecting even a portion of that investment toward the least active communities has the potential to deliver the greatest return for Sydney’s overall health.

Source: Original chart, referencing findings from the Lancet<sup>52</sup> and Sports England<sup>53</sup>



Designed to reduce cost barriers to organised sport, NSW’s Active Kids voucher program reached more than half (53 per cent) of all school-enrolled children in NSW in 2018, making it one of the largest programs of its kind worldwide. Children who used a voucher increased days achieving physical activity guidelines from four to five days per week after six months across all subgroups. Uptake was uneven geographically with redemption rates highest in Sydney’s east and north, and lowest in the west. Between 2017–2022, children and adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds were less active, and this gap remained consistent – meaning the program did not close existing inequalities. However, a separate economic evaluation found the program benefits outweighed its costs in almost all cases, under conservative parameter values. Extending the program duration increased the benefit-cost ratio to 1.08.

Source: University of Sydney<sup>54</sup>/Centre for International Economics<sup>55</sup>



## 2.6 Stuck on the sidelines

### A long way to go on inclusivity

Declining participation is concentrated in groups the system has consistently failed to serve well. These are not marginal gaps at the edges of an otherwise healthy system. They reflect a system historically designed around a narrow demographic – activities that are competitive, club-based, English-language, costly and timed around traditional working patterns:

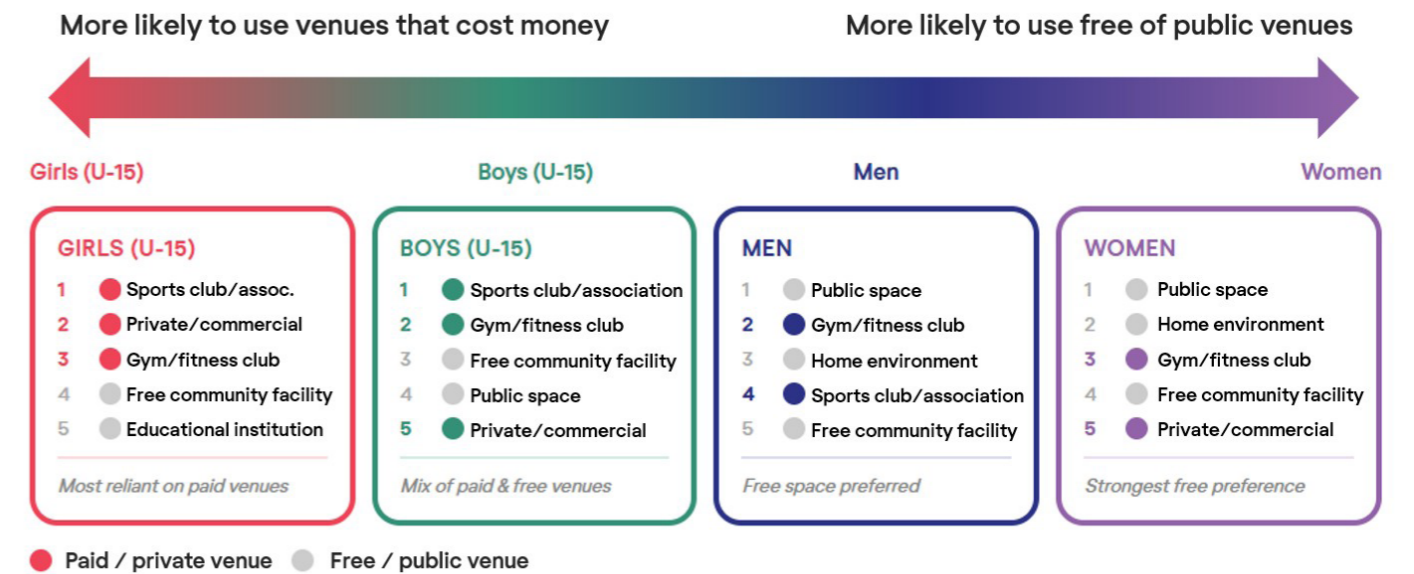
- Women and girls are less likely to meet physical activity guidelines compared to their male counterparts, with the gap widest among children at 13 per cent<sup>56</sup> – a persistent gender gap that has widened sharply since 2021, suggesting structural or cultural barriers for girls in sport are intensifying rather than easing
- Non-English-speaking people participate in sport at consistently lower rates than English speakers, again with the gap widest among children at 13 per cent<sup>57</sup>
- People with disability are four times less likely to participate in sport on a weekly basis, with just 14 per cent doing so compared to 58 per cent of the general population<sup>58</sup>
- For older Australians, activity levels remain relatively stable until age 75, where participation experiences a steep drop of nine per cent<sup>59</sup>
- More than half (53 per cent) of LGBTIQ+ young people have witnessed discrimination, and 40 per cent have experienced discrimination, mostly through verbal vilification<sup>60</sup>

- Income is a powerful factor: children from low-income households are less than half as likely to participate in organised sport as those from high-income families. With cost of living pressures increasing, discretionary spending on the cost of registration, equipment, travel and even time away from work are not minor of registration, equipment, travel and time are not minor inconveniences – they are barriers to participation that exclude substantial numbers of Sydney’s children.

Every individual within these demographic groups brings a specific life experience and perspective – there is no single story – but there are clear demographic impacts in the data, and participation gaps compound at the intersections. For example, an older woman on a low income faces barriers that are qualitatively different from and greater than those of any single group alone. But cultural expectations are shifting: people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, LGBTIQ+ communities, older people and other previously marginalised groups are increasingly lining up to play casually and competitively on their own terms, not just the way it’s always been done. The question is what steps are being taken – in policy and governance approaches, and programmatically – to enable that.

What’s clear is the system has not adapted to the city it now serves, and is failing to deliver participation outcomes that would justify significant public and private investment in sport and active recreation. The evidence points not to bringing underserved groups into existing structures, but to a fundamental rethinking of who and what sport and active recreation is designed for.

Figure 17. Girls are more likely to use paid sport activities



Younger people are more likely to engage in organised, structured sport – often in environments that require payment or membership – shaped by the role of schools, clubs and parental support in facilitating children’s activity. Girls under 15 are more reliant on paid and private venues than any other group, while boys are more likely to use free community spaces and public areas. As people move into adulthood, participation shifts to more flexible, informal settings: public spaces, home environments, free community facilities. Women in particular favour lower-cost, time-flexible options, likely reflecting the practical realities of balancing caregiving and domestic responsibilities alongside staying active.

Source: AusPlay survey results for NSW July 2024 –June 2025, excerpt from tables 7 and 8<sup>61</sup> (refer to Appendix 4 for expenditure on sports by age and demographic groups)





**Figure 18. Periods are a significant and largely unacknowledged barrier to girls' participation**

**Training absence**

**2 in 3**

63% of girls surveyed missed training because of their period



**Performance impact**

**3 in 5**

60% of girls surveyed experienced changes in skill and effort



**Competition absence**

**1 in 3**

33% of girls surveyed missed a competition due to their period



**Considered dropping out**

**1 in 5**

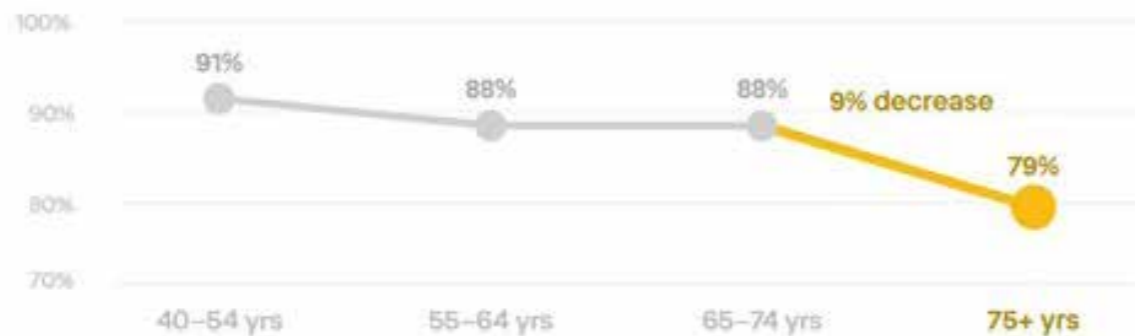
18% of girls surveyed considered quitting sport altogether



Source: Strachan & Casey (2025)<sup>62</sup>

Nearly one-in-five girls aged 10-16 considered dropping out of sport due to period-related challenges in a Victorian study, with impacts to attendance at training (63 per cent), attendance at competitions (33 per cent), skill and participation effort (three-out-of-five) – and 18 per cent considered quitting sport altogether.

**Figure 19. Activity levels remain relatively stable until age 75, when participation experiences a steep drop of nine per cent**



Base level participation (the share of people exercising at least once per year) is relatively stable until 74-years-old, but drops nine per cent from 75.

Source: AusPlay, Older Australians' Participation (2018)

## 2.7 Squeezing under the salary cap

### Public budgets under pressure

The instinctive response, to simply invest more in sports facilities and programs, runs into public budgets that are more constrained than ever.

All three levels of government contribute to funding the sector, but local councils have shouldered a disproportionate share of the rising costs of grassroots sport – particularly the long tail of maintenance, operations and asset renewal that state and federal grants rarely cover – and the financial position of many councils is deteriorating. Research by SGS Economics and Planning for the Australian Local Government Association found a quarter of councils nationally have low financial sustainability, with 31 per cent found to be failing to meet target asset sustainability ratios<sup>63</sup> – meaning assets are wearing out faster than they are being renewed or replaced. Per capita local government expenditure has grown more slowly than state and commonwealth spending over the past two decades, compressing the capacity of the tier of government most responsible for community sport infrastructure.

A structural constraint that compounds this in NSW is the 'rate peg,' which limits how much councils can increase general income each year, restricting their ability to respond to rising costs or service debt on new capital investment.<sup>64</sup> The NSW Government has acknowledged the problem, offering measured support for reform in response to a recent parliamentary inquiry, but substantive change has been slow.<sup>65</sup>

Councils are able to levy developers to fund local infrastructure as required with new developments, either through the capped

statutory funds allowed via Section 7.11 of the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (which have not kept pace with CPI), or by developing their own contribution rates. However, this cannot be used for indoor facilities, or for ongoing maintenance and renewal of existing facilities, heavily limiting its application.

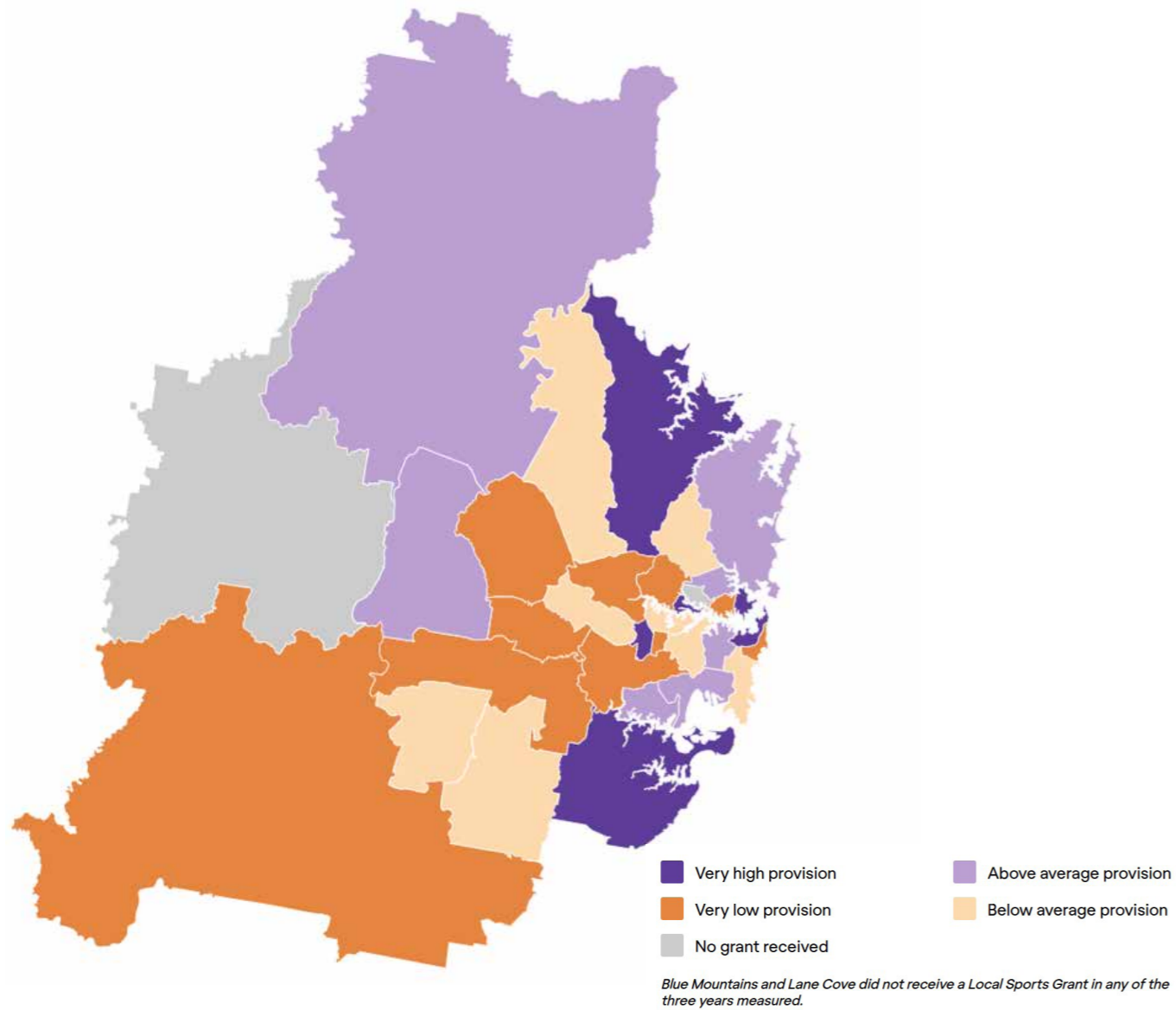
Long-term operational funding of sport facilities is a major obstacle. Funding programs, like the NSW Government's Open Spaces initiative (\$50 million over three years)<sup>66</sup> provided real support. But one-off capital grants like these don't address ongoing maintenance and operational costs: when new or renewed facilities open, the ongoing costs again fall back to councils and clubs already stretched to capacity.

At club level, the economics are similarly structural. Few sports generate enough revenue to cover recurrent costs, let alone capital expenses. Learn-to-swim programs and gyms have found commercially viable models; most not-for-profit community clubs have not. When revenue falls short, maintenance is deferred, and deferred maintenance accelerates deterioration, drives away participants, reduces revenue further and deepens the shortfall. This is not a cash flow problem that a one-off injection fixes. It is a business model problem that requires sustained structural support.

More investment is necessary, but investment without considering lifecycle costs of assets and programs, and without broadening the base of capital sources, risks repeating the same cycle: assets communities can't afford to operate, programs that build dependency then disappear, and facilities that deteriorate faster than they can be renewed. The case is not just for more funding, it is for a fundamentally different funding model.



Figure 20. Greater Sydney’s sport grants aren’t landing where need is greatest

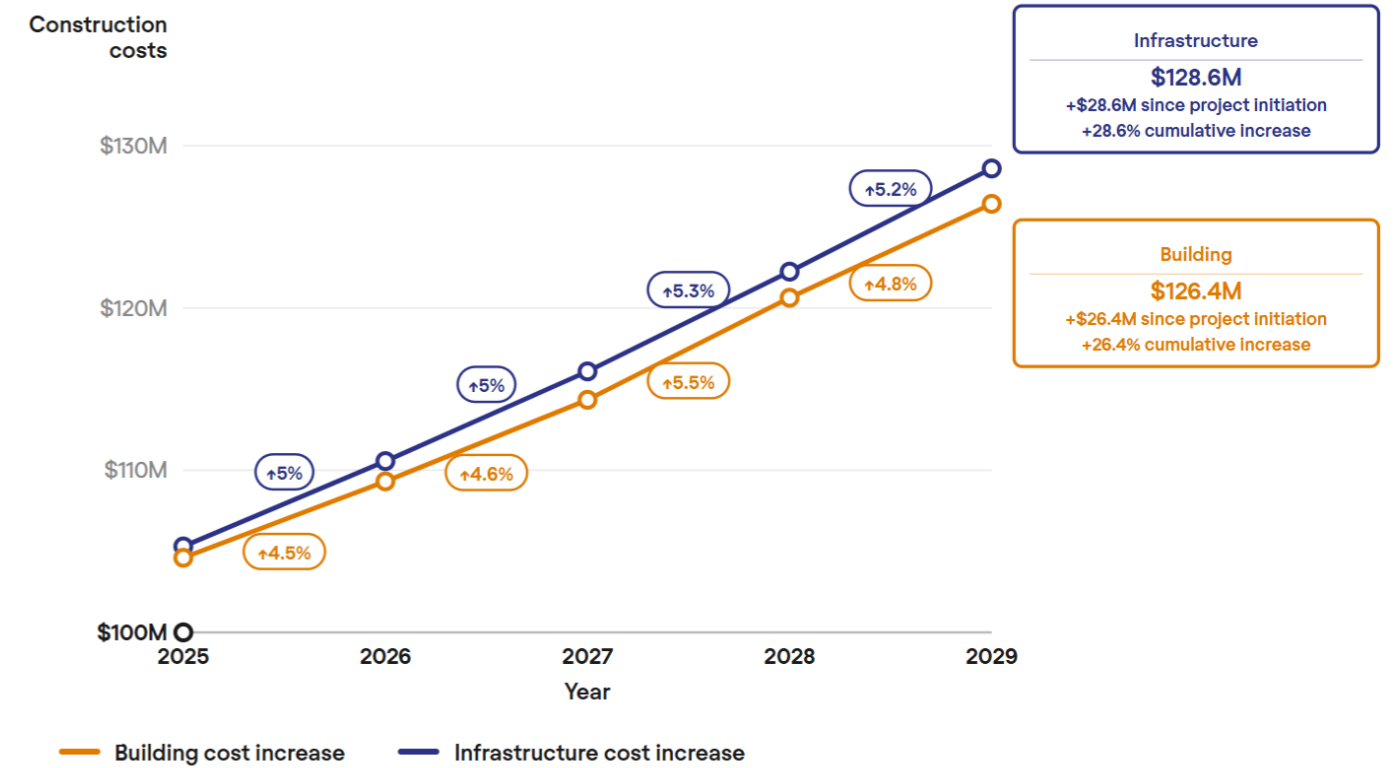


Average annual sports grant provision per resident from NSW Office of Sport’s Local Sports Grant Program over the past three cycles (2023–2025), aggregated by local government area, highlights inequality across Sydney. Per-resident provision in Liverpool (\$0.33), Fairfield (\$0.35) and Blacktown (\$0.36) is roughly four times lower

than Hunters Hill (\$1.43) and Mosman (\$1.08). This pattern suggests the competitive, application-based model might favour clubs in better-resourced areas, leaving faster-growing communities with fewer opportunities to access funding.

Source: Local Sports Grant Program, NSW Office of Sport<sup>67</sup> (detailed funding table in Appendix 5)

Figure 21. Construction costs in Australia escalating well above general inflation



Sydney’s building tender prices are forecast to rise about 4.5–5 per cent in 2026, and 5.3–5.5 per cent in 2028,<sup>68</sup> reflecting ongoing pressures such as skilled labour shortages, high materials costs and supply chain delays. Other factors include increased regulatory compliance and designing facilities to address extreme heat, bushfires and intense rain events. Assuming an initial project cost of \$100 million (with costs compounding year-on-year), projected increases (in this case from 2025 to 2028) mean projects routinely cost more than initially budgeted. For example, for a sports complex with budget of \$10 million, a five per cent cost escalation adds another \$500,000.

Source: WT<sup>69</sup>



# Learning from the best: Sydney and the world

**The problems facing sport and active recreation in Greater Sydney are longstanding, interconnected and resistant to simple solutions. Decades of effort – more grants, more facilities, more programs – have moved the needle without shifting the system.**

What consultation, research and direct engagement with sport, government and industry leaders made clear is that incremental responses to structural problems are not enough. What's needed is a fundamentally different way of working.

That means moving beyond the patterns that have held the sector back: fragmented effort, short-term funding cycles, internal competition for limited resources, and planning that responds to yesterday's sporting culture rather than our growing city.

It also means recognising that all this effort will be more than justified by the scale of the opportunity: for public health, community onnection, social cohesion, educational attainment, economic productivity and simple human enjoyment.

The first step: understanding what's working, where best practices are emerging globally, what we can learn from. This photo essay canvasses some of the best case studies of projects, programs and policy changes from around the world to help us understand what the next steps should be.

Image: Bayside Council



## Case study: Barton Park

Location: Arncliffe

Organisations: Bayside Council, Mode Design, St George FC, TCorp, Office of Sport

Barton Park's upgrade is a model for shared use, with new turf sports fields and 450-seat grandstand for football, multi-use courts for basketball, futsal and handball, tennis courts, netball, table tennis, fitness stations, playground and shared paths.



Image: Bayside Council

## Case study: Arncliffe Youth Centre, Library and Community Hub

Location: Arncliffe

Organisations: Bayside Council

Arncliffe Youth Centre, Library and Community Hub, delivered through a voluntary planning agreement negotiated by Bayside Council, includes two multipurpose basketball courts. Maintenance and upkeep highlights the need to factor ongoing costs into developer agreements.



**Case study: Beaumont Hills Park**

Location: Beaumont Hills  
 Organisations: Hills Shire Council, NSW Department of Planning & Environment, Transport for NSW/Sydney Metro, Place Laboratory, Trinity Skateparks, JOC Consulting

Beaumont Hills Park includes a BMX pump track, three basketball stands, street-style skating area, and new tracks connecting to the shared path network. Under the Sydney Metro Skytrain on Windsor Road, it includes solar lighting to improve safety and extend hours of use. Artwork by Bradley Eastman ('Beastman') completes the park's visual style.

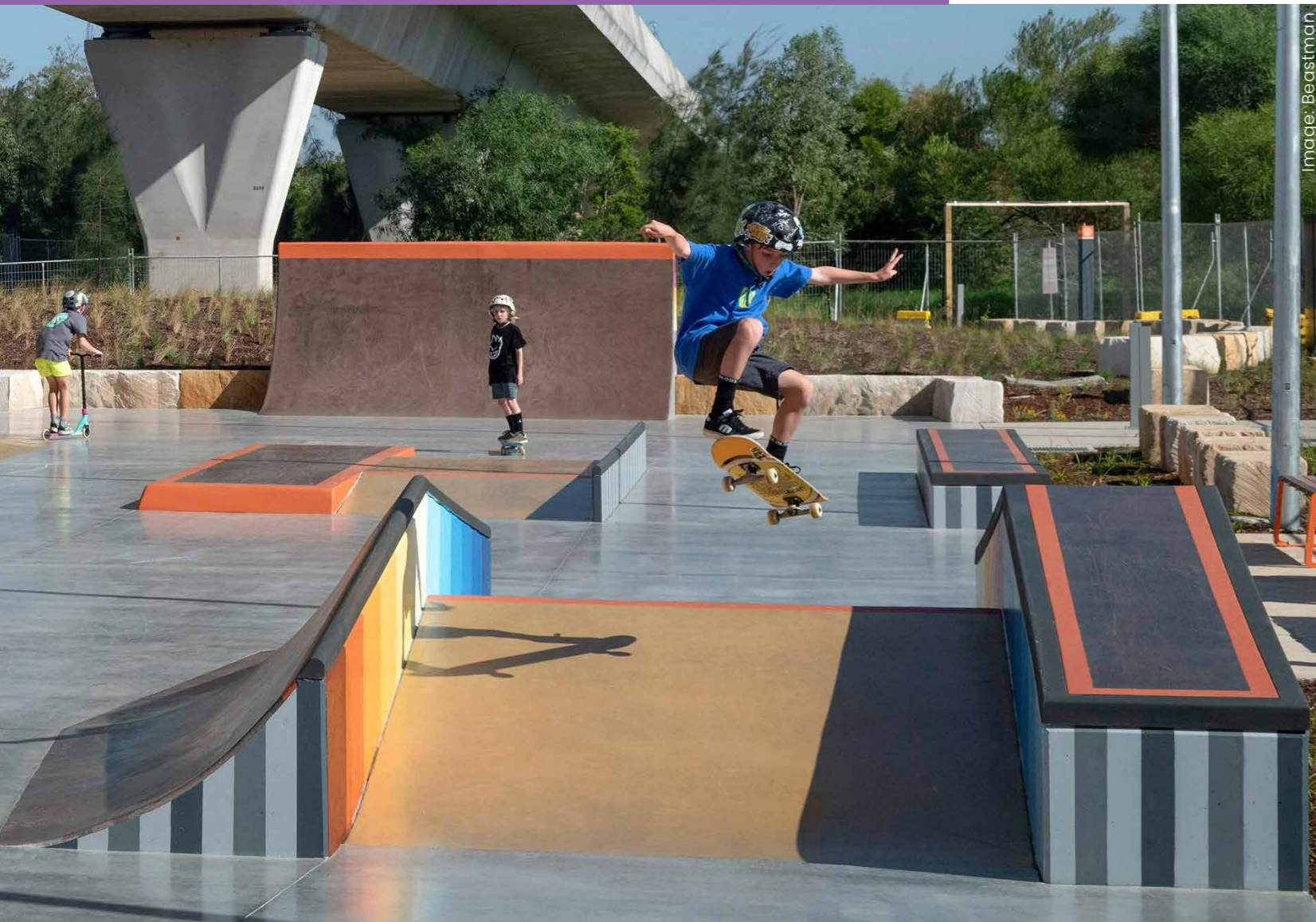


Image: Beastman



Image: Hoops House

**Case study: Hoops House**

Location: Brookvale  
 Organisations: Hoops House

Local startup Hoops House has a full-size indoor basketball court, fully equipped gym and six ball machines, established by a local coach and basketball fan. The project addresses the biggest challenge for basketball on the Northern Beaches – available court space.



Image: Penrith City Council

**Case study: Gipps Street**

Location: Claremont Meadows  
 Organisations: Penrith City Council, Office of Sport, Group GSA

Gipps Street – the “Luna Park of open space recreation” – replaced a 32-hectare waste facility with four rectangular fields, a junior field, two cricket/AFL ovals with synthetic wickets, two netball courts, four cricket practice facilities, skate park, pump track and multi-sport courts, outdoor fitness and children’s playspaces. Floodlights enable night use.



Image: Georges River Council



**Case study: Hurstville civic precinct masterplan**

Location: Hurstville  
Organisations: Georges River Council, GYDE

Hurstville’s civic precinct masterplan shows the potential for considering active recreation in public place design. Tai chi and line dancing were identified as key activities for local community groups, and included as part of the plan for 50 per cent public space in the new precinct.



Image: ICC Sydney

**Case study: ICC Sydney’s events deck**

Location: Darling Harbour  
Organisations: ICC Sydney, House of Pickle

ICC Sydney’s events deck has been converted to eight purpose-built pickleball courts, open for casual play, coaching and social rounds for community and corporate groups. It’s part of a broader effort to use the venue’s outdoor spaces for active recreation, encouraging event organisers to add team building and wellness experiences.



Image: NRLW

**Case study: Kellyville memorial park**

Location: Kellyville  
Organisations: Hills Shire Council, City of Parramatta

Kellyville Memorial Park precinct, which was jointly funded by two councils, alongside state and federal support, is Australia’s first gender-equal elite facility, giving women’s rugby league the professional environment it deserves.



Image: Committee for Sydney

**Case study: The Greenway**

Location: Inner West  
Organisations: Inner West Council, Transport for NSW, Aspect Studios

The GreenWay is a six-kilometre north-south path joining two of Sydney’s most popular waterside routes, the Cooks River and Bay Run paths, to create a superhighway of active recreation.



**Case study: Kelso North sports precinct**

Location: Milperra  
Organisations: City of Canterbury Bankstown Council

Kelso North sports precinct was home to a regionally significant AFL ground but had typically serviced a limited local player base. Adjacent baseball diamonds also hosted local and regional competition. With increasing demand from other sports, the council prepared a plan of management, backed by consultation and co-operation from the existing users. The willingness of the traditional clubs to share facilities resulted in multi-use of the AFL field and conversion of a baseball diamond into an athletics field area. Little Athletics and grade cricket now consider the ground home, and local schools have improved sporting options. Both AFL and baseball maintained their strong connection to the grounds and benefitted from significant new infrastructure.



Image: City of Canterbury Bankstown Council



Image: Randwick City Council

**Case study: Heffron Park**

Location: Maroubra  
Organisations: Randwick City Council, South Sydney Rabbitohs

Heffron Park's renewal shows the benefit of deep partnership between councils and sporting clubs. It has synthetic football and NRL standard fields, indoor stadium with multipurpose courts (basketball, netball, table tennis, badminton, indoor soccer, futsal, volleyball and pickleball), a 4.2 kilometre criterium cycle track, acrylic surface show court and nine tennis courts, a gymnastics facility, and plenty of opportunities for active recreation.

**Case study: Hoops EQ**

Location: Moore Park  
Organisations: Hoops Capital, Entertainment Quarter

Hoops EQ has four half-courts and one full court for street tournaments, clinics – free and open to all ages and skill levels. Built multi-purpose, it has capacity for 1,500 for performances. Owned by Hoops Capital, it pairs a free, outdoor street basketball space with a premium indoor facility.



Image: Hoops Capital

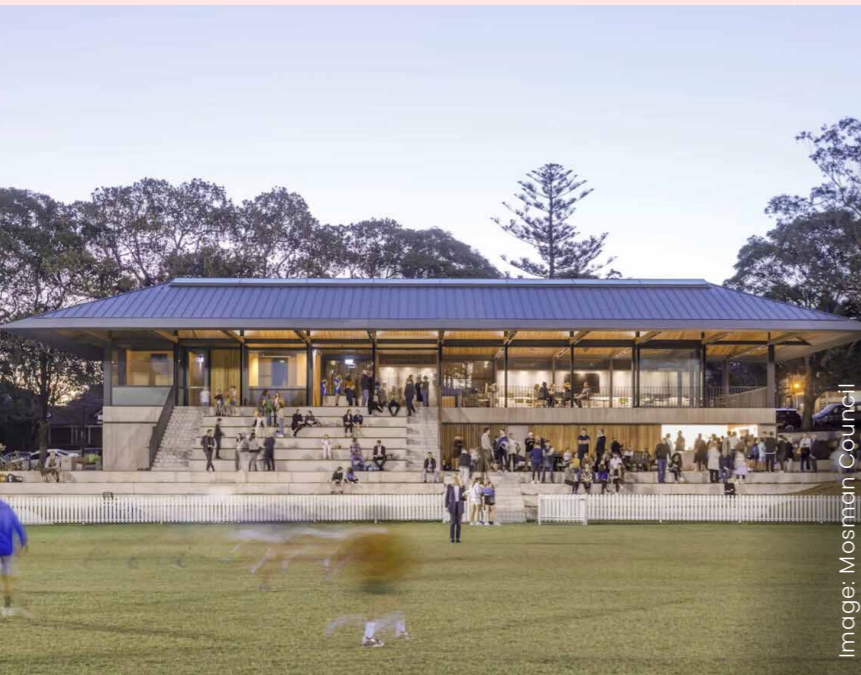


Image: Mosman Council

**Case study: The Allan Border Oval pavilion**

Location: Mosman  
Organisations: Mosman Council, Archer Office

The Allan Border Oval pavilion's upgrade shows the potential for broader community benefit. It has a big overhanging roof for plenty of shade on hot cricket days, with space for community events and social gatherings with a big domestic kitchen, canteen kiosk and communal spaces.



Image: Blacktown City Council

**Case study: Exercise Sports and Technology Hub (BEST) and Disability Sport Centre**

Location: Rooty Hill  
Organisations: Blacktown City Council, Australian Catholic University, Architectus, ARM Architects, WSP, Buildcorp, CO.OP Studio, TTW, Forge, WentWest, Disability Sports Australia, Office of Sport

Blacktown's Exercise Sports and Technology Hub (BEST) and Disability Sport Centre projects show growth centre councils can lead with major projects, leveraging relatively lower average unimproved land values and available space to deliver city-scale impact, while also reversing historically low provision of facilities.



Image: John Gollings/Spackman Mossop Michaels

**Case study: Redfern stadium**

Location: Redfern  
Organisations: City of Sydney, Spackman Mossop Michaels, BVN

The renewal of Redfern stadium lowered the playing fields and moved the stadium to the side, reopening the park and returning access to the community, while retaining high quality space for training, games and fan access.



Image: NCIE

**Case study: The National Centre of Indigenous Excellence**

Location: Redfern  
Organisations: National Centre of Indigenous Excellence

The National Centre of Indigenous Excellence includes a purpose-built three-level multi-use sporting complex with indoor sports halls and activity rooms, a heated 25-metre pool and a high-quality football training field. Despite its challenges, the NCIE stands as one of Sydney's most compelling examples of sport and community infrastructure being delivered by a not for profit organisation.



**Case study: Galungara Park**

Location: Schofields  
Organisations: Blacktown City Council, School Infrastructure, Group GSA

Galungara Park is a good example of co-location and shared infrastructure, backed by an effective partnership between school, council and government. The shared car park was designed for joint-use, serving the school in the week and the broader community and sporting groups on weekends and evenings.



Image: School Infrastructure NSW



Image: Elite Turf

**Case study: Green Square Public School**

Location: Zetland  
Organisations: School Infrastructure, City of Sydney, BVN

Green Square Public School's partnership between City of Sydney and School Infrastructure enabled facilities to be shared. To encourage community use, the covered multipurpose sports court – for basketball, volleyball and netball – was moved from the rooftop to street level. It's wrapped with the rippling motifs of artist Blak Douglas's 'The Belly of the Feast'



Image: BVN / City of Sydney / School Infrastructure

**Case study: St Marys Leagues Club**

Location: St Marys  
Organisations: St Marys Rugby League Club, Elite Turf

Full reconstruction of the main sports field at St Marys Leagues Club in 2025 included earthworks, subsurface drainage to maximise performance in all weather conditions, high-efficiency irrigation system for long-term sustainability, making it one of the best surfaces in the city.



**Case study: Gunyama's synthetic sports field**

Location: Zetland  
Organisations: City of Sydney

Gunyama's synthetic sports field was constructed after a needs analysis that highlighted high demand, limited space and potential to use the field up to 15 hours per day. There was little community opposition, likely due to its location in a brownfield, former industrial area.



Image: City of Sydney



Image: Cairns Regional Council

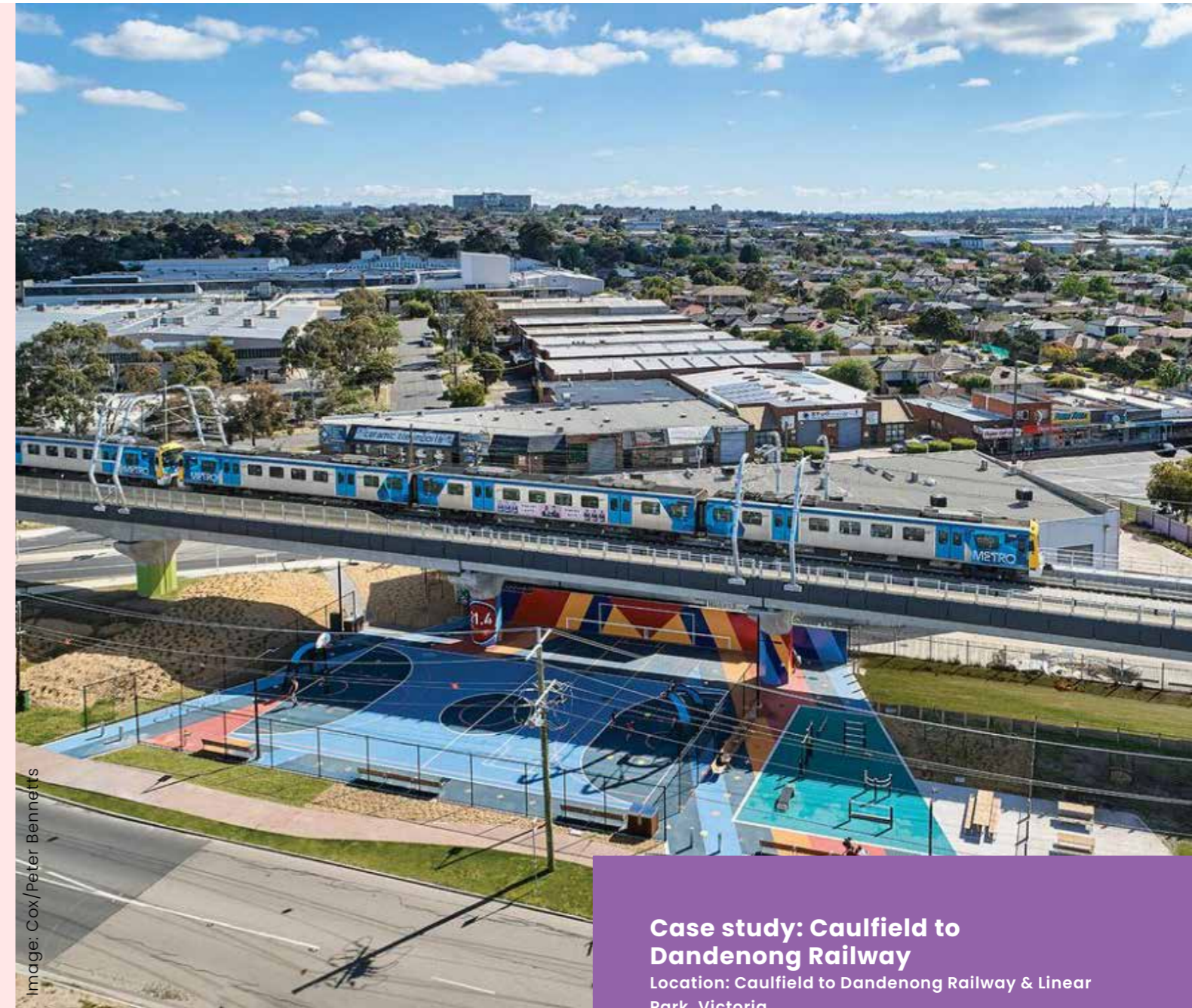


Image: Cox/Peter Bennetts

**Case study: Caulfield to Dandenong Railway**

Location: Caulfield to Dandenong Railway & Linear Park, Victoria  
Organisations: Level Crossing Removal Authority, Lendlease, CPB, Cox Architecture, Aspect Studios

Part of the refurbishment of the Caulfield to Dandenong rail line, this project embraces the spaces below the rail line to create public spaces, including gardens, open gyms, playgrounds and sports zones along the line, with each area reflecting the surrounding suburb.

**Case study: Cairns Esplanade**

Location: Cairns, Queensland  
Organisations: Cairns Regional Council

Cairns Esplanade has 2.5 kilometres of shared paths for active recreation, a 4800sqm saltwater swimming lagoon, five beach volleyball courts, a bouldering park, fitness stations, multi-use court for basketball, soccer, netball and pétanque, and a skateboarding plaza. All free for public use.



Image: Mirvac, Cricket Victoria/Melbourne Renegades, City of Whittlesea

**Case study: Olivine Recreation Reserve**

Location: Donnybrook, Victoria  
Organisations: Mirvac, Cricket Victoria, City of Whittlesea

Olivine Recreation Reserve was delivered through a joint venture between developer Mirvac, Cricket Victoria and City of Whittlesea, with two ovals, outdoor cricket nets, netball courts, playground, skate park and function spaces. It shows the potential for high quality sport infrastructure delivered through development, in close partnership with sport and government.



Image: Queensland Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games

**Case study: Myponga Reservoir**

Location: Myponga, South Australia  
Organisations: SA Water

While there is no swimming in SA's Myponga Reservoir, like most of the state's reservoirs it is now open for public access. About an hour's drive from Adelaide City, on the Fleurieu Peninsula, it has an extensive trail network with six kilometres of unsealed tracks for runners, cyclists and walkers, the reservoir itself is open for fishing as well as kayaking and canoeing.



Image: Paddle Australia

**Case study: Gold Coast Performance Centre**

Location: Runaway Bay, Queensland  
Organisations: Queensland Department of Sport, Racing, Olympic and Paralympic Games

Gold Coast Performance Centre's co-location of high-grade facilities, including track and field, heated Olympic pool and criterium track, enables the venue to host triathlon competitions. It's open to public use, with a synthetic hockey field, strength and conditioning gym and high quality facilities for disabled athletes.





**Case study: Hingleys Playing Fields**

Location: Cradley Heath, United Kingdom  
Organisations: Ormiston Forge Academy, Football Foundation

Hingleys Playing Fields was suffering severe disruption as increasing rainfall expanded a nearby wetland. After 36 home games were cancelled in the 2022/23 season, the club implemented nature-based solutions: a linear pond was created to collect water from a natural spring, and a bund and drainage ditch system built to support water retention and slow spread.



Image: Google Maps

**Case study: Rooftop skate park and run base**

Location: Hong Kong  
Organisations: Gaw Capital Partners, One Bite Design Studio, Red Bull

Hong Kong's first rooftop skate park and run base, delivered as part of the H.A.N.D.S. ('Have a Nice Day Shopping') shopping centre development, is split across three levels for roller skating, skateboarding and bike riding – decorated in bright colours and checkerboard patterns – with free access, no bookings required and open daily 9am-8pm.



Image: H.A.N.D.S.

**Case study: Shade is Social Justice**

Location: Cambridge, USA  
Organisations: City of Cambridge

Cambridge's 'Shade is Social Justice' project provides artist-designed shade structures at recreational parks, including the Russell Field Playground where Alejandro Saldarriaga's netted 'Growing Shade' provides shade and seating for active recreation.<sup>70</sup>



Image: City of Cambridge

**Case study: Superkilen park**

Location: Copenhagen, Denmark  
Organisations: City of Copenhagen, BIG, Topotek1, Superflex

Copenhagen's unique Superkilen park is programmed into three colour-coded zones – red for market, culture and sport, black for an urban living room, and green for sport, picnics and sunbaking. It deliberately breaks down the rules around how games are played, allowing people to skateboard, play basketball or sit on a court, or play table tennis or train at a boxing bag alongside a cycle track, without prescriptive lines on the ground.



Image: City of Copenhagen



**Case study: A8ernA community play area**

Location: Koog aan de Zaan, The Netherlands  
 Organisations: Zaanstad Municipality, NL Architects, Carve

The A8ernA community play area, under a motorway bridge, resulted from conversion of a run-down old car park. It now includes skateboarding park, breakdance stage, table tennis, small football pitch, basketball court and benches, as well as a mini-marina and marketplace.



Image: Global Designing Cities Initiative



Image: CIFE

**Case study: Kai Tak Sports Park**

Location: Kowloon City, Hong Kong  
 Organisations: Chow Tai Fook Enterprises, HSBC, Populous, Arup, ADI

Kai Tak Sports Park, delivered through a public-private partnership and built on a former airport site, anchors a broader precinct, providing space for weekend markets, community sport and open-air cultural events, backed with long-term operational governance and robust public space design.



Image: Peter Pichler Architecture

**Case study: Looping Towers**

Location: Maarsse, The Netherlands  
 Organisations: Peter Pichler Architecture

This figure-of-eight development is planned for Maarsse, near Utrecht. Known as Looping Towers, it will include 260 duplex apartments in two residential towers connected by a rooftop running track. The project is expected to complete in 2028. <sup>71</sup>

**Case study: Miami Harbor floating court**

Location: Miami Harbor, USA  
 Organisations: Yntegra Group

This Miami Harbor floating court for padel, a racket sport similar to tennis or squash, uses recycled steel from shipyards and operates engine and battery free – being moved by boat and then anchored. It includes the court, protective fencing, light posts and a thin strip that serves as a platform for observers.



Image: Yntegra Group





Image: JAJA Architects

**Case study: Park'n'Play**

Location: Nordhavn, Denmark  
Organisations: Creative Denmark, JAJA Architects

Copenhagen's Konditaget Lüders – or 'Park'n'Play' – is a 2,400sqm rooftop park above a carpark. With minimal active recreation space at street level, the rooftop is publicly available with a flight of stairs that wraps around the building from street level, providing space for crossfit, TRX training, box jumps, Panna football, a 60-metre sprint course, trampolines, swings and a climbing spiral.



Image: Hyundai Engineering & Construction

**Case study: Punggol Regional Sport Centre**

Location: Singapore  
Organisations: Hyundai Engineering & Construction

Punggol Regional Sport Centre is a six-storey building with a 5000-seat outdoor stadium due to open in 2026. It includes swimming complex with five pools, indoor sport hall with 20 badminton courts, team sport hall, gym, fitness studios, sheltered tennis and futsal courts, water sport centre and archery field. It's part of Singapore's Sports Facilities Master Plan, which aims to provide most Singaporeans with access to quality, affordable sports facilities within a 10-minute walk from home by 2030.



Image: Miyashita Park

**Case study: Miyashita Park**

Location: Shibuya, Japan  
Organisations: Shibuya City, Mitsui Fudosan, SEIBU Landscape, Takenaka Corporation, Nikken Sekkei

Tokyo's Miyashita Park is a complex facility delivered through the public-private partnership redevelopment of a carpark in Shibuya. Providing accessible open space on the rooftop with an arched arbour canopy, the skate bowl, bouldering wall and sand court complement four storeys of hip, youth focused retail/commercial and an 18-storey hotel.

**Case study: Water squares**

Location: Rotterdam, The Netherlands  
Organisations: De Urbanisten / City of Rotterdam / Grain Collective

Rotterdam's 'water squares' at Bellamyplein, Bentemplein and Tiel are an example of flood-adaptive sports fields.<sup>73</sup> They were designed for games and recreational activities with layouts that change depending on climate conditions, collecting rainwater and preventing flooding.

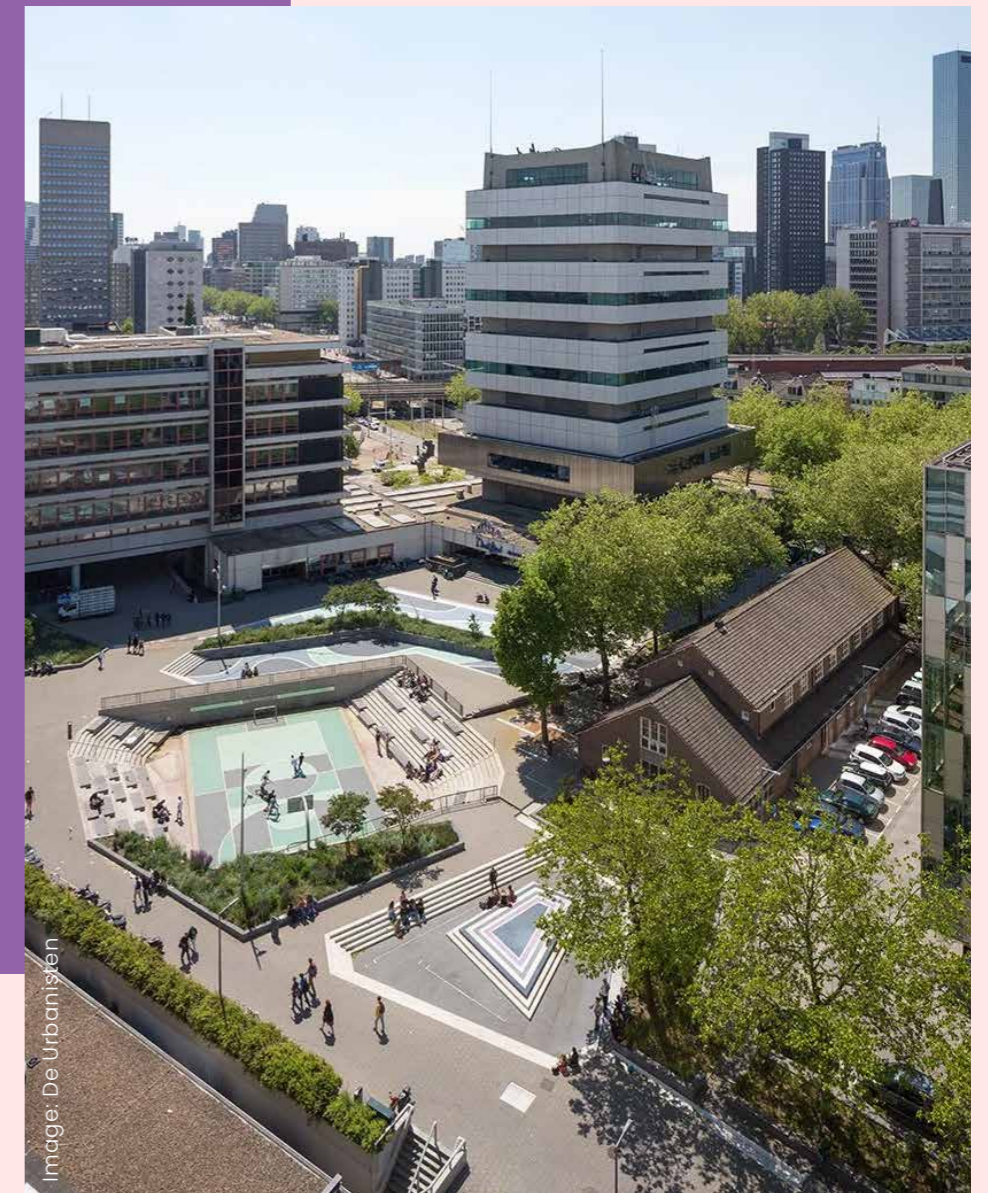


Image: De Urbanisten



**Case study: WSYD Moving**

Organisation: WSYD Moving

WSYD Moving fosters collaboration and partnership, with a collective vision to reduce physical inactivity across Western Sydney. Modelled on Manchester Moving, the health promotion charity is built around Local Active Partnerships, place-based networks that bring together local organisations, community groups, sport clubs and others.

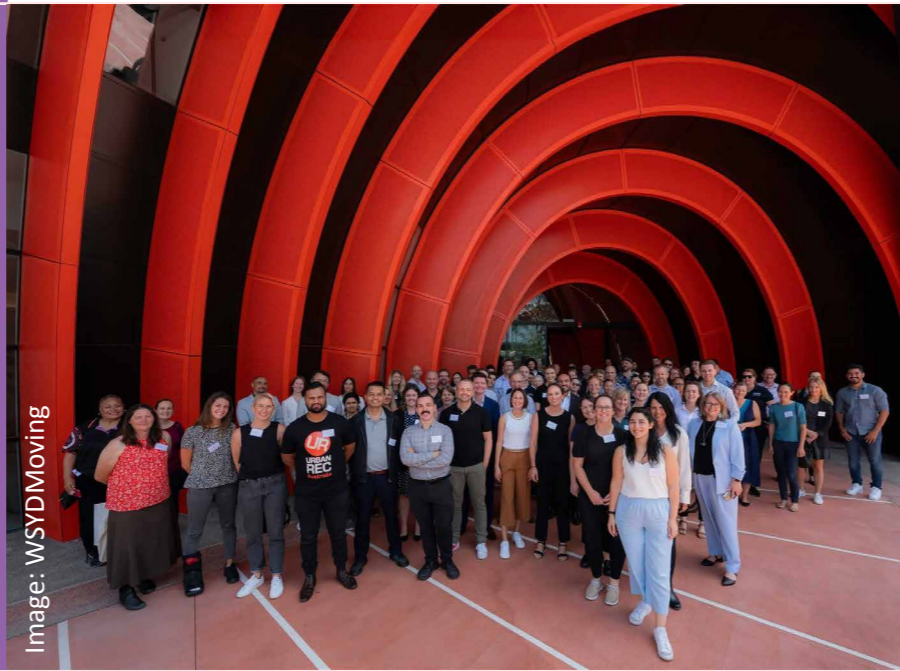


Image: WSYD Moving



Image: LYCS Architecture

**Case study: Primary school sport facilities**

Location: Taizhou, China  
Organisations: LYCS Architecture

This primary school built sport facilities on the roof to get around severe space constraints. The rooftop has an open-air basketball court, 100-metre sprint track and 200-metre looped running track (half the size of an Olympic track). Three layers of protective barriers guarantee children's safety, with spring cushions beneath the track to provide a sound barrier.



Image: Sportsbox

**Case study: SportsBox**

Equipment system Sportsbox is designed to get more people moving by providing free access sports gear in local parks, recreation centres, courts and sports fields.[i] The solar-powered lockers are stocked with equipment for 50+ activities, tailored to local areas with accessible, culturally relevant and gender-specific gear. Access is via an app, with usage tracked using a cloud-based management system. Smaller community programs include the City of Monash's Sports Locker program.[ii]

**Case study: Rooftop sport facility**

Location: Singapore  
Organisations: Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority, Sport Singapore

This carpark rooftop is being converted into a sport facility, with a 200-metre running track and sheltered multi-use courts for badminton, table tennis and a mezzanine events space. Singapore's Sport in Precinct program aims to activate genuinely underused infrastructure with sports amenities at no cost to residents.



Image: Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority



Image: Triathlon NSW

**Case study: Finish Lines Not Finish Times**

Organisations: Triathlon NSW, Office of Sport NSW

Triathlon NSW’s ‘Finish Lines Not Finish Times’ program addresses the surprising demographics of triathlons: girls and boys participate in similar numbers, but those who rejoin later in life are almost all men. Rough beach swims are moved to a calmer bay, borrowed bikes are arranged with maintenance lessons, and competitors stay on to cheer the final finisher.



Image: St Peters Parkrun

**Case study: ParkRun**

Organisation: ParkRun

ParkRun has expanded quickly since its first Sydney event – at Sydney Park, St Peters, in 2012 – with 33 different groups now organising 5 kilometre community runs each Saturday morning across metropolitan Sydney.

**Case study: Twilight Women’s Cricket League**

Organisations: Cricket NSW, Office of Sport NSW

The ‘Twilight Women’s Cricket League’ was designed to attract more women and girls by addressing barriers: shorter games (1.5 hours, around half a typical club match), shorter seasons (eight-week blocks), easier to get a team together (eight-a-side), simple website and booking system, with a coordinator who brings the gear, and games self-organised on WhatsApp. Women may not want to sign up for a season of cricket – or can’t due to other responsibilities like work or caring – but they will engage if there’s a product that’s more flexible to their needs.”



Image: Cricket NSW



Image: Georges River Council

**Case study: Skate, break and build**

Location: Penshurst

Organisation: Georges River Council

The two-day ‘Skate, break and build’ event at Olds Park Skate Park, Penshurst, was timed for the Paris Olympics skateboarding finals. With the new park designed to provide sporting facilities for all users, including women, girls and people with disabilities, and a trial of extended lighting (7-9:45pm) to extend access and ensure safety. Temporary events delivered de facto community consultation, co-design and activation.





### Case study: Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Location: Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, UK  
Organisations: Arup, Applied Information Group

The updated design guide for Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, which guides design decisions across the parklands, incorporated 'secured by design' principles with visible, direct routes and clear, intuitive signage and wayfinding. The aim here is enabling different communities (such as women and girls or neurodivergent people) to easily navigate to and from facilities, with sightlines that avoid hidden corners or dead ends.



Image: Bayside Council

### Case study: Botany Golf Club

Location: Broadmeadow  
Organisations: Bayside Council

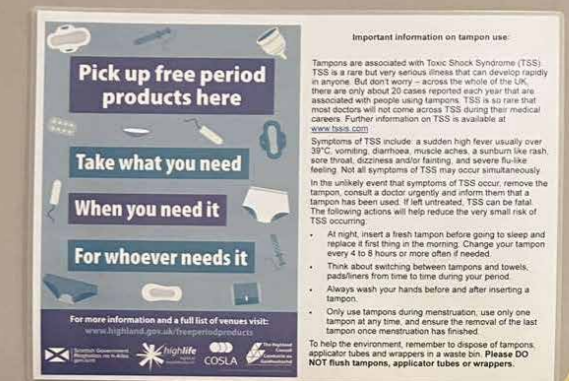
When Botany Golf Club's management collapsed, Bayside Council moved operations in house shifting the nine-hole course from a member-based model to pay-to-play, prioritising inclusion across ages and abilities. It's attracted more social groups, layovers from Sydney Airport, younger players, ladies' groups, and Friday afternoon tradies.

### Case study: Scotland's Period Products Act

Location: Scotland  
Organisations: Scottish Parliament

Scotland's Period Products Act<sup>74</sup> – the world's first legislation requiring public institutions to provide free menstrual products – should be replicated in publicly funded sport facilities here.

Clubs should play a direct role, embedding menstrual health literacy in coach accreditation would equip coaches to adjust training loads and respond appropriately, rather than interpreting absence or reduced effort as lack of commitment. Treating period-related absence equivalently to illness would immediately remove a real deterrent.



### Case study: 50 per cent levy

Location: Hong Kong  
Organisations: Our Hong Kong Foundation

Hong Kong legislation allows betting on football with a 50 per cent levy on revenue returned to the community under a license to the Hong Kong Jockey Club, and a new bill proposes to add basketball. Proceeds go to general revenue, but a local think tank has proposed directing 2 per cent of funds to sports infrastructure.



Image: Arup/Applied Information Group



## Strategies best practice

Three best practice strategies for boosting participation in sport and active recreation, delivering necessary sport facilities, and coordinating cross-government efforts.

### England – Uniting the Movement (Sport England, 2021–2031)



Building on the 2015 Sporting Future strategy, which reshaped the way sport is funded, coordinated and supported, this repositions Sport England as a cross-government actor. Includes a commitment to building partnerships and a common purpose across government, and to keep building evidence showing the links between the issues the nation cares about, including preventative health, wellbeing, education and planning, and the impact of sport and physical activity. Effort and investment are targeted to communities and people that need it most.

### Singapore – Vision 2030 / ActiveSG (Sport Singapore, 2012–present)



Singapore's cross-government model shares responsibility between the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, Sport Singapore and Ministry of Education. A standout mechanism is the use of credits to drive participation: as of September 2025, more than 1.1 million members had claimed SG60 ActiveSG credits (a one-off \$100 government top-up), with more than 40 per cent having used their credits on at least one transaction. The Sport Facilities Master Plan works to ensure Singaporeans have convenient access to affordable public sports facilities close to home: innovative, affordable and accessible public facilities; placemaking that provides common spaces to bond, participate in sport and rally behind local sporting heroes; and effective and efficient use of resources through intensifying land-use, rationalising sports facilities, and unlocking the value of other publicly funded facilities by making them more accessible. The Dual-Use Scheme opens school facilities – indoor sports halls and fields – to the public on weekend afternoons and evenings, effectively doubling the utility of existing education infrastructure for community sport.

### Norway – Joy of Sport for All (Ministry of Culture / Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports, ongoing)



Norwegian sport policy aims for everyone to have the opportunity to participate in sport or self-organised physical activities. The state funds sport facilities and supports voluntary organisations, justifying this through health, education and culture benefits. A cross-sector instrument, the Declaration of Leisure (Fritidserklæringen), between municipalities, the voluntary sector and federal government, ensures all children, regardless of social and financial situation, can participate regularly in at least one organised recreational activity. Public funding for sport is drawn from 64 per cent of gaming proceeds from the national lottery and sports betting mechanism, Norsk Tipping – approximately US \$400 million annually for new projects. Crucially, these funds sit outside the annual parliamentary budget negotiation, giving sport funding long-term stability, and underpinning one of the world's densest networks of community sport facilities. Facilities are required to meet universal design requirements encouraging usability for all people, with and without disabilities.

### NSW – Everyone Plays Here (Office of Sport NSW, 2024–2028)



This plan signals an aspiration to whole-of-government coordination, with a strong equity agenda aiming for increased participation by underrepresented groups including women and girls, multicultural communities, people with disability, First Nations people and the LGBTQIA+ community supported by dedicated sub-strategies. In comparison with the three international strategies, the most striking gap for Sydney and NSW is funding stability and cross-government integration. Norway's ringfenced lottery model and Singapore's integrated agency structure both solve problems that NSW is struggling with – how to give sport infrastructure planning long-term certainty and how to formally embed sport outcomes into decisions made by the larger health, education, transport and planning departments. The emerging risk for Sydney is that the NSW Government's Low and Midrise Housing and Transport Oriented development programs, layered on top of an already documented facility shortfall, create a growing risk that is not yet reflected in strategic responses of government. This is the clearest gap relative to Singapore's model, where facility provision is planned and funded in advance of population growth rather than in response to it.



# Next steps

**For Sydney to address the challenges this report identifies and learn from best practices emerging here and internationally will take action across seven interconnected areas. Together they form a framework for transforming not just individual failure points, but the system as a whole.**

**This is what we need to do next, and the focus for our sport program from here.**

## **Switch the focus from pathways to participation – reorient the sector’s culture and funding toward the broad base of everyday players**

For decades, sport administrators have been trying to fix participation, but putting the focus on end behaviours cannot and will not change a system in which the incentives and cultural norms are geared to progression towards ever higher performance rather than retention and engagement of new participants. To encourage lifelong participation, it’s the system that needs to flex, not the participant. That means addressing heavy time commitments and long seasons, costly fees and aggressive coaching. It also means rethinking what we mean by sport – recognising the far wider range of sports and activities, including disability sports, that Sydneysiders now participate in, and ensuring they are supported equitably. Turning this around should be the focus of public policy efforts, with fun and welcoming activities designed to engage new players and foster a lifelong passion for sport – with all the social, health and economic benefits that come with that.

## **Optimise the carrying capacity of existing facilities – extract more value from what already exists before building new**

Increasing the carrying capacity of existing facilities – sweating the assets we have by increasing the maximum level of usage, in hours, number of players, or types of activity, that a facility can support while maintaining an acceptable playing quality – can be an effective strategy for addressing facility shortfalls. This means addressing playing surfaces, supporting services, scheduling, community engagement and governance.

## **Mixed use, adaptable facilities for now and the future – design infrastructure that serves multiple activities, communities and time horizons**

Global case studies show best practice sport developments are moving away from single use facilities to hubs that blend locals and visitors, schools and clubs, councils and private operators. Best practice examples offer multiple options, with flexible spaces for emerging uses that can help mitigate shortages and improve utilisation and equitable access. Many embrace their role as dual-purpose climate infrastructure,

designed to address flooding, heat and other extreme weather impacts. Simple accessibility design decisions can also make multi-use venues suitable for organised disability team sports such as wheelchair basketball or powerchair football. They may have shared-use models that run around the clock, offering the potential for revenue stacking: memberships, day passes, corporate wellness, recovery services, food, events, community activation.

## **Design public places to encourage more activity – make the built environment an active participant in driving participation and community connection**

With activities like running, walking and informal fitness becoming a primary way people engage with recreation, they need to be deliberately planned and designed to handle higher volumes of use, with strong path networks, flexible spaces and the basics to ensure they are safe. The rapid growth in participation provides a unique opportunity to tap design, programming and policy innovation, taking care to ensure public areas are accessible to all, with particular consideration to ensure women



and girls, culturally and linguistically diverse Sydneysiders, people with visible and less visible disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ communities feel welcome, safe and supported to participate.

**Partnership and collaboration – replace fragmented, competitive effort with shared purpose across government, codes and community**

Despite the many great projects and initiatives underway across Sydney's sport system, we need to see more projects that begin with a consideration of the opportunity for win-win outcomes from partnership. Councils, schools, sports groups, state agencies, universities, developers, private operators and the many others in this system should be encouraged to work together, and publicly funded assets should be expected to contribute to a wider community benefit, including open space and sport assets held by universities, TAFE and schools – with the support they need to enable shared access.

**Diversified funding and delivery – reduce dependency on grant cycles and build sustainable operating models across the sector**

NSW is already recognised for its leadership on alternative financing in business cases. With public budgets under growing pressure, and high costs related to land acquisition, design, construction, operation and maintenance of facilities, alternatives include facilities or programs that are privately funded and operated, public-private partnerships, player or fan owned co-operative models, delivery through development pathways, lottery-funding, philanthropy and so on. Global examples show sport facilities offer real financial returns and societal benefits, driving urban regeneration and community development – particularly in growth centres where shortfalls are often most stark. Whether delivered privately, as public private partnerships, or mandated through development mechanisms and incentives, the focus should be freely accessible places where sport is well integrated into everyday city life, not just switching on for a few hours on match day.

**Data, impact and strategy – build the evidence base and strategic coordination that the sector currently lacks**

What effective coordination and impact reporting can do is ensure the powerful systems of government are working to support strong local partnerships that benefit communities. Sport and active recreation's positive effects as a primary 'social determinant' for physical and mental health, community connection, social cohesion and crime prevention, educational attainment, and other government objectives are undeniable. However, effective data infrastructure is required to enable accurate measurement and reporting on facility usage, participation rates and broader social impacts. There should be effective coordination throughout the system, with clear accountability for the results of the system – across government departments and agencies, councils, codes and clubs, schools, communities and others, all working toward a shared vision that aligns their actions.





# Appendix

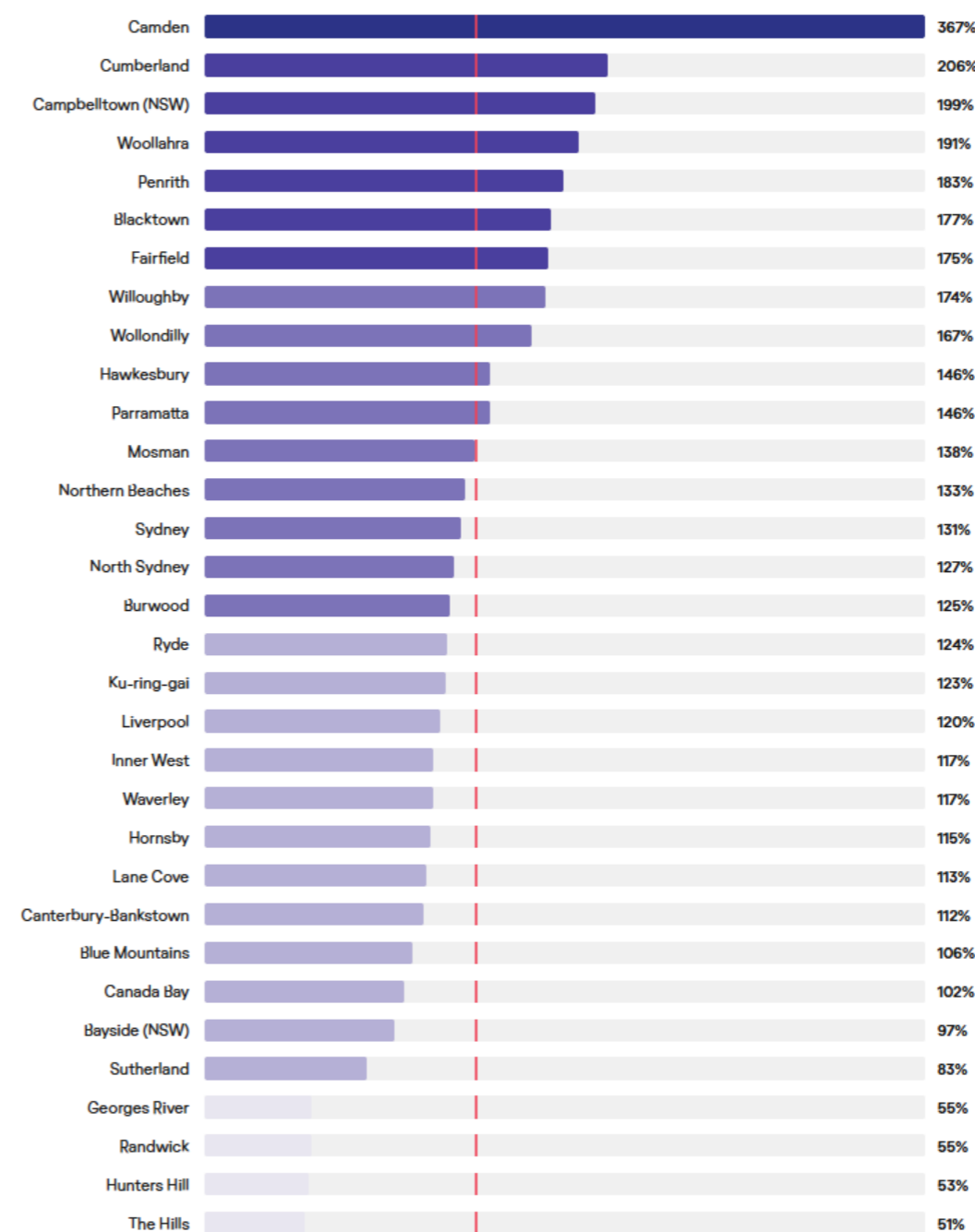
## Appendix 1: Public Sports Facility Provision by Local Government Area (2025)

LGA	2025 population	Count of facility	Provision per capita in 2025
Liverpool	269,621	52	1:5185
Sydney	239,927	50	1:4799
Bayside (NSW)	185,901	40	1:4648
Blacktown	450,524	102	1:4417
Camden	150,168	34	1:4417
Waverley	73,202	17	1:4306
Georges River	161,747	40	1:4044
Burwood	44,268	11	1:4024
The Hills Shire	232,495	67	1:3470
Randwick	147,920	45	1:3287
North Sydney	71,595	24	1:2983
Canada Bay	92,381	34	1:2717
Penrith	228,943	86	1:2662
Strathfield	51,268	21	1:2441
Woollahra	57,124	24	1:2380
Inner West	193,895	82	1:2365
Parramatta	278,461	127	1:2193
Canterbury-Bankstown	383,680	175	1:2192
Northern Beaches	267,907	126	1:2126
Cumberland	256,326	125	1:2051
Lane Cove	44,981	22	1:2045
Hornsby	154,397	78	1:1979
Mosman	28,680	15	1:1912
Sutherland Shire	239,689	131	1:1830
Ryde	137,278	76	1:1806
Hawkesbury	70,096	40	1:1752
Fairfield	213,483	133	1:1605
Ku-ring-gai	126,758	86	1:1474
Campbelltown (NSW)	189,548	142	1:1335
Wollondilly	62,759	50	1:1255
Willoughby	78,473	64	1:1226
Hunters Hill	13,679	12	1:1140
Blue Mountains	78,980	71	1:1112

Source: NSW Spatial Collaboration Portal; Planning NSW

## Appendix 2. Land value growth by LGA, 2015–2025

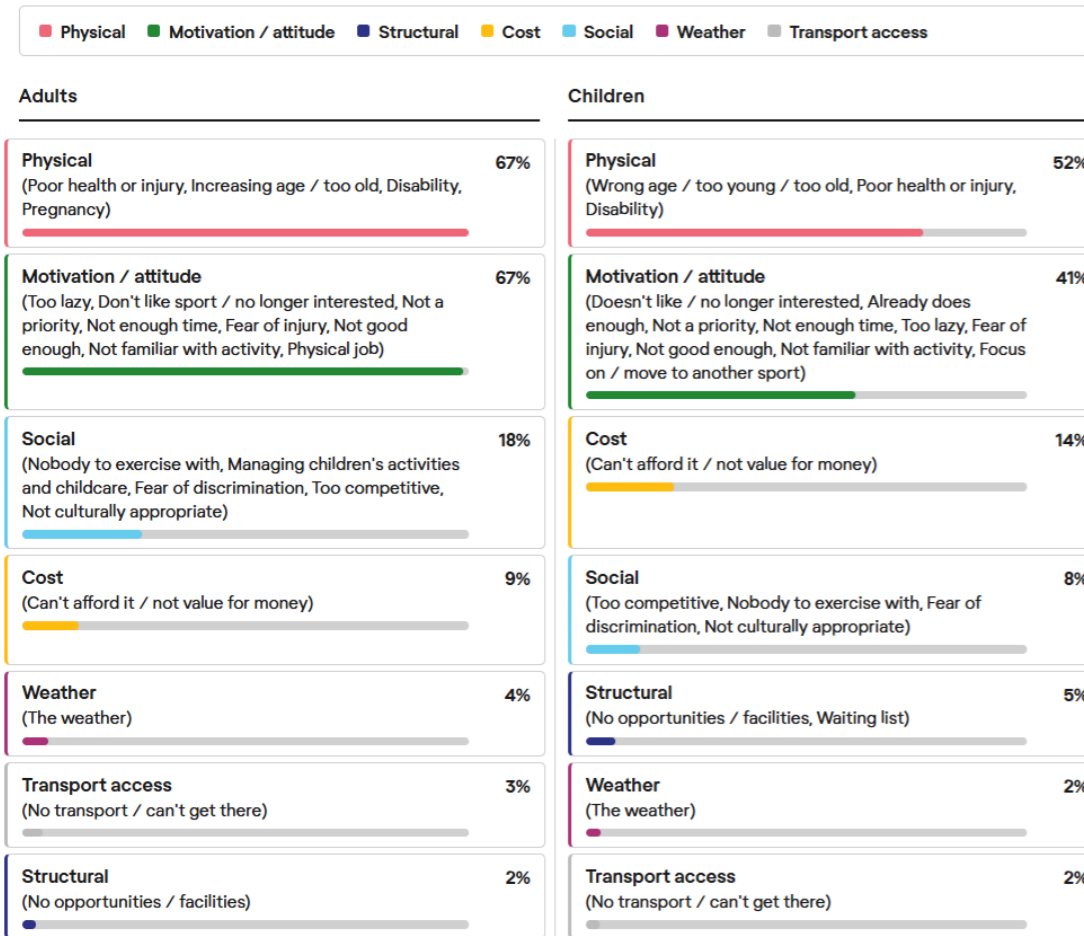
Percentage change in land value per local government area, ordered highest to lowest. Red line marks the Sydney-wide average (138 per cent)



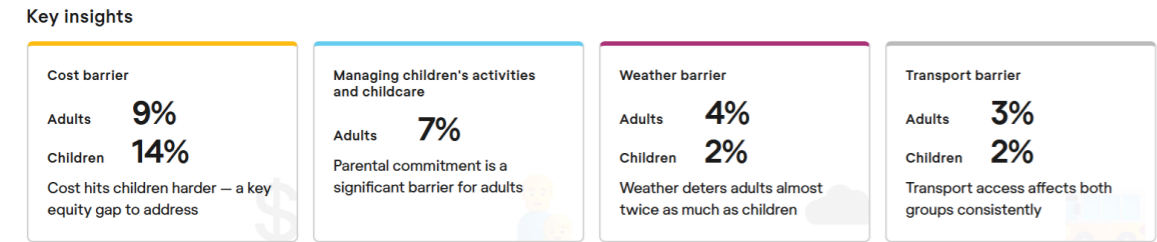
Source: NSW Valuer General, historical land values



### Appendix 3. Beyond physical limitations, factors such as cost and accessibility rank high as barriers to sports participation

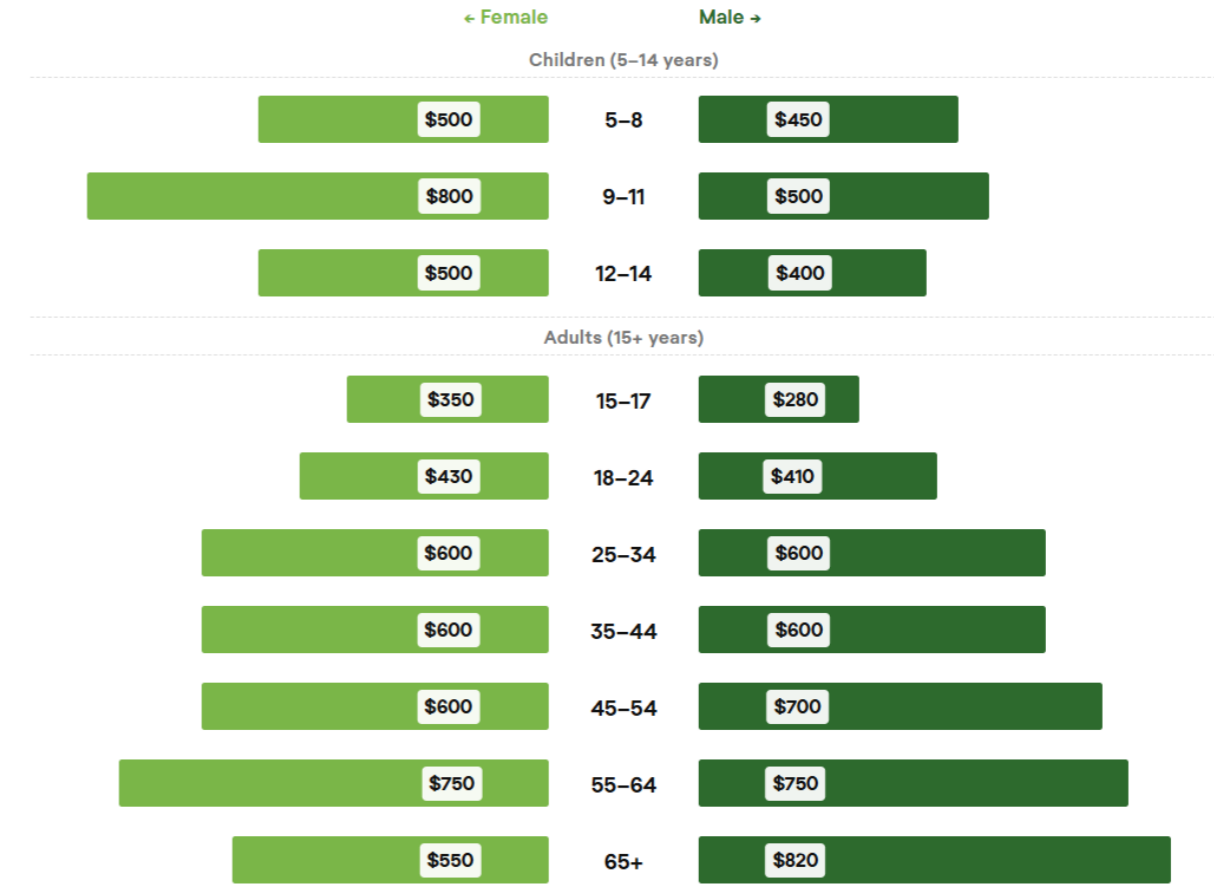


Note: Each figure shows the share of people who are not currently active and cited that factor as a reason for not participating. Respondents were able to select more than one reason, meaning figures within each column will add up to more than 100% and category totals may overlap. These figures should not be read as proportions of a whole.



Source: AusPlay survey results for NSW July 2024 -June 2025, excerpt from tables 12 and 13<sup>72</sup>

### Appendix 4: Spending on sport by demographic group



Source: AusPlay survey results for NSW July 2024 -June 2025





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