



How to engage older people in sport and physical activity

A resource for sporting, recreation and fitness clubs

This resource offers sports clubs, recreation and fitness organisations practical strategies and resources to encourage older people to participate in sport and recreation clubs and associations.

Older Victorians are living longer. The ageing population in Australia represents a dramatic evolutionary shift with the number of people aged 65 years and over exceeding the number of children by 2025. With a life expectancy of 87 years, the added years of life for many Victorians are lived free from disability.

There is sound evidence that physical activity improves the health and wellbeing of older Victorians. Being physically active reduces the likelihood of developing chronic diseases, some cancers and some forms of dementia, or delays their progression. Taking part in regular physical activity improves mental health, maintains muscle strength and flexibility, reduces the risk or impact of falls and retains independence. Physical activity, particularly through sport, recreation and fitness, also provides an essential opportunity for social connection, fun and laughter.

Despite these benefits, people in later life struggle to access appropriate levels of sport or recreation programs while providers often feel uncertain about how to support older people.

This resource aims to assist clubs to provide a welcoming, supportive environment for all people, and especially those in later life so everyone can participate in being physically active. COTA would like to thank Sport and Recreation Victoria for their funding and support of this work. We would also like to thank those people from the sport, recreation and fitness industry who provided valuable knowledge and helpful feedback in the development of this resource.

This resource could also be adapted to attract other ages and target groups to clubs and organisations.

Key Messages for Sports Clubs and Organisations

- Fun and meeting new people are major drawcards in encouraging older people to be part of your club
- Build relationships with older people
- Welcome and be hospitable to older people
- Physical activity improves people's physical and mental health
- Consult older people about their needs
- Sport and exercise does not have to be competitive
- Be flexible. Modify your activities to make them enjoyable
- Network with others to share your ideas and resources

Why sport and recreation clubs need to encourage older people?

People over 65 are the fastest growing age group in Australia. Many parts of Victoria have more residents over 65 years of age than children under 15 years. For sports clubs to continue to grow and flourish, they need older people. And, for older people, being physically active is essential for a long, healthy and happy life.

The benefits for your club in encouraging older people include:

- Your membership and supporter base can grow
- Older people are largely an untapped target group
- Older people are a great resource – they can bring a wealth of experience and skills to your club to assist with events, coaching, umpiring, administration, and business nous
- New faces add vitality and vigour to clubs
- Older people can provide enthusiastic, inspirational role models for younger members
- Team spirit is enhanced by a diversity of members
- Older people bring more local connections

For older people, being part of a club can provide:

- A great sense of purpose, essential for living a good life
- Regular physical activity which is proven to delay the onset of ill-health, aid recovery from illness and prevent some illnesses, including the risk of falls
- Being part of a club is an important way older people can stay connected to other people in their community
- Club life can provide a source of fun and laughter
- Physical activity helps people maintain their independence longer
- If an older person has an injury, operation or chronic condition, it is easier to recover or be rehabilitated if they are fit or have been active.

How can clubs attract older people?

1. Why do older people want to get involved in sport and physical activity?

Older people get involved for a variety of reasons. Understanding the potential reasons for getting involved will make it easier to attract older people

to your sport. When thinking about the benefits for older people to be part of your club or group, ensure you can provide these core opportunities.

- Meeting new people. This is one of the main reasons older people give for joining a group, so provide a social aspect with food as part of your activity
- Have Fun – another very important reason to play or participate
- Improving health / fitness
- Finding challenging and rewarding activities
- Being part of a team
- Reducing stress
- Reducing the risk of falls

2. Where do you find older people?

Older people are a diverse group. There is no one 'representative' older person.

Look at the demographic data on older people for your catchment area on the relevant local government website, profile.id website, or the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Consider the age range, gender, physical ability, socio-economic



status, and ethnicity of older people in your catchment. This information will assist you to target your advertising.

Make a list of the range of organisations involving older people in your community.

Is there someone in the club who has contacts with older people? Use these connections.

COTA Vic can offer links to older people in your community, or to other organisations that may be able to assist you in locating older people willing to attend.

You can contact your Local Council Aged and Disability Services Department. You can also try:

- Shopping Centres
- Library noticeboards
- Senior Citizens Centres
- U3A – University of the Third Age
- Life Activity Clubs
- Probus Clubs
- Community organisations
- Neighbourhood Houses
- OM:NI groups – Older Men: New Ideas
- Men's sheds
- Retirement villages
- Council programs
- Medical Centres

3. How best to communicate with older people?

- Choose your words carefully when talking or communicating to older people. Special attention must be given to countering any negative age stereotypes. Actively identify and counter ageist stereotypes that may exist in your club or members of the club. Ageism does matter
- Present a positive view of ageing and recognise the diversity of knowledge and backgrounds of older people. Expect and cater for difference in life experiences, values, skills, expectations, and capacities of potential new members. Make it clear there is no 'one size fits all' approach.



- Humour is often very helpful to help people to relax or identify with others. Although most people are now aware of the need to avoid sexist and racist jokes, the same is not true of ageism. Many damaging stereotypes are perpetuated in the name of humour. Ageist jokes are anything but funny
- Many older people are of non-English speaking background and participate more confidently in their first language even though they have functional English. Try to bring in a bi-lingual club member as a translator (brief them beforehand), and/or plan for people to communicate in their own language within a small group and then have one person from the group present the ideas in English
- Start by listening to the older person's knowledge, concerns, questions, values. An open ended question rather than a yes/no is preferable



4. How best to promote club activities to older people?

When promoting your club activities, use channels and formats older people are more likely to use. Always use positive images of older people to counter stereotypes. People do not see themselves as being targeted because they are older, so words like “senior”, “veterans”, “masters”, “elderly”, “mature age” and “older adult” can be off putting. Similarly the word “exercise” or “physical” may also discourage older people so be flexible. COTA can assist you by reviewing your promotional material.

Other things to consider are:

- ‘Word of mouth’ is the best way to attract older people
- ‘Bring a friend’ is another good personal approach
- Council newsletters can reach all households
- Posters can be hung where older people are likely to see them
- Leaflets give older people something tangible to take away and read. Ensure materials use a large font size, have high colour contrast, and that key information such as place, time and costs are easy to read

- Local letter drop – can be hit and miss
- Local newspapers and radio are a good opportunity for free publicity. Your chances of receiving media coverage are improved if you write a media release about a local person in a positive way with some photos attached. Get to know your local journalists and radio presenters. Local radio is a key source of information for older people, especially ethnic community radio for older people from non-English speaking backgrounds
- Television is great if you can attract the media with a good story
- COTA Connect, COTA’s e-newsletter, distributed fortnightly across Victoria, is a good vehicle
- Digital media including websites and Facebook are inexpensive ways for promotion. Ensure positive images of older people taking part in club life are included with clear links to information.

5. How can older people participate in your club or activity?

Consider how older people will participate. Remember, older people are very diverse. Some may not have done any physical activity since school, nor been part of a club during their life.

Others may have been in a club as a child, or supported their children's sports. Think about what part of the club might interest them, and how the club can support this particular person become more physically active. Some people may want to participate:

- In a social or modified sport, more like recreation than sport
- In a beginners group with regular coaching
- As an individual rather than as part of a team activity
- In training or practice rather than competition
- As a volunteer or spectator rather than a competitor
- With a range of other people whether by age groups, gender or culture
- In activities that challenge them in a range of ways not just physical
- By helping others to participate, or the club to grow

Tips to encourage older people to join your club or activity.

According to the ABS, participation in sport and recreation generally declines with increasing age, with a relatively large decline in participation in older people aged 65 years and over. However, while older people were less likely than younger people to have participated at all, those who did were more likely than younger people to participate regularly. So, once older people are part of a club, they will stay around.

It is essential to always remember the impact of ageist attitudes that might be present and unintended. Do your posters include positive images of older people? Are older people welcomed into the club as a resource and a strength? Is the language people are using, ageist?

It is important to understand what hinders older people from joining a club, group or organisation.





Here are some tips and responses to older people's concerns:

I don't have the time.

Possible solution: Cut back the number of games, overs (cricket), holes (golf), and time required to play the sport or activity

It is too competitive

Possible solution: Emphasize the social side. Modify the rules so things don't have to be competitive. Consider not keeping score.

I might get hurt

Possible solution: Find out about the person's sports history. Let them know how much more aware sports clubs are now of injury prevention and management. Ensure activities are safe or can be modified. Explain to potential players that they can play safely at their own level. It may be best if the potential player checks with his or her doctor before starting

I don't have transport

Possible solution: Consider car-pooling, or create travel buddies. Is there another member who can pick up the person and take him or her to the activity? Is public transport near-by? Provide public

transport options with maps to assist people get to the venue. Change the time to allow people to travel by public transport.

I can't afford the cost

Possible solution: Don't request a registration fee at the start, and consider regular payments rather than a yearly fee. Remember, older people are more likely to be regular attendees. Offer free sessions, discounts for fees and easy payments. Do not insist on uniforms (except suitable footwear). Provide equipment or consider an equipment library.

I don't have good health

Possible solution: Emphasize the social side of coming to the club. Modify the rules. Is there something else the person can do? Provide examples of what the person can do that will benefit the club – no pressure. Let them know the benefits of doing any form of activity.

It's too difficult and I won't cope

Possible solution: emphasize the social side and modify the rules so it does not have to be hard. Make it fun!

I don't have the skills

Possible solution: Don't embarrass the player.



Make your club approach successful

- Convince people your club has something for them
- Visit older people's groups
- Have a 'Welcoming' person at the club follow up with newcomers – See 'Club Help' website
- Introduce people gradually – hold a special day/session for newcomers, involve members, volunteers or staff who will make the newcomers welcome, provide a buddy or support system for newcomers
- Ensure programs offered are actually safe for older people
- Ensure all programs offered include warm ups, cool downs and stretches
- Consider a 'child minding' service for grandparents minding grandchildren
- Network with other clubs and organisations to pick up ideas and share information, resources and support

Step by step guide to engaging older people into sport and physical activity

Provide a quality experience from day one, as this makes all the difference.

- The 'welcoming' person in your club or organisation should approach older people where they meet. The 'welcoming' person needs to explain what you can offer and the benefits
- Promote various ways for people to get involved – sport, activity, volunteer, administrator, official, coach or spectator
- Take along a role model who can relate to older people
- Provide examples of the sport or activity
- Encourage people to visit your club to see what happens there and how things operate
- Provide transport if needed
- Hold a special introductory session for newcomers at your club or centre to show the previous point. Include the activity. Encourage people to bring a partner or friend

Provide coaching, tuition and support so the person will be keen to continue. Speak plainly. Some sports jargon may not be understood and may need to be clearly and simply explained.

I am worried that I won't be accepted or fit in the group

Possible solution: Think about how the image people expect from a club. Reassure the older person that your club or organisation is a welcoming club for all people and that it looks after everybody. Educate the club or group's members to be accepting and supportive of others.

I don't like being intimidated by younger people

Possible solution: As above. This is often said when ageism is present.

I don't know about the sport

Possible solution: Promoting your sport in the right location or through the right channels to attract older people can create the awareness of your sport or activity.

- Invite the newcomers to visit again on the main day for the activity and see the activity in action. Meet some of the other participants and players. Introduce everyone involved. Get the players to talk about their involvement and what they get out of the sport or activity.
- Advise the newcomers that they can call on the 'welcoming' person or a designated person to answer any questions or give support
- If someone does not want to be involved, find out why and suggest an alternative sport or activity
- Arrange for members to link up with the newcomers each time they attend the club or centre in whatever role they doing – playing, volunteering, spectating, etc
- Allocate a club member who the newcomers know, to follow up with a phone call to see how they are going?

Case Studies of Ideas

Networking with other groups, sharing ideas and brainstorming is a great way to come up with successful ways to engage older people to sport and physical activity. The following ideas were raised and shared during consultations and discussions with sports clubs, leisure centres and fitness organisations across Macedon Ranges Shire, City of Greater Shepparton and City of Darebin. If you have other ideas and examples please share them or contact us.

Macedon Croquet Club

This club is already challenging other clubs to come out and play croquet. They have sent one challenge out through the local newspaper to the local "Over 60's Cricket Club".

Sunbury and Macedon Ranges Over 60's Cricket Club

This cricket club achieved a photo and article opportunity in the local paper promoting the club looking for new players with the caption "Bowl up, Seniors". The club also has an 80 year old role model who has a pacemaker who returned to cricket last year. He has to be reminded to slow down!!

"Tatstudio" Fitness Centre Tatura

A group of local residents at Tatura agreed that they needed a central point to collect and share information. They also needed a driver to lead the promotion of sport and physical activities in the town. The seed has now been sown and they are approaching people and groups around the town to start the ball rolling!!

Mooroopna Education and Activity Centre (MEAC)

MEAC run community programs for all ages. Last year they ran two events during Seniors Festival. One event was on Healthy eating which attracted 15 people, the second event was a "High Tea" which was booked out with over 100 people attending!! Types of food can be a big drawcard.

Mooroopna Cricket Club

The cricket club have started a "Past Players and Supporters" group to meet socially on Thursday nights and Saturday afternoons. The group contributes to funds around the club, raising money that will benefit the whole club, such as funding training lights so they can experience playing under lights. This has been a drawcard. They also have a newsletter that is sent all over Australia to keep past players informed.

Shepparton Croquet Club

The croquet club tried to engage new players by offering child care but were discouraged by the requirement for regulations and need for police checks on their members. When sharing this issue with other sports and leisure groups in the consultation, the other groups explained that they did not need to pay for the "working with children" check if the people were volunteers.

Northcote City Soccer Club

The soccer club has 200 juniors and the club realized that meant possibly 400 – 600 grandparents who could join in the clubs events or support other programs. There are now thoughts of a social walking group or exercise group for older people.



Preston Reservoir Bowling Club

The bowling club people were enthusiastic to work with the Northcote City Soccer Club to provide bowls activities to the grandparents.

The club will be holding a special exhibition day to promote their new bowling aid called “a bowlers arm” but were not sure how to promote it. The club has been linked with the Darebin City Council “Inclusion” Officer to promote the event. Clubs need to have the network and contacts. Talking and discussion can be very beneficial.

Reservoir Leisure Centre and East Reservoir Seniors Citizens Club

After bringing the ‘Centre’ Manager and ‘Club’ President together, it was agreed that the ‘Centre’ would visit the Club and provide some gentle exercise programs for the members. The venues are next to each other and this had not been done before.

Resources

- COTA Victoria
1300 13 50 90
www.cotavic.org.au
4th Floor, Block Arcade,
98 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne 3000
- Sport and Recreation Victoria
<http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/sport-and-recreation>
- Choose Health: Be Active Booklet – Australian Government 2008
- Club Help - <http://www.clubhelp.org.au/>
 - A community guide for inclusiveness
 - Ideas for modifying participation
 - Transport Support Strategies
 - Role Description of a “Welcoming Officer”
- Regional Sports Assemblies
<http://www.vicsport.asn.au/Membership/Affiliated-Membership/Regional-Sports-Assembly/>
- Sport England - <http://www.sportengland.org/sport-you/help-for-clubs/clubs/>
- Actively Ageing – A Resource for Masters and Veterans Sport 1995 The Hillary Commission