

Council on the Ageing Queensland

Response to *Queensland Sport Strategy 2025*

May 2025



Council on the Ageing Queensland

Council on the Ageing Queensland is a for-purpose statewide charitable organisation.

We are the state's Seniors Peak and Seniors Social Isolation Prevention Peak and work with and for older adults, advancing the rights, needs, interests, and futures of people as we age. For more than 60 years, we have worked to influence positive social outcomes for older Queenslanders.

We connect directly with older Queenslanders, their families, carers, and organisations, service providers, consumer advocates, special interest groups, and our federal, state and local governments. We engage with all of these groups to understand needs, aspirations, and priorities for older people in Queensland, and partner to achieve the best outcomes for people as we age.

Our work includes policy analysis, community education, representation, evaluation and research, community engagement, and cross sector collaborations to achieve systemic change. We deliver funded programs directly to older people in need and provide sector support to those organisations who offer aged care and other services to older people.

We seek to eliminate ageism and support healthy ageing and growth of age-friendly communities. There are many areas of policy development needed to achieve this – elder abuse, energy, social isolation and loneliness prevention, climate resilience and disaster preparedness, digital inclusion, health, housing, and transport are just a few.

Our vision is that ageing is a time of possibility, opportunity, and influence.

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Acknowledgement

*Council on the Ageing Queensland acknowledges Australia's
First Nations Peoples as the original custodians of this land.*



**Creating more
equitable access to
activities for older
Queenslanders that
improve physical
health and wellbeing**

Equitable access for older Queenslanders

With the number of older people expected to double by 2053, ensuring the health and participation of older Queenslanders has never been more important. We appreciate this opportunity to provide feedback on the *Queensland Sport Strategy 2025*.

We provide a response below according to the four themes highlighted in the discussion paper.

Making sport everyone's game

The Australian Sports Commission have outlined in their strategic vision¹ for the coming decade the goal of involving more Australians with sport at all levels with the key focus area of promoting and supporting inclusive and diverse sporting environments. The Commission outlined that, as part of achieving their goals, they would identify:

[...] the barriers and gaps to inclusion, equity and diversity in sport, to drive an agenda that demands change, setting national expectations and principles for behaviour, governance and safety and being the exemplar for these, supporting the wellbeing and safety of all people involved in sporting environments, [...] reflecting the rich diversity of our community by increasing recognition and diverse representation, and making sport accessible for all, creating quality experiences for participants at all levels.²

For older people, this means physical movement, having fitness goals, and participating in organised group or individual sporting activities keeps them, for example, connected, engaged and participating in community; reduces or prevents the risk of falls through building or maintaining healthy bones and muscle mass; and enable increased level of activities consistently as part of overall health and wellbeing.

Promoting participation throughout the life span and as capacities change, means that people are supported no matter their ability, capacity, geography and background to participate in ways that meet their needs, lifestyles and interests. Australia is a proud sporting nation, and Queensland a proud sporting state, we revere sporting skill and talent – now it is time to also promote and revere the benefits of community and grassroots activities and remove the stigma for older cohorts so they can participate in diverse contexts where physical movement is the focus.

Due to societal ageism, **assumptions are made about older people's capacity to participate** based on age or previous experiences (assuming limited experience). In addition, sometimes there are limited opportunities for participation in group activities that are non-competitive or less competitive, which means older adult cohorts (particularly those wishing to increase their fitness levels or participating for the first time), sometimes do not feel there are enough welcoming environments for older people.³

¹ Australian Sports Commission, Australian Government. (n.d.). *The Australian Sports Commission's Strategic Vision: Our Green and Gold decade of opportunity*. [Report]. Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and the Australian Sports Commission. https://www.sportaus.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/1070315/ASC-Strategic-Vision-to-2034_acc.pdf

² See page 6 of *The Australian Sports Commission's Strategic Vision: Our Green and Gold decade of opportunity*: https://www.sportaus.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/1070315/ASC-Strategic-Vision-to-2034_acc.pdf

³ We also observe that vetted referrals and resources for older people already experiencing adverse effects of limited physical activity or limitations to participation from living with changing capacities, disabilities, or managing chronic health conditions provide excellent information but not all promote or provide preventative information or steps on physical fitness and health.

The Ausplay data released by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC)⁴ indicates that Australians across all demographics have a preference to get involved in ‘less organised’ activities such as walking (10 million), fitness/gym (6 million), and bush walking (3 million) (which reflects the top activities at the state level as well).⁵ However, walking and bushwalk do not receive as much funding as other activities yet it is also listed as the most popular sporting activity across aged groups in the Queensland context.⁶

The ASC also highlighted the benefits to participating in more organised group activities which echo vital preventative factors for healthy ageing in older cohorts – social connection, a sense of belonging in communities, and development of leadership skills.

For certain cohorts of older adults, however, despite sometimes having potential access to low to no cost activities, they experience compounded barriers to participation. For example, in Queensland, nearly 1 in 4 carers (23.4%) are aged 65 and over, and 254,500 are primary carers, with 68.2% being female.⁷ Almost 1 in 5 older Queenslanders (17.5%) living in households were carers of someone else in 2018.⁸ Further, the Queensland Carers Action Plan 2024–26 was released in 2024.⁹ This plan aims to enhance support and recognition for the state’s carers, who number over 642,000 and provide unpaid care to individuals with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or age-related conditions.

Therefore, for older women, older carers, grandparents, and grandparent carers, for example, their participation is impacted, and they become at risk of poorer health outcomes if they are unable to maintain physical activity as part of their physical and mental health. These types of cohorts **require flexibility in scheduling of activities**, as part of recognition of their unique lifestyles. Other adults who are also impacted are those transitioning to retirement or gradually reducing workload to transition to non-paid work opportunities.

Therefore, we recommend embedding in the strategy and/or accompany action plans:

- **Promotion of lifelong participation through encouragement of physical activity across all ages and capacities by embedding inclusive, age-friendly sport and movement options into community sport strategies.**
- **Address societal ageism by celebrating and normalising older adults' participation in sport—particularly in grassroots, community-based, and non-competitive settings.**

⁴ Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, Australian Government. (2024). *Over 600 sports available to participate in: strive to be active in 2025 Australian Sports Commission (ASC) Ausplay data identifies that Australians participate in over 600 sports and physical activities nationwide* [Research update, 20 December 2024]. <https://www.health.gov.au/news/over-600-sports-available-to-participate-in-strive-to-be-active-in-2025>

⁵ Referencing page 4 of the discussion paper: Queensland Government. (2025). *What does 2032 mean for you? Discussion paper. Help shape the next decade of sport in Queensland*. [Discussion paper, 8 May 2025]. https://www.sport.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2038247/Discussion-Paper_Qld-Sport-Strategy.pdf

⁶ Referencing page 4 of the discussion paper: Queensland Government. (2025). *What does 2032 mean for you? Discussion paper. Help shape the next decade of sport in Queensland*. [Discussion paper, 8 May 2025]. https://www.sport.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2038247/Discussion-Paper_Qld-Sport-Strategy.pdf

⁷ Queensland Government. (2025). *Disability statistics*. [Webpage, 30 January 2025]. <https://www.qld.gov.au/disability/community/disability-statistics>

⁸ Queensland Government. (n.d.). *Health and social wellbeing – older Queenslanders* [Factsheet]. https://www.families.qld.gov.au/_media/documents/seniors/social-characteristics-fact-sheet.pdf

⁹ Queensland Government. (n.d.). *Queensland Carers Action Plan 2024 – 26* [Action plan]. https://www.families.qld.gov.au/_media/documents/carers/carers-action-plan.pdf

- **Prioritise investment in widely preferred activities such as walking and bushwalking, which are top choices for older adults but currently underfunded relative to more structured sports.**
- **Create more welcoming, social, and non-competitive group-based activities to support older adults, especially those new to exercise or returning after a break (due to life changes/transitions, health, or caring responsibilities).**
- **Develop flexible scheduling, local access, and low-cost or no-cost options for older carers, many of whom are women and face multiple time and caregiving pressures.**
- **Recognise and support older adults transitioning into retirement or out of the workforce, offering tailored opportunities that align with their evolving schedules and interests.**
- **Highlight the well-documented benefits of sport for ageing populations (embed in existing or new campaigns alongside other aged cohorts to further normalise ageing) e.g., fall prevention, bone and muscle health, mental wellbeing, and social connection.**
- **Ensure sport and activity planning accounts for geography, background, gender, and ability.**

The above recommendations will assist in creating equitable access across diverse older cohorts in Queensland.

An aspirational Games & more people in community sport

With the exponential growth of older cohorts in Queensland, supporting older adults' participation in volunteering is important. In 2024, just over 52% of older Queenslanders aged 65 years and over, volunteered, averaging just over 19 hours per month. Their top motivations included helping others (77.1%), enjoyment (47.2%), using skills and experience (45.3%), staying active (41.4%), and social and community connection (38%), which reflect the qualities found in community and group sporting, fitness and physical activity environments. However, barriers remained to volunteering particularly around time constraints, costs involved, health issues, and burnout.¹⁰

It is also important to maximise the legacy of the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. As part of the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland, Council on the Ageing Queensland made a submission which was informed by surveys from community and service providers and community organisations. We asked Queensland communities about their thoughts, ideas, insights into volunteering and the 2032 Games events.

Forty-six older adults completed the survey with the majority of respondents aged between 60 - 79 years (70%), and identifying as female (70%). Over half (53%) of respondents volunteered on a weekly basis, 15% volunteered monthly, 11% volunteered occasionally, and 2% had never volunteered.

Many respondents had ideas, suggestions and recommendations for local communities and councils for older adults and volunteering, and how the state government could leverage the

¹⁰ Queensland Government. (2024). *Older Volunteers in Queensland* [Webpage, 30 September 2024]. <https://www.families.qld.gov.au/our-work/seniors/older-volunteers-in-queensland>

2032 Olympics and Paralympic Games to support older adults and volunteering. What came out strongly from responses were **inclusive and accessible opportunities, provision of practical support, raising awareness, focus on recruitment, and recognition and legacy**. Specifically:

Inclusive & accessible

- Ensure volunteering roles are inclusive of all ages and offer positions suited to older adults.
- Provide training and skills development for all volunteers, regardless of age.
- Assign volunteers to sites closest to their homes to reduce travel burden.
- Offer shorter, flexible shifts to accommodate physical limitations.
- Provide roles that require minimal physical strain (e.g., ambassador roles, guides, information support).

Practical supports & considerations

- Improve public transport access and offer transport or accommodation support for regional and rural volunteers.
- Provide shaded areas, hydration stations, and rest spots to ensure volunteer comfort.
- Offer reimbursement or allowances for travel and meals to support participation.

Awareness & recruitment

- Create a website or database listing all available volunteer opportunities.
- Advertise widely across communities to ensure people know how to get involved.

Recognition & legacy

- Recognise and utilise the existing skills and experience of older adults in meaningful roles.
- Promote Volunteering Queensland's role in organising and supporting volunteers including their recently released *Seniors Volunteering* campaign and evidence-based resources.¹¹
- Ensure volunteers are properly recognised and celebrated, similar to the approach taken in *Paris 2024*.
- Develop legacy projects that continue to benefit older adults beyond the Games.
- Collaborate with organisations supporting older adults (such as the organisations funded to mitigate and prevent social isolation, advocacy organisations, peak bodies, or organisations that offer hybrid service delivery of referrals for healthy ageing, health, wellbeing, care options, etc.) to create structured volunteering opportunities.

In terms of concerns, some respondents reported feeling disinterested in the Games or believe volunteering does not belong in the Olympics. Others expressed concerns about age limitations by 2032, suggesting that long-term planning should consider the ageing volunteer population. Respondents also commented on importance of reflection and learning from previous experiences (e.g., Commonwealth Games) to ensure volunteers are valued and not sidelined.

¹¹ Volunteering Queensland. (n.d.). *Seniors Volunteering*. [Website]. <https://vq.volunteeringqld.org.au/seniorsvolunteering/>

We also received survey responses from 14 service providers and community organisations located across the state, and they conveyed that the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games present a unique opportunity for the state government to promote and strengthen volunteering across Queensland. Organisations and providers suggested **establishing long-term volunteering initiatives, attracting participation and creating a lasting culture of volunteerism in Queensland** through the following suggestions:

- **Establish a long-term volunteer initiative that extends beyond the Games, training and engaging volunteers for ongoing community service in various sectors.**
- **Use the Games as a platform to celebrate and thank volunteers, offering incentives such as free event tickets, public recognition, and exclusive experiences for dedicated volunteers.**
- **Consider requiring previous community volunteering experience for those wishing to volunteer at the Olympics, encouraging broader engagement in local volunteer programs.**
- **Launch community awareness campaigns, local seminars, and media stories to highlight the importance of volunteering and inspire more people to get involved.**
- **Develop a website or portal listing upcoming volunteering opportunities, making it easier for people to find roles before, during, and after the Games.**
- **Provide travel and accommodation support for volunteers from rural and remote areas, ensuring greater accessibility to Olympic-related volunteering opportunities.**

From these insights,¹² Council on the Ageing Queensland subsequently recommended that it was vital to **develop a ‘Volunteer Legacy’ program for the 2032 Games that engages older volunteers in ongoing community service**. Specifically, and firstly, ensure that Olympic and Paralympic Games planning processes include sufficient engagement with community groups

¹² Overall themes that came from communities, older people, service providers and community organisations included:

- Age-inclusive volunteering e.g., flexible inclusive roles suitable for older adults and takes into consideration any physical limitations), recognition of older adults’ skills and experience, and concerns about ageing volunteer population by 2032.
- Training & skills development (ideas around universal access to training regardless of age, ongoing skills development and support, and the requirement of prior volunteer experience).
- Accessibility & support e.g., volunteer opportunities to be offered close to home, improved public transport to enable more access to opportunities, and wheelchair accessible options in volunteer roles. People also suggested reimbursement for travel and meals, and support for rural and regional travel and accommodation (where indicated as appropriate for volunteer roles).
- Flexibility of volunteer roles e.g., practical approaches to volunteering retention including provision of shorter shifts, roles with minimal physical strain, and menial or low-stress tasks when required (when capacities or time commitments changed).
- Recruitment, awareness & information e.g., people felt there need to be wider promotion of volunteering opportunities via websites or a dedicated portal, and broader advertising and community outreach required. In addition, people suggested local seminars or media campaigns, and sharing information about what is required and where (so they remain well informed about upcoming events and opportunities).
- Recognition & incentives e.g., the need for recognition of volunteers similar to *Paris 2024* which would come through public acknowledgement and appreciation. The role of incentives and ‘perks’ such as free tickets to events, merchandise, and visibility and link to community through volunteer uniforms – seemingly small things that make a big difference to cementing identity in community, attracting people to roles, and keeping people engaged in their roles.
- Community & social inclusion e.g., programs that would promote social engagement but not necessarily in person (e.g., pen pal initiatives), collaboration with support organisations (e.g., peak bodies and service organisations that support older people), and ensuring legacy volunteering projects that are sustained beyond the Games period.
- Legacy & long-term strategy e.g., volunteer legacy initiatives, the need for continuous engagement in local volunteering opportunities post-Games, and applying the learnings from past experiences (e.g., Commonwealth Games).

to ensure existing volunteer supported services are not understaffed during Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Secondly, the experience that older volunteers acquire with the Games is able to be used post-events in their local communities through provision of post-games incentives (e.g., certification, recognition, free training) and connections to encourage older volunteers to continue volunteering in local organisations and community hubs. In addition to the provision of 12 months of networking support post-Games to connect Games volunteers with opportunities in their local communities, ideally for longer-term sustainable volunteer roles (e.g., mentors, educators, and representatives for their regions, communities, or interests) where they can continue making contributions with their recent training from the Games events which will assist community development and support local organisations.

Places and spaces

We advocate for age-inclusive approaches for participation. We outline below three overarching areas that we view as critical to enable participation across all aged cohorts, particularly older Queenslanders: heat and shade factors; physical safety and accessibility; and inclusive everyday environments for participation. and

Heat and shade factors

Extreme heat poses significant risks to older individuals, particularly in Queensland's climate. The Griffith University-led Ethos project is developing an in-home early warning system tailored to older adults. This system monitors heat exposure, identifies risks, and suggests effective cooling strategies, aiming to help older people live safely and comfortably at home during hot weather. A 2022 Queensland-wide survey revealed that while older adults are aware of heat as an issue, there is less awareness of its health risks, indicating a need for increased education and behaviour change.¹³

Additionally, the Queensland Heat Health Community of Practice focusses on building heat resilience across the state. Their *Building a Heat Resilient Queensland* event brought together experts and stakeholders to discuss strategies for adapting communities to rising temperatures, emphasising the importance of shade and cooling solutions to protect vulnerable populations, including older adults.¹⁴ Together, these initiatives highlight the critical need for targeted interventions to mitigate the impact of heat on older individuals, ensuring their safety and participation in community life.

In the context of fitness, sport and physical activities, **mitigating impacts of heat in indoor and outdoor environments must be considered in enabling greater participation of older adults.**

We recommend:

- **Raise awareness and promote mitigative strategies for the impact of heat especially during summer months.**

¹³ Griffith University. (n.d.). *The Ethos project. Heat health early warning system for older people*. [Webpage]. <https://www.griffith.edu.au/research/climate-action/climate-transitions/health/ethos-project>

¹⁴ Queensland Heat Health Community of Practice. (n.d.). *Queensland heat health community of practice*. [Webpage]. <https://qhhecop.org/>

- **Ensure investment in age-inclusive design including adequate shade in outdoor spaces through retaining and planting trees, adequate shelters, and covered pathways, and adequate cooling (air-conditioned and using existing natural breezeways) for indoor spaces.**
- **Use of existing spaces in local communities that are already equipped to provide mitigation of heat and/or adequate shade and prioritise use of these spaces for fitness/sport/physical activities.**
- **Create or retain dedicated spaces in local communities that can prevent impacts of heat to loan, hire or lease so community organisations and activity groups can access appropriate spaces for activities at low to no cost.**

Physical safety & accessibility

Queensland Walks has partnered with Zonta Club of Brisbane Inc with research support from the University of Queensland's Institute of Social Science Research and the School of Architecture, Design and Planning, to conduct the *Safe Cities Safe Streets* project which includes research reports that evidence 84% of women in Queensland feel unsafe to walk or run at night.¹⁵

Queensland Walks also advocates for a sustainable transport model where walking, rolling and strolling across all aged cohorts is number 1, followed by cycling, then public transport, freight and taxi, and lastly, private vehicles.¹⁶ They highlight that a quarter of Queenslanders do not hold a driving licence, and many people cannot afford or choose not to drive.

For older cohorts, a non-driving lifestyle is sometimes voluntary but can also be involuntary if they need to hand over their licence due to changing capacities or health conditions. **Driving cessation and more sustainable active modes of transport present an opportunity to promote physical activity through walking, running, cycling, scooting, for example, as sustainable and affordable forms of transport which can also be enjoyable and recreational.**

We recommend:

- **Increased lighting in established and new local parks to encourage walkability of local spaces especially for women and girls, people living with disabilities, and older vulnerable people.**
- **Promotion of active transport modes as inclusive for all ages and abilities (in solo or group environments) with real life examples or scenarios that show the benefits of engaging in these transport modes such as cycling, riding, scooting, walking, and running.**

Inclusive everyday environments for participation

Nationally and statewide we already have excellent initiatives that cater to diverse needs, capacities and interests for all aged cohorts. We provide below positive and successful

¹⁵ Queensland Walks. (n.d.). *Create Safe Cities Safe Streets for Women and Girls. It's a Human Right*. [Webpage]. <https://queenslandwalks.org.au/safe-streets-for-women-and-girls/>

¹⁶ Queensland Walks. (n.d.). *Prioritising people who walk*. [Webpage]. <https://queenslandwalks.org.au/>

examples from Queensland which make a substantial impact to healthy ageing in local communities:

1. The [Seniors Social Isolation Prevention programs](#) that are funded across the state to provide low-cost accessible activity programs to older people. Some of these programs have been running in communities for more than 30 years. The programs include physical fitness and recreation (in addition to interest groups, hobbies, crafting, music, etc.).
2. The University of Queensland's [Healthy Living program](#) where they support older adults aged 50 years and over to be informed and active in taking care of their health through physical, mental and emotional health.
3. The Brisbane City Council has the [Growing Old and Living Dangerously \(GOLD\) Program](#) which provides a diverse physical movement and fitness calendar of free or low cost activities to older adults who reside in Brisbane and greater Brisbane areas.¹⁷
4. The [50+ Fitness program offered by PCYC Queensland](#) offers fitness classes such as Move for Life, Zumba Gold, and group sessions focused on mobility, muscular conditioning, balance, and flexibility.
5. The [Queensland Government promotes Be Active](#) providing information on various programs, including walking groups, local council-run activities, and also promotes the Seniors Social Isolation Prevention programs.
6. The [Take Action - Physical Activity Directory by Queensland Health](#) lists local sport and recreation programs, including Brisbane City Council's *GOLD program* and *Get Active Gold Coast*.

We also include an interstate example from Tasmania as a case study of collaboration between state government, peak bodies, and health professionals. Tasmania have a variety of approaches and offerings to older people including the [Get Moving Tasmania](#) campaign, the Primary Health Network's [Exercise Treatment Program](#), the [Staying Strong at Home program](#) promoted by Council on the Ageing (COTA) Tasmania,¹⁸ and the [Smooth Movers](#) (Arthritis and Osteoporosis Tasmania).

Finally, we list notable organisations at a national level which also provide insight into differing levels of involvement and physical abilities including:

- The popular [Heart Foundation Walking Groups](#) which are often inclusive in terms of physical abilities and locations e.g., air-conditioned shopping centres during summer in warmer climates; prioritisation of even surfaces to reduce fall risks; proximity to facilities, etc.
- [Parkrun Australia](#) is also growing in popularity with all aged cohorts and often incorporates use of natural outdoor spaces. It is promoted as an all-ages activity, free

¹⁷ And examples of recent scheduling of free or low-cost activities for older people promoted on Brisbane City Council's website: <https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/events-arts-and-culture/what-s-on-in-brisbane/event-search?search=seniors&when=&free=false&type=Active%20and%20healthy%20events&ages=&suburbs=&status=&subtypes=&searchResults=true>

¹⁸ And the Staying Strong at Home booklet can be viewed here: https://cotatas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/09/COTA-Staying-Strong-at-Home-Booklet-2024-_WEB.pdf

community event, and positive, inclusive and welcoming. It also provides streamlined administration to join with members only needing to register once.

- A final example is the [Australian Masters Games](#) which is a week-long festival of sport that celebrates fitness, physical activity and social connections and which provides participants an experience of competition sporting activities.

However, to be more inclusive we need to strengthen recreation and enjoyment within the Sports Strategy which will ensure that those participating in organised and less organised recreational activities are receiving physical and mental health benefits from participation in these activities.

This includes promoting more examples of these types of activities so that all aged cohorts understand that sport does not just refer to higher-level organised sporting activities and can mean physical movement (dancing, tai chi, chi gong, yoga, pilates, lawn bowls, table tennis, squash, etc.). These **activities at community level are often inherently more inclusive and often planed for all abilities at local sites making them ideal options for older cohorts residing in smaller communities who cannot reach larger sporting or organised group activities due to disabilities, transport challenges or higher cost activities.**

Therefore, we recommend:

- **Increased promotion of existing successful initiatives, long-term programs, and grassroots initiatives especially for cohorts that are seeking to increase their fitness levels or meet health goals.**
- **Ongoing funding required for community activities in general but specifically those that have a record of success with wider benefits for mental and physical health and wellbeing especially for older people.**

We view the Sport Strategy and the upcoming Games events as a fantastic opportunity to showcase the age-inclusive and age-friendly fitness, sporting, and physical activity programs and initiatives that already exist in Queensland.