

Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

AUSPLAY™

Lifelong involvement
in sport

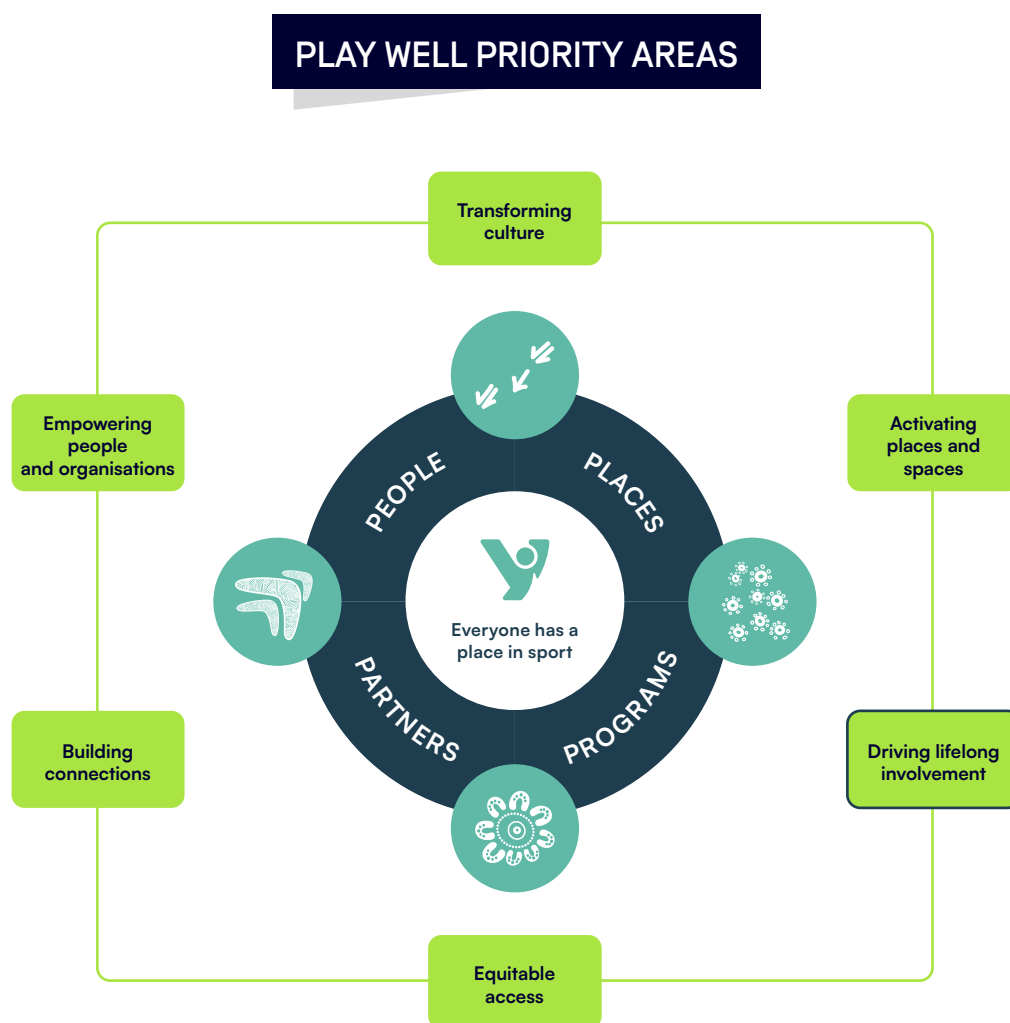
November 2025



INTRODUCTION

Sport is a powerful vehicle for personal growth, community building, and positive social change.

It is stronger when everyone's involved, and this is core to **Play Well – Australia's Sport Participation Strategy**, which was co-designed with the sport sector. The aim of Play Well is to create great sporting environments and experiences for all, welcoming individuals of all ages, backgrounds, genders, and abilities to access the benefits of sport.



At the core of this strategy, and one of the six priority areas of Play Well, is **Driving lifelong involvement** – Fostering a sporting environment that enables positive lifelong involvement in sport.

The ambition is to create an ecosystem which provides multiple entry and re-entry points into sport and facilitates seamless transitions between roles and sports and allows everyone to access the benefits of sport.

In keeping with this theme of lifelong involvement in sport, **this report presents data on playing and non-playing roles showing a picture of overall involvement in sport and how it changes at different stages of life.**

Most information presented in this report is based on data collected between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025 (a cumulative sample of 41,820 Australians aged 15+, which also includes data for 8,829 children aged 0-14 collected from their parent/guardian). Charts which include breakdown by demographic group are based on two years of data (July 2023 to June 2025) to maximise reliability of the results.

LIFELONG INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT

What do we mean by lifelong involvement in sport?

There are so many ways to be involved in sport – play with other people within a structure, participate in events, take part in sport informally alone or with friends or family, but also coach, join a club committee, volunteer in the canteen or contribute in a myriad of other ways that facilitate or enable sport participation.

Typically, participation in sport will evolve for any one individual with many people being involved in one or more of the above-mentioned ways at different stages of their life.

How is this information captured in AusPlay?

In AusPlay, the different types of involvement in sport are grouped into two main categories:

PARTICIPANT / PLAYER

Either:

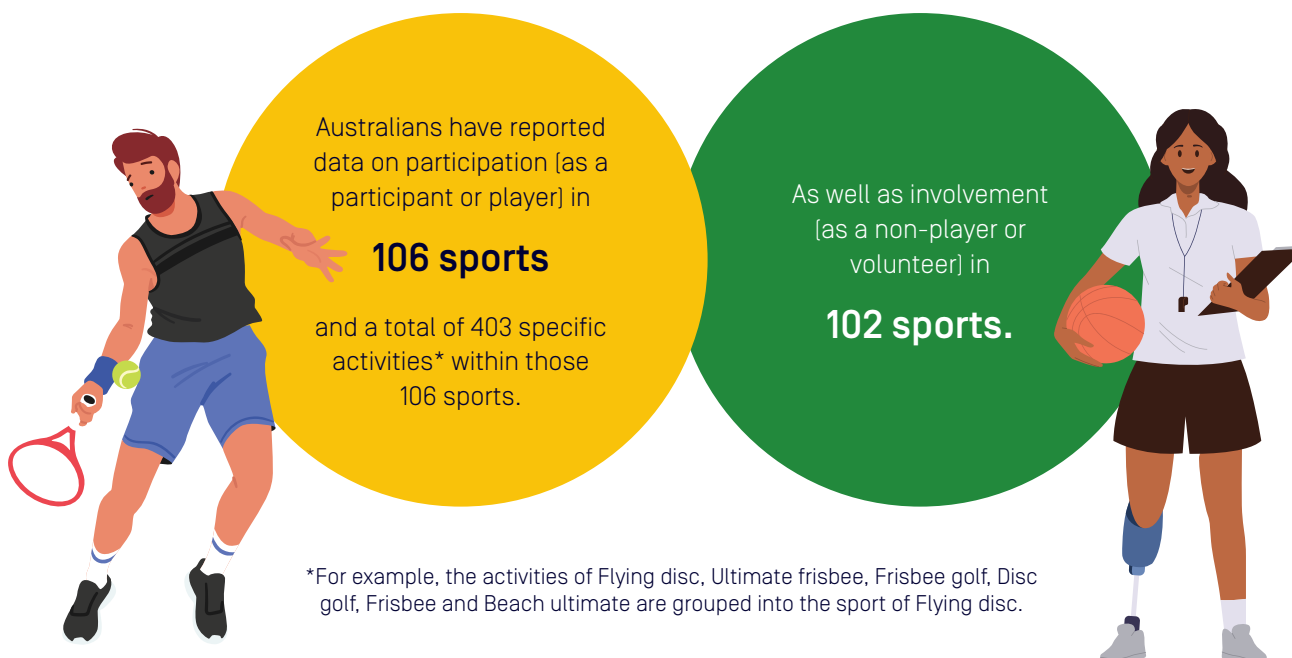
- Formally through an organisation such as a club/association or at an event (“organised sport”); or
- Informally with family/friends or alone (“informal sport” – only captured for people 15 years and older),

NON-PLAYER OR VOLUNTEER

Either:

- As a facilitator of play, such as coach, official, team manager or medical support person; or
- As an enabler of play, such as club administrator or committee member, driver or general assistant.

Additional information about frequency of participation is collected from participants/players only (for example, at least once a year, at least once a fortnight), not from non-players/volunteers.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report focuses mostly on participation and non-playing involvement in organised sport as a whole, with limited data on informal sport presented. This includes all Australians who reported being involved in organised sport in some way at least once per year. Data for participation in individual sports is limited to where a sport is represented in the 15 most commonly played at different life stages.

Unless otherwise stated, participation in this report is defined as being at least once a year (1+/year). However, many Australians will have participated at least once a fortnight (1+/fortnight), three times a week or even more. Setting the participation rate as at least once a year ensures we include participation in all organised sport, even if it is infrequent.

Other terms used in this report

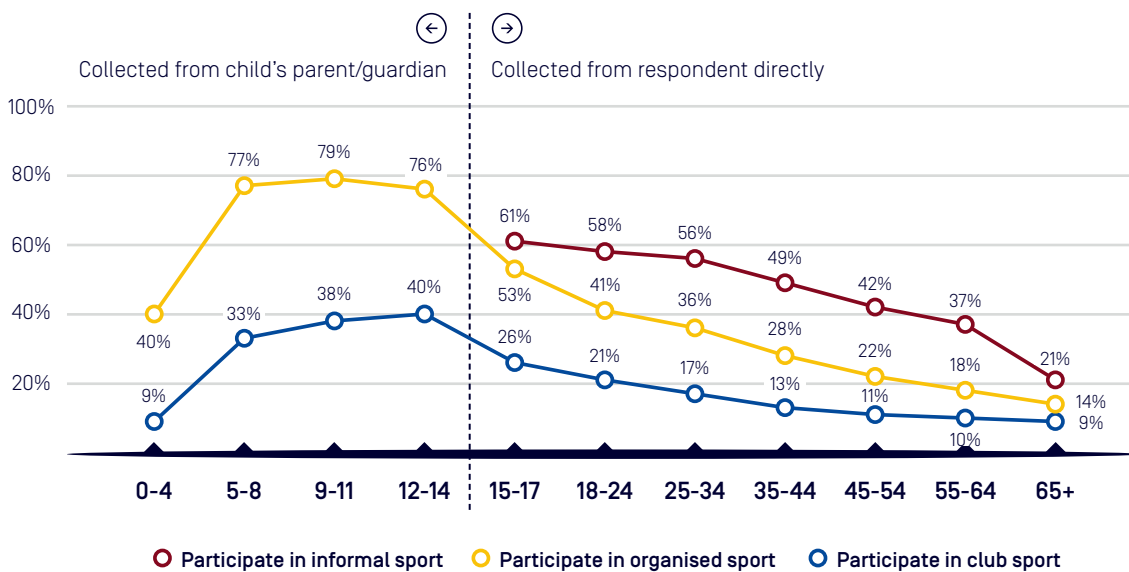
Sport-related activity	An activity that is typically associated with a National Sporting Organisation, e.g. Cricket Australia, Swimming Australia. This term is mainly shortened to "sport" in this report.
Non-sport-related activity	Any physical activity that does not have an associated National Sporting Organisation e.g. gym/fitness, yoga.
Organised sport	Sport-related activity that is carried out on a formal or semi-formal basis, organised by an entity such as a sports or recreation club/association, a gym/fitness club/sports/aquatic centre, a private or commercial business, a personal trainer/coach, an event, work, educational institution, community organisation or social group.
Club sport	Sport-related activity that is carried out through a sports club or association. This is a subset of organised sport.
Non-playing involvement	This includes all involvement in non-playing roles such as coach, official, manager, general duties, regardless of whether the person was paid or received other compensation for their involvement.
Volunteer	This includes those involved in non-playing roles who didn't receive any financial or other compensation, or who consider themselves a volunteer even if they were recompensed in some way.
Rate	Unless otherwise stated, participation or involvement rate means playing or being involved in a sport at least once in the last 12 months.
Estimate	The estimated number of Australians who are involved in a particular activity, based on the percentage of AusPlay respondents reporting that involvement. Note that as estimates are projected from survey responses, they are subject to margins of error (further information on margins of error can be found in the AusPlay Methodology report).
Australians	To be eligible for inclusion in AusPlay, a respondent needs to have been resident in Australia for the previous 12 months. This may include temporary and permanent residents as well as Australian citizens.
LOTE	Speaks a Language Other Than English at home.
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.

INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT AS A PARTICIPANT / PLAYER

Participation in sport through the life stages

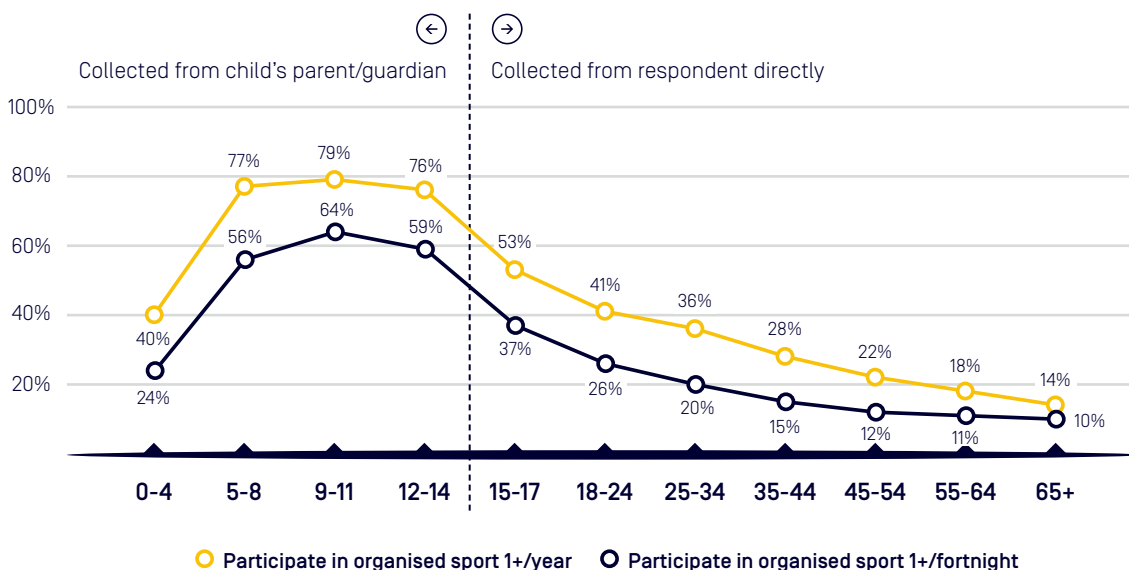
Organised sport is important and prevalent in the lives of Australian children, with participation peaking in the 9-11 age group. Sport club participation peaks slightly later at 12-14 years. Almost two-thirds [61%] participate in informal sport at 15-17 and from there all three forms of sport participation – informal, organised and club – decrease with age, but the rate of decline slows.

PARTICIPATION IN INFORMAL AND ORGANISED SPORT BY AGE: 1+/YEAR



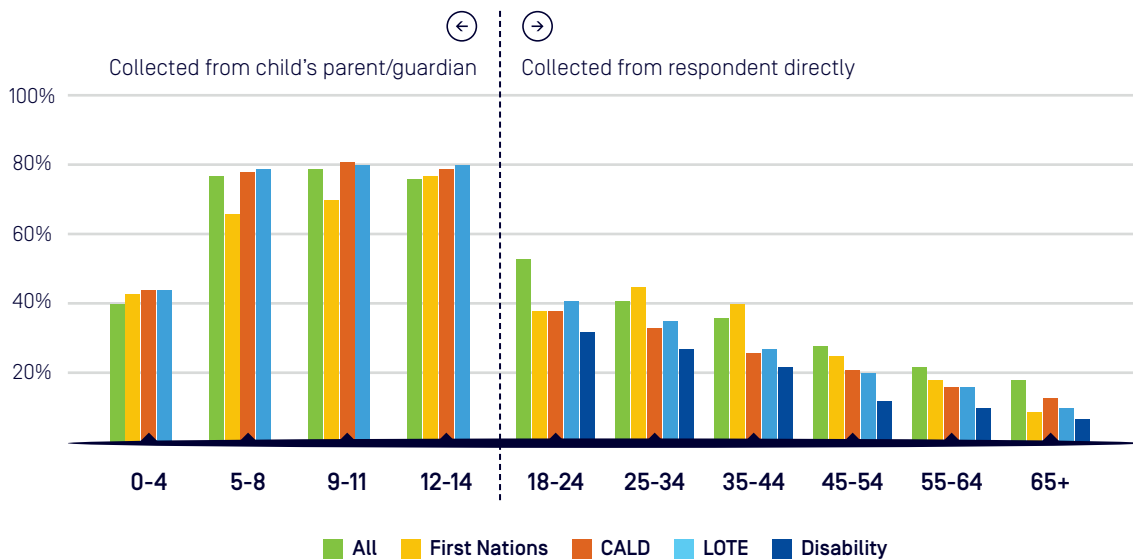
The drop in organised sport post 14 years of age is also present at higher frequencies of participation. For example, at least once a fortnight participation in organised sport peaks in children aged 9-11 [64%], begins its decline at age 12-14 [59%], and then drops to 37% at age 15-17.

PARTICIPATION IN ORGANISED SPORT BY AGE: 1+/YEAR VS 1+/FORTNIGHT



The pattern of participation and ages of peak participation are relatively constant across a range of demographic groups. Indigenous populations are participating less in their youth but more than some other demographic groups between ages 25 and 44 especially.

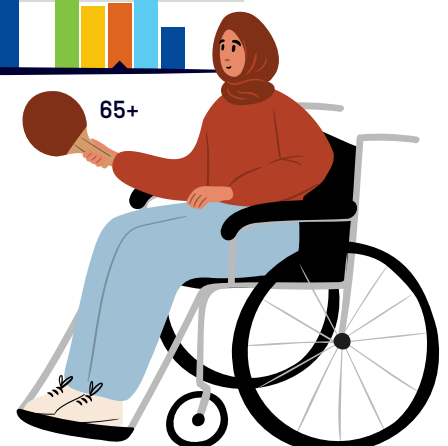
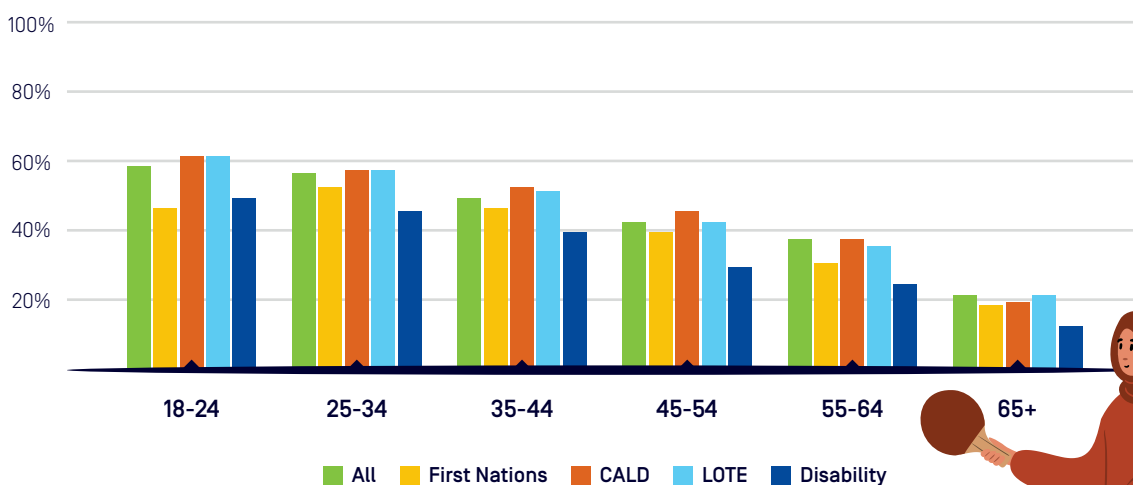
ORGANISED SPORT PARTICIPATION BY AGE AND DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP: 1+/YEAR



Note: Respondents aged 15-17 are not asked demographic questions that may be considered sensitive so are absent from this graph. Children are assigned to the same demographic group as their parent/guardian. Parents/guardians are not asked if their child has a disability.

Indigenous Australians are however less likely to participate in informal sport compared to the overall population, and especially in young adulthood.

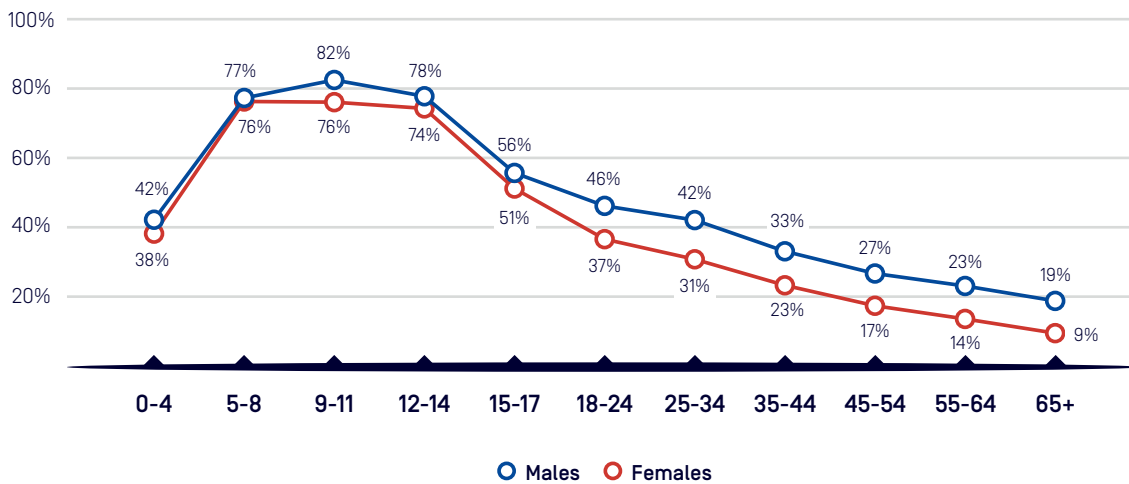
INFORMAL SPORT PARTICIPATION BY AGE AND DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP: 1+/YEAR



Drop off in youth sport participation

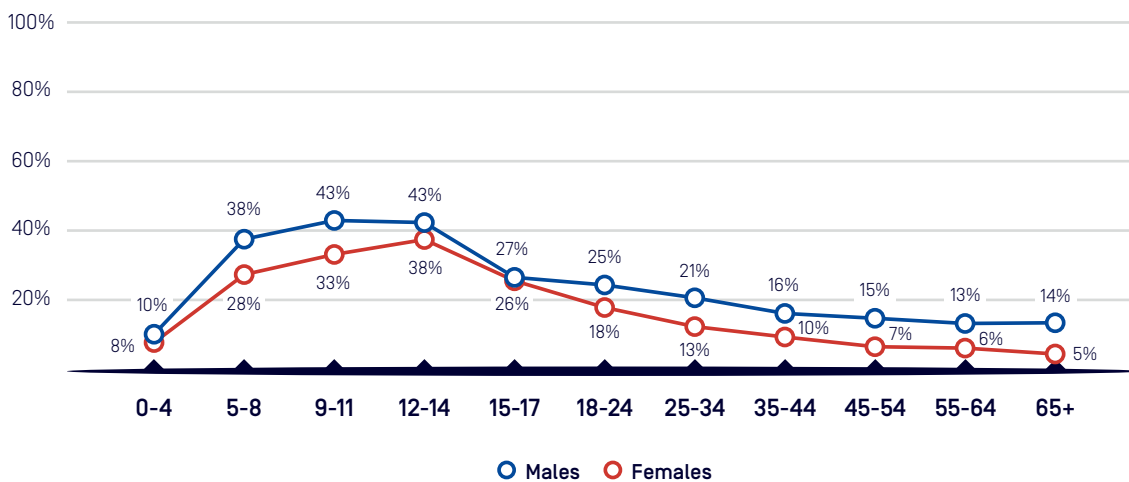
The data shows the ages of 15 to 17 years to be a critical inflection point for organised sport participation, and that the experience for boys and girls is very similar.

ORGANISED SPORT PARTICIPATION BY AGE AND GENDER: 1+/YEAR



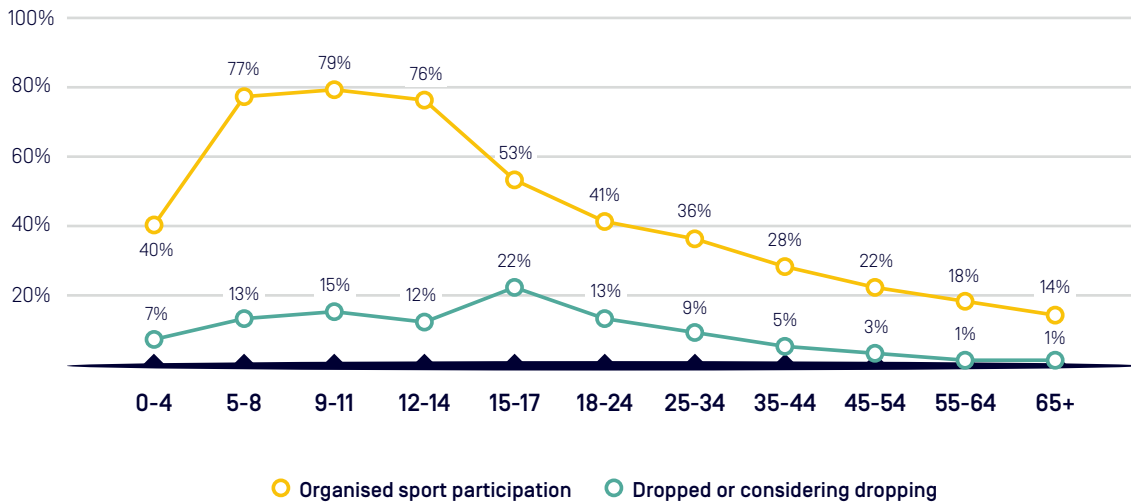
There's a similar pattern when looking at sport club participation in particular, although girls' peak participation takes place slightly later at ages 12-14, and coming from a much lower peak both men and women's participation drop off is more gradual over the adult years.

SPORT CLUB PARTICIPATION BY AGE AND GENDER: 1+/YEAR

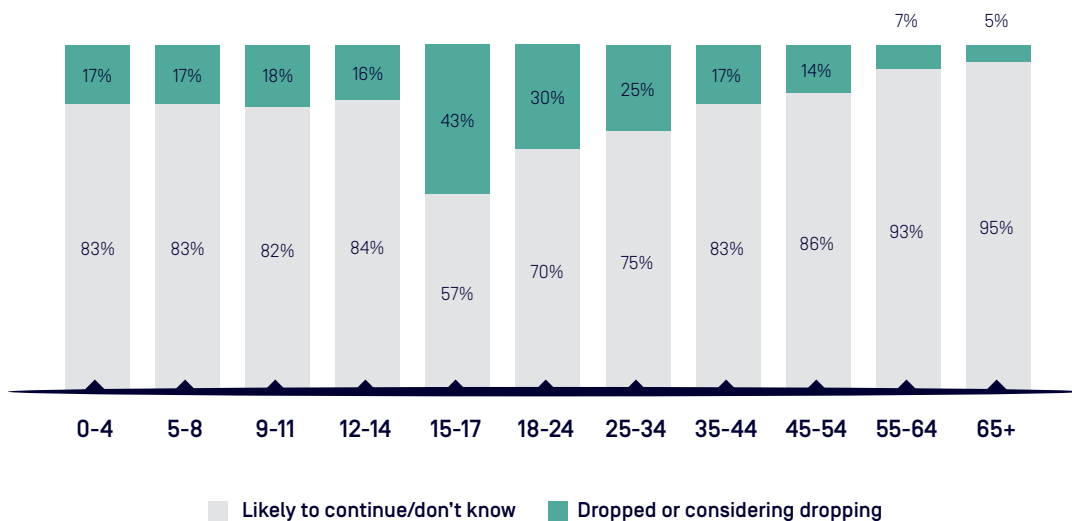


The retention challenge ahead of the sport sector is further highlighted when looking at the percentage of organised sport participants who have dropped or are considering dropping at least one of their sports, which is highest between 15 and 17 years of age.

ORGANISED SPORT PARTICIPATION AND RISK OF LAPSING BY AGE: 1+/YEAR



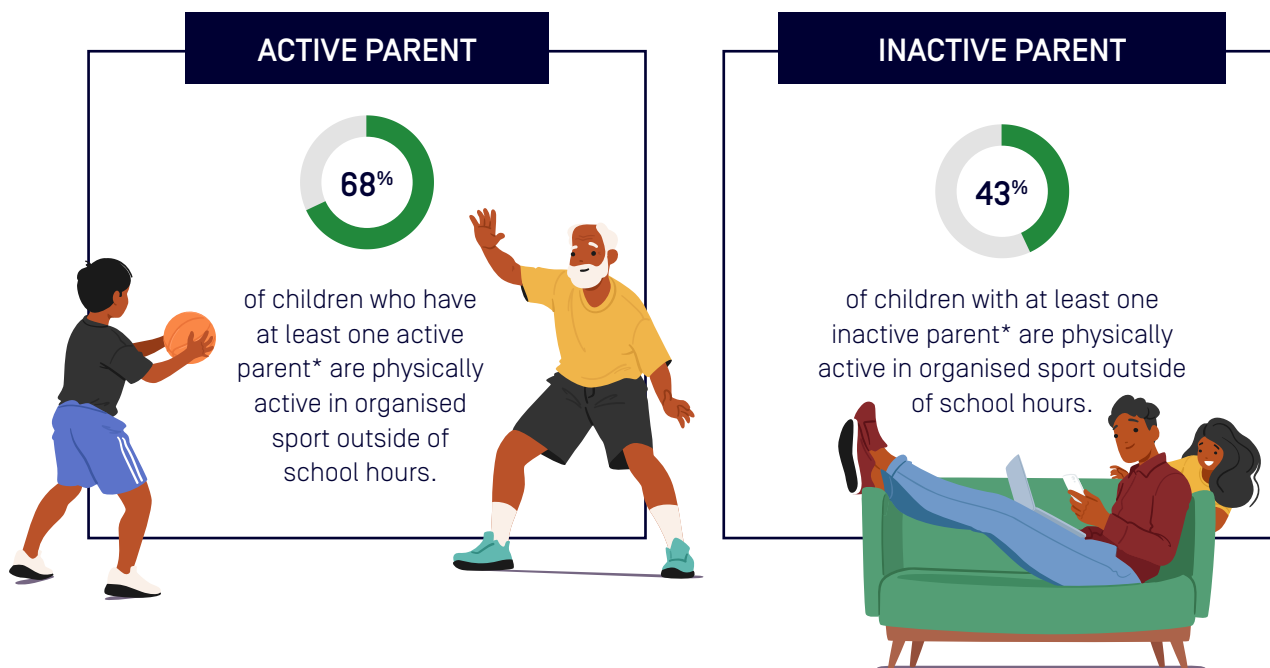
INTENTIONS AMONG ORGANISED SPORT PARTICIPANTS



Comparatively, while there are fewer organised sport participants aged 55 years and older, the majority of them are likely to continue.

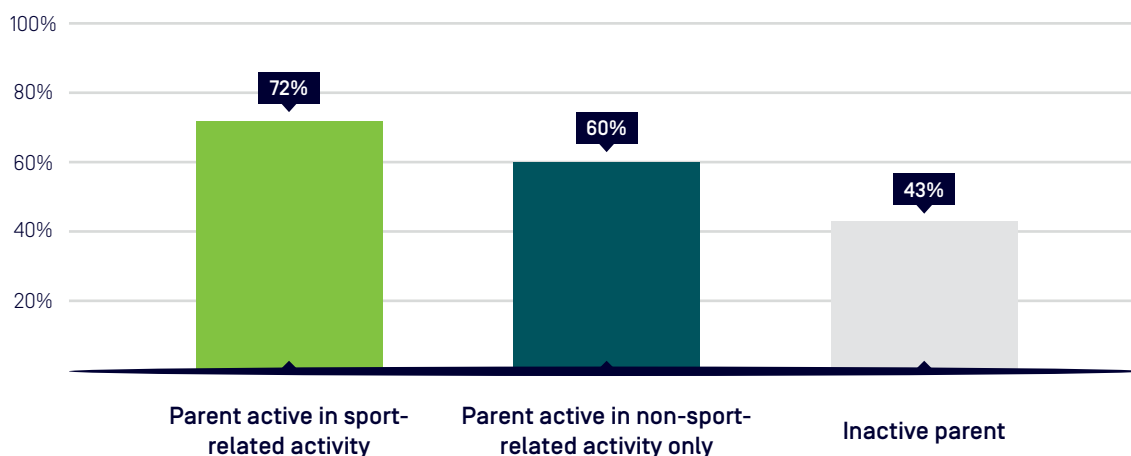
Children need active, sporty parents

It is well known that parents' activities and behaviours strongly influence the way children develop. The data shows that there is a relationship between a parent's engagement in sport and that of their child.



Children with parents participating in organised sport are also much more likely to be involved in sport compared to children with parents who only do physical activities. Therefore, a parent's level of engagement with organised sport seems to be a critical factor in whether their child is also involved in organised sport outside of school hours.

IMPACT OF TYPE OF PARENTAL ACTIVITY ON CHILDREN'S ORGANISED SPORT PARTICIPATION: 1+/YEAR



*Please note that AusPlay collects data from only one randomly selected parent and only one randomly selected child in the same household. This data therefore does not consider the influence of both parents on child participation. "Active parent" is defined as having participated in sport or physical activity at least once in the last 12 months.

The organised sports participated in evolve with life stage

For children under the age of 15, participation in organised sports outside of school hours varies with age. While foundational activities such as Gymnastics and Swimming lessons are very popular in younger age groups, team sports such as Football/soccer, Australian football, Basketball or Netball are prevalent in the early teens. We know that adults are more likely to participate informally in sport or physical activity, but if we look at the organised sports that adults do take part in, Running/jogging is the most participated in activity (includes participation in events) in early to middle age. Team sports are still prevalent at younger adulthood before being slowly replaced with other activities such as Golf, Tennis, Bowls, Pickleball/padel* or Martial arts (e.g. Tai Chi) later in life. Tennis is one of few sports that is popular across the entire lifespan.

ORGANISED SPORT RANKINGS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN – TOP 15 IN EACH AGE GROUP: 1+/YEAR

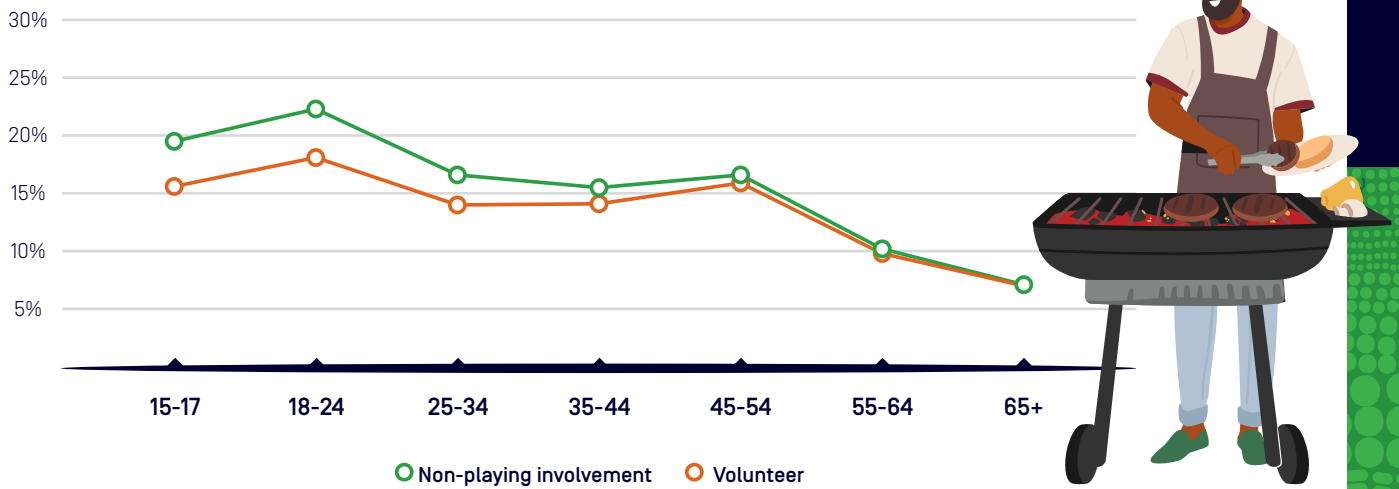


* Pickleball/padel includes pickleball, paddle tennis and padel.

INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT AS A NON-PLAYER OR VOLUNTEER

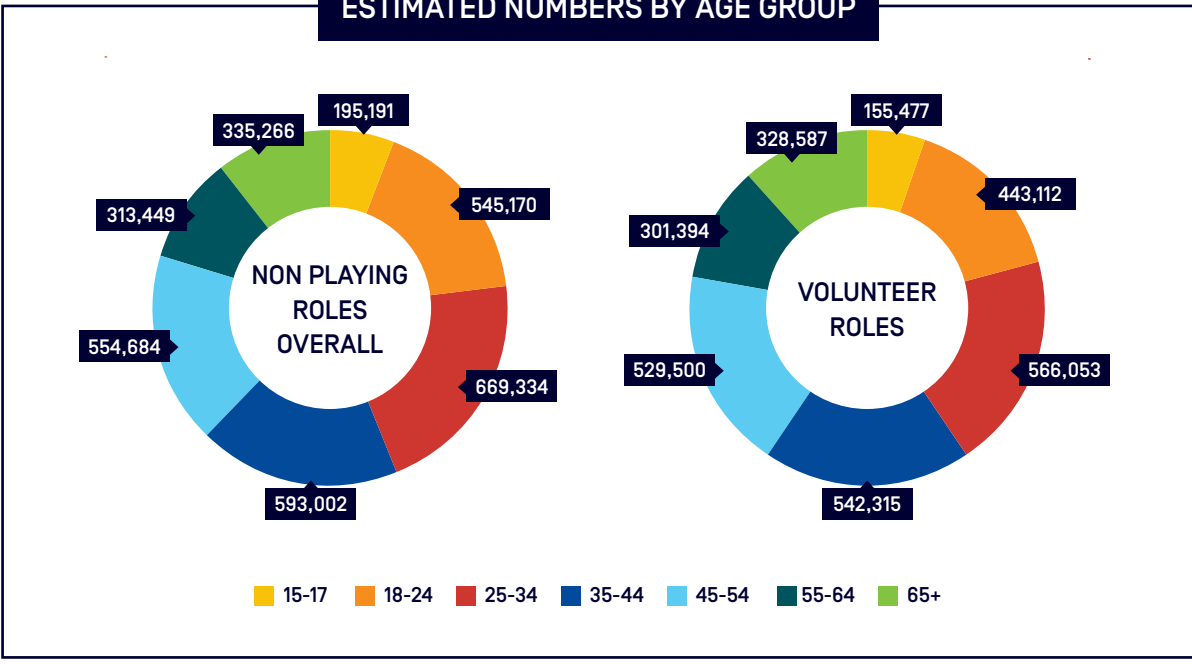
Non-playing involvement in sport through the life stages

INVOLVEMENT RATE IN NON-PLAYING AND VOLUNTEER ROLES BY AGE



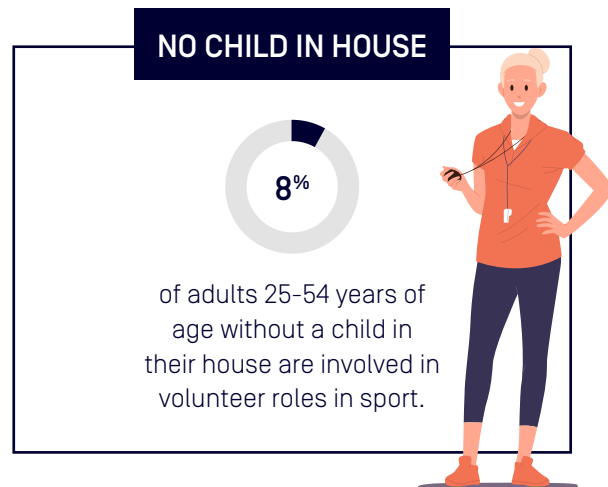
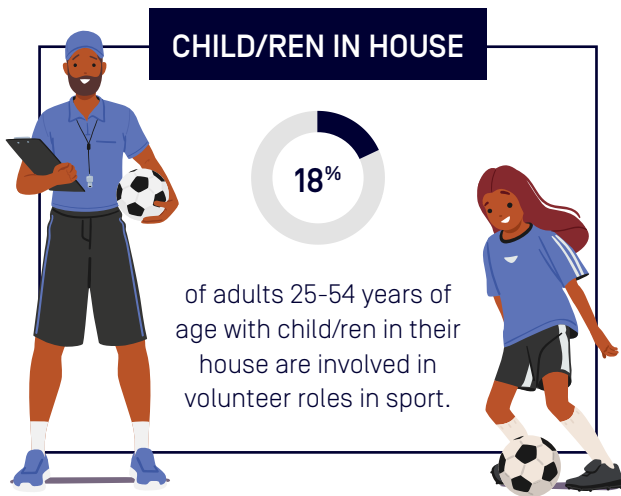
Australians involved in non-playing roles are less likely to be paid or receive some form of compensation as they age. The age groups with the highest numbers of volunteers are those that correspond to the parent / young family stages of life [25-34 and 35-44].

ESTIMATED NUMBERS BY AGE GROUP



The influence of family structure

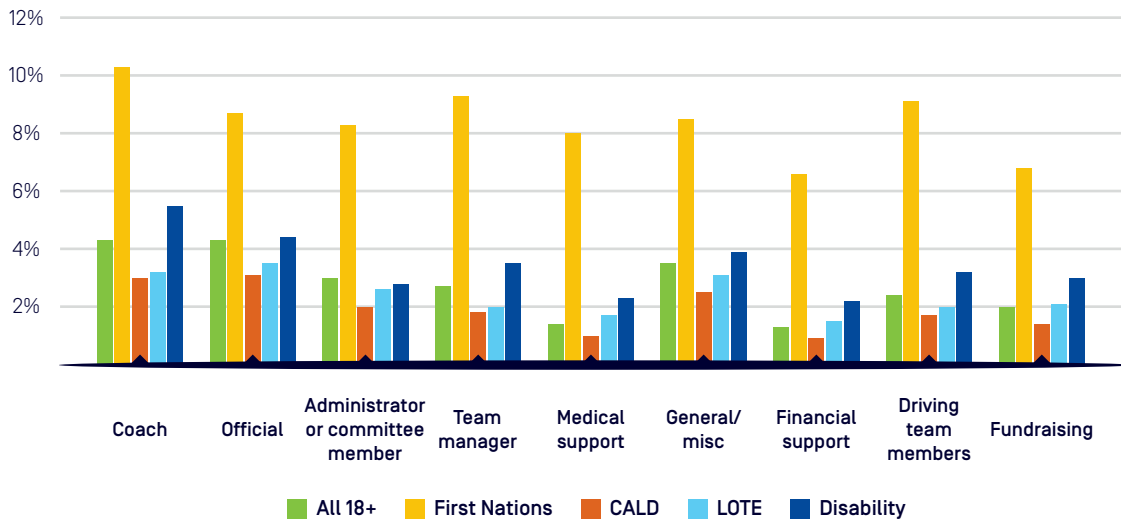
Not surprisingly, whether Australians between the ages of 25 and 54 volunteer or not is influenced by whether they have at least one child in the household.



Involvement differs for different population groups

The following chart highlights how sport is a critical component of Indigenous communities coming together and maintaining their connection.*

INVOLVEMENT IN VARIOUS NON-PLAYING ROLES BY DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS IN AUSTRALIA



*This pattern in the data (about higher involvement in non-playing roles from Indigenous communities), is also present in our data from the Community Perceptions Monitor (CPM) survey, and it is not out of the question that it reflects a real tendency for First Nations adults to engage in non-playing roles at a slightly higher rate. But we need to be cautious about drawing definitive conclusions about this population from this data alone as:

1. The First Nations sample in the AusPlay survey tends to skew towards younger parents, which is correlated with higher non-player involvement; and
2. Online panel (and phone) surveys of the general community are rarely considered fully representative sources of data on the First Nations community.

The following quote from qualitative research undertaken by the ASC among Indigenous communities in 2018 also supports this data:

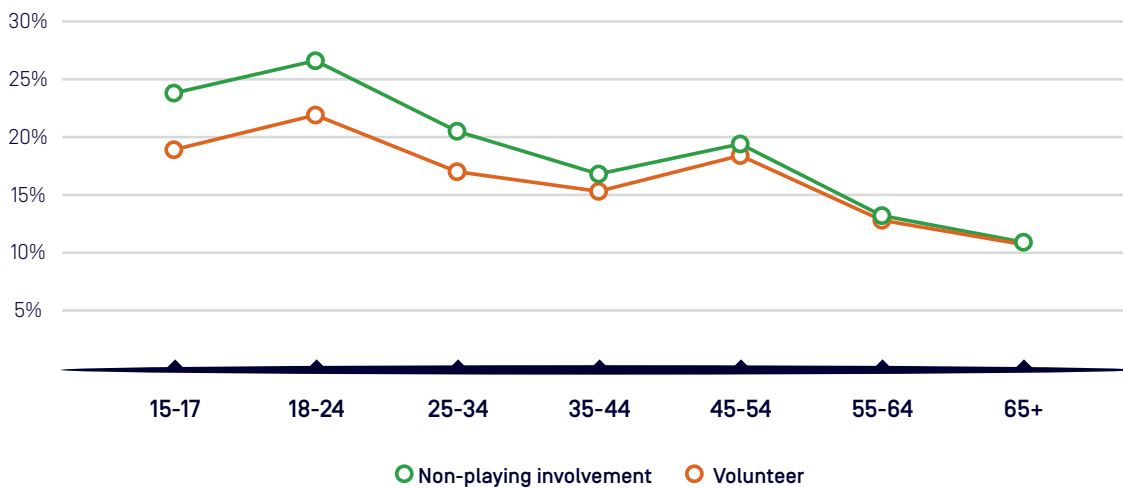
“It takes a community to raise a child. Everyone goes to the games and looks after the kids. The players, aunties, uncles, volunteers. Thousands can come along. It’s our modern-day corroboree.”



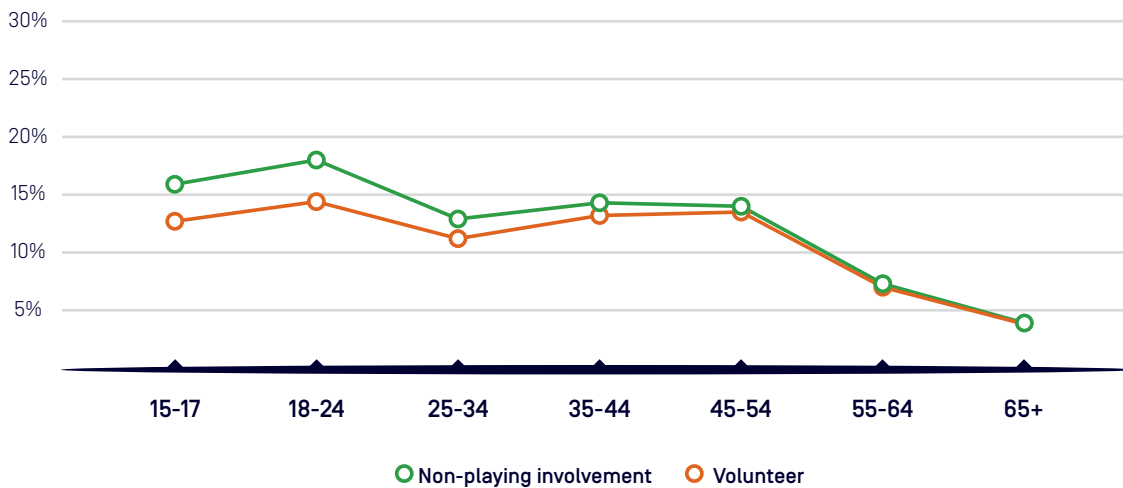
Some involvement patterns vary slightly between life stages

Both men and women's non-playing roles are more likely to be paid/compensated in the younger years. For younger people, non-playing involvement can be useful paid work experience, whilst also building life skills and confidence.

NON-PLAYING ROLE VS VOLUNTEER IN NON-PLAYING ROLE - MEN



NON-PLAYING ROLE VS VOLUNTEER IN NON-PLAYING ROLE - WOMEN



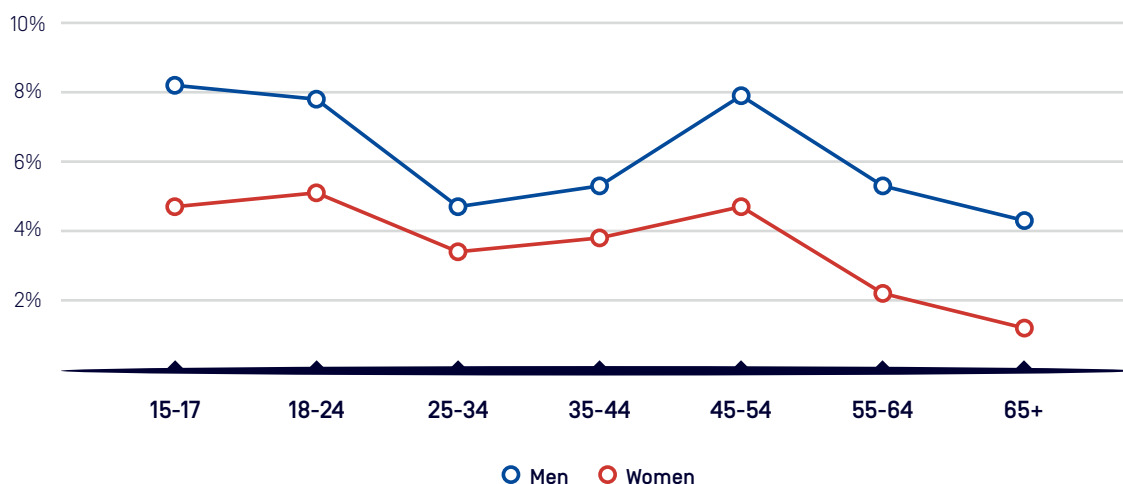
The picture of involvement changes with different roles



Officials [including referees/umpires, line judges, scorers, timekeepers, starters, etc.]

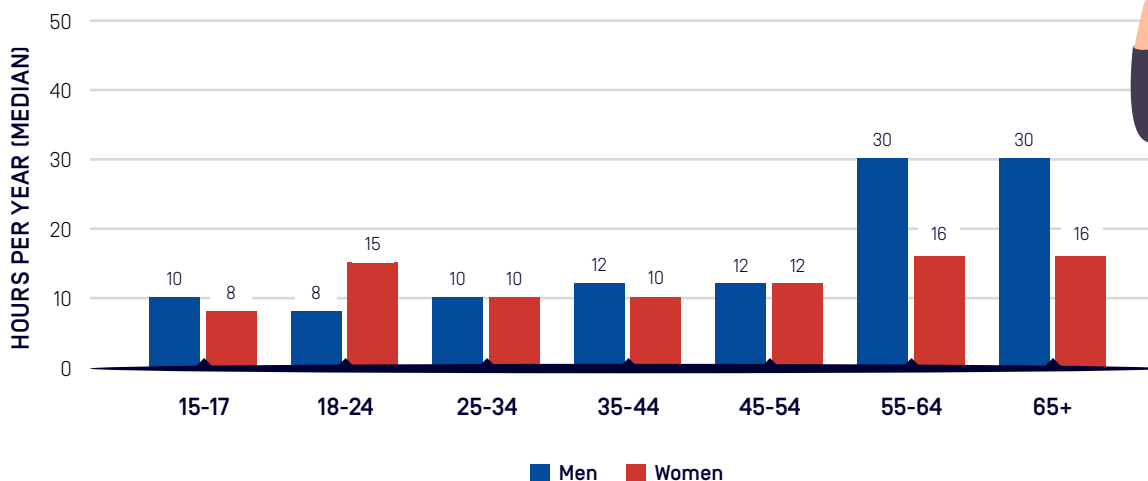
Involvement in officiating roles peaks in the mid-teens (15-17), but some are drawn back to these roles or try them for the first time around middle age.

OFFICIAL BY AGE AND GENDER



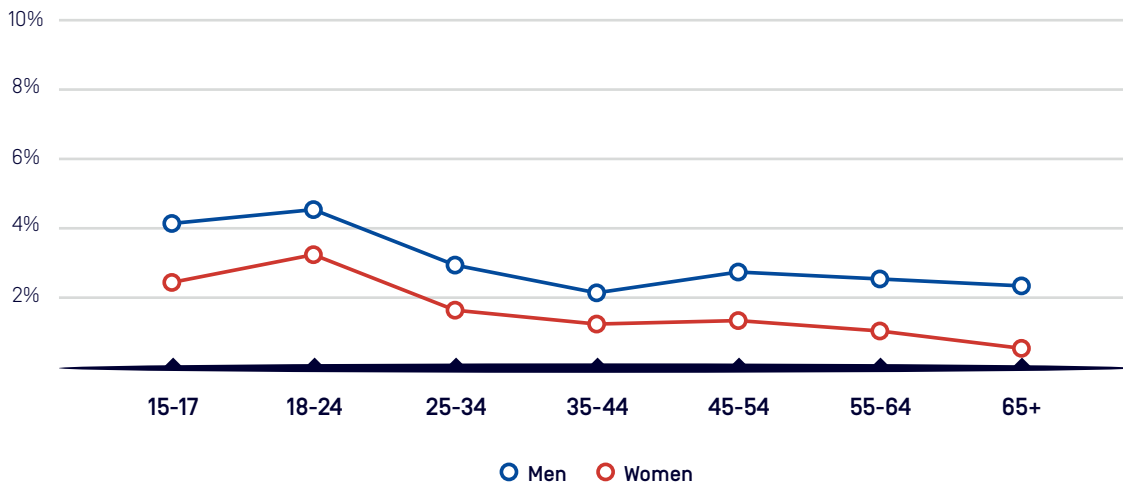
While older Australians are less likely to be involved in officiating roles overall, they tend to contribute more time to it.

OFFICIAL VOLUNTEER HOURS BY AGE AND GENDER

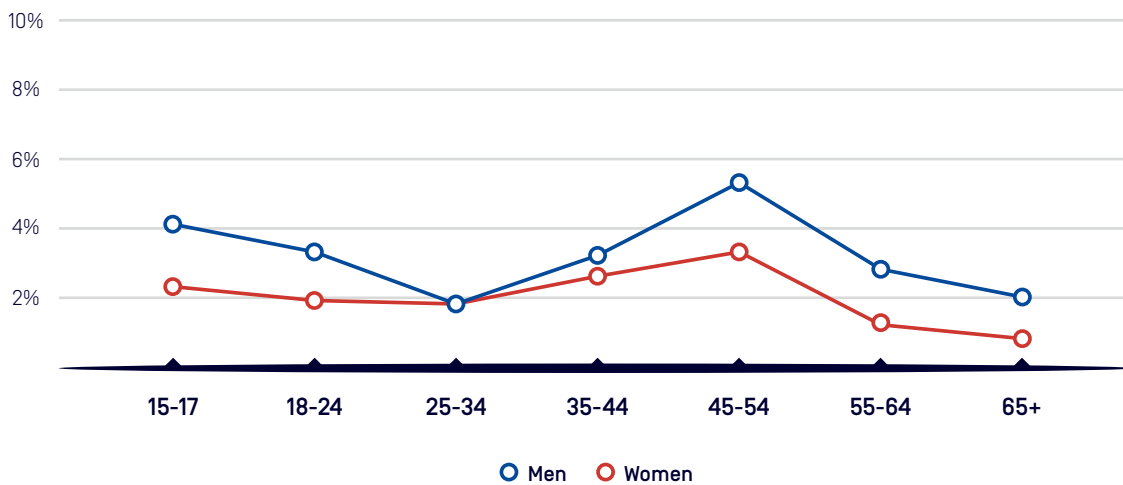


Young officials may equally be formally trained for the role or not, whereas the rebound seen at 45 to 54 years of age is driven mostly by adults who have not undertaken any formal training to support their role.

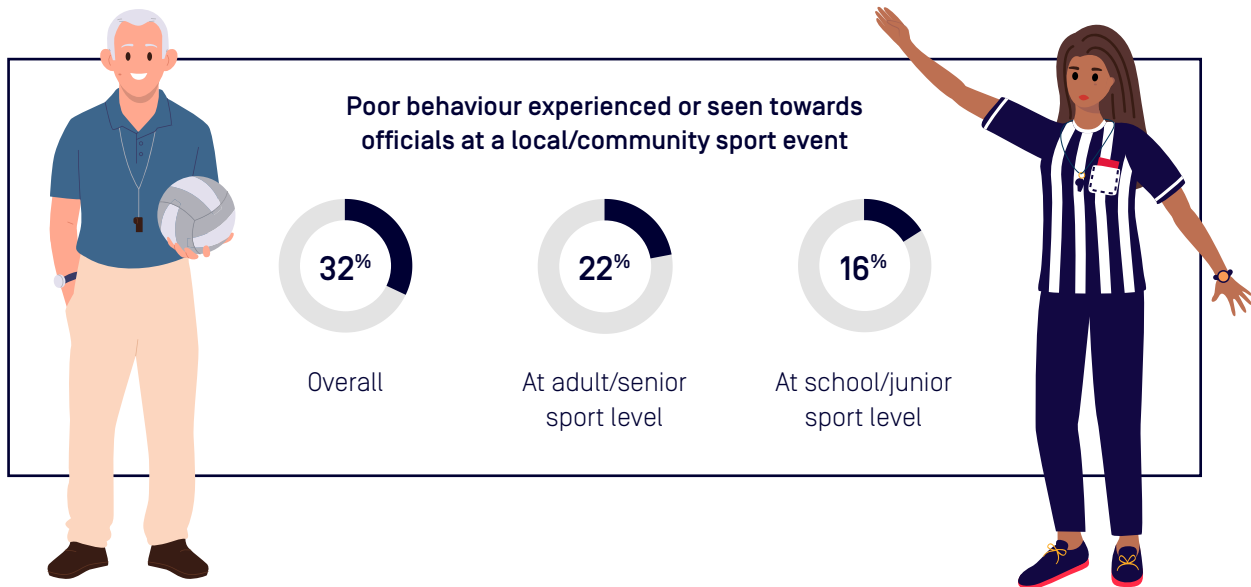
OFFICIAL WITH FORMAL TRAINING BY AGE AND GENDER



OFFICIAL WITHOUT FORMAL TRAINING BY AGE AND GENDER

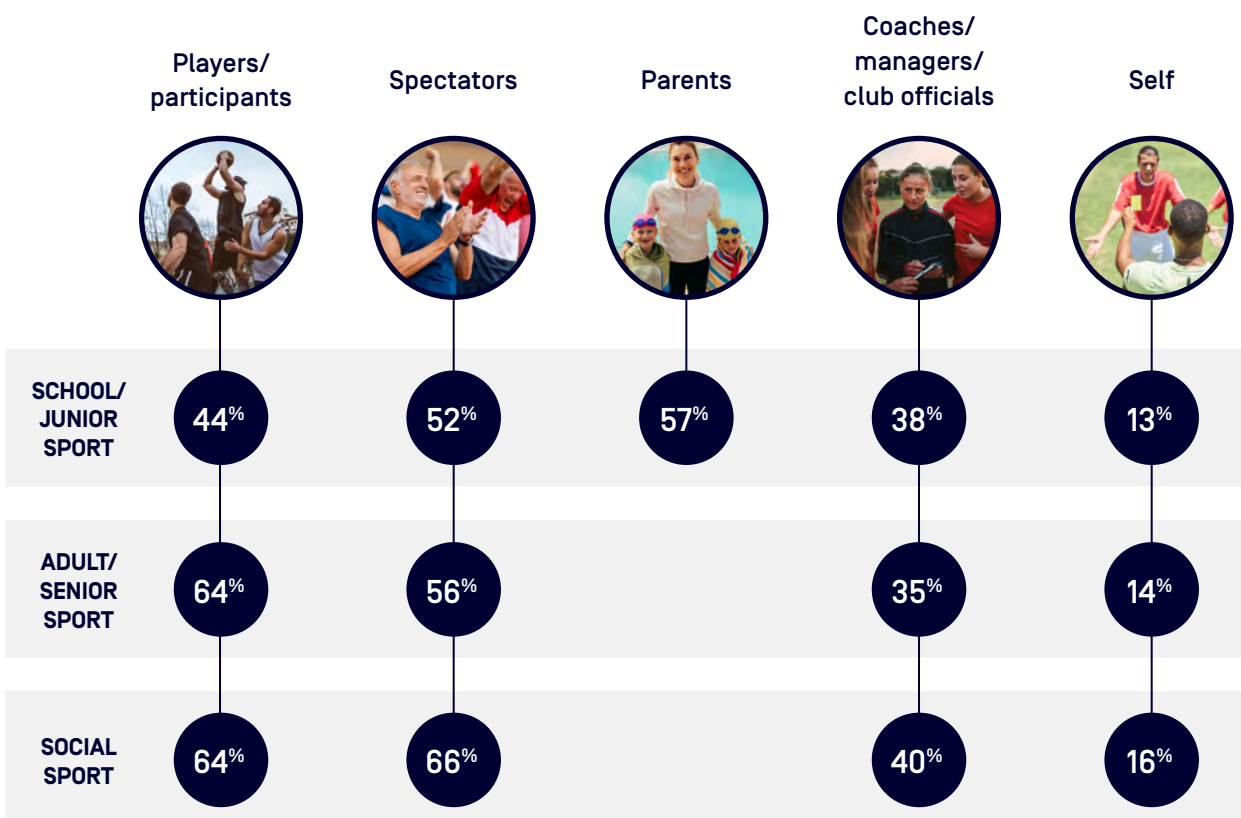


To drive more involvement in these officiating roles, the experience needs to be positive. There is still a lot of work to be done on that front as data captured in the ASC's Community Perceptions Monitor (CPM) survey in 2024 shows that almost a third (32%) of Australians who have attended community sport events have observed poor behaviour towards officials.



The data below shows the types of people who were seen behaving poorly. For example, 44% of those reporting they had seen poor behaviour at school/junior sport said it had come from players/participants. The "Self" column refers to people who admitted behaving poorly themselves.

TYPES OF PEOPLE BEHAVING POORLY TOWARDS OFFICIALS

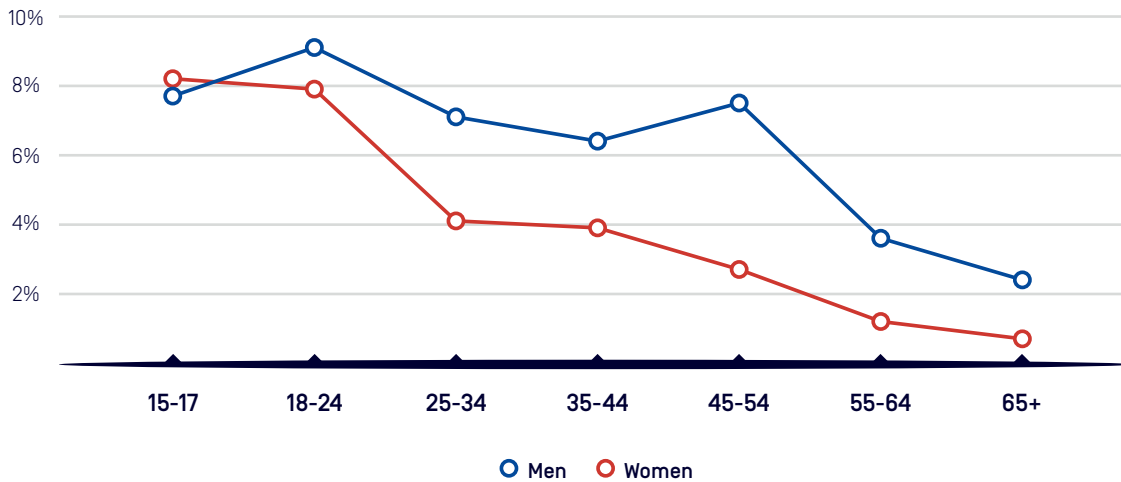




Coach, instructor, trainer or teacher

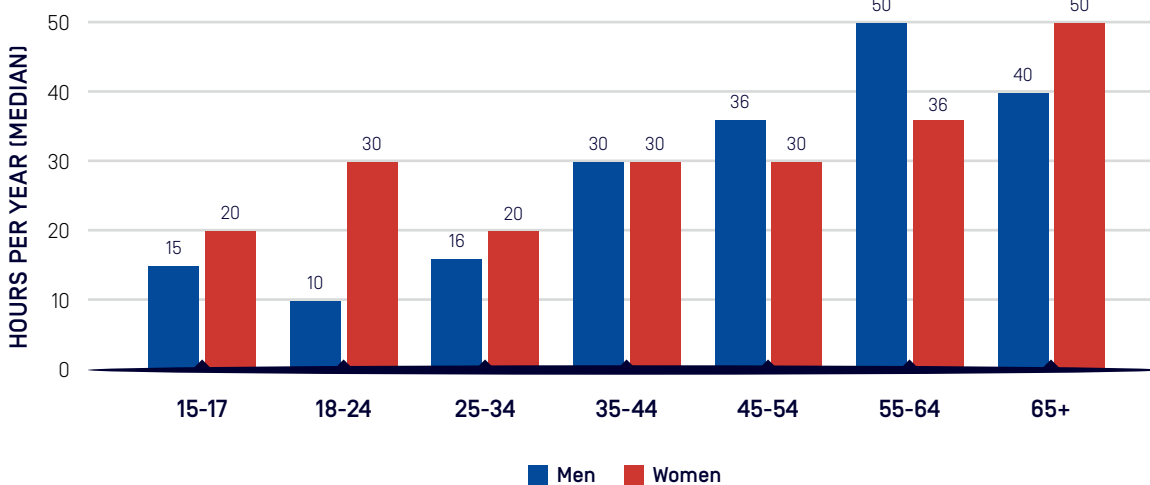
Women are involved in coaching at a similar rate to men in the mid-late teens and early 20s, but female involvement then drops dramatically. Men's coach involvement is a little more stable until the mid-50s before declining.

COACH BY AGE AND GENDER



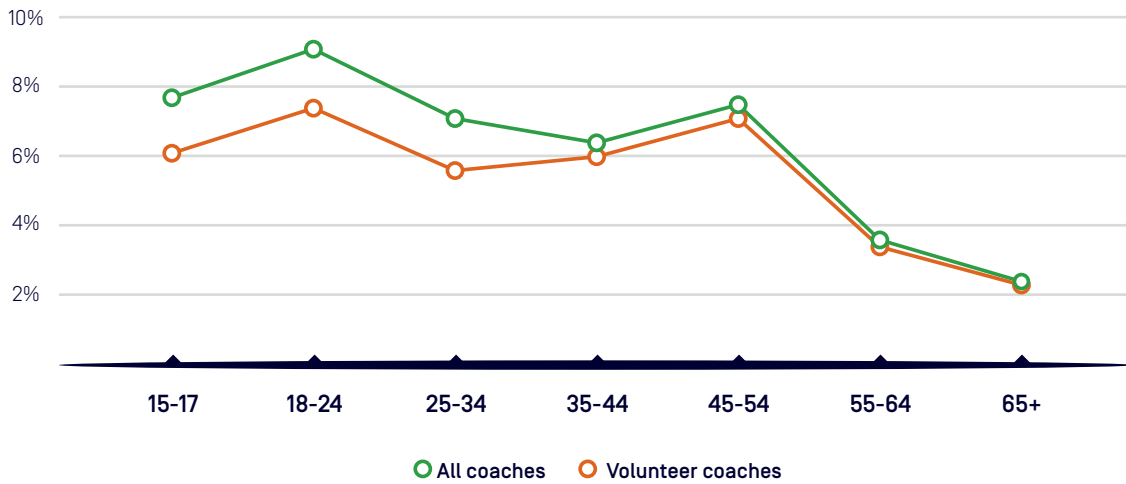
As was the case with officiating, older coaches generally allocate more time to this role.

COACH VOLUNTEER HOURS BY AGE AND GENDER

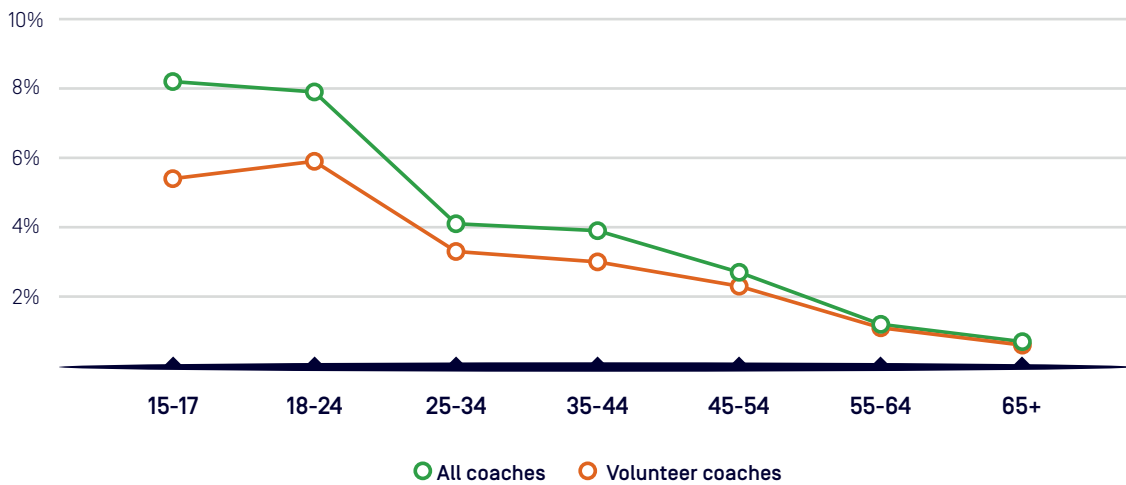


Men are engaged in coaching for longer than women. Past age 18-24 more women drop out of paid/compensated and volunteer coaching.

COACH VS VOLUNTEER COACH - MEN



COACH VS VOLUNTEER COACH - WOMEN

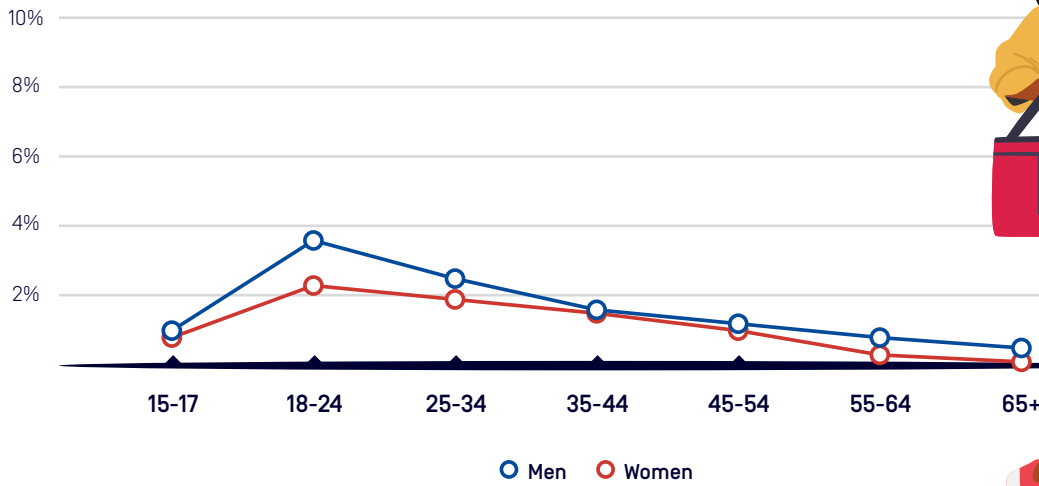




Medical support roles

Some other non-playing roles show varying patterns of involvement. Medical support roles are more popular with young adults.

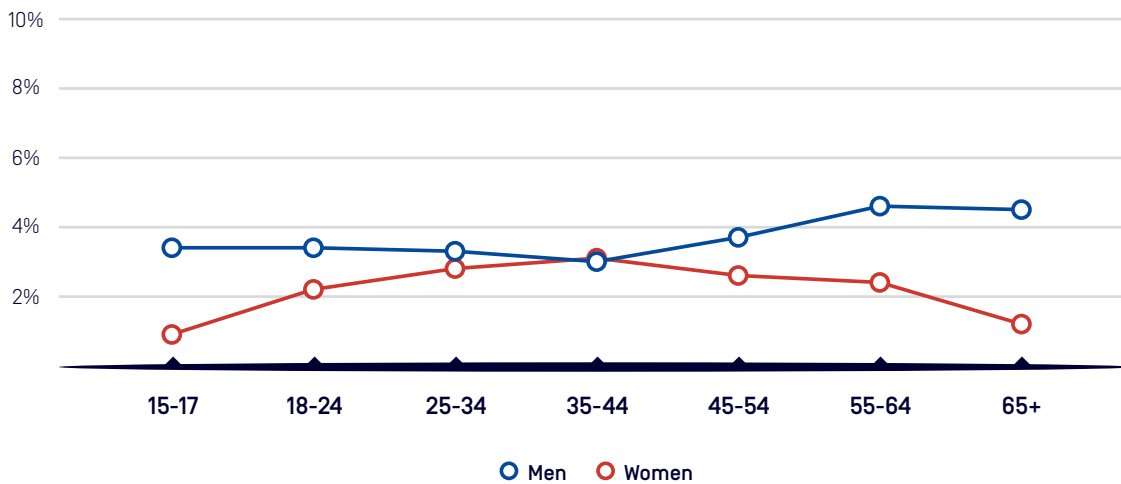
MEDICAL SUPPORT BY AGE AND GENDER



Administrator or committee member roles

Alternatively, administrator or committee member roles are most often held by older men. Women's involvement in these roles is more prevalent in mid-life.

ADMINISTRATOR OR COMMITTEE MEMBER BY AGE AND GENDER

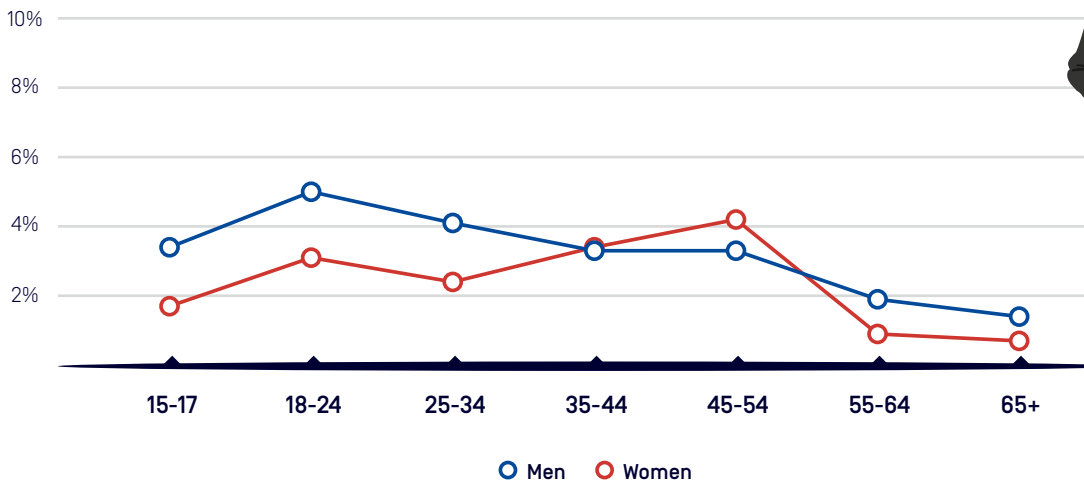




Team manager roles

Men are more likely to team manage when they are younger adults, while again women tend to be involved at a later stage in these roles.

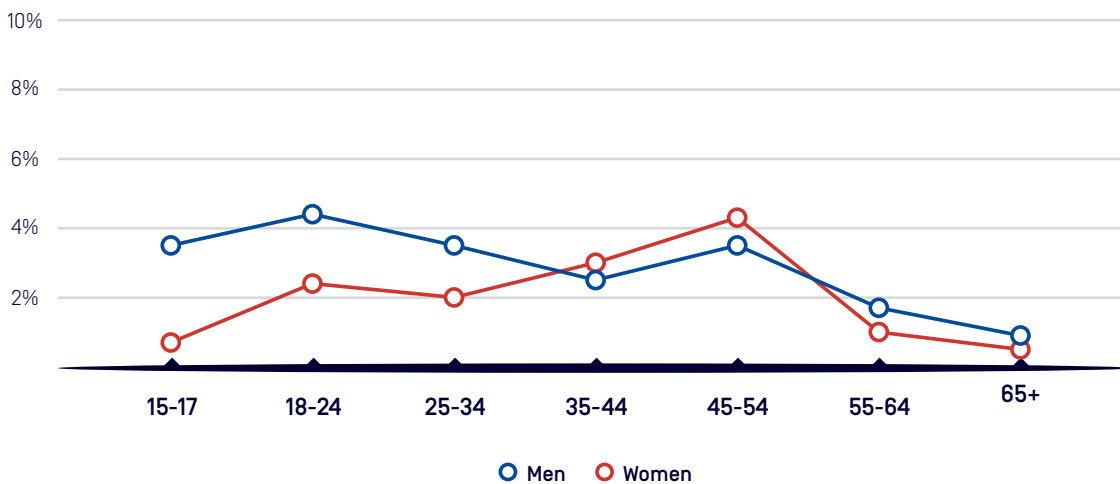
TEAM MANAGER BY AGE AND GENDER



Driving team members roles

The role of driving team members to competition or training follows a similar pattern.

DRIVING TEAM MEMBERS BY AGE AND GENDER

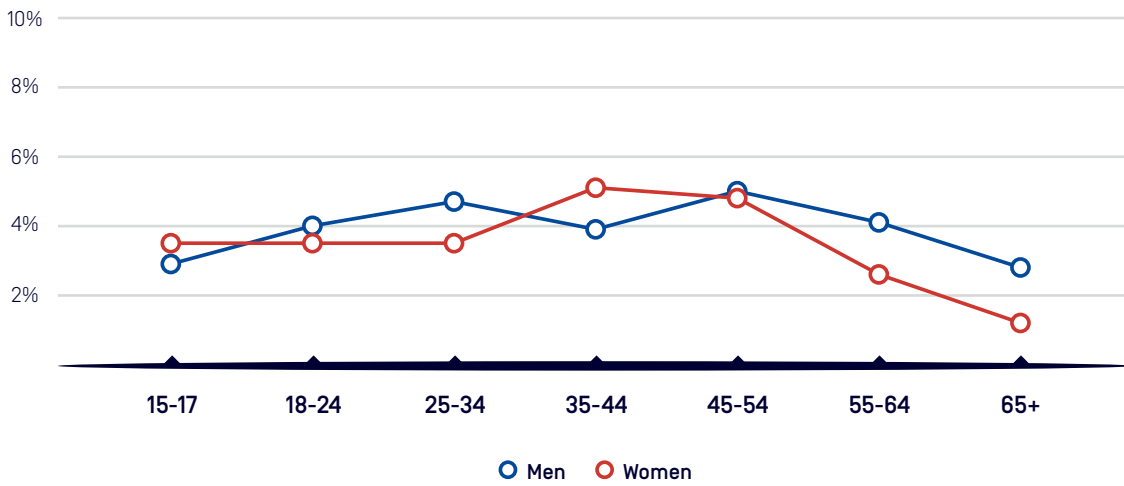




General/miscellaneous roles

Patterns of involvement are somewhat similar between men and women for other general and miscellaneous ad-hoc assistance roles such as setting up, cleaning, canteen, etc.

GENERAL/MISCELLANEOUS ROLES BY AGE AND GENDER

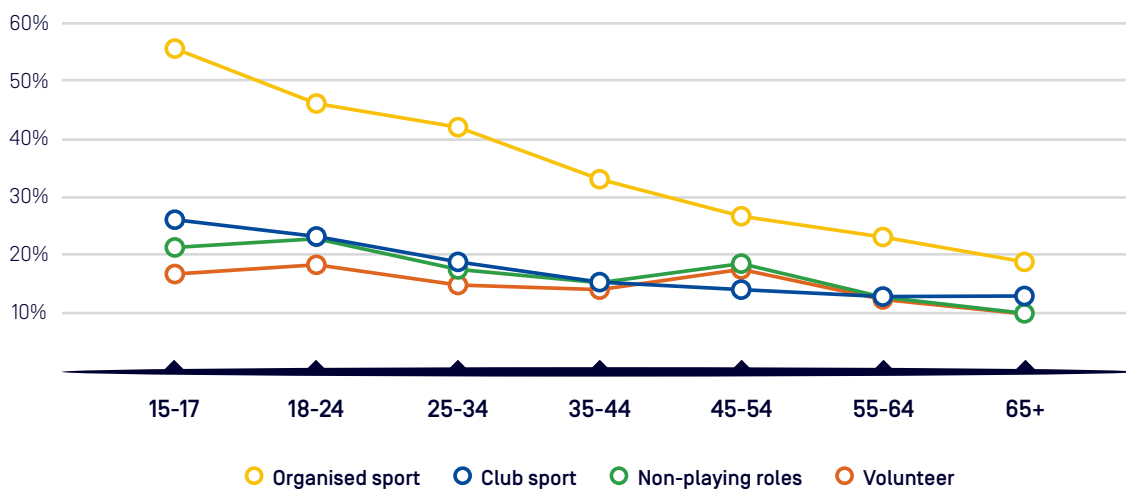


HOW DO PARTICIPATION AND NON-PLAYING INVOLVEMENT INTERACT?

Sport involvement by age

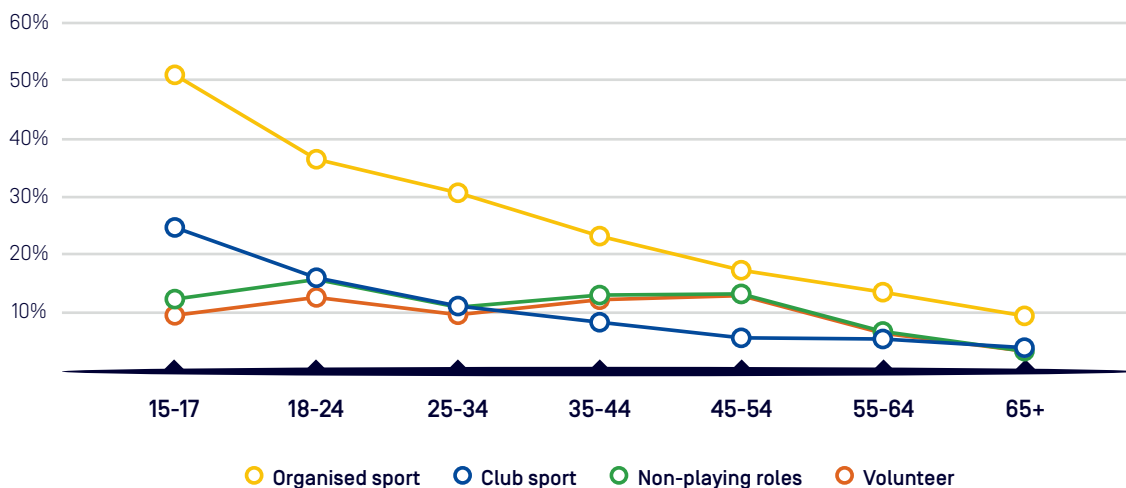
Younger men are almost as involved in non-playing roles as they are club sport participants/players. In fact, club participation and non-playing involvement follow very similar trajectories for males as they age, apart from an uptick of non-playing involvement at middle age.

SPORT INVOLVEMENT BY AGE - MEN: 1+/YEAR



Overall, women are generally less involved than men in non-playing roles, but while they are almost as involved as men in club participation in the mid-teens, they then drop out of club participation (as well as overall organised sport participation) more steeply earlier on.

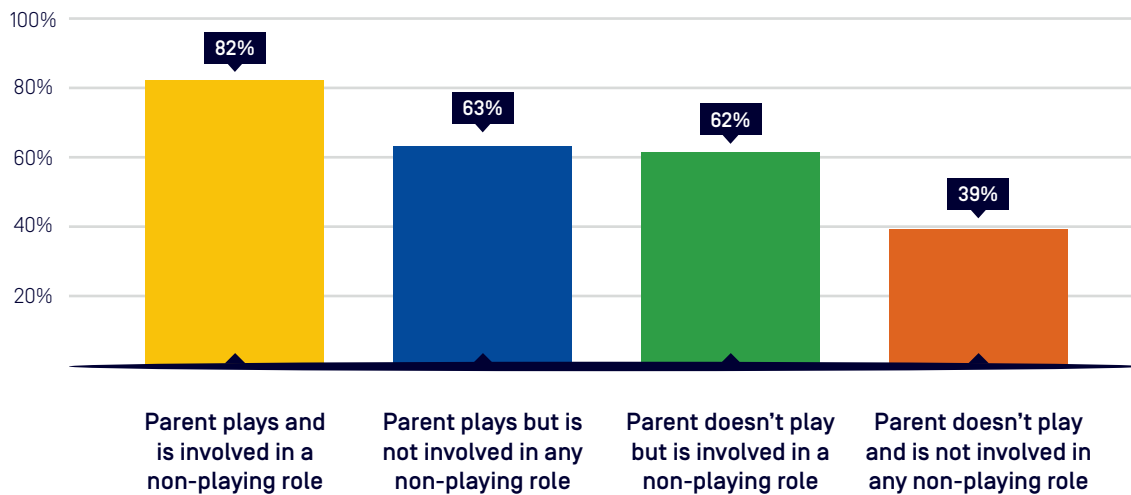
SPORT INVOLVEMENT BY AGE - WOMEN : 1+/YEAR



OTHER INTERESTING INTERACTIONS

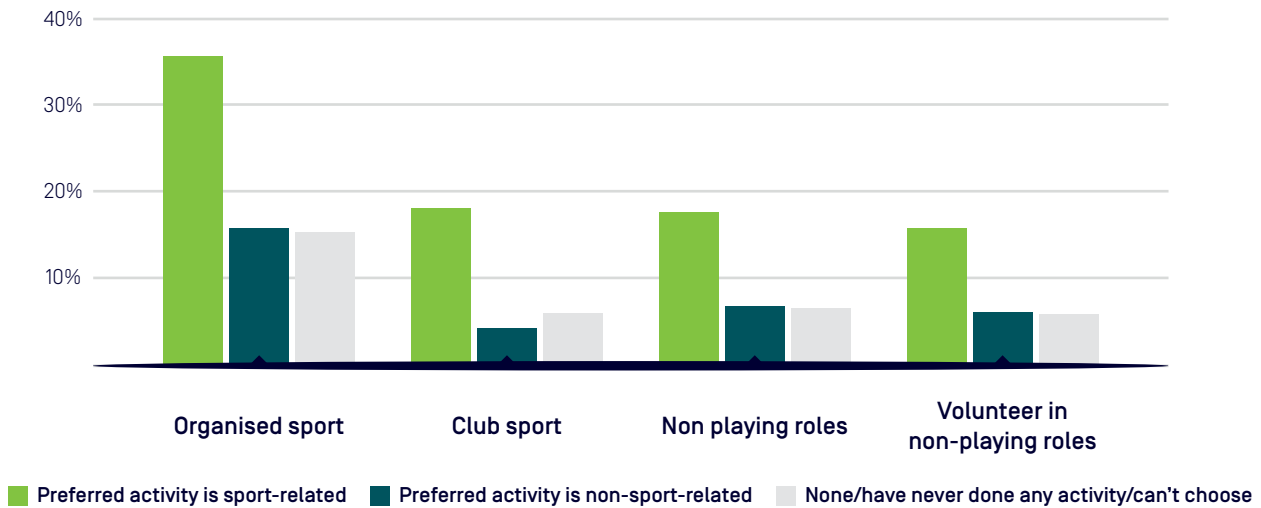
We already showed how parents' participation has an influence on their child's participation. The same is true for parents' involvement in non-playing roles, further highlighting that the greater the involvement of a parent the higher the likelihood of participation in organised sport for children and vice versa.

CHILDREN'S ORGANISED SPORT PARTICIPATION : 1+/YEAR



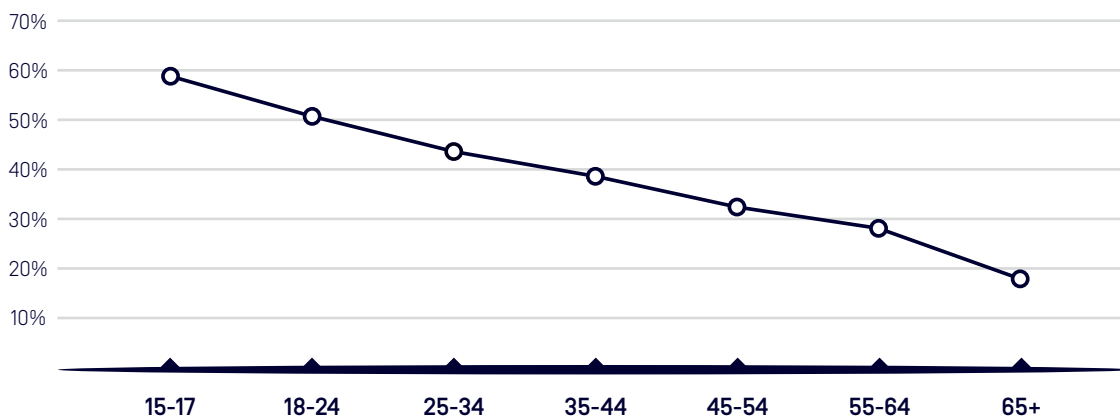
One question in AusPlay asks people about the single sport or physical activity they have participated in throughout their life that they most strongly associate with. Not surprisingly, someone associating themselves most with a sport – as opposed to a non-sport physical activity or no association with any activity – is much more likely to be involved in organised sport in some capacity.

SPORT INVOLVEMENT BY PREFERENCE: 1+/YEAR



And young people are more likely to STILL be participating in the sport they most associate with. As age increases so does the likelihood that Australians have moved on to playing different activities, while still keeping an emotional attachment to their 'preferred' activity played in younger years.

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE SPORT THEY MOST ASSOCIATE WITH: 1+/YEAR





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For further information on AusPlay (including explanation of the methodology and questionnaire changes made in July 2023) visit the **Clearinghouse for Sport**.

For any queries on the data contained in this report (including for additional customised reporting/further analysis of the dataset), please contact the **ASC Insights team**.

