

# Active older people

Energising and enriching the lives of older people through participation in community sport and active recreation



[sportnz.org.nz/activeolderpeople](http://sportnz.org.nz/activeolderpeople)



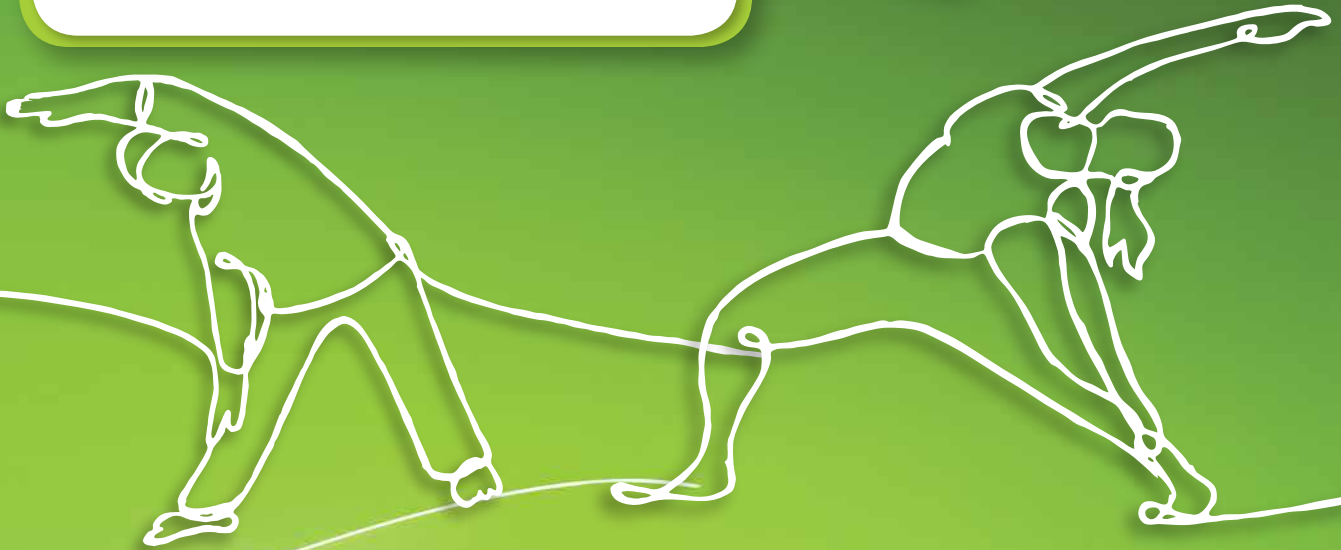
Community sport

Older people are a diverse group in terms of their health status and their mental and physical ability.

When planning for community sport and active recreation, the clearest message from older people is don't stereotype. Instead, we need to provide different options to cater for their different abilities and interests.



“ I love Tai Chi and Yoga...it's good for my mind and keeps me balanced ”



“ We love open spaces where we can bike safely and the grandkids can learn.”



# Why do older people think community sport and

**Connections:** The social aspect – even seemingly solitary activities such as walking are valued as an opportunity to connect with other people.

**Freedom:** It's not just about 'keeping fit' or 'keeping active', but 'staying upright', 'staying alive' and 'staying out of a rest home as long as I can'. It's also about relief and respite from some of the more challenging aspects of daily life. Older people get a physical sense of freedom from exhilarating and exciting activities like motorbike riding and cycling.

**Discovery:** When older people take up a new community sport or active recreation activity, there is often a huge thrill involved with trying something new.

**Relaxation & rejuvenation:**

Often activities are outside – in the bush, at the beach, by a river or lake – providing the chance to breathe fresh air, get in touch with nature and, quite literally, to 'smell the roses'. Indoor activities such as yoga may also provide a deep sense of relaxation.

# active recreation is important?

## New identity:

Having something new to talk about, a sense of belonging to an organisation or club, or feeling part of something through wearing an identifying uniform.

## Contributing:

The chance to contribute and 'give back' (e.g. coaching, being on committees, organising social events) enhances the experience for many older people. Fishing, collecting shellfish and hunting, too, are all ways that people can provide food for their families and friends.

## Pursuing passions:

Some older people are incredibly passionate about certain community sport and active recreation activities. In some cases they may be reviving interest in an activity they participated in years ago. It's not just 'something they do', but a deeply fulfilling and abiding passion.



# What demotivates older people?

I'm too old!

**'Old body'** – each older person has strong views about what the older body can do at a certain age.

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It's too hard and competitive

**Perceptions** – the word 'sport' is perceived as being for the young – something that's strenuous and often competitive.

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I wouldn't fit in

**Not belonging** – most find participating in any form of exercise is more pleasurable with others, but many older people are unsure about getting involved with a new group.

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I don't need to

**Healthy enough** – many older people understand the health benefits of being physically active, but claim to already be healthy enough.

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I don't know if this is ok for me

**Health issues** – often these become more of an issue with age and, without knowledge of the benefits and risks associated with physical activity, the safest option becomes to withdraw from physical activity.

# Practical considerations that can put up barriers

I get hurt easily now

**Fear of injury** – people are more risk adverse as they age and it takes longer to recover from any injury.

I really don't have time

**Time** – the assumption that people have more time when they retire is not always true. There may be time pressures and commitments to other family roles and activities, such as volunteering.

I actually don't know how to do this

**Physical competence** – for those who haven't been involved in an activity for some time it takes more effort to rekindle skills once accomplished, and even longer to learn new skills.

Too many obstacles

**Difficult to access** – places that are considered not so user-friendly such as inconvenient car parking, steep steps to enter a facility or restricted options for participating.

Too far away

**Distance to exercise** – having to travel any considerable distance to an activity, particularly if there is limited public transport, is off-putting.

It is really off-putting

**Uninviting environment** – e.g. too busy and crowded, not clean, inadequate changing facilities, feeling unsafe or threatened, and designed more for younger people.

I can't afford it

**Cost** – those reliant on superannuation or saving for retirement may have limited budgets. This impacts the amount people may be willing to pay to participate or purchase appropriate clothing or equipment.

# What can we all do to support their par

## 1 Start with *engaging* older people

- Whether you work at local, regional or central government level, there are many ways you can utilise the experience and expertise of older people to guide your decision making and better meet their needs.
- Liaise with community organisations that represent older people, and talk to older people at work, clubs, church, cafés, and social and community events.

## 2 Challenge the *stereotypes* and advocate

- We all need to challenge what being 'old' really means.
- Visual promotion of older people's participation should associate community sport and active recreation with having fun, social cohesion and having successful experiences.
- As part of this, we need to work with the health sector to maximise the options for older people. Health professionals are a significant influence in encouraging older people to begin or remain being active.
- Marketing also needs to move from just a health message, to one that recognises the whole person and their enjoyment. Family and friends are key in influencing participation. We need to promote and encourage them to share the information and support the older people in their lives to take part.



# Participation?

## 3 Make sure information about opportunities is always available and helpful – **inform**

- Cater to the fact that older people are online, watch TV, read newspapers, listen to radio and pick up pamphlets. They also get information from friends and family, go to the doctor's office, socialise at events, and go to church and marae.
- Ensure provision of information in the work place – many older adults remain employed over the age of 65.
- Ensure information is easily accessible, up to date and answers obvious questions (cost, do I have to become a member, how do I get there, how much ability do I need, can I bring a friend?).
- Be informative about what support is on offer (e.g. assistance for those who have medical concerns or degenerative conditions).

## 4 Help providers **understand** older people and the possibilities

- Providers may need support and training to work effectively with older people. Using the Physical Literacy Approach to understand this life stage could assist. Being 'physically literate' is about the motivation, confidence, and physical competence to be active at any stage of life (find out more at [sportnz.org.nz/physicalliteracy](http://sportnz.org.nz/physicalliteracy)).
- As we age, there is progression into and out of community sport and active recreation, requiring greater flexibility and modified activity options. Consider specialist courses for clubs, coaches and referees so they can support this new way of thinking and help break down barriers.
- The capabilities of sport and recreation clubs and organisations also need to be supported so that older volunteers are provided with adequate inductions, resources, regular support and appropriate incentives and recognition. Older people should be encouraged and supported to become 'community connectors' (leaders and volunteers). Providers can utilise this valuable, experienced and connected group.
- We need to work with providers to deliver quality activity experiences to older people so they will want to continue the activity and recommend it to others.

## 5 Provide the knowledge and data to support change – *information flow*

- At central government level, we need to continue to share knowledge and work more closely together to advocate for older people.
- At regional level, we need to share resources and knowledge, and work with older people in communities to mine that knowledge.
- Sometimes involvement in community sport and active recreation does not involve participation in the activity. Supporting planning, organising, or administering is sometimes as beneficial as participating. Regional Sport Trusts (RSTs) can play a role in facilitating connections and experiences.
- RSTs can also support and share information with Regional Sport Organisations, clubs and physical activity providers to understand the needs of older people to attract and retain their participation in sport.
- At regional and local level, expos with a focus on transitioning into retirement or positive ageing, including the various community sport and active recreation options available, are a good opportunity to challenge perceptions and encourage people to keep active.

Visit [sportnz.org.nz/activeolderpeople](https://sportnz.org.nz/activeolderpeople)  
to read the full Active Older People  
Discussion Document

## 6 Address the *practical* problems

- Councils can work alongside sport and recreation providers to ensure safe, accessible infrastructure and open spaces that are open and welcoming to older people. Together with provision of appropriate local programmes and events, this has significant implications for participation levels in community sport and active recreation.

Some practical examples:

- Handrails at local pools and aquatic facilities
- Well-lit walkways to parks and facilities
- Destination walking paths being close to public transport, and opportunities to complete walks in stages if needed
- Accessible facilities and transport appropriate for those with reduced mobility or in wheelchairs
- More off-road cycleways to encourage cycling as a mode of transport
- Affordable or free activities
- Adapted activities and reassurance for older people to reduce fear of injury e.g. GP approval, progressive levels of activity, and possible modified equipment.

## 7 Be *welcoming* – so simple

- Providers need to have a welcoming face at the door and to communicate effectively.
- Providers could promote a social activity alongside community sport and recreation activities such as a cup of tea and time for informal catch-ups afterwards. It can also help to encourage people to bring a friend on their first visit to assist with confidence coming into a new environment.
- Providers also need to offer flexibility in attendance schedules to allow for changing circumstances. Providers should commit towards meeting the needs of different cultural groups to ensure activities and programmes adequately meet their needs and encourage increased participation. We need to think about a variety of appropriate offerings including modified options and programmes.

## Acknowledgements

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