

# Active older people

2016-2020

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## *A discussion document*

*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)



SPORT  
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Community sport

## Introduction

Sport New Zealand<sup>1</sup> is interested in supporting ‘older’ people to continue with or rekindle their participation in community sport and recreation because we believe in the power of sport and recreation for all ages. This links to our Physical Literacy Approach<sup>2</sup> released in 2015. The Sport NZ Physical Literacy Approach takes a holistic view of the participant that considers their physical; social and emotional; cognitive; and spiritual needs. By understanding that these dimensions influence the needs of every participant, within their specific environments, we can provide physical activity and sport experiences that inspire ongoing participation.

Being ‘physically literate’ is about the motivation, confidence, and physical competence to be active at any stage of life. The evidence is unequivocal about the importance of remaining active as we age and we want to help all older New Zealanders to do that.

*“This isn’t just about the obvious health benefits. The fundamental driver for participation in community sport and active recreation is joie de vivre; the joy of living. In essence, community sport is a way for people to participate fully in the human experience. It is a physical and emotional state of being that extends far beyond ‘physical activity’, ‘exercise’, ‘sport’ or ‘play’. It is all of these things, and more.”<sup>3</sup>*

In 2015 we started to look at how older New Zealanders relate to, and participate in, community sport and active recreation (following on from the release of our national *Community Sport Strategy*). The sport and recreation sector was strongly interested in this, and wanted us to help shed some light on what older people thought about community sport and active recreation.

### **Who are ‘older New Zealanders’?**

**Chronologically in this document we are referring to age 65 plus. But chronological age can be misleading. We encourage people when thinking of ‘older’ to view age in terms of attitude and ability, not number of years.**

Sport Bay of Plenty (Sport BOP)<sup>4</sup>, our partner in this work, have a desire to understand and support older people in their community. They helped to initiate the development of this discussion document. One of Sport NZ’s and Sport BOP’s key principles was that this work be ‘participant focused’ – that is, developed with older people and, eventually, implemented with and for older people.

A number of steps were instigated, including regional stakeholder workshops<sup>5</sup> involving local and regional community sport stakeholders and leaders, to provide perspectives from those working in

<sup>1</sup> Sport NZ is the government agency for sport and active recreation. Its vision for community sport is outlined in the Sport New Zealand Community Sport Strategy [<http://www.sportnz.org.nz/about-us/our-publications/our-strategies/community-sport-strategy/>]

<sup>2</sup> Physical literacy is “the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding required by participants that allows them to value and take responsibility for engaging in physical activity and sport for life”. <http://www.sportnz.org.nz/about-us/who-we-are/what-were-working-towards/physical-literacy-approach/>

<sup>3</sup> “It’s not about staying alive...It’s about loving life”- *Connect* Research Final Report, pg. 2

<sup>4</sup> Sport BOP’, representing the Northern Cluster Regional Sports Trusts

<sup>5</sup> Regional workshops organised by Sport Waikato, Sport Northland, Sport Hawkes Bay, Sport Gisborne and Sport Bay of Plenty. Attendees from Tauranga, Hamilton, Rotorua, Thames, Whangarei, Napier, Gisborne and Whakatane.

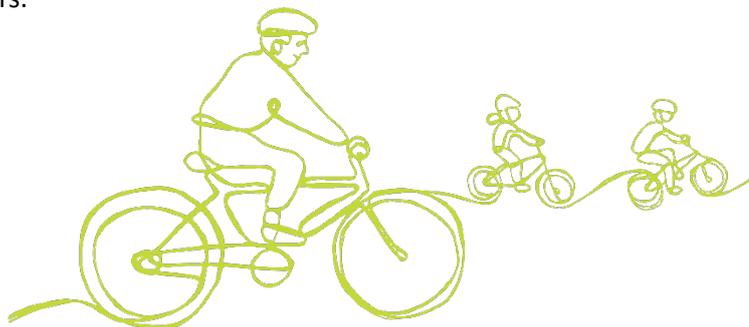
the community to encourage greater participation by older people in community sport and recreation.

Sport BOP also worked with 'Connect - consultation & research' to undertake exploratory research involving focus groups and in-depth interviews with older New Zealanders in October and November 2015. *Connect's* qualitative report can be found [here](#).

This work was overseen by a Steering Group, with support from a Project team.<sup>6</sup> Sport NZ thanks the Steering Group, the Project team, Sport BOP, *Connect*, and all who worked with them for the valuable insights they provided. Sport BOP would like to particularly acknowledge the contribution from Emeritus Professor Bevan Grant through sharing his knowledge, experience and relevant literature to assist this project.

This document was disseminated in draft over July – August 2016, for comments and discussion. The feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive about the conversation in this document, and about the importance of older people being active. We thank all those who contributed. We hope that this document will help groups think about the many things they can do to support participation in community sport and active recreation by older New Zealanders.

This document deliberately brings the voice of older people to life and helps us better understand the value they place on being active through community sport and active recreation. We look forward to seeing this work further evolve with ongoing discussions with older New Zealanders and community sport and recreation providers.



#### ***What is 'Community Sport' and recreation'?***

***...a spectrum of sport and recreation activity that includes play, active and outdoor recreation, competitive sport and informal mucking around. It can be alone or with others, including participation at clubs and events. It can be participated in as both as a participant and a volunteer.***

***It can be going for a walk in the park, walking and playing games on the beach, Zumba, lifting weights, tramping, cycling, golf and dance....***

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<sup>6</sup>Steering Group: Heidi Lichtwark CEO Sport BOP, Geoff Barry, GM Community Sport, Sport NZ, Stuart Crosby (former Mayor of Tauranga). Project Team: Sport BOP Sonia Lynds (Project Team Leader), Catherine McCulloch Chloe Petterson; Sport Waikato, Stephanie McLennan; Sport Hawkes Bay, Roger Coleman; Sport NZ, Graham Huckstep, Janette Brocklesby; Emeritus Professor Bevan Grant, University of Waikato; and Adrienne von Tunzelmann, Age Concern New Zealand Board Member.

## A snapshot of this document

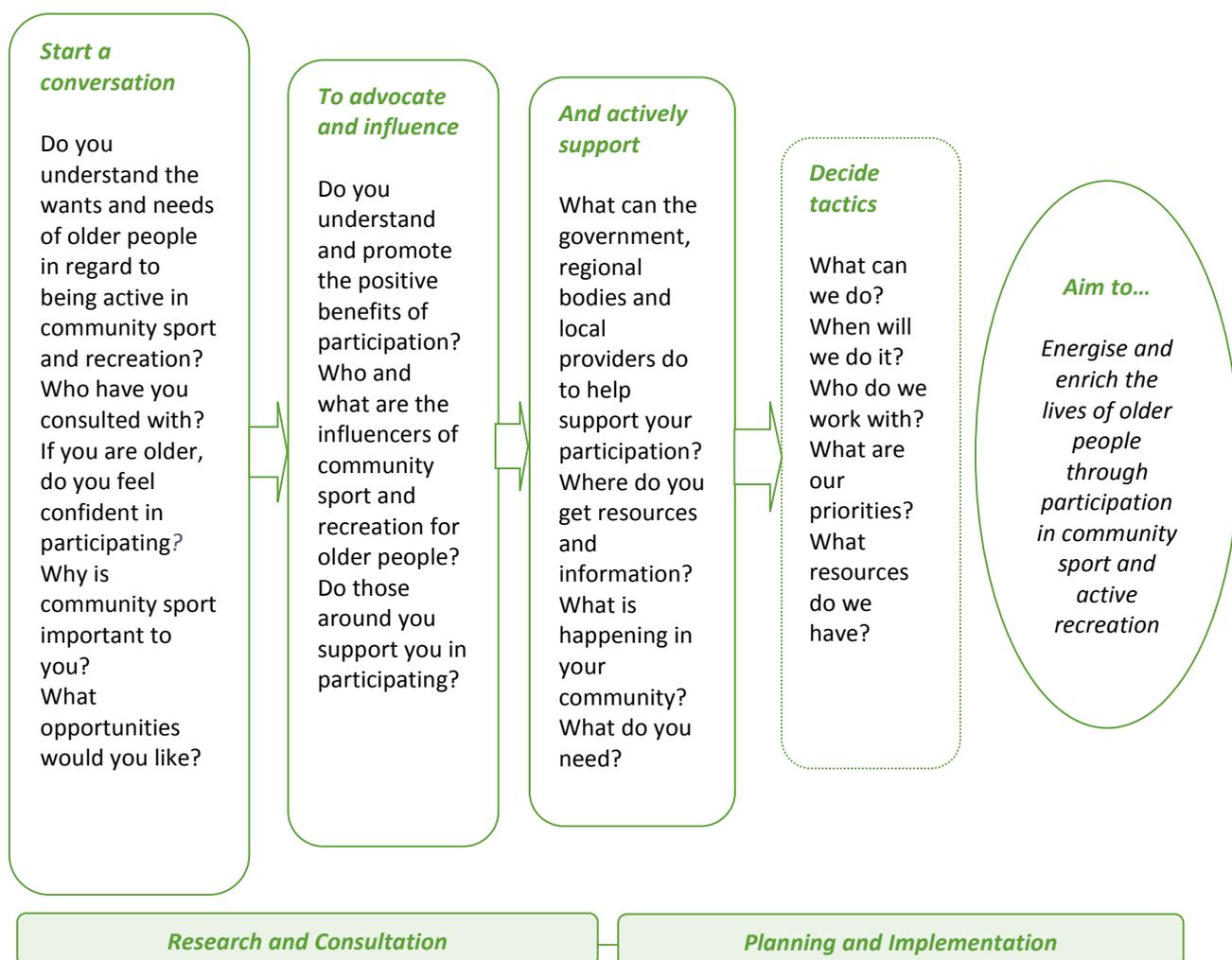
This document includes some thoughts about the changing face of ageing, and offers a range of ideas for organisations to consider when supporting older adults to embrace an active lifestyle.

The purpose of this document is to:

- **start a conversation** on the needs, wants and aspirations of older people in relation to participation in community sport and recreation;
- **advocate and influence** across government and non-government organisations for recognition of the positive outcomes for older people through participation in community sport and recreation, and the benefits of maintaining physical literacy as we age; and
- **support** those who want to encourage/provide quality community sport and recreation for older people, including those working within the sport and recreation sector and agencies/organisations supporting older people in physical activity settings.

Each community and organisation will approach encouraging their older adults in different ways. Figure 1 outlines some ideas to assist in the planning process.

**FIGURE 1: Planning for Older People and Community Sport and Recreation**



## First, some quick 'stats'

As for all developed countries, the proportion of older people in New Zealand is predicted to increase dramatically during the next two decades.



How large is this increase? The number of people aged 65 years and over is projected to increase to **one million** in the late 2020s, when that group will outnumber children, and is expected to reach 21 per cent of the population by 2031.<sup>7</sup> That's a significant increase.

How active is this demographic currently? In Appendix 1 we provide some more detail on participation. In brief, the good news is that while choosing to be physically active does decline with age, older New Zealanders are relatively active – with those aged 65-74 just as physically active as 'all adults'.<sup>8</sup>

The number of activities done per person does decline with age, however, especially for those aged 75+. Club membership and participation in natural settings also declines as people get older.

Volunteering by older adults has increased overall, by 7% from 2008 to 2014. In 2014, 24% of 65-74 year olds and 12% of 75+ year olds volunteered for sport and recreation. That's an amazing contribution.

From the Active NZ<sup>9</sup> survey, we have a snapshot of participation at each age-stage:

- **50-64 year olds** enjoy walking, cycling, swimming and fishing, with greater diversity of interests, more in line with 'all adults'. They prefer free and outdoor activities that are easily accessible. Connected walkways and cycleways, aquatic centres and local waterways, where they can participate in their own time and at no or low cost, are important.
- **65- 74 year olds** do fewer activities, yet do their favourites more often. Level of interest in new or more activities is lower, with fitness and health and enjoyment dominating reasons for participating. Customised multi-purpose indoor facilities, situated locally are required for this age group.
- **Adults over 75** participate less in all activities, with accompanying lower interest and involvement. Health issues tend to determine levels of sport and physical activity, and increasingly a clinical or therapeutic approach is required.

These current participation rates could be improved and the question is, are we working with and *adequately* encouraging and supporting older people to be active? Could their participation rates be

**What kind of activities are older people doing? Based on Sport NZ's Active New Zealand Survey favoured sports and activities for older people are:**

- **Walking**
- **Swimming**
- **Fishing**
- **Equipment-based exercise**
- **Cycling**
- **Bowls**
- **Golf**
- **Dance**
- **Callisthenics.**

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Social Development. <https://www.msd.govt.nz/what-we-can-do/seniorcitizens/positive-ageing/trends/ageing-population.html>

<sup>8</sup> Sport NZ. 2015. Sport and active recreation in the lives of New Zealanders. <http://www.srknowledge.org.nz/research-completed/sport-and-active-recreation-in-the-lives-of-new-zealand-adults-2/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

higher? Physical inactivity is increasing and less than half of 65-74 year olds are meeting the recommended daily physical activity levels. For those 75+ it is only just over a third.<sup>10</sup>

What about those who aren't participating at all – what deters them?

And as the population ages, what else do we need to consider? Are we giving enough regard to ensuring we all maintain our physical literacy as we age?

Behind the statistics and the summaries, there are a variety of experiences. Older people are not a homogenous population group. They are diverse in terms of their health status and mental/physical ability. The interviews undertaken by *Connect* shed some light on how diverse those over 65 years can be. This helps us to understand that planning for this group needs to be diverse and responsive.

The key messages from the interviewees are summarised below.<sup>11</sup>

- a) Health and physical/mental ability:** A commonly shared experience of older age – and one that is very important in terms of community sport and recreation participation is the gradual decline in health status and mental / physical competence. However, as with other transitions, changes may be sudden and abrupt, or slow and steady. When compared with other age groups, the diversity in older people's health status and physical ability is considerable. The interviewees excluded older people who defined themselves as 'frail' or 'very frail', so most participants had reasonable health, strength and mobility. However, at least half of them had experienced (or were currently experiencing) serious health/physical issues, with the most commonly mentioned including knee/ankle/hip replacements, heart problems, joint pain/weakness and mobility issues.
- b) Work status:** Later life is characterised by significant diversity in terms of work status. The interviewees included a substantial proportion of over-65s who are still working full-time or part-time in paid positions. Many are undertaking voluntary work for a variety of organisations and roles. Some – particularly over-75s – are doing neither paid nor voluntary work at present. Those still in paid work have mixed feelings about this: some would prefer to be retired but continue to work for financial reasons; others enjoy the stimulation and satisfaction provided by their job, and intend to continue working as long as they are physically able. Voluntary work includes leadership roles in clubs and committees (e.g. Rotary, community sport and recreation clubs), providing hands-on support to others in the community (e.g. driving for the Red Cross, being a Community Constable), and working in charitable organisations and social agencies.
- c) Family status / caregiving obligations:** Living arrangements, relationships and family commitments vary tremendously, with the interviewees including people living alone, as a couple, with flatmates, and with family/extended family. Some live in their own homes, some are renting; some are living in retirement villages. A considerable number have caregiving obligations – usually to their spouse/partner, and/or for grandchildren.

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Health: <http://www.health.govt.nz/nz-health-statistics/national-collections-and-surveys/surveys/current-recent-surveys/new-zealand-health-survey>

<sup>11</sup> "It's not about staying alive...It's about loving life"- Connect Research Final Report, pg.9-10

- d) **Socio-economic status:** Older people traverse this life-stage with varying levels of financial resources and this has implications for how they can engage in activities like community sport and recreation. Some are financially secure, and subsequently have few concerns about money and the option to participate in activities. Others have very little income or savings, and are under considerable financial stress and this means many activities are out of reach. Some also feel obliged to support other family members, including children and grandchildren.
- e) **Culture and ethnicity:** The interviewees included older people from a range of cultural backgrounds, including those from Pakeha and Māori families, and immigrants to New Zealand from Pacific, Asian, Indian and European cultures. Some of those who have immigrated to New Zealand are very connected to, and involved with, their culture through family, social and church networks. Other immigrants report feeling isolated in New Zealand and never really ‘fitting in’.
- f) **Local environment:** The interviewees included older people living in urban, provincial and rural locations. Their location has a huge impact on the type of life they lead, and the opportunities and restraints afforded to them. For example, those living in densely populated areas may have relatively good public transport and many opportunities to take part in arts and cultural offerings, but they may report feeling unsafe in large crowds. Those in rural areas find their environment tranquil and peaceful, but may be isolated from friends and family.

Reflecting the diversity of the characteristics of older people, *Connect* found that:

*“Older people’s experiences of later life may be positive or negative, or a mixture of both. Some are having ‘the time of their lives’, with wide-ranging opportunities to lead a happy and productive life. Others may be feeling sad, depressed and frustrated. The journey through later life is not a gradual, linear progression downwards, but rather a series of transitions – changes in personal circumstances which cause older people to readjust, recalibrate, and at times, redefine their entire lives.”*<sup>12</sup>

So, when planning for community sport and active recreation for older people, the clearest message is, **don’t stereotype.**

*“It is easy to slip into stereotypical notions of what older people can, could and should be doing in relation to sport.... It is also easy to make assumptions about the types of ...sports older people want to do...”*<sup>13</sup>

The following statements from older people help to illustrate why stereotypes aren’t helpful, and why we need to be more open-minded about the ways in which older people think about and participate in community sport and recreation.

<sup>12</sup> “It’s not about staying alive...It’s about loving life”- *Connect* Research Final Report, pg. 2

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pg.46

*“I’d love to go roller blading. I used to do roller skating.”*

*“Tai chi is something I’m thinking about.... I’ve watched them doing it, being in South East Asia and you see it on TV. ...So it’s group participation and you’re breathing, you know, you’re doing something.”*

*I’d like to do horse riding. Even now I still want to go on a horse. Back in Samoa we used to ride into the plantation.”*

*“I’ve got parachuting on my bucket list.”*

*“I’d love to try some gliding ... I’ve seen films of people gliding, listened to commentaries on flights and just the freedom to go out and use the natural currents. I think that’s a marvellous idea, why can’t I do that?”*

Connect, Research Final Report pg.46

## Starting the conversation – why is community sport and active recreation important?

In New Zealand we already recognise the huge potential of our population ageing well, and many organisations are working to better understand and support that potential.

Work is being done in government by the Ministries of Health<sup>14</sup>, Social Development<sup>15</sup>, Business, Innovation and Employment<sup>16</sup> and the Accident Compensation Corporation<sup>17</sup> to name a few. There is a wealth of knowledge available, and we need to keep sharing this knowledge at regional and community level as we build a better picture of what being older in New Zealand is like.

Community sport and active recreation is an inherent part of and has the potential to contribute so much to this work.

The most obvious is attaining and maintaining good health through engaging in self-fulfilling activities. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that older people should participate in physical activity on a regular basis, and that we, as a society, have a responsibility to advocate broad-based participation in physical activity.

*“Years have been added to life, now we must add life to years.”*

*World Health Organization dictum<sup>18</sup>*

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Health: <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/life-stages/health-older-people>

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Social Development <http://www.msd.govt.nz/what-we-can-do/seniorcitizens/positive-ageing/trends/>

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment <http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/science-innovation/national-science-challenges/ageing-well>

<sup>17</sup> Accident Compensation Corporation: <http://www.acc.co.nz/preventing-injuries/falls/older-people/>

<sup>18</sup> “Active Aging: Realising Its Potential”, Alan Walker, University of Sheffield, UK, 2015.

The WHO also sees the benefits as not just biological health ones, but broader benefits like empowerment, enhanced social and cultural integration, reduced health and social care costs, and enhanced productivity.<sup>19</sup>

New Zealand's National Science Challenge, 'Ageing Well' recognises the challenge and potential of our ageing population.<sup>20</sup> It has five goals that participating in community sport and recreation can contribute to:

- **Enabling independence and autonomy** of older people and their whānau and families
- Ensuring a meaningful life through **social integration and engagement**
- Recognising the value of ongoing **contributions of knowledge and experience** of older people
- **Reducing disability**
- Developing **age-friendly environments**

We know that community sport and recreation brings many positive aspects into people's lives. It has the ability to bring people together from diverse backgrounds for a common positive purpose. By participating together, people are exposed to different perspectives, new friendships and wider networks. It provides opportunities for families to play together, contributing to stronger family connections. It generates productivity and revenue gained through provision of activities and events, and can decrease healthcare costs.

Mental capacity, good health, social connectedness, a role in the labour market (if wanted or needed) are all important parts of the jigsaw of wellbeing in our older years. Community sport and active recreation, both participating in and volunteering, is an important contributor to that jigsaw.

*"For older people, community sport and recreation can be linked to the 'best parts' of the older life-stage: connections, freedom, discovery, relaxation, new identity, contributing and pursuing passions."*<sup>21</sup>

Yet older people are not always encouraged to be active. Some view the path to old age as a steady reduction in activity, 'taking it easy' after years of work. Being told to slow down, you're too old or stop participating by well-meaning friends and family can be quite demotivating and dismissive.

*"Participants would often visibly light up when talking about their community sports. With further exploration, it was clear that community sports have a powerful, positive impact on older people at a deep-seated, personal level. The more frequently older people participate in community sport, the more they reap the benefits".*

Connect, Research Final Report pg.15

<sup>19</sup> WHO calls this its 'schema' (or model). Under the WHO schema, individual benefits can be summarised into three general areas: physiological benefits, psychological benefits, and social benefits, as well as benefits for society. There is good discussion of this in: Chodzko-Zajko, Wojtek J. 2014. ACSM's Exercise for Older Adults. American College of Sports Medicine. USA. pp9-11

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ageingwellchallenge.co.nz/> Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

<sup>21</sup> "It's not about staying alive...It's about loving life"- Connect Research Final Report, pg. 2

## Why do older people think community sport and active recreation is important?

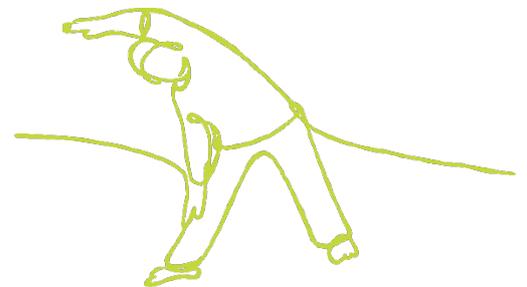
The following is a summary of what older people told us.<sup>22</sup>

**Connections:** The social aspect of community sport and recreation is a key reason many older people enjoy participating. Those taking part in regular, group and club-based activities enjoy feeling part of a community, and the opportunity to get to know new people. Even seemingly solitary activities – such as walking – are valued as an opportunity to connect with other people.

**Freedom:** For many older people, participating in community sport and recreation is a way of *maintaining* their precious freedom and independence. They are not focused on simply ‘keeping fit’, or ‘keeping active’, but ‘staying upright’, ‘staying alive’ and ‘staying out of a rest home as long as I can’. For others, taking part in community sport and recreation provides ‘freedom’ in terms of delivering *relief and respite* from some of the more challenging aspects of their daily lives. Some community sport and recreation provide a *physical* sense of freedom because they are exhilarating and exciting (e.g. motorbike riding, cycling).

**Discovery:** When older people take up a new community sport or recreation activity, there is often a huge thrill involved with trying something new. People often find the learning process very stimulating mentally, and it gives them something new to talk about with family and friends. Outdoor activities (such as walking, tramping, fishing, and biking) provide many opportunities for discovery, and these appear to be a key reason for their popularity among older people.

**Relaxation:** Many community sport and recreation activities are valued by older people because they provide a sense of peace, relaxation and rejuvenation. Often these 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.



**New identity:** Older people who try new community sport and active recreation activities, or take on new roles within clubs/groups, may derive a new identity as a result. Many find this quite satisfying and stimulating i.e. 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:** Some older people derive great pleasure from community sport and recreation that gives them the chance to contribute and/or ‘give back’. For example, fishing, collecting shellfish and hunting are all ways that people can provide food for their families and friends. Many older people have voluntary roles at community sport and recreation clubs and groups they belong to – coaching, being on committees, organising social events – and this enhances the overall experience for them.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pg.22

***Pursuing passions:*** Some older people are incredibly passionate about certain community sport and active recreation activities, and in some cases may revive interest in a previous activity they participated in years ago. As well as taking part in community sport and active recreation, they love watching television programmes about it, reading magazines, going online to learn more, talking to others who share their passion, and so on. The community sport and active recreation activity is not just ‘something they do’, but a deeply fulfilling and abiding passion.

## What are motivators to taking part?

The research informing this document provides some insights into motivation. This is not an exhaustive list, but provides some interesting snippets about why older people take part in community sport and recreation and how we like to engage in it.

What is interesting, is that the motivators older people discussed below are not so different from what motivates young people. People’s relationship with being active doesn’t change simply because they age.

The following messages are derived from the interviews and focus groups.<sup>23</sup>

### *Maintaining their sport and recreation activities – “we tend to do what we’ve always liked to do”*

In many cases, the community sport and recreation activities older people gravitate towards, and most enjoy are the same ones they’ve always preferred. When older people lose the ability, competency or desire to participate in those activities which have been their favoured options, they switch to less physically demanding activities which contain some of the same elements. For example, people who always enjoyed the competitive aspects of sport will still prefer activities that include a competitive element.

### *Attracted to those of ‘like mind’ – “we like being with people we relate to”*

When trying something new or joining a new group, older people report that they usually look for some sort of familiarity to those already participating. This could be that they go along with a friend; they join in with others of their own culture or beliefs or they remain part of a sport/recreation organisation that they have been involved with while they are younger.

### *Volunteering – “it’s not just about participating, it’s about community”*

The experiences people are looking for are positive people connections, contributing back to the community, opportunities to use skills and experience and pursuing passions. People over 60 years of age are more likely to be motivated by the opportunity to help a cause such as a sport/recreation programme that they may feel is important for children and for the community as a whole.

### *Motivations – “it’s not just about health”*

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<sup>23</sup> It’s not about staying alive...It’s about loving life” - *Connect Research Final Report*, pg. 21-26

Despite there being great health benefits as a result of activity, motivation is not usually related to an older person's desire to decrease the possibility of health related illnesses or by following the recommended amount of activity minutes each day/week. A health concern might be a catalyst to get started, but it's the ability to have a choice in what they do and the fun, social experiences that make older people leave the house to participate regularly.

The range of needs, wants and possibilities within this age population is extensive. Some older people need strength and balance 'falls prevention' programmes; others seek easier access to facilities; many just like to have a gentle walk if the environment is appealing; and a few active older people participate competitively in Master's sports.

## What are de-motivators?

As well as what influences older people, we need to also understand what deters older people from participating.

### Perceptions and attitudes of the older person them self, as well as others can be the first stumbling blocks

I'm too old!

**'Old Body'** - each *older* person has strong views about what the older body *can* and/or *should* do at a certain age with regards to physical activity and just being *too old* is a strong deterrent even among the "*young old*".<sup>24</sup>

It's too hard and competitive

**Perceptions** – The word 'sport' is primarily perceived as being for younger people, very strenuous and too competitive. So with age; sport and many other forms of physical activity become less appealing, except that of being a spectator.

I wouldn't fit in

**Not Belonging** – participating in any form of exercise for most people is more pleasurable with others but many older people feel unsure about taking the first step to being involved with a new group.

I don't need to

**Healthy enough** – irrespective of age, older adults are informed about the health benefits of being physically active via sport and other forms of activity but the majority claim to be already *healthy* enough.

I don't know if this is ok for me

**Health Issues** – these become more prolific with age and a lack of knowledge with regards to the benefits and risks associated with physical activity are not fully understood, so the safest option becomes to withdraw from placing any form of undue stress on the body.

### And there are practical considerations that can put up barriers

I get hurt easy now

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

<sup>24</sup> Younger older people were described as those age 65-74 in "It's not about staying alive...It's about loving life"- *Connect Research Final Report*, pg. 8

I really don't have time

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

I actually don't know how to do this

**Physical Competence** – if one has not been involved in an activity for some time it takes more effort to rekindle the skills once accomplished, and even longer to learn new skills to ensure a satisfactory level of success.

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** – this includes a range of factors such as the weather, noise levels, uncomfortable mixing with other age groups, 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 have limited budgets. This impacts the amount people may be willing to pay for participating in any activity/ programme or purchasing appropriate clothing /equipment.

## So what can we practically do to help?

Addressing issues that are partly perception and partly realistic means thinking about how we discuss, promote, document and deliver community sport and active recreation with and to older people. The following are some ideas and some thoughts on what we can all do to support participation.

### 1. Start with engaging older people

If we don't know what the older people in our community are doing, are interested in doing and what their motivations are, how can we support their participation?

Whether you work at local, regional or government level, there are many ways you can utilise the experience and expertise of older people to guide your decision making.

How do you engage? Use organisations in the community that represent older people, talk to older people already participating in clubs, talk to older people at work, use all kinds of media to seek input. Find and approach age-concern groups. Talk to older people at church, clubs, in cafés, social events and community events.

Have wide ranging conversations. Age, culture, living situation (e.g. community, retirement village) all factor in what older people may be looking for in community sport and recreation.

If you are older – make your voice heard. Find out who to talk to in your area e.g. your General Practitioner, Regional Sports Trust, organisations catering for those over 65, community newspapers and online groups.

## **2. Challenge the stereotypes and advocate**

We need to have conversations outlining how important community sport and active recreation is. We need to celebrate what this brings to communities, and what older people can bring to community sport, active recreation and society.

We need to challenge what being ‘old’ means. We need to consider how we promote community sport and active recreation to older people currently.

Visual promotion of older people’s participation should associate community sport and recreation with having fun, social cohesion and having successful experiences. This includes use of resources such as community billboards and community documents (e.g. annual plans, websites, newspapers), so activity within this population group is viewed as the norm.

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. Health professionals continuing to prescribe a ‘Green Prescription’ to patients aged 75 years and over is important. Guidelines for older people and encouragement is essential for older people to have the confidence to maintain an active lifestyle. The Ministry of Health have very comprehensive guidelines available regarding recommended physical activity levels for those over 65 years.<sup>25</sup>

Marketing also needs to move from ‘just a health’ message, to one that recognises the whole person and their enjoyment. Marketing needs to be clear that there are a range of options, and physical ability doesn’t always have to be a barrier, that individual circumstances and abilities can be accommodated. Additionally, family and friends are key in influencing participation. We need to market to them, encourage them to share the information and support the older people in their lives to take part.

We need to use vehicles that already help break down stereotypes – Master’s sports have been excellent for highlighting and celebrating older peoples’ diversity of sport and skills, as well as showing that older people can and are willing to train and compete at high levels if they are able/want to.

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

Older people are online, watch TV, read newspapers, listen to radio, pick up pamphlets, get information from friends and family, go to the doctor’s office, socialise at events, and go to church and marae. Are we using all these channels to provide information about being active for older people? We also need to ensure provision of information in the work place, as many older adults remain employed over the age of 65.

Are we providing information that is helpful? We need to ensure resources and information about activities and options are easily accessible. Up to date, consistent information needs to be available,

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<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Health: <http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/guidelines-physical-activity-older-people-aged-65-years-and-over>

that answers obvious questions (what does it cost, do I have to become a member, how do I get there, how much ability do I need, can I bring a friend?).

We need to break down any barriers around equipment and technology which may help older people to be active. We need to be informative about what support is on offer – will there be assistance on hand for those who have medical concerns and/or degenerative conditions such as dementia? Being clear about this will help older people to make informed decisions.

#### **4. Help sport and active recreation providers understand older people and the possibilities**

Sport NZ and partners are embedding the Physical Literacy Approach that will help explain and guide how to integrate the components of motivation, confidence, competence and skills for older people to participate.

Providers may need support and training to work effectively with older people e.g. to better understand activity components and consider/develop modified activity options that will best meet the needs of this population. Using the Physical Literacy Approach to understand this life stage could assist.

As we age, there is progression into and out of community sport and active recreation activities, requiring greater flexibility and modified activity options. Specialist courses for clubs, coaches, and referees so they can support this new way of thinking would 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 in community sport and recreation). Providers can utilise this valuable, experienced and connected group. The benefits of volunteering in community sport and recreation as a way to contribute to a community needs to be promoted more.

Good communication is key; in all mediums (user friendly websites, phone manner, face-to-face connections) providers can offer a welcome, friendliness and empathy in a non-judgemental, inclusive, non-ageist, approachable and responsive manner.

Can community sport and active recreation activities be organised in an intergenerational manner? Would this work in a club or group type setting, or more of a family/whānau setting?

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. We need to have conversations around what older people need and want, and identify new opportunities and potential providers to work with.

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

At government level, we need to continue to share knowledge and work more closely together to advocate for older people and ageing well. We need to find and disseminate resources, track and monitor older people and their participation levels, and share the data.

At regional level, we need to share resources, share 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. It may be supporting planning, organising, or administering. This type of experience is

sometimes as beneficial as participating. Regional Sport Trusts can play a role in facilitating connections and experiences.

Regional Sports Trusts can also support and educate Regional Sport Organisations, clubs and physical activity providers to understand the needs of older adults to attract and retain their participation in sport.

At regional level and local level, expos with a focus on transitioning into retirement/positive ageing and the various community sport and active recreation options available are a good opportunity to challenge perceptions and encourage people to keep active.

## **6. Address the practical problems**

Practical issues must be looked at to ensure facilities, transport, affordability and access is appropriate for older people. This is about infrastructure and cost. Safe, enabling infrastructure has huge implications for participation by older people in community sport and active recreation. Local bodies can help with this, as can sport and recreation providers.

Councils play a significant part in catering to the needs of older people in community sport and active recreation in terms of accessibility of spaces and places as well as accessibility of programmes and events.

Local government has an essential role to ensure spaces are open and welcoming to older adults (including parks, streets and recreation facilities).

What are some practical examples?

- Handrails at local pools and aquatic facilities
- Well-lit walkways to parks and facilities
- Wider footpaths with shaded seating facilities (to enable people to safely share with other users and to walk short sections with breaks in between)
- Accessible and appropriately placed toilet facilities along public walkways and in 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 cycle ways to encourage cycling as a mode of transport.
- Affordable/low-cost and free activities
- Adapted activities and reassurance for older people to reduce fear of injury – e.g. GP approval, progress intensity of activity as appropriate, 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/interaction 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/programmes.

## Where to next?

This document is intended to start a conversation and provide some guidance, both to older people and to people who provide community sport and recreation.

Every region, every town and every city in New Zealand is unique and will approach this work differently. We all need to take these ideas and see what we can do with them.

Sport NZ will make this discussion document and the *Connect* research available via the Sport NZ website.

Regional bodies will need to decide what they can do in their communities, and how they can support each other collectively.

Every region may have different needs and stakeholder relationships This document can provide insights and knowledge regarding older people and their motivations, opportunities and challenges to then develop a regional plan in collaboration with key stakeholders

Prioritisation of resources is always a challenge, but sharing knowledge and advocating can assist greatly in demonstrating how important this work is, and how to go about it within often limited budgets.

Hopefully, this document can provide a tool to start conversations on a regional level between key stakeholders working with older people in community sport and active recreation.

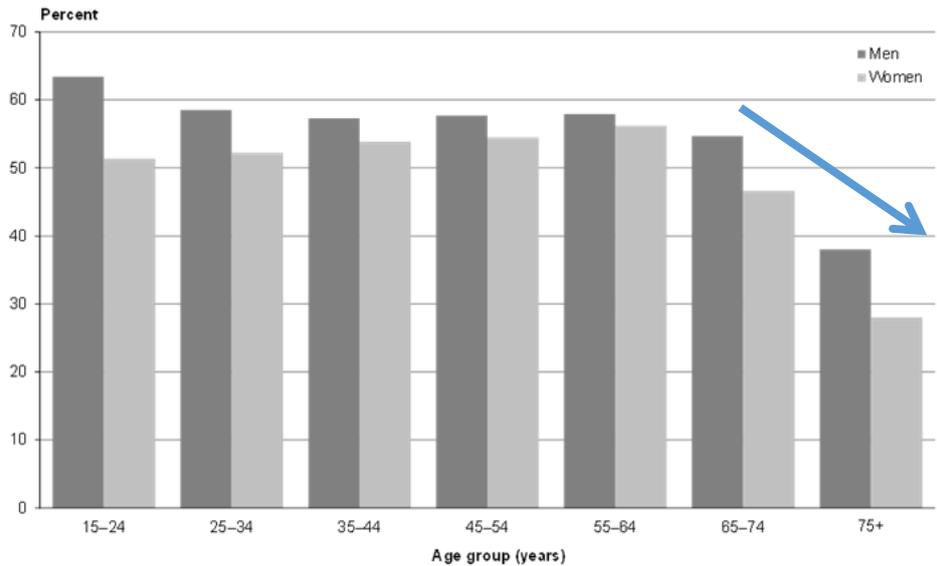
However, it's also important to go and speak with, and learn from, the older people in your own community. Age, ability, attitude, ethnicity, and socio-economic status all influence older people's thoughts about their involvement in community sport and active recreation.

The more we work together, the better we can ensure that the 'joie de vivre; the joy of living' through community sport and recreation continues at whatever age we are.

## Appendix 1 – Participation Rates

Sport and regular physical activity decline with age.  
 Inactivity (<30 minutes per week) rises markedly from age 65.  
 Women are less active than men.

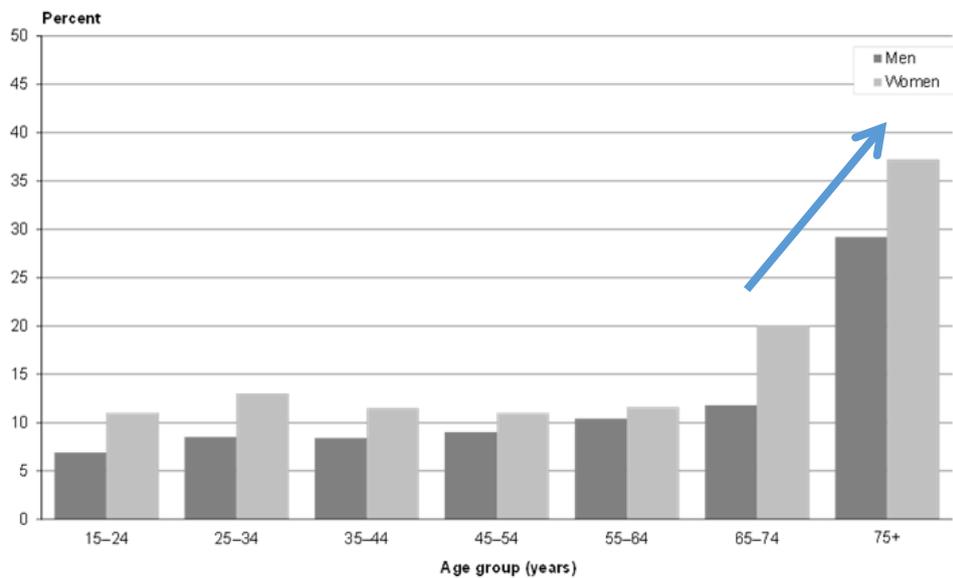
**Figure 1: Regular physical activity for adults (2011/12)**



Note: Prevalence is unadjusted.

Source: Ministry of Health, 2013, Guidelines on Physical Activity for Older People, <http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/guidelines-physical-activity-older-people-aged-65-years-and-over>, page 5

**Figure 2: Proportion of physically inactive men and women (2011/12)**

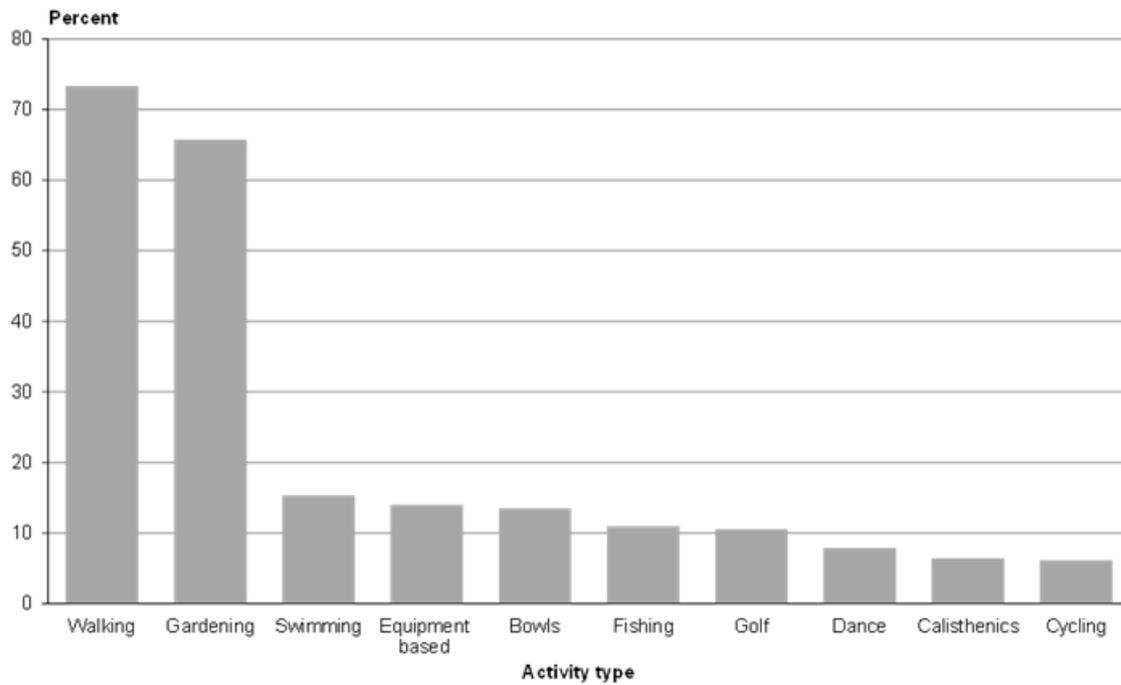


Note: Prevalence is unadjusted.

Source: Ministry of Health, 2013, Guidelines on Physical Activity for Older People, <http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/guidelines-physical-activity-older-people-aged-65-years-and-over>, page 6

Walking and Gardening dominate activities of physically active older people.  
When Walking and Gardening are excluded, participation drops significantly.

**Figure 3: Activities of physically active older New Zealanders (2008)**



Source: SPARC2008 – cited in Ministry of Health, 2013, *Guidelines on Physical Activity for Older People*, <http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/guidelines-physical-activity-older-people-aged-65-years-and-over>, page 7

Number of activities participated in declines with age, especially 75+, as does club membership and participation in natural settings.

People in residential care are more likely to be sedentary.

When Gardening is excluded, Top 10 activities for older people are:

65-74 years				75+ years		
1	Walking	72.2	275,000	Walking	61.7	138,000
2	Swimming	20.5	78,000	<b>Bowls</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>27,000</b>
3	Cycling	15.8	60,000	Equipment-based exercise	10.4*	23,000
4	Fishing	15.2	58,000	Swimming	8.1*	18,000
5	Equipment-based exercise	13.0	50,000	Fishing	8.0*	18,000
6	Golf	11.8	45,000	Golf	7.0*	16,000
7	<b>Bowls</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>36,000</b>	<b>Callisthenics</b>	<b>5.8*</b>	<b>13,000</b>
8	Dance	9.4	36,000	Dance	5.3*	12,000
9	Pilates/yoga	7.6	29,000	<b>Exercising at home (other)</b>	<b>4.3*</b>	<b>10,000</b>
10	Tramping	6.8	26,000	Cycling	3.4*	8,000

Source: Sport New Zealand. 2015. Active New Zealand Survey. <http://www.srknowledge.org.nz/research-completed/sport-and-active-recreation-in-the-lives-of-new-zealand-adults-2/>, page 26

97% of older participants participate casually, with 16-18% doing so in regular club competitions:

#### Different ways participants take part over 12 months by age (years)

	16-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65-74	75+
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Casually, on their own or with others	95.6	98.1	98.8	98.2	97.1	96.6
In regular club competitions	43.7	23.1	19.0	14.1	17.7	15.9
In short-term organised competitions	15.3	9.5	8.1	7.3	6.6*	3.0*
In a one-off or series of events	12.3	6.3	10.0	7.0	3.5*	2.7*
In other ways	17.8	13.8	12.8	12.2	13.0	8.7*

Source: Sport New Zealand. 2015. Active New Zealand Survey. <http://www.srknowledge.org.nz/research-completed/sport-and-active-recreation-in-the-lives-of-new-zealand-adults-2/>, page 35

89% of older participants participate in free activities, and 19-21% pay per visit, entry or hire. 23% of older participants aged 65-74 pay by club membership, with 18% aged 75+ paying this way.

#### Payment types for activities taken part in over 12 months by age (years)

	16-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65-74	75+
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Could do the activity without paying - it was free	90.7	90.7	94.0	95.1	89.5	89.4
Paid per visit, entry or hire	40.7	42.9	41.5	29.4	21.4	19.1
Paid by way of my membership at a sport or physical activity club	33.9	18.9	17.0	17.5	23.0	18.2
Paid by way of membership at a gym, swimming pool or recreation centre	26.2	26.3	20.2	10.8	7.5	8.2
Paid entry costs for a competition or event (as an individual or team member)	16.3	8.5	11.2	9.3	7.2	3.6
Paid for a concession card	6.7	8.9	6.6	7.4	5.3	4.8

Source: Sport New Zealand. 2015. Active New Zealand Survey. <http://www.srknowledge.org.nz/research-completed/sport-and-active-recreation-in-the-lives-of-new-zealand-adults-2/>, page 37

34-37% of older adults belong to any club/centre. 27% of 65-74 year olds are members of a sport or physical activity club, dropping to 20% aged 75+. 75+ have much higher membership of a community leisure or recreation centre at 11%, compared to 4% for age 65-74.

### Membership of clubs, gyms and recreation centres over 12 months by age (years)

	16-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65-74	75+
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Member of any club/centre	61.2	49.9	42.6	37.0	36.9	34.2
Sport or physical activity club	44.9	26.2	24.3	21.5	27.4	20.2
Gym or fitness centre	30.8	27.7	20.5	14.4	6.2*	5.0*
Community leisure or recreation centre	10.9	7.9	5.9	5.9	4.0*	10.7*

Source: Sport New Zealand. 2015. Active New Zealand Survey. <http://www.srknowledge.org.nz/research-completed/sport-and-active-recreation-in-the-lives-of-new-zealand-adults-2/>, page 39

27% of 65-74 year old participants and 20% of 75+ participants receive coaching or instruction.

78% of 65-74 year old participants and 52% of 75+ participate in a manmade or natural setting.

50% of 65-74 year old participants and 37% of 75+ are interested in trying new or doing more.

Volunteering by older adults has increased by 7% from 2008 to 2014.

24% of 65-74 year olds and 12% of 75+ volunteer for sport and recreation.

### Changes in volunteering over 12 months:

	2007/08 (%)	2013/14 (%)	Difference* (%)
All adults 16+ years	24.9	27.7	2.7
<b>Gender</b>			
Men	24.0	29.0	5.0
Women	25.8	26.4	0.6
<b>Age (years)</b>			
16-24	29.2	29.4	0.2
25-34	24.9	22.1	-2.9
35-49	33.3	36.7	3.4
50-64	19.4	24.1	4.7
65 and over**	14.0	20.7	6.7

Source: Sport New Zealand. 2015. Active New Zealand Survey. <http://www.srknowledge.org.nz/research-completed/sport-and-active-recreation-in-the-lives-of-new-zealand-adults-2/>, page 62