



A Sporting Chance
The inside knowledge
on healthy sports clubs

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What do healthy sports clubs have in common?

Although each club has a different story to tell, they share similar characteristics, regardless of the sport played.

VicHealth and Victorian State Sporting Associations (SSAs) are working together to improve the health of all Victorians and promote the physical and social benefits of belonging to a sporting club.

Through VicHealth, SSAs and their affiliated clubs are creating safe, healthy, welcoming and inclusive sporting environments to increase participation by gaining, maintaining and re-engaging their members.

The physical health benefits of participating in sport have been well documented; the many mental health benefits are less well known. Belonging to a sporting club provides opportunities for people to develop friendships, interact with others from varying backgrounds, become part of a team, and develop a strong sense of belonging and sense of purpose.

Participating in sport has also been linked to increased levels of self-esteem, lower levels of overweight and obesity, and decreased involvement in risky behaviours such as drug-taking and crime.

So what makes a healthy successful sporting club?

Regardless of the sport played, successful clubs have a long, strong history, a commitment to including others, and a family and social focus. They value and reward members, communicate and promote regularly, and have policies that cover all bases, from sun protection to healthy food choices. They provide a valuable service to the local community and give people a place to go for physical and social health.

To illustrate these characteristics, VicHealth has produced this brochure along with 18 insightful and inspiring success stories from a range of different sports. The success stories can be downloaded at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sportingchance. The clubs featured were nominated by their SSA because of their success in increasing levels of participation and valuing and promoting inclusiveness.

- Albert Sailing Club
- Altona Hockey Club
- Anglesea Surf Life Saving Club
- Bendigo Orienteers
- Dandenong Motorcycle Club
- Essendon Baseball Club
- Glen Eira Junior Soccer Club
- Kingsville Tennis Club
- Lara Swimming Club
- Leongatha Bowls Club
- Maroondah Rugby Club

- Mornington Peninsula Pony Club
- Natimuk Football Netball Club
- PIT Mill Park Gymnastics Club
- Sporting Shooters Association – Springvale Branch
- Sunshine Heights Cricket Club
- Waverley Little Athletics Centre
- Williamstown Women's Lacrosse Club





A long, strong history

Clubs that are prosperous tend to have been around for 50 years or more. They feature:

- generations of the same family representing the club;
- a sport of long-standing importance in the local area;
- members' awareness and promotion of the club's history;
- club memorabilia and documentation reflecting and revering past players; and
- a strong sense of pride.

“Lacrosse has always been a key part of Williamstown’s history. There are generations of families that have played lacrosse here. The sport is part of Willy kids’ lives; if your brother or sister doesn’t play, your uncle’s bound to have, or your cousin or a neighbour plays.” – **Fran Whitty, Williamstown Women’s Lacrosse Club**

> **Success stories to read:**

[Altona Hockey Club](#), [Essendon Baseball Club](#), [Kingsville Tennis Club](#), [Leongatha Bowls Club](#), [Williamstown Women’s Lacrosse Club](#)



A family focus

An astute club knows that its future lies in the next generation. Focusing on and investing in junior development and recruitment programs ensures that the club thrives and survives.

Many clubs have made their environment more family-friendly by:

- scheduling games/events so the whole family can attend on the same day and then enjoy refreshments together at the end;
- involving more juniors in the club – more juniors means more parents, which results in a vibrant community atmosphere and increases the pool of potential volunteers for the club;
- getting involved with local schools to recruit new junior members;
- welcoming new mums back to the sport by providing informal child care, and scheduling events at family-friendly times, eg on Sundays; and
- encouraging several members of the same family to get involved in the club and share official duties.

“A healthy club is a club that has family involvement. The kids absolutely love being here. The benefits of belonging to a sporting club as a family are incredible. You have quality time together – we have a ball.” – **Jenny Rogers, Essendon Baseball Club**

> **Success stories to read:**

[Dandenong Motorcycle Club](#), [Essendon Baseball Club](#), [Lara Swimming Club](#), [Maroondah Rugby Club](#), [Mornington Peninsula Pony Club](#), [Williamstown Women’s Lacrosse Club](#)



A social spirit and commitment to including others

Clubs that have been able to dramatically increase their membership and profile are those that are welcoming and inclusive. Including many people from within the community creates a fun, community spirit and shifts the focus from competition to participation. It can also be extremely valuable in developing tolerance and acceptance of different cultures and abilities.

Clubs have increased their memberships and their social standing in the community by:

- finding out which people in their community needs them – targeting women, juniors, people with disabilities and people of varying cultures and ethnicities;
- developing specific programs which encourage participation;
- utilising their clubrooms and facilities as a place for people to meet socially after games or on specific days; many people meet members of the local community by participating in the social events put on by their sporting club; and
- sharing their clubrooms and facilities with other clubs and organisations.

“Our club reflects the community make-up and is on the front foot of accepting newly arrived migrants.” – **Chris Hatzoglou, Sunshine Heights Cricket Club**

> **Success stories to read:**

[Albert Sailing Club](#), [Glen Eira Junior Soccer Club](#), [Kingsville Tennis Club](#), [Sporting Shooters Association](#) – [Springvale Branch, Sunshine Heights Cricket Club](#)





Active communication and promotion

Regular, positive communication is vital for every club, and includes internal communication between members as well as external promotion to key individuals and organisations.

Internal communication

Many clubs have faced the possibility of folding, mostly because of internal squabbles, personality clashes and poor communication. They have been able to improve communications by:

- building a club website for new and existing members, and potential sponsors;
- keeping members up to date with regular newsletters, noticeboards and regular events;
- organising social events as a way of exchanging thoughts and ideas;
- fostering a positive open atmosphere in the club (if members share their thoughts, simmering issues can be diffused before they become serious concerns); and
- encouraging younger members to join the committee.

External communication

Clubs that win awards and secure/ receive sponsorships tend to be the clubs that are able to document and promote their achievements to the right people. Successful promotional strategies include:

- tap into the skills that already exist – some members are excellent report writers, photographers or public speakers and they can be enlisted to help the club secure sponsorships and attract the attention of state bodies and local council;
- use inter-club sporting days – these are popular promotional activities with some clubs now running annual goodwill events between rival clubs; and
- contact local newspapers – they can be a valuable source of promotion for clubs; most papers are eager for local stories and clubs see this as an important and easy way to promote their events and generate a profile for future sponsorship opportunities.

“We get a lot of coverage in the local paper; a few of the parents are really good at helping out with that.” – John Dorrington, PIT Mill Park Gymnastics Club

> Success stories to read:

[Glen Eira Junior Soccer Club](#),
[Lara Swimming Club](#), [PIT Mill Park Gymnastics Club](#), [Sunshine Heights Cricket Club](#), [Waverley Little Athletics Centre](#)

Club ethos

Most club members experience a sense of pride in their club – when representing the club, wearing club colours and being part of the team. Clubs with a healthy ethos and culture tend to:

- see themselves as part of the broader community, with a responsibility to assist and improve their community;
- be responsive to community needs by developing specific programs and social events (this generates goodwill that is often reciprocated by other community members and organisations);
- offer their facilities to other community groups;
- take a personal interest in the health of their members and the wider community; and
- celebrate and respect the history of the club while actively planning its future.

“We had a group of Iranian women who wanted to learn about the beach, so we made sure we got women instructors and women life savers on board to make it happen. We will do our best to accommodate community needs.”
 – Pam Wood, Anglesea Surf Life Saving Club

> Success stories to read:

[Albert Sailing Club](#), [Anglesea Surf Life Saving Club](#), [Bendigo Orienteers](#), [Kingsville Tennis Club](#), [Sunshine Heights Cricket Club](#)



Recruiting and retaining volunteers

Clubs are run by a core group of passionate volunteers who love the sport and love being part of a team. They donate considerable time each week to ensure the club continues to survive and grow. A club is only as good as the volunteers that sustain it. Strategies employed by clubs to avoid burn-out and attract new volunteers include:

- getting to know members so that people can be given tasks they will enjoy;
- acknowledging and rewarding work done so members feel valued, respected and want to stay involved;
- recruiting more junior members – more parents around the club increases the pool of potential volunteers;
- making jobs easier so they don't become a burden, such as appointing assistants to committee positions;
- encouraging junior members to take on responsible jobs around the club; and
- scheduling meetings and events at family-friendly times.

“Burn-out is a major challenge for us. We are managing this by encouraging as many parents as possible to help. If everyone did their bit, it would be heaven.” – **Lindsay Harrison, Waverley Little Athletics Centre**

> **Success stories to read:** [Bendigo Orienteers](#), [Maroondah Rugby Club](#), [Natimuk Football Netball Club](#), [PIT Mill Park Gymnastics Club](#), [Waverley Little Athletics Centre](#)



Business acumen

Many thriving clubs have had periods of instability. They were able to rebuild their finances and memberships largely due to the efforts of a passionate core group who were committed to the club's survival.

Tips for survival:

- Tap into the resources and personal and professional networks of members. This is a valuable way of checking out potential sponsorship opportunities with organisations such as local businesses and service clubs.
- Enlist the help of committee members with administrative experience; many are skilled at sourcing grants and other funding opportunities.
- Establish a positive, honest relationship with the local council and regularly update them about the club's activities. Council support, especially for upgrading facilities and ground maintenance, is vital to the survival of many clubs.
- Be willing to share facilities with other clubs and community groups. This reduces costs, provides reciprocal benefits and enhances the club's community profile.

“The financial aspect of running a club is a big challenge. You need to attract sponsors and use the networks that already exist in the club via the parents.” – **Lance Cox, Maroondah Rugby Club**

> **Success stories to read:** [Altona Hockey Club](#), [Kingsville Tennis Club](#), [Maroondah Rugby Club](#), [Natimuk Football Netball Club](#), [PIT Mill Park Gymnastics Club](#)

A healthy heart

A healthy club makes sure it covers all bases. It has sun protection policies and responsible alcohol serving practices, a safety or risk management plan, healthy food choices on offer, and is smoke free. These are the basics of being healthy. To be healthy and thrive, other elements are equally important. Clubs must:

- provide a welcoming and inclusive environment;
- value and reward members;
- communicate positively and regularly across all levels;
- provide a service to the local community; and
- give people a place to go for physical and social health.

“It is great that the club is a lot louder and happier and that there are more women here. I am really proud of how people are integrated into the club.” – **Mary Bingham, Sporting Shooters Association – Springvale Branch**

> **Success stories to read:** [Anglesea Surf Life Saving Club](#), [Dandenong Motorcycle Club](#), [Essendon Baseball Club](#), [Leongatha Bowls Club](#), [Sporting Shooters Association – Springvale Branch](#)

“A sporting club gives people a place to go and something to do. Clubs are about community, not about making money.”

– Marg Lind, Kingsville Tennis Club



Victorian Health Promotion Foundation
PO Box 154
Carlton South 3053 Victoria Australia
Phone: +61 3 9667 1333
Fax: +61 3 9667 1375
Email: vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au

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