ACTIVE BALLARAT STRATEGY REFRESH

ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS REPORT



JULY 2026

CITY OF BALLARAT

Prepared by Otium Planning Group Pty Ltd
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Otium acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our company is located and where we conduct our business. We pay our respects to ancestors and to Elders, past, present and emerging. Otium is committed to national reconciliation and respect for Indigenous peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas, and their rich contribution to society.

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Acknowledgement

Project Acknowledgement

Otium Planning Group would like to acknowledge the staff, user groups and community from the City of Ballarat, local clubs and associations and State Sports Associations that have provided their expertise and input to the **Active Ballarat Strategy Refresh**

Their valuable insights and feedback have been instrumental in shaping the strategic directions for the Plan.

Acknowledgement of Country

The City of Ballarat acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we live and work on, the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples, and recognises their continuing connection to the land and waterways. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.



Figure 1: Murrup Laarr Ancestral Stones

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1. Introduction

The Active Ballarat Strategy Refresh aims to ensure that the original Strategy continues to effectively guide the planning, promotion and delivery of recreation and physical activity opportunities across the municipality. Since the Strategy was first developed, the recreation landscape has evolved, with growing demand for more inclusive, accessible and diverse ways to support physical activity, wellbeing and social connection.

This Engagement Findings Report summarises the insights gathered through a range of targeted engagement activities undertaken as part of the Strategy refresh. These activities were designed to capture perspectives from the broader community, local clubs and associations, State Sporting Associations and City of Ballarat (Council) staff, providing a strong evidence base to inform future strategic directions.

The following engagement methods were undertaken for the Active Ballarat Strategy Refresh:

- **Community Survey**
  - An online community survey was open between 6 March and 17 April 2026.
  - The survey received 127 responses from residents across Ballarat, capturing participation habits, barriers to activity, perceptions of inclusivity and priorities for future investment.
- **Clubs and Associations Survey**
  - An online survey was distributed to clubs and associations operating within the City of Ballarat.
  - A total of 25 clubs and associations completed the survey, providing insights into participation trends, facility needs, inclusion practices and future priorities.
- **State Sporting Association Interviews**
  - Targeted interviews were conducted with 11 State Sporting Associations.
  - These discussions focused on participation trends, emerging formats, inclusion priorities, facility constraints and opportunities specific to the Ballarat region.
- **Internal Council Stakeholders Workshop**
  - A facilitated workshop was held with key City of Ballarat staff.
  - The session explored competing demands on facilities, opportunities to better support informal activity, affordability challenges and alignment with broader Council priorities such as gender equity and access.
- **Clubs and Associations Workshop**
  - A dedicated workshop was held with local clubs and sporting associations.
  - This session focused on future needs, facility and capacity challenges, emerging participation trends and opportunities to strengthen organised and informal sport across the City of Ballarat.

Together, these engagement methods provided a diverse and detailed understanding of how people are currently active in Ballarat, what is working well, where barriers exist, and how the City of Ballarat can best support active living into the future.

2. Community Survey

This section summarises the key findings from the online community survey. This survey took place between 6 March and 17 April 2026. A total of **127 people** completed the survey.

2.1 Respondent Profile

The following information provides details on who responded to the survey.



The slight majority (50.3%) of respondents were female.



Age groups that represents the highest percentage of the respondents were ages 30–39 and 40–49, each at 22%.



The predominant postcodes where respondents lived were Alfredton, Ballarat East and Canadian.

Figure 2: Survey Respondent Characteristics

The following tables summarise the user survey respondents' sample for the City of Ballarat.

Table 1: User Survey Respondent Sample

Category	Sub-group	Number	%
Gender	Female	64	50.3%
	Male	60	47.2%
	Non-binary/Gender Fluid	1	0.7%
	Prefer not to specify	2	1.5%
Age Range	4 years and under	1	0.7%
	4 to 10 years	2	1.5%
	11 to 19 years	8	6.3%
	20 to 29 years	6	4.7%
	30 to 39 years	28	22%
	40 to 49 years	28	22%
	50 to 59 years	20	15.7%
	60 to 69 years	22	17.3%
	70+ years	12	9.4%
	Prefer not to specify	0	0%

Table 2: User Survey Population Statistics

Suburb	Count	%
Alfredton	22	17.3%
Ballarat East	10	7.8%
Canadian	9	7%
Ballarat	8	6.3%
Wendouree	6	4.7%
Brown Hill	5	3.9%
Buninyong	5	3.9%

Suburb	Count	%
Lake Wendouree	5	3.9%
Redan	5	3.9%
Soldiers Hill	5	3.9%
Other	46	36.5%

Figure 3: User Survey Intersectionality

Respondent Profile	Count	%
A person with a disability or impairment	12	9.4%
An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person	2	1.5%
A person with a non-English speaking background	4	3.1%
Low socio-economic (earn less than $650/week)	9	7%
LGBTIQA+	4	3.1%
I would prefer not to say	9	7%
None of the above	92	72.4%

A review of the survey respondents indicates that:

- The sample was relatively balanced by gender, with women (50.3%) slightly higher than men (47.2%), and a very small representation from non-binary respondents (0.7%) and those preferring not to specify (1.5%).
- The most represented age groups were 30–39 years and 40–49 years (both 22%), followed by 60–69 years (17.3%) and 50–59 years (15.7%).
- Respondents lived in Alfredton (22), followed by Ballarat East (10), Canadian (9), Ballarat (8), and Wendouree (6), with several other suburbs contributing smaller but consistent numbers.
- Small proportions identified as a person with a disability or impairment (9.4%) and low socio-economic background (7%). Smaller representation was recorded for non-English speaking background (3.1%), LGBTIQA+ respondents (3.1%) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents (1.5%).

2.2 Participation in Sports

Respondents were asked if they participated in any organised physical activity in the last 12 months. The following graph summarises the responses.

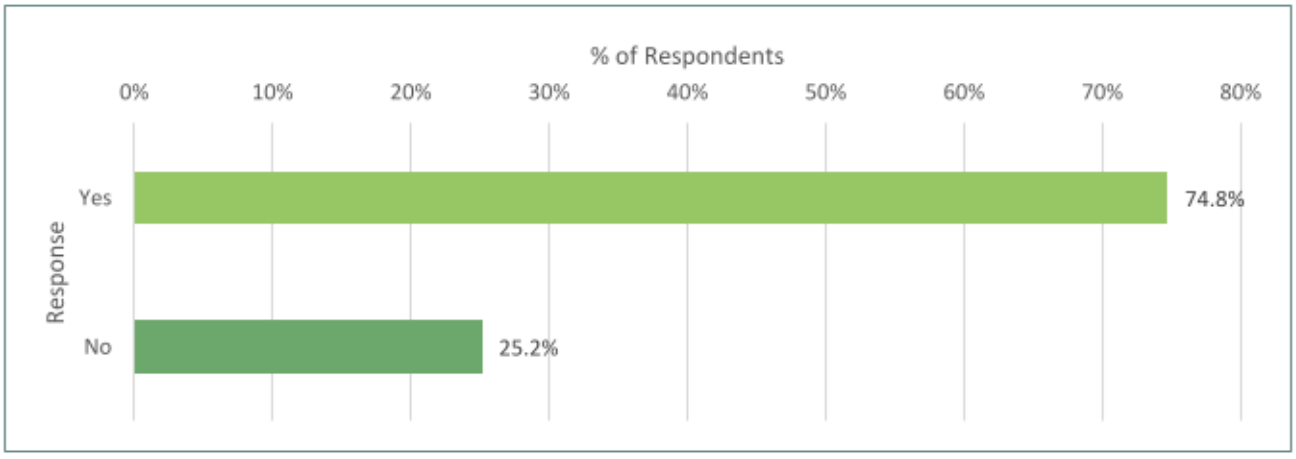


Figure 4: Participation in sports by respondents in Ballarat

Respondents who answered "Yes" were then asked to specify which organised sports and structured activities they had participated in. The following graph summarised the responses.

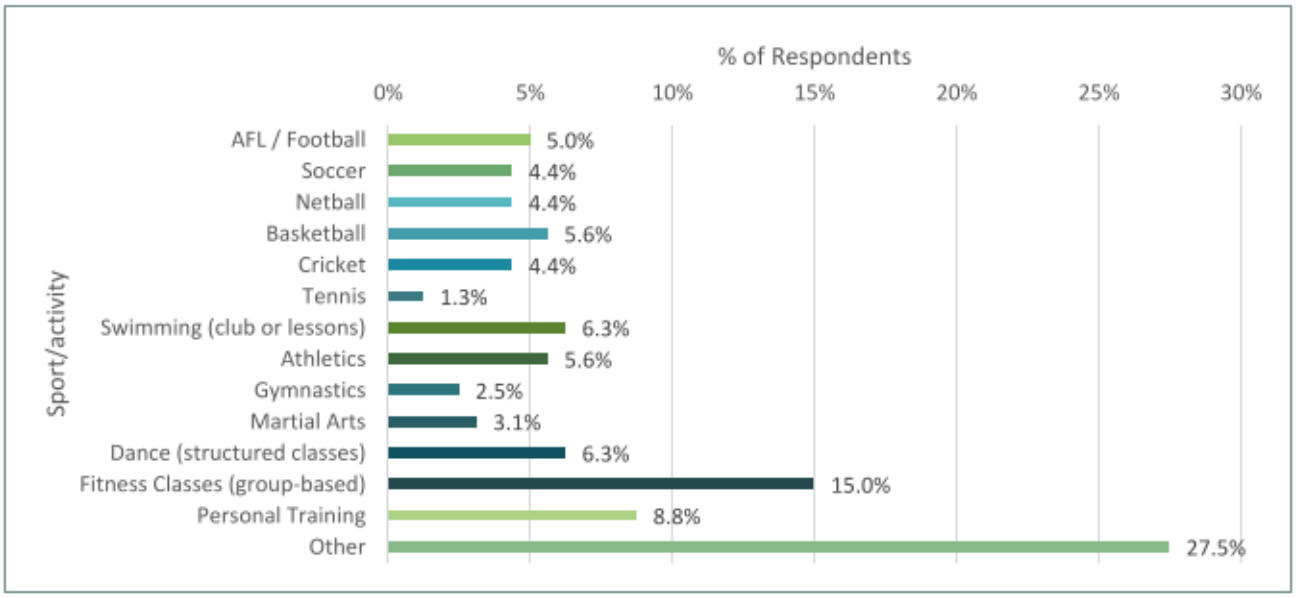


Figure 5: Participation in organised sports and structured activities by respondents in Ballarat

The graph above indicates that:

- The most popular activities are group-based fitness classes (15%) and personal training (8.8%).
- These are followed by dance classes and swimming (club or lessons), each with 6.3% participation.
- Respondents also participated in basketball and athletics (5.6% each), as well as AFL/football (5%).
- Respondents who selected Other mentioned sports such as Pickleball, Hockey and Disc golf/ Ultimate Frisbee.

Respondents were asked what informal activities they participated in. The following graphs summarises the responses.

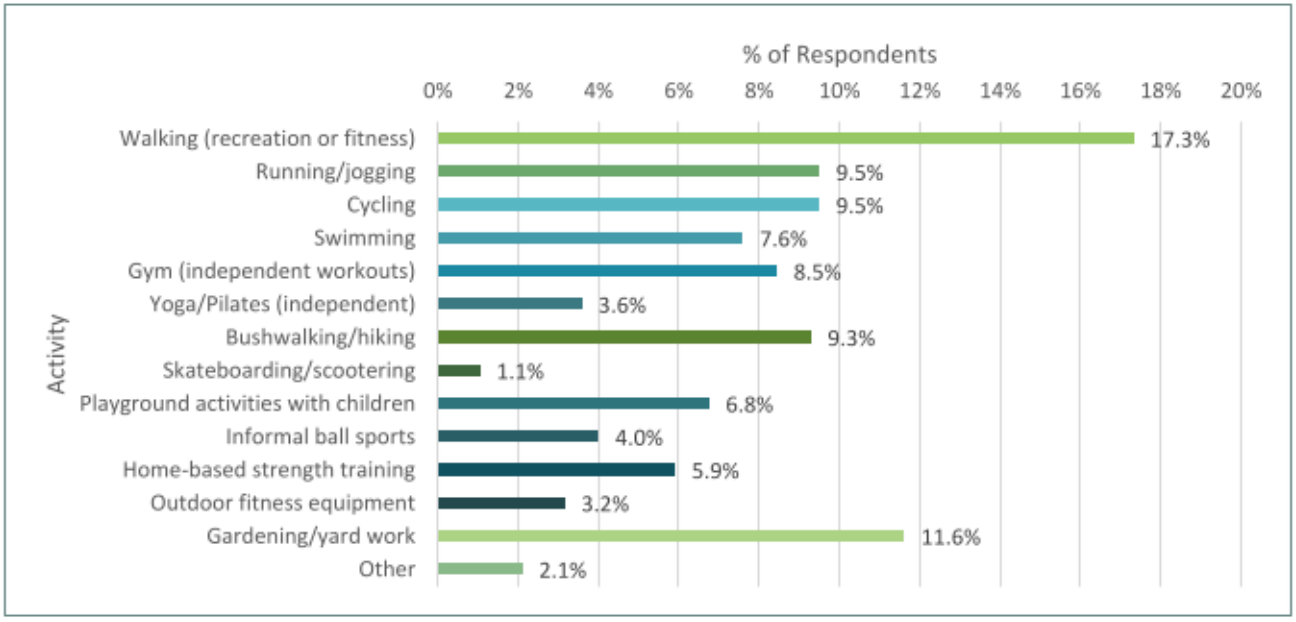


Figure 6: Informal activities participated in by respondents in Ballarat

The graph above indicates that:

- Walking for recreation or fitness is the most common activity, with 17.3% participation, followed by gardening or yard work (11.6%), cycling (9.5%), and running or jogging (9.5%).
- Bushwalking or hiking (9.3%), and independent gym workouts (8.5%) also attract substantial participation, while swimming (7.6%) and playground activities with children (6.8%) are moderately popular.

It should be noted that responses relating to informal physical activity were substantially higher than those for organised sport, with a total of 473 selections for informal activities compared to 160 selections for formal activities.

2.3 Frequency of Participation

Respondents were asked how frequently they participated in these activities. The following graph summarises the responses.

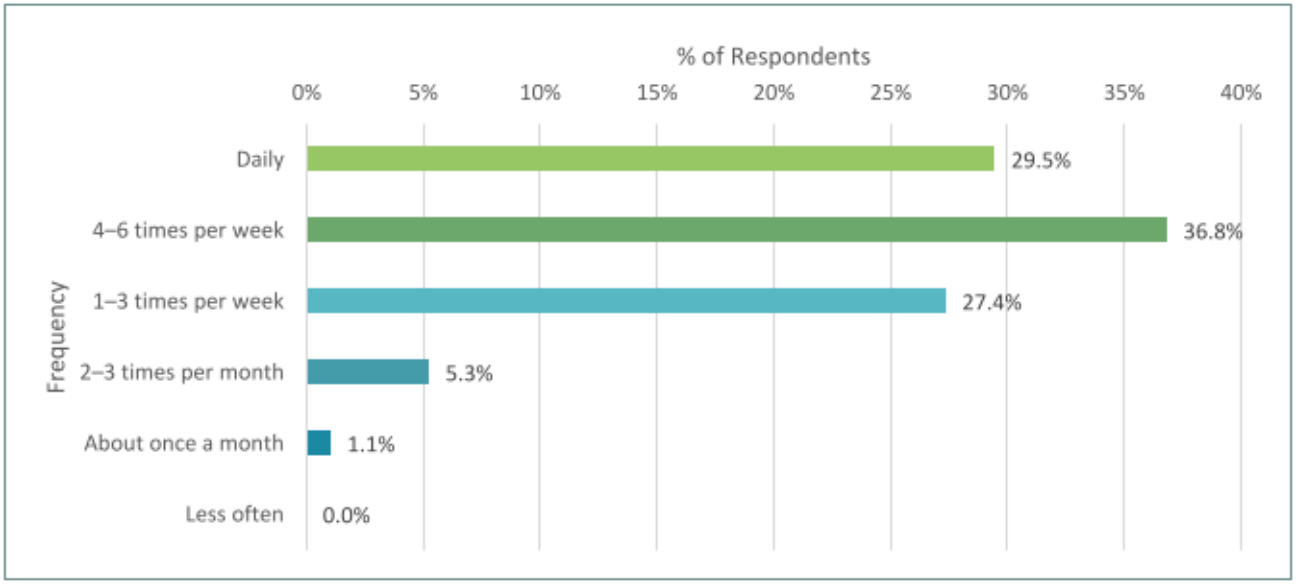


Figure 7: Frequency of participation of respondents in activities in Ballarat

The graph above indicates that:

- Most respondents reported participating in these activities regularly, with 36.8% involved 4–6 times per week and 29.5% participating daily.
- A further 27.4% reported taking part 1–3 times per week, indicating that the majority are active at least weekly.

Respondents were asked if they travelled outside of their local area to undertake active recreation and 63.1% answering “Yes” compared to 36.8% that answered “No.”

2.4 Physical Activity Habits

Residents were asked if they were as physically active as they would like to be and the response were almost equally split with 51.9% answering Yes and 48% answering No.

Respondents that said No were asked the reasons why and following responses were provided.

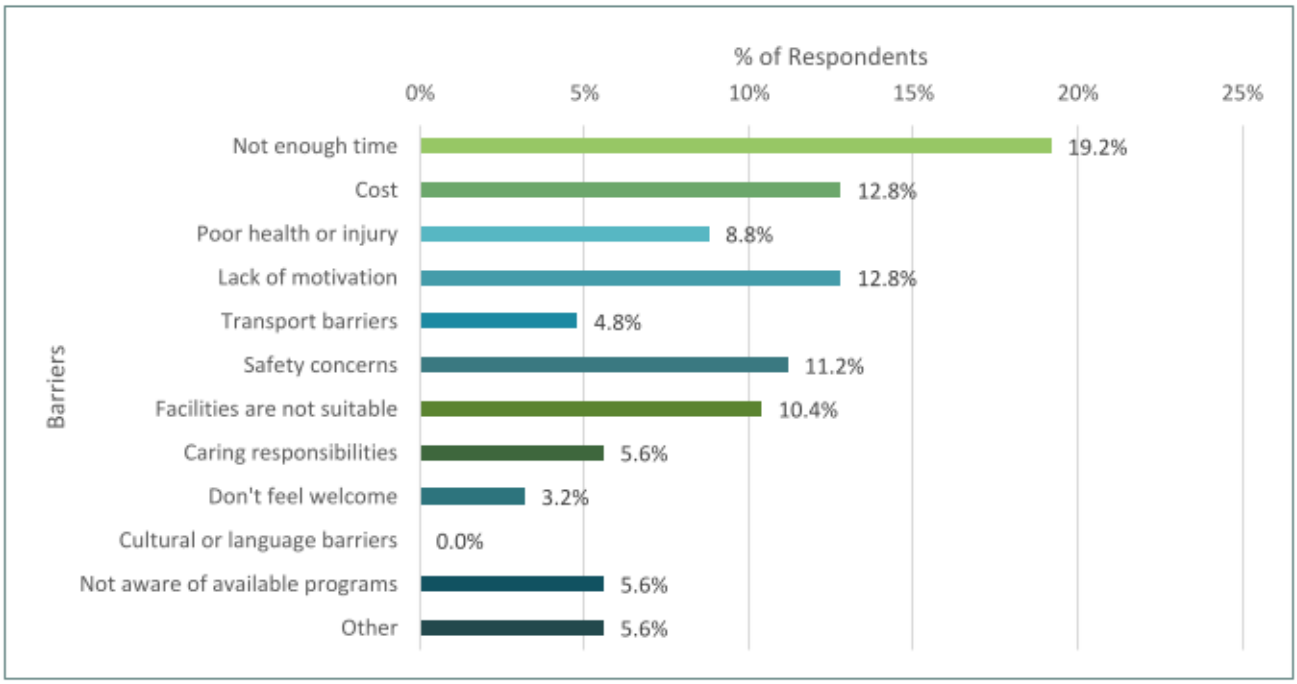


Figure 8: Barriers to active habits of respondents in Ballarat

The graph above indicates that:

- The most common barrier was lack of time (19.2%), followed by cost and lack of motivation (both 12.8%).
- Other barriers included safety concerns (11.2%), facilities not being suitable (10.4%), and poor health or injury (8.8%).

2.5 Ballarat Recreation Facilities and Programs

Respondents were asked if they felt that recreation facilities and programs in Ballarat are inclusive and welcoming. The following graph summarises the responses.

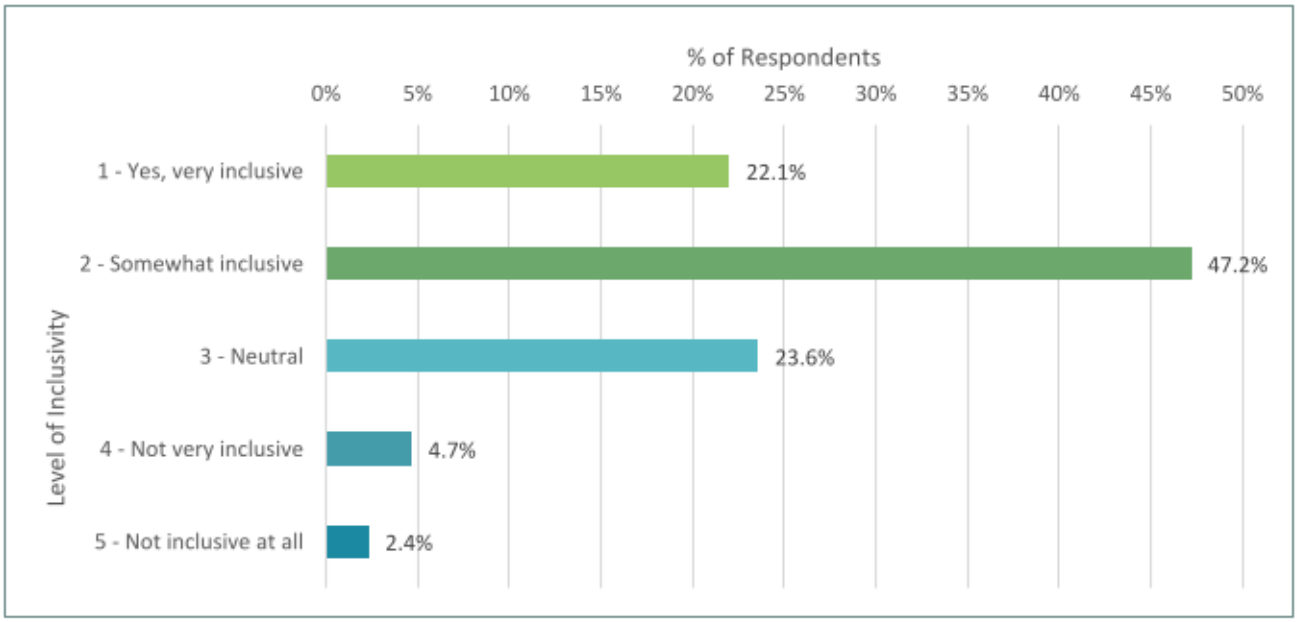


Figure 9: Inclusivity of recreation facilities and programs in Ballarat

The graph above indicates that:

- Most respondents felt that recreation facilities and programs in Ballarat are inclusive, with 47.2% describing them as somewhat inclusive and 22.1% as very inclusive.
- A total of 23.6% were neutral, while only a small proportion felt that facilities were not very inclusive (4.7%) or not inclusive at all (2.4%).

Respondents were asked if they ever felt excluded or unwelcome in a sport or recreation setting in Ballarat. 21.2% answered Yes, 72.4% answered No and 6.4% did not provide and answer.

It should be noted that 12.7% of the responses that said Yes were from a minority community.

Respondents were asked what would make participation more inclusive for them and others in the community. The following graph summarises the responses.

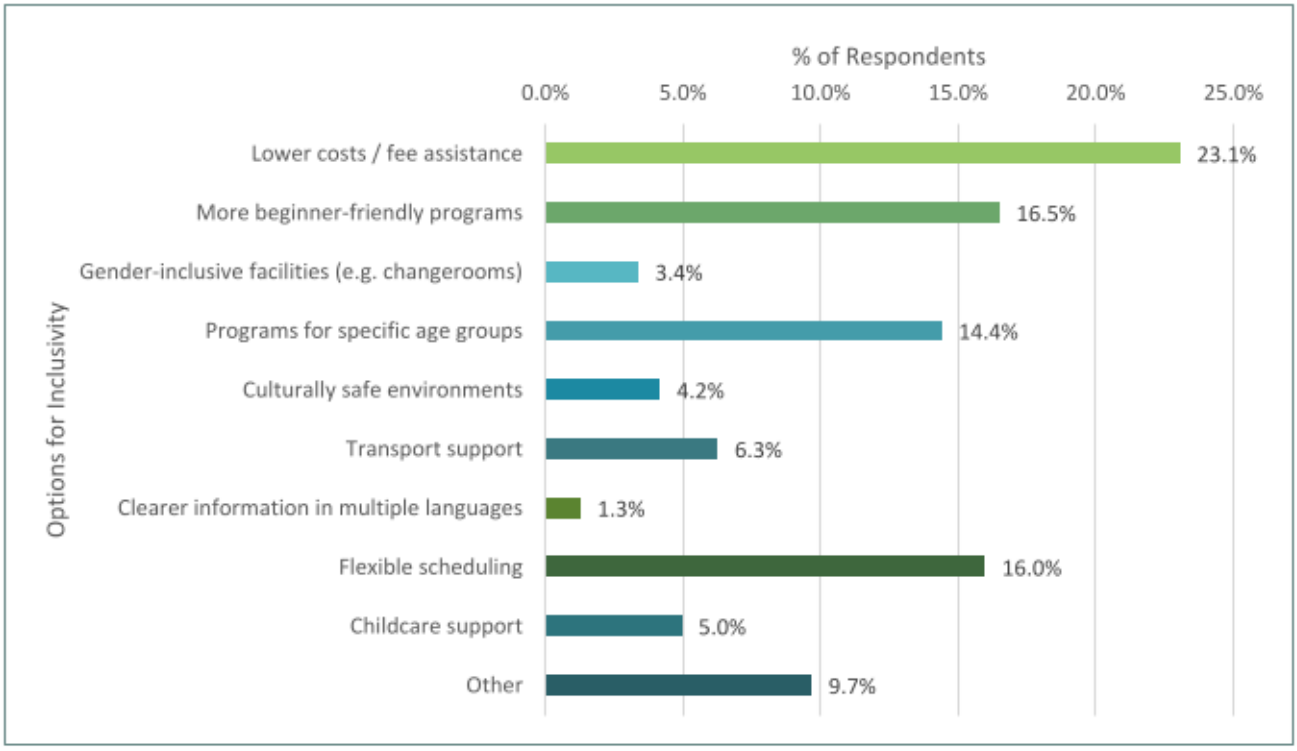


Figure 10: Options to increase inclusivity in Ballarat

The graph above indicates that:

- Respondents identified lower costs or fee assistance as the most important factor for making participation more inclusive (23.1%).
- This was followed by more beginner-friendly programs (16.5%), flexible scheduling (16.0%), and programs for specific age groups (14.4%).
- Other factors raised included transport support (6.3%), childcare support (5.0%), and culturally safe environments (4.2%).

2.6 Active Recreation Initiatives in Ballarat

Respondents were asked whether they participate in any active recreation initiatives in Ballarat. Only 21.2% indicated "Yes," while 74% reported "No" and 4.7% were "Unsure". This indicates a need to increase the availability of events and provide greater community awareness of existing active recreation opportunities.

When asked which initiatives were attended, the following responses were provided:

- Cycling and bike-related events were the most popular, including Biketober, Ride to Work Day, Ballarat's Biggest Bike Ride, and general use of bike paths.
- Free swimming pool activities.
- Community running and walking events, including the Ballarat Marathon and walks around the Wendouree Lake.
- School and community sport activation programs, such as the Western Bulldogs AFL Super Clinic and Ride to School Day.
- General use of aquatic facilities and outdoor recreation spaces (e.g. swimming, lake walking, pool visits) were commonly referenced as informal active recreation opportunities.
- Other occasional events and programs, such as Summer Sunday music and recreation days, were also mentioned but less frequently.

Respondents were asked how the City of Ballarat could support the community to participation in active recreation as summarised below:

- **Better information and promotion**: clearer communication about what activities, programs, facilities and events are available, including schedules, costs, beginner options and "come and try" opportunities.
- **Improved infrastructure for walking and cycling**: safer, connected and well-maintained walking paths, bike lanes and crossings, better lighting (especially at night), shade, seating, and upkeep of existing tracks and trails.
- **More accessible and inclusive facilities and programs**: options for all ages, abilities and backgrounds (including people with a disability, seniors, women, children and LGBTIQA+ people), more non-competitive, low-impact and beginner-friendly activities.
- **Greater affordability and flexible access**: lower costs, free or low-cost options, casual use of facilities, more sessions outside business hours (evenings and weekends), and reduced barriers such as booking rules or insurance requirements.
- **Investment in facilities and maintenance**: more pools, courts, fields, playgrounds, outdoor gyms and all-weather spaces, plus better maintenance, lighting and access to existing facilities across all suburbs.

Respondents were asked to rate the top three priority areas that the City of Ballarat should focus on in this strategy, and the following were identified as the key themes:

- **Safe, connected active transport**: build and link high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure (protected bike lanes, shared paths, footpaths, safe crossings, lighting) to make everyday movement easy, especially around schools, activity centres and neighbourhoods.
- **Inclusive, accessible and affordable participation**: provide low-cost or free activities, facilities and programs for all ages, abilities, genders and cultures, with a strong focus on people who are inactive, seniors, people with a disability, women, children and lower-income communities.
- **Better facilities and year-round spaces**: invest in fit-for-purpose indoor and outdoor facilities (pools, courts, tracks, playgrounds, and outdoor gyms), maintain existing assets, and ensure spaces are usable outside club usage times and during winter.
- **Stronger promotion, activation and pathways**: improve communication about what is available, offer more "come and try" and beginner-friendly programs, activate parks and facilities with social and informal activities, and create clear entry points to encourage being active.

- **Improved access and support systems**: address transport barriers (public transport, parking, and bike parking), safety concerns (especially at night), childcare barriers, and support clubs and community groups to deliver flexible, welcoming and well-run participation opportunities.

2.7 Health and Wellbeing of Ballarat Community

Respondents were asked how they rated their health. The following graph summarised the responses.

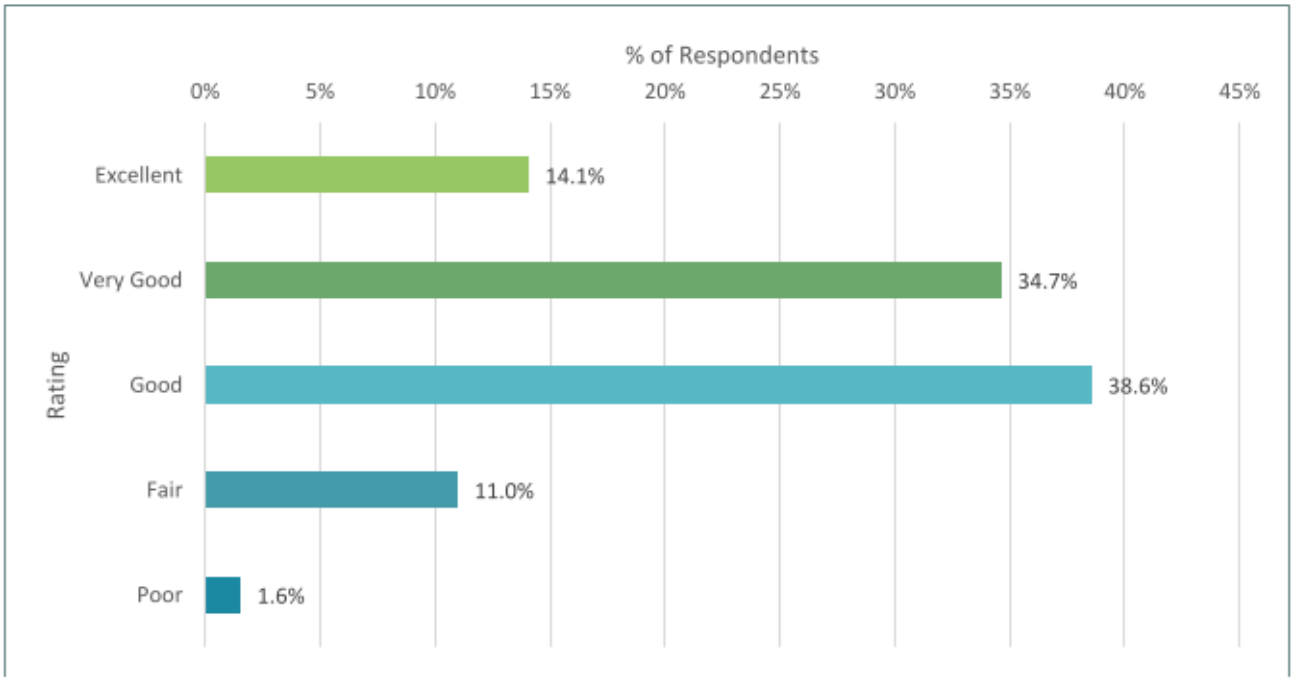


Figure 11: Respondents Health Rating

The graph above indicates that:

- Most respondents rated their health positively, with 38.6% describing their health as good and 34.7% as very good. A further 14.1% reported excellent health.
- In contrast, a smaller proportion rated their health as fair (11.0%), while only 1.6% reported poor health.

Respondents who indicated “Fair” or “Poor” were asked what restricted them from being healthy and active. The following were identified as the key themes.

- **Lack of time and competing commitments**: work, study, caring responsibilities, parenting, fatigue and poor sleep make it hard to prioritise activity.
- **Health, injury and ability barriers:** chronic illness, disability, mental health challenges, ageing, pain, injuries, weight concerns and recovery needs limit what people can do.
- **Cost and financial pressure**: expense to access facilities and programs, equipment, support services and transport reduces participation.
- **Safety, access and environment issues**: unsafe roads and crossings, poor cycling and walking infrastructure, darkness in winter, weather, car dependency, transport barriers and limited nearby facilities.
- **Motivation, routines and information gaps**: low motivation, poor mental health, boredom, difficulty forming habits, lack of social connection, and not knowing what activities or entry-level options are available.

Residents were asked how many days per week they engaged in moderate to vigorous physical activity. The following graph summarises the responses.

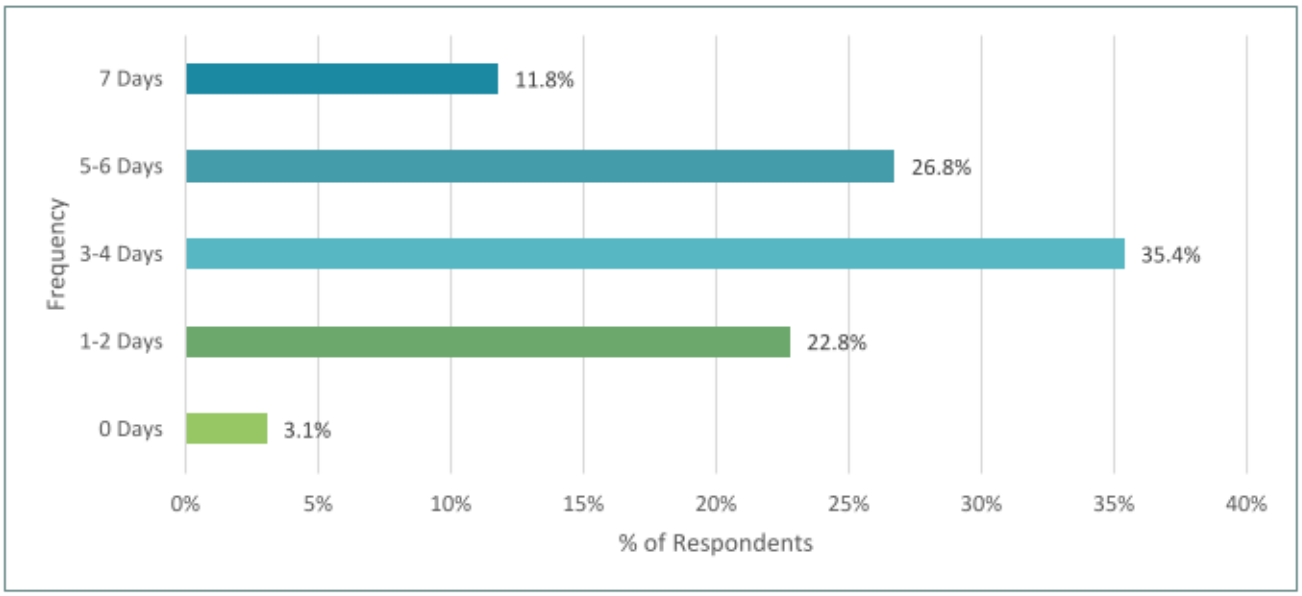


Figure 12: Respondents frequency of vigorous physical activity

The graph above indicates that:

- Most residents reported being active on multiple days each week. The largest proportion (35.4%) engaged in moderate to vigorous physical activity 3-4 days per week, followed by 26.8% who were active 5-6 days per week.
- A further 22.8% participated 1-2 days per week, while 11.8% were active every day. Only a small proportion (3.1%) reported no physical activity, indicating generally high levels of participation across the community.

2.8 Key Findings of Community Survey

Following are the key findings from the survey:

- **Respondent profile:** The survey received 127 responses, with a balanced gender split and strongest representation from adults aged 30-49 years. Respondents came from across Ballarat, with Alfredton most represented, and small but important representation from people with disability, low-income households, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and LGBTIQA+ communities.
- **Higher participation in informal activity than organised sport:** Informal physical activity was significantly more common than organised sport, with a total of 473 selections for informal activities compared to 160 selections for organised activities. Walking, cycling, gardening, running and bushwalking were the most popular informal activities, while organised participation was led by fitness classes, personal training, dance and swimming.
- **Participation:** The majority of respondents reported participating in physical activity weekly or more often, and nearly two-thirds travelled outside their local area to access active recreation opportunities.
- **Mixed satisfaction with activity levels:** Residents were almost evenly split on whether they are as active as they would like to be. The main barriers to increased participation were lack of time, cost, motivation, safety concerns, unsuitable facilities, and health or injury.

- **Generally positive views on inclusivity, with clear gaps:** Most respondents felt Ballarat's recreation facilities and programs are inclusive and welcoming, though around one-fifth had felt excluded. Key improvements identified were lower costs, beginner-friendly programs, flexible scheduling, age-specific program options, better transport options and childcare support.
- **Good overall health, but structural barriers remain:** Most respondents rated their health as good or better, and levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity were generally high. However, those reporting fair or poor health highlighted time pressures, cost, access, safety, motivation and health limitations as continuing barriers to being more active.
- **Low engagement with active recreation initiatives:** Only 21.2% of respondents had participated in formal active recreation initiatives in Ballarat. Those who had attended the most mentioned cycling events, free swimming activities, community running and walking events, and school or community activation programs. Respondents mentioned the need for better promotion, improved walking and cycling infrastructure, more accessible and affordable options, and greater activation of local spaces to increase participation and awareness.

3. Clubs and Associations Survey

Online surveys were distributed to clubs and associations in the City of Ballarat to gather their insights into the Active Ballarat Strategy. A total of 25 clubs/associations completed the survey. The following section summarises the results and key findings from the survey.

Table 3: Clubs and Associations that responded to the survey

Organisation Name	Club or Association
Ballarat Netball Association	Association
Ballarat Football Umpires Association	Association
Ballarat Light Car Club Inc	Club
Ballarat Masters Badminton Club Inc	Club
Ballarat Disc Sports	Club
Ballarat Bowling Club	Club
Ballarat Pony Club	Club
Lake Wendouree Football Netball Club	Club
East Point Junior Football Netball Club	Club
Ballarat Fire Brigade Cricket Club	Club
Ballarat Amateur Canoe Club	Club
Ballarat Football Netball Club	Club
Dragons Abreast Ballarat - Dragon Boating Club	Club
Brown Hill Cricket Club	Club
Volleyball Ballarat	Association
Lake Learmonth Yacht Club	Club
Ballarat Cricket Association	Association
Ballarat Royals Baseball Club	Club
Ballarat Gymsports	Club
Ballarat Water Polo Association	Association
Ballarat Soccer Club	Club
Central Highlands Pickleball	Club
Trainor Taekwondo Academy	Club
Ballarat Alexandra Croquet Club	Club

3.1 Membership

Clubs and associations were asked to identify any recent membership changes within their sports, and the following points summarise the key themes across all responses.

- **Growth driven by juniors, women and new formats:** Many clubs/associations reported increases in junior participation, female participation, and mixed or social formats (e.g. netball, cricket, volleyball, baseball, pickleball), often supported by targeted programs, school pathways and more flexible competitions.
- **Post-COVID disruption with uneven recovery:** Several clubs/associations experienced membership declines during or after COVID-19, with recovery varying by sport. Some have regained momentum, while others remain below pre-COVID-19 levels due to changed lifestyles, reduced volunteering, or loss of engagement.

- **Diversification increasing membership:** Clubs/associations that expanded their offerings beyond traditional formats (e.g. disc sports adding disc golf, golf off-course venues, social and short-format competitions) reported broader and more inclusive membership growth across ages and abilities.
- **Barriers causing decline or stagnation:** Membership challenges were linked to cost-of-living pressures, facility limitations, access issues, environmental constraints (e.g. lack of water, shelter, indoor courts), and competition from lower-cost or alternative activities.
- **Membership changes:** Several clubs/associations noted that changes in life circumstances such as study, work, relocation, health, injury or pathway progression strongly influence retention, particularly among young adults and volunteers.

3.2 Emerging Trends

Clubs/associations were asked to report on any emerging trends within their sport. The following points summarise the key themes.

- There is increasing demand for flexible, social and informal participation, including mixed formats, shorter commitments, and pay-per-session options that fit around work, family and social connections.
- Junior interest is growing across several sports, driven by population growth and renewed engagement, though this demand is often limited by facility capacity, competition rules and infrastructure constraints.
- Lifestyle pressures such as full-time work, family commitments, ageing and injury are changing how people participate, with many preferring lower-impact roles, informal play or shorter participation periods.
- Participants are seeking better value for money and more supportive, inclusive environments, including family-friendly clubs and welcoming pathways for diverse and mixed participant groups.

3.3 Diversity and Inclusion

Clubs and associations were asked whether they had girls and women in leadership roles such as coaches, committee members or presidents. A total of 22 clubs reported Yes, while 3 clubs indicated that they did not.

Participation Profile

Clubs/associations were asked if any of their current participants belong to one or more of specific community groups. The following chart shows the number of clubs and associations that indicated one or more of their participants belong to one of the participant groups listed.

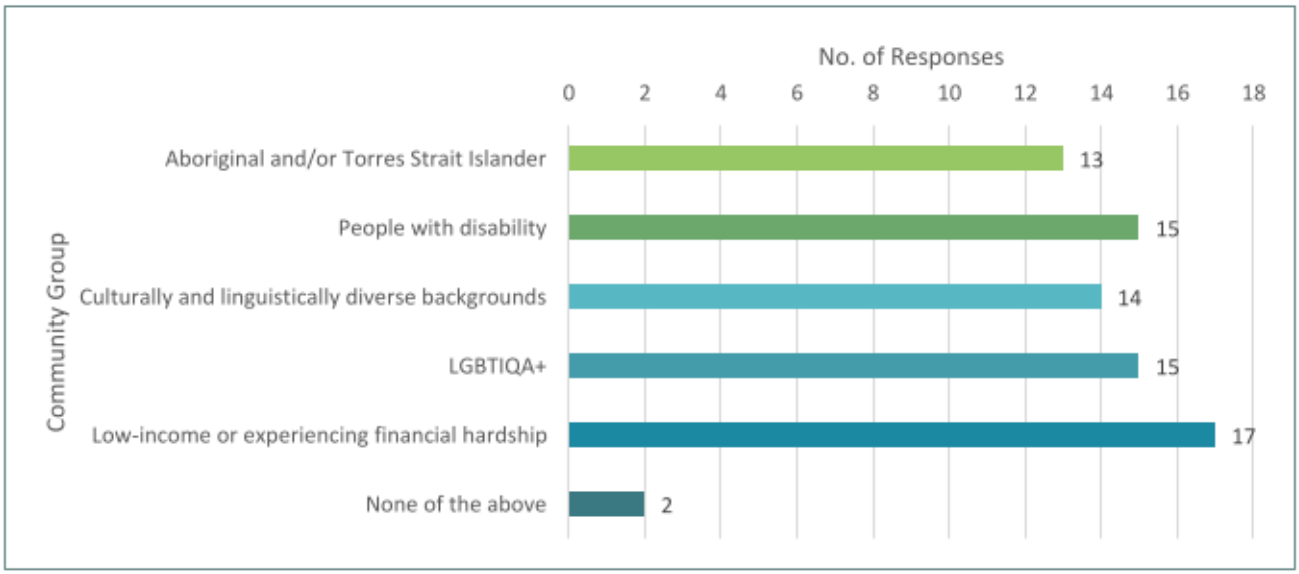


Figure 13: Ballarat Clubs and Associations participation profile

The table above indicates that:

- Most clubs confirmed participation from low-income or financially disadvantaged people (17 clubs), followed by people with disability and LGBTIQA+ participants (15 clubs each).
- Clubs also reported strong participation from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (14 clubs) and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants (13 clubs).

The clubs/associations were also asked if they actively collect participation data on diversity and only seven clubs indicated that they did while the majority (eighteen clubs) reported that they did not. Not tracking data participation related to diversity may limit clubs and associations' ability to understand who is engaging with their programs and to plan targeted inclusion initiatives.

The survey then asked if the clubs/associations currently have any programs that directly target the participation of any of these groups. The following graph shows the number of clubs that actively target participation among the respective groups.

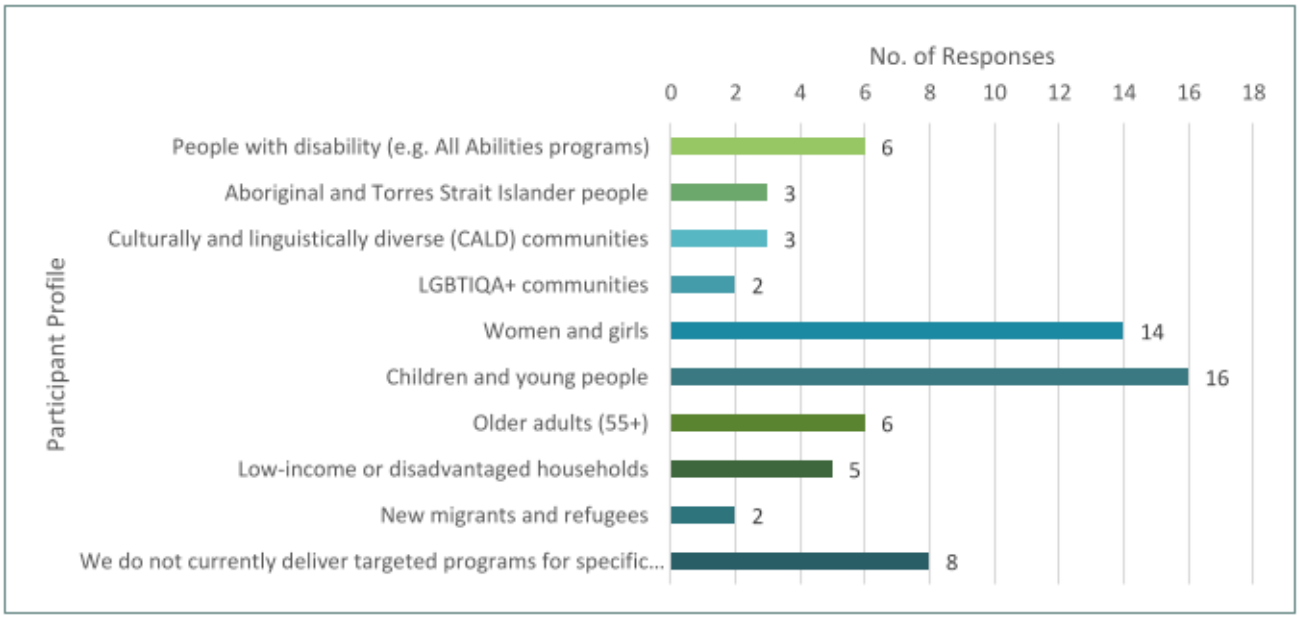


Figure 14: Clubs and Associations programs for participant profiles

The graph indicates that:

- Most clubs reported delivering programs specifically targeting children and young people (16 clubs) and women and girls (14 clubs).
- Fewer clubs indicated targeted programs for people with disability and older adults (6 clubs each), low-income or disadvantaged households (5 clubs), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and CALD communities (3 clubs each), while a smaller number focused on LGBTIQA+ communities and new migrants or refugees (2 clubs each).

The following table details responses from clubs and associations outlining programs and initiatives designed to support participation among diverse community groups.

Table 4: Clubs and Associations participant profile programs

Clubs/Associations	Programs
Ballarat Netball Association	• NETTA Program - early primary school aged children. • Junior Netball Competitions from 9/u, 11/u, 13/u, 15/u, 17/u. • Senior Netball Competitions - Female, Social & High Level. • Senior Netball Competitions - Mixed. • Academy Program - early high school aged girls. • Primary School Competitions - Grades 3/4 and 5/6. • Regional Secondary School Competitions. • School Holiday Clinics. • Umpire workshops and development. • Coach workshops and development. • Representative Squad Program (TID) - 13/u, 15/u 17/u.
Ballarat Football Umpires Association (BFUA)	• Women & Girls Umpire Experience Hub: Dedicated sessions for females, designed to teach basics and build confidence in a supportive environment. • Development & Specialisation: The BFUA focuses on building character on and off the field, offering pathways for all levels of experience, including beginners, and has a Girls Umpiring Academy in partnership with Loreto College and Boys Academy with St Patricks College. • Partnerships with AFL Victoria for development days and "Come & Try" days.
Ballarat Masters Badminton Club Inc	• Introduced a social playing session to encourage men & women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds to stay active playing badminton. With the current rise in interest towards the sport in the Ballarat region, have started coaching sessions for children and young people. • Conducted a coaching camp during the Easter break and will be moving into a term based coaching program from Term 2 onwards. • Stated the club and the sport of badminton is a welcoming space for new migrants, refugees, women & girls to come together to stay active.
Ballarat Disc Sports	• The club currently delivers targeted 'Come and Try' initiatives specifically designed for young people in the Ballarat region. These introductory sessions focus on lowering the barrier to entry for both Ultimate Frisbee and Disc Golf, providing a low-pressure environment for students and young adults to learn the basic skills.
Ballarat Pony Club	• Certificate work, junior committees.

Clubs/Associations	Programs
Lake Wendouree Football Netball Club	• Junior and senior joint initiatives - e.g. training together, game day experience. • Celebrate the Indigenous round by engaging with our ATSIC players.
East Point Junior Football Netball Club	• The club is a Junior Sporting club, so all programs are delivered to underage participants.
Ballarat Fire Brigade Cricket Club	• Maintain low-cost access to sport by being the cheapest cricket club in Ballarat.
Dragons Abreast Ballarat - Dragon Boating Club	• Starters Days for seniors through University of 3rd Age (U3A) • Starters Days for Special School - disability group • Starters Days for high school age participation - "Outward Bound" style for school camps etc. (not continuing).
Brown Hill Cricket Club	• Discounts on clothing and annual fees.
Volleyball Ballarat	• Women's specific competition. • Junior training and game play.
Lake Learmonth Yacht Club	• When there is water in the lake they offer informal sailing days, cruisers, informal instruction.
Ballarat Cricket Association	• Welcoming environment at all clubs for all ages from 6-year-olds to senior players, male and female.
Ballarat Royals Baseball Club	• Offer specific junior programs. During summer these programs are run at a no cost to families and during winter if they wish to participate in competition, they have that available. They target junior and young people through mentoring and those that can support in development and growth in officiating and support moving into leadership roles with young people sitting on our committee.
Ballarat Gymsports	• A gymnastics club offering sessions for recreational and competitive participants from 9 months to 90 years through a large range of classes and sessions. Currently operate around 170 sessions each week.
Ballarat Water Polo Association	• Come and Try Session (Pride Month): Offer a Come and Try water polo session during Pride Month to encourage participation from the LGBTIQA+ community and promote an inclusive sporting environment. • Community Engagement: Engage with Club Surge (Melbourne's LGBTIQA+ water polo club) and invite their players to participate in our annual competition held in October, helping to build inclusive connections across clubs. • Women and Girls Participation: Offer programs that actively support participation from women and girls. Our sessions are typically mixed, creating an inclusive environment where women and non-binary participants feel comfortable. Where needed, sessions can be split into groups to better support development and confidence. • Junior Development Program: Offer a dedicated junior program designed specifically for younger players, focusing on skill development, confidence in the water, and introducing the fundamentals of water polo in a supportive environment.
Ballarat Soccer Club	• Payment plans on fees to target low-income households, increased effort into girls and women's programs to boost participation and ensure they feel included, providing junior teams for young players to play in. We are also one of the first clubs to begin an active respect

Clubs/Associations	Programs
	program for young boys around the treatment of women, to be rolled out to our under 14 and under 16 boys this year.
Central Highlands Pickleball	• Junior coaching program. • Women's program. • Welcome all ages. • Many members from the LGBTIQA+ community that feel very comfortable at our club. • Offer cardio pickleball for everyone for fitness. We are an inclusive club.
Trainor Taekwondo Academy	• Self-defence classes for children, women and girls.

Clubs were asked whether their programs operate on a seasonal, year-round, or flexible basis. Thirteen clubs reported running seasonal programs, nine indicated their programs operate year-round, and three reported flexible delivery.

Clubs and associations were asked whether they have policies or practices in place that promote participation from people with diverse backgrounds. The following graph summarises the responses.

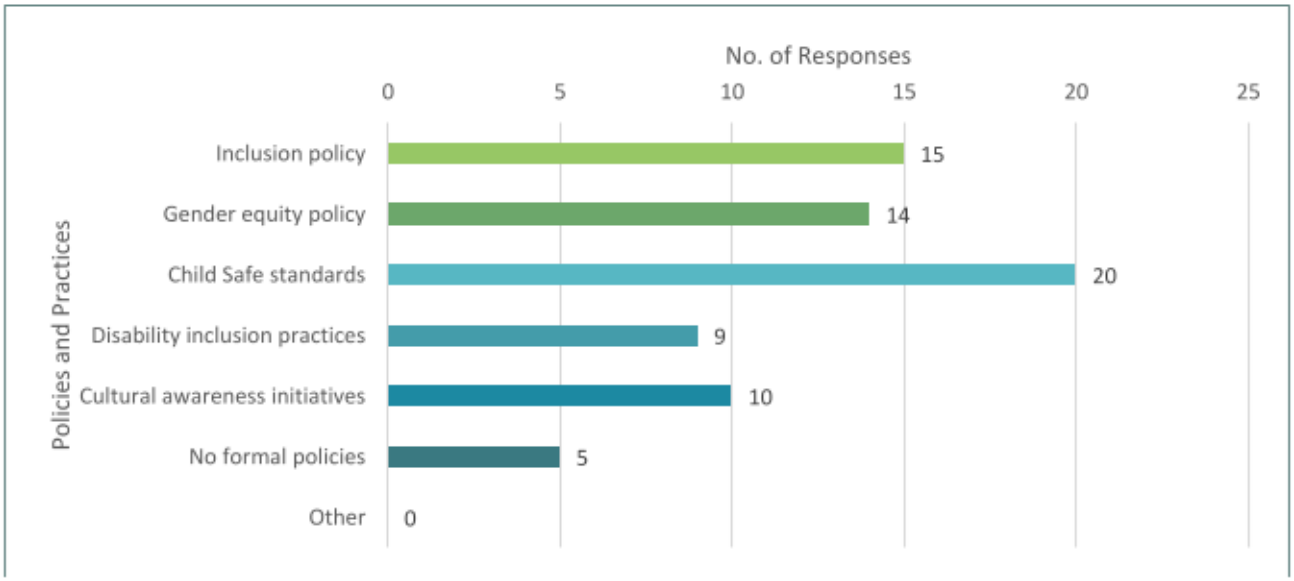


Figure 15: Ballarat Clubs and Associations policies and practices

The results indicate that:

- Child Safe Standards were the most common, reported by 20 clubs.
- Inclusion policies were reported by 15 clubs, and gender equity policies by 14 clubs.
- Cultural awareness initiatives were in place at 10 clubs, while nine (9) clubs reported disability inclusion practices.
- Five clubs indicated that they do not currently have any formal policies in place.

Clubs and associations were asked how confident they are in welcoming participants from diverse backgrounds. The following graph summarises the responses.

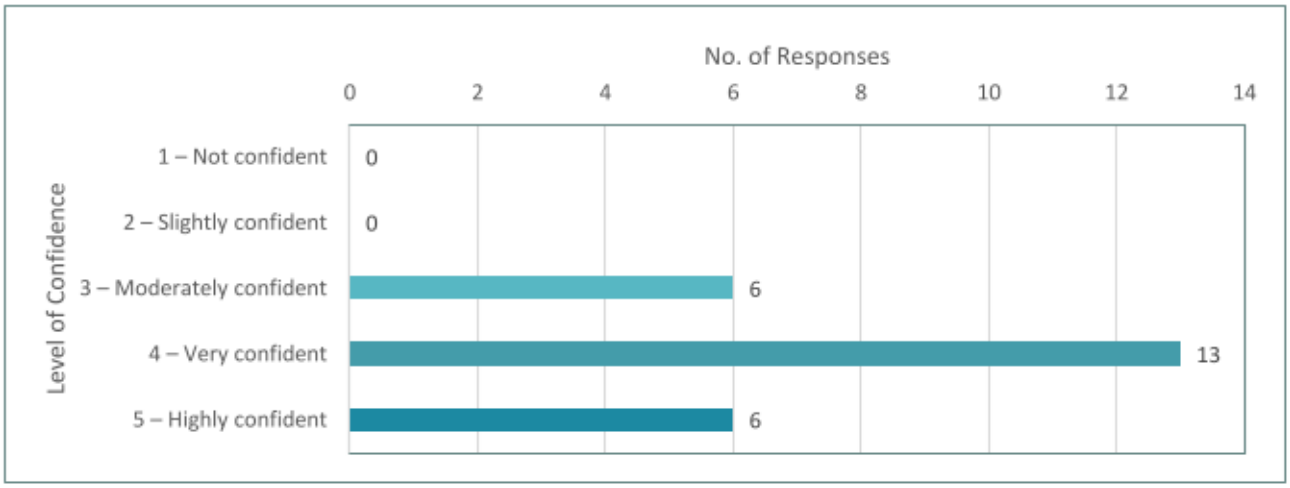


Figure 16: Ballarat Clubs and Associations level of confidence on inclusion

The responses indicate that:

- Thirteen clubs rated themselves as very confident, and six clubs as highly confident.
- Six clubs reported moderate confidence.

Respondents were asked what barriers they face when attracting and retaining participants from diverse backgrounds. The following points summarise the key findings:

- **Facility and infrastructure limitations** were the most common challenge, particularly affecting the ability to include people with disability, women and families, and to provide safe, accessible and visible spaces for participation.
- **Cost, transport and financial pressures** were frequently mentioned as barriers, including membership fees, insurance costs, equipment expenses and travel requirements, which can limit participation for people from diverse or low-income backgrounds.
- **Awareness, promotion and cultural familiarity** remain challenges, with some sports being under-advertised, unfamiliar to culturally diverse communities, or perceived as less inclusive or relevant.

Respondents were asked to highlight their success stories of engaging participants from diverse backgrounds. The following examples were provided.

- Many clubs describe a welcoming and inclusive culture, with clubs such as Ballarat Netball Association and Ballarat Pony Club emphasising open participation regardless of background or ability.
- Low-cost and low-barrier programs (e.g. “Come and Try” sessions) have been effective, with examples including Ballarat Disc Sports and Ballarat Amateur Canoe Club removing financial and equipment barriers to participation.
- Clubs including Ballarat Cricket Association, Ballarat Soccer Club and Trainor Taekwondo Academy reported strong growth in culturally diverse participation, with some members progressing into coaching or higher-level competition.

- Inclusive opportunities for older adults and people with a disability were highlighted by groups such as Dragons Abreast Ballarat and Lake Learmonth Yacht Club, supporting social connection and continued participation.
- Meaningful Indigenous engagement was demonstrated through Indigenous Rounds and cultural activities at clubs such as East Point Junior Football Netball Club and Lake Wendouree Football Netball Club.
- Ballarat Water Polo Association shared a notable success story of a culturally diverse participant progressing from community club involvement to selection at the Australian Country Championships.

3.4 Future Council Support

Clubs were asked what types of support would help them attract participants from diverse backgrounds. The following graph summarises the responses.

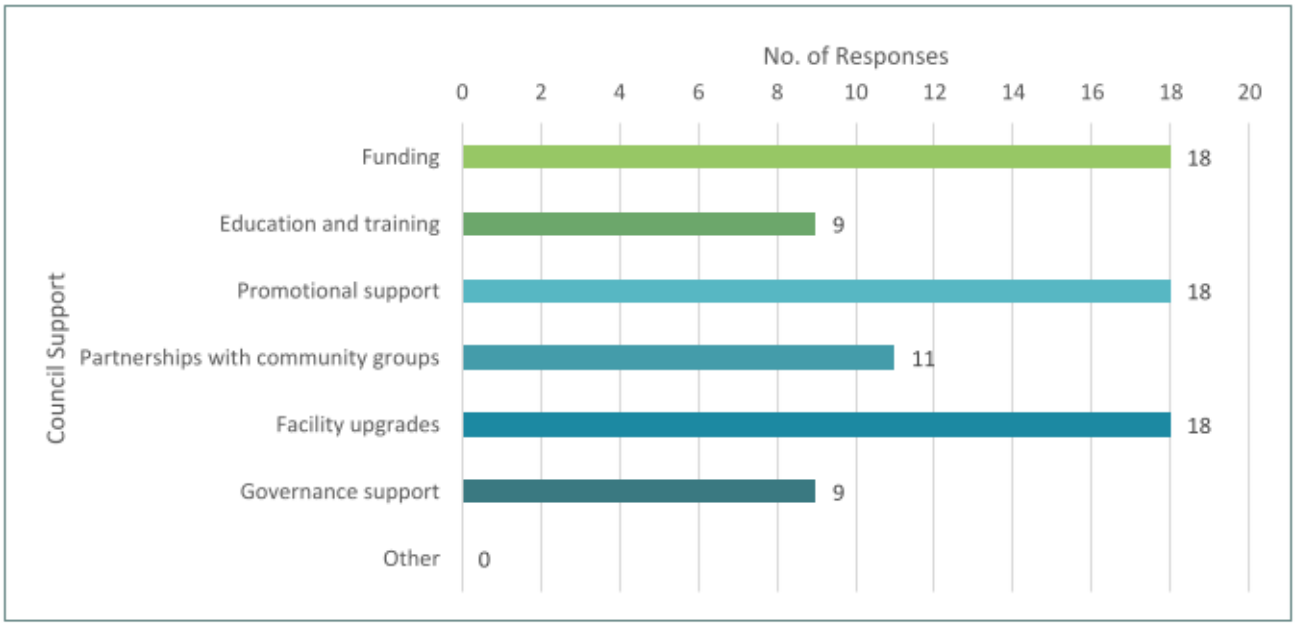


Figure 17: Clubs and Associations response for types of Council support

The most commonly identified needs were:

- Funding, promotional support, and facility upgrades, each selected by 18 clubs.
- Partnerships with community groups were selected by 11 clubs.
- Education and training and governance support were each selected by nine (9) clubs.

Clubs were asked what types of additional support would be most valuable if they were to seek further assistance. The following graph summarises the responses.

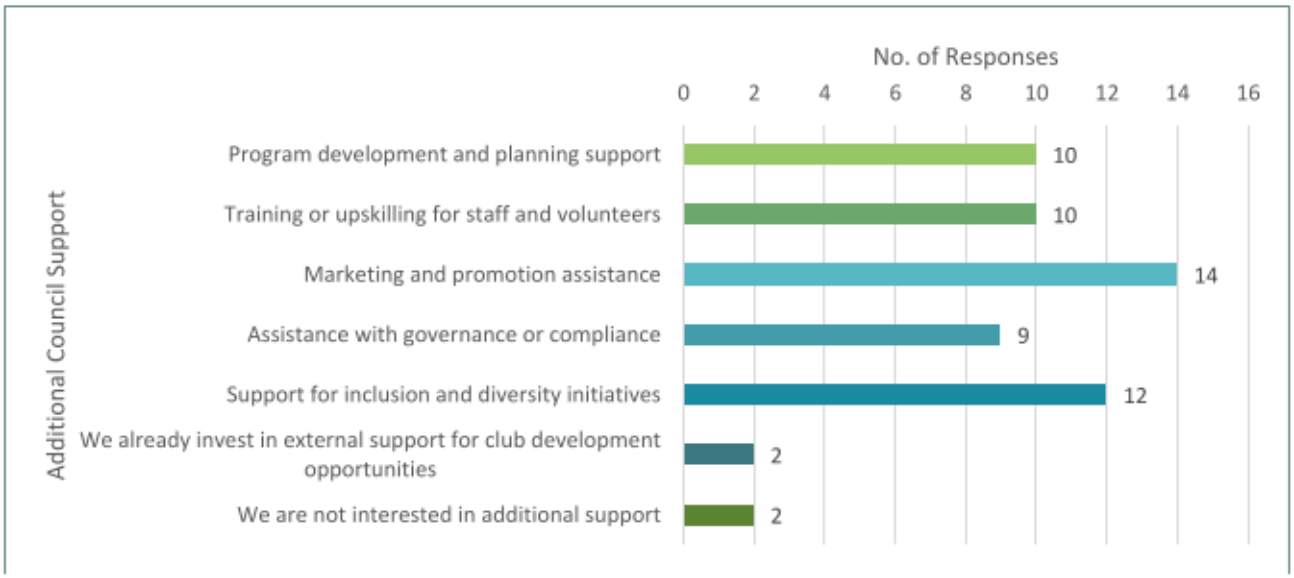


Figure 18: Clubs and Associations response on additional support from Council

The responses indicated that:

- Marketing and promotion assistance was the most valued (14 clubs), followed by support for inclusion and diversity initiatives selected by 12 clubs.
- Program development and planning, and training for staff and volunteers were each selected by 10 clubs, while governance or compliance support was identified by nine (9) clubs.
- Only two (2) clubs indicated they already invest in external support, and two (2) clubs were not interested in additional support.

When asked if the club/association was willing to pay a fee for this additional support, six indicated that they would and 17 said that they would not.

Clubs and associations were asked which participant groups they most want to grow over the next three to five years. The following graph summarises the responses.

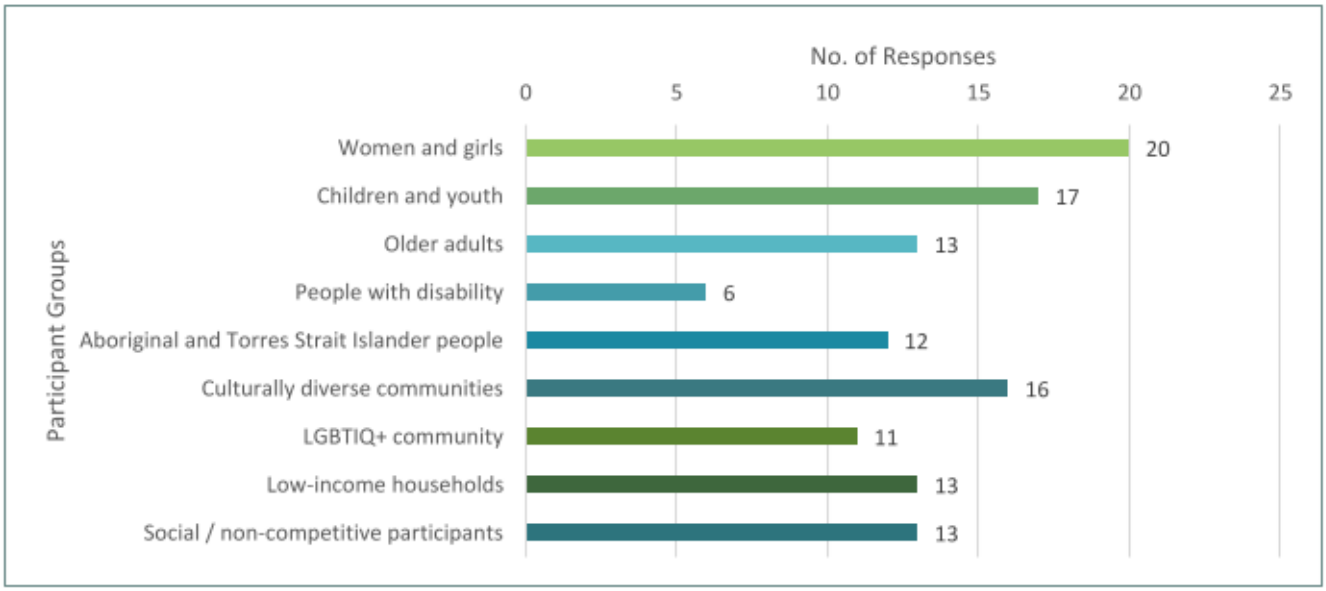


Figure 19: Clubs and Associations future target groups

The graph indicates that:

- Women and girls were the highest priority (20 clubs), followed by children and young people (17 clubs).
- Culturally diverse communities were identified by 16 clubs.
- Older adults, low-income households, and social or non-competitive participants were each identified by 13 clubs.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were identified by 12 clubs, LGBTIQ+ communities by 11 clubs, and people with a disability by 6 clubs.

Clubs were asked who they believe should deliver these types of support. The following graph summarises the responses.

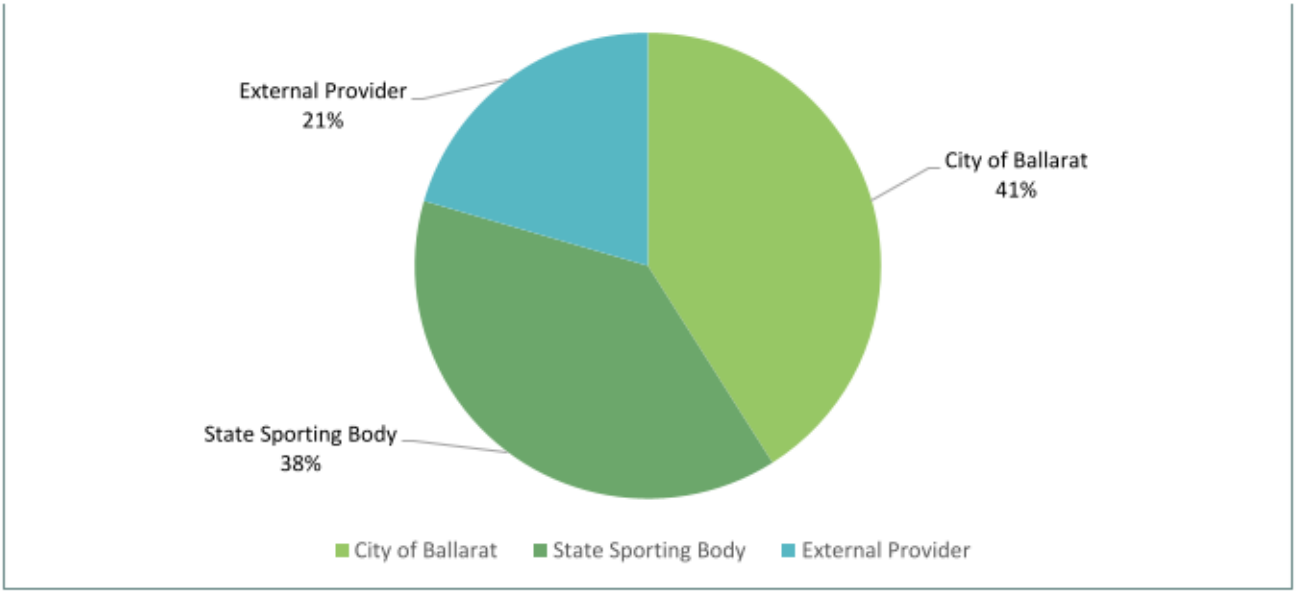


Figure 20: Clubs and Associations response on who should deliver support

The results indicate that:

- The City of Ballarat was selected by 16 clubs.
- State Sporting Bodies were selected by 15 clubs.
- External providers were selected by eight (8) clubs.

3.5 Top Priorities for the Future

The top priorities for clubs and associations to grow participation and deliver active living outcomes in the next 3–5 years include:

- Facility access and upgrades are the most consistent priority, including the need for home venues, additional courts and ovals, indoor training spaces, storage, and inclusive change rooms.
- Growing junior, women's and girls' participation is a major focus, alongside building clear development pathways from entry-level programs to long-term involvement.
- Volunteer, coach and umpire recruitment and development is critical to sustaining participation and competition quality.

- Inclusive and low-cost participation models were frequently emphasised, particularly for families, culturally diverse communities, people with a disability, and social or non-competitive participants.
- Promotion and visibility of sports is seen as key to attracting new participants, especially for lesser-known or emerging sports.
- Financial sustainability remains a concern, with several clubs prioritising survival, maintenance of existing assets, and managing rising operational costs.

When asked how the City of Ballarat can best support clubs and associations, the responses were as follows:

- Investment in facilities and infrastructure was the strongest request, including redevelopment of ovals, additional courts, improved lighting, accessible amenities, and indoor training facilities.
- Improved access to venues was highlighted, such as securing additional playing spaces, easing seasonal or lake access restrictions, and increasing capacity in growth areas.
- Promotion and marketing support is needed to raise awareness of clubs, programs and opportunities through Council communication channels and events.
- Financial support and affordability measures were frequently requested, including grants, reduced hire fees, and assistance with rising utilities and maintenance costs.
- Capability building and training for clubs was suggested, particularly in governance, volunteer skills, media channels, inclusion practices and program delivery.
- Stronger partnerships and ongoing engagement with Council were valued, with clubs seeking regular communication, planning support and alignment between participation growth and infrastructure planning.

3.6 Key findings from the Clubs and Associations Survey

The following are the key findings from the survey:

- **Changing participation patterns:** Participation is shifting but remains strong, with many clubs reporting growth driven by juniors, women and girls, and more flexible or social participation formats.
- **Growing demand for flexible and inclusive options:** Demand for flexibility and inclusivity is increasing, with participants preferring informal, low-cost, family-friendly and pay-per-session options that better balance work, study, health and lifestyle constraints.
- **Strong presence of diverse participants:** Diverse participation is present across most of the clubs/associations, particularly people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and low-income communities.
- **Limited diversity data collection:** Formal data tracking on diversity is limited. Strengthening data collection would support more targeted planning and improve inclusive participation outcomes.
- **Focus on targeted programs**: Targeted programs focus mainly on children, young people, and women and girls, while fewer clubs currently offer specific programs for people with a disability, older adults, CALD communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or LGBTIQA+ participants.
- **Facility and infrastructure constraints:** Facilities and infrastructure are the major constraint, affecting both participation growth and inclusivity, especially access to courts, ovals, indoor spaces, storage, lighting and accessible amenities. Cost, transport and awareness remain key

barriers, with fees, equipment costs, insurance, travel, and limited promotion reducing participation for some groups.

- **Importance of Council support:** Clubs strongly value Council support, particularly for facility upgrades, promotion and marketing, funding assistance, and capacity building, with most preferring the City of Ballarat and State Sporting Bodies to lead delivery of inclusion and participation support.

4. State Sporting Associations

Otium conducted interviews with 11 State Sporting Associations (SSAs) to understand participation trends, inclusion priorities and emerging opportunities relevant to the Active Ballarat Strategy refresh.

4.1 AFL Victoria

Table 5: AFL Participation Profile in Ballarat

2024/2025	Female	Male	Non-Binary	Total
Total	809	4,140	1	5,358

Interview key findings:

- AFL Victoria reported that participation levels are generally stable, with growth in female football offset by declines in some clubs, with some clubs putting higher focus on female participation.
- Auskick remains a strong entry point for skill development; however, mandatory registration from age five and longer time commitments have contributed to a significant drop-off (around 30%).
- Modified programs such as Superkick are being used to improve retention, providing a more game-based experience and a clearer pathway into community club football from Under 8's through to Under 12's.
- There is a clear opportunity to strengthen female pathways, particularly enabling girls to progress through Auskick together and introducing Under 10 girls-only opportunities to complement the existing Under 12 competitions.
- Population growth and increased migration into the LGA present challenges, as AFL is not always a first-choice sport; there is a notable gap in introductory programs for children aged 10–14 years who are new to AFL, which AFL Victoria is seeking to expand in Ballarat.

4.2 Basketball Victoria

Interview key findings:

- Basketball Ballarat was identified as one of the stronger associations in terms of community engagement, delivering a higher level of outreach activities compared to other associations.
- Current initiatives include all-abilities and wheelchair basketball programs, mentoring and engagement programs supporting at-risk and disengaged youth, and accessible participation formats such as walking basketball and mothers' social basketball.
- The appointment of a new CEO presents a positive opportunity to strengthen and further develop the partnership between Council and the Association.

4.3 Cricket Victoria

Table 6: Cricket Participation Profile in Ballarat

2024/2025	Female	Male	Non-Binary	Total
Sub Junior (Under 10's)	87	316	0	403
Junior	198	915	1	1,114
Senior	218	1,568	16	1,802
Total	**503**	**2,799**	**17**	**3,319**

Interview key findings:

- Cricket Victoria reported that participation in Ballarat is increasing across most cohorts, including junior boys and girls, and senior women, with further growth potential in new residential growth areas.
- Junior numbers have grown by approximately 65 players, including a 34-player increase in girls' cricket, supported by school programs; however, women's participation has plateaued, indicating a need for stronger and more flexible entry points.
- Mt Clear Cricket Club was highlighted as a leader in inclusion, recognised with a State award for initiatives such as all-abilities Blasters and tape-ball programs engaging the South Asian community, driven by strong local leadership.
- Senior men's participation remains strong (approximately 200 players), with diversified formats and population growth supporting continued engagement.
- Flexible formats such as the Smash Series (eight-a-side, tape-ball) present a key opportunity to address time barriers and attract South Asian communities, girls and women.
- Cricket Victoria identified Ballarat as well positioned for further growth due to governance maturity, established competitions and infrastructure, with a strong need for LGA partnership to support inclusion, club capacity and participation outcomes.

4.4 Football Victoria

Table 7: Football Participation Profile in Ballarat

2025	Female	Male	Non-Binary	Total
Miniroos (Ages 0 -11)	338	1,600	0	1,938
Juniors (Ages 12-18)	181	726	0	907
Seniors (Ages 19 – 35)	96	343	1	440
Over 35's (Ages 36+)	16	103	0	119
TOTAL	**631**	**2,772**	**1**	**3,404**

Interview key findings:

- Football Victoria (FV) reported that since the Regional Governance Review in 2025, FV now directly manages and governs regional competitions. Previously, FV played a support role only, which created barriers; these have now been removed.
- Ballarat has a stronger infrastructure baseline than many other regions, but participation outcomes have been lower because there was previously limited focus on capturing and retaining players. This is now being addressed through a dedicated FV Development Coordinator based in Ballarat, who can deliver targeted local programs without governance roadblocks.
- There is a mix of both on-field and off-field improvement. The national Club Changer program is used as a diagnostic tool to identify gaps and priorities, alongside constitutional reform where clubs are now members and must meet set criteria and thresholds.
- Coaching development and activation is a key priority, including delivery of the Club Coach Developer program, formal coaching accreditation pathways, and the "Coach Her" program, which supports the entry and retention of women coaches and improves experiences for girls and women participants.
- School programs, previously delivered by the A-League, have now returned to FV. This has significantly increased school touchpoints, with a focus on building strong relationships between schools and local clubs, including zoning schools to clubs to create clear feeder pathways.

- FV highlighted the success of social and off-season formats run in Term 1 and Term 4, such as summer competitions (e.g. Surf Coast FC/Coerver model) and MiniRoos. These formats attract a different audience in a better environment and have seen clubs grow from around 200 to 500 players where facilities allow. These programs have not previously been run in Ballarat and represent a major opportunity.
- Ballarat is in a unique position to support year-round football, with capacity at approximately four venues suitable for continuous programming.
- FV emphasised the importance of a strong partnership with Council, particularly around facility access, program alignment and avoiding duplication, noting that both parties share the same participation goals and that momentum and energy now exist to unlock Ballarat's full potential.
- FV also noted stronger outcomes are typically achieved through larger, well-resourced clubs with stronger governance, highlighting that smaller clubs often face ongoing challenges, a trend made especially clear during COVID-19.

4.5 Hockey Victoria

Table 8: Hockey Participation Profile in Ballarat

	2024				2025			
	Female	**Male**	**Non-Binary**	**Total**	**Female**	**Male**	**Non-Binary**	**Total**
Sub Junior (Under 10's)	4	6	0	10	3	4	0	7
Junior	26	45	0	71	31	52	0	83
Senior	42	35	0	77	45	41	0	86
Total	**72**	**86**	**0**	**158**	**79**	**97**	**0**	**176**

Interview key findings:

- Hockey Victoria identified the capacity limits of a single pitch as the key challenge, noting it restricts the ability to deliver community programming outside of training and competition.
- The West Vic competition structure adds further scheduling complexity, limiting flexibility to trial and introduce new participation formats.
- A second pitch would significantly change capacity, allowing delivery of alternative offerings such as social hockey, small-sided games and modified formats, which are currently capped due to facility constraints.
- A state-wide junior competition review is underway, with Hockey Victoria developing modified pathways for different ages and abilities, focused on improving entry points and retention. Ballarat was identified as having potential to host pilot programs.
- Hockey Victoria recently launched the Melbourne Cobras, an Indian-centric team competing nationally with six Indian marquee players, designed to create visible role models and increase participation from the South Asian community.
- Hockey Victoria acknowledged that traditional Western sport governance models have not supported participation growth in all communities and is actively exploring alternative approaches to better engage diverse demographic groups.

4.6 Netball Victoria

Table 9: Netball Participation Profile in Ballarat

Member Type	2025 Female	2025 Male	2025 Other	2025 Total	2024 Female	2024 Male	2024 Other	2024 Total	Diff. Female	Diff. Male	Diff. Other	Diff. Total
All Abilities	51	5	0	56	31	4	0	35	+20	+1	0	+21
NetSetGo	110	2	0	112	67	0	0	67	+43	+2	0	+45
Senior	960	31	0	991	970	16	1	987	−10	+15	−1	+4
Junior	1,351	32	0	1,383	1,310	28	0	1,338	+41	+4	0	+45
Off the Court	28	3	0	31	13	0	0	13	+15	+3	0	+18
Single Game Voucher/ Short Season	75	15	2	92	108	9	1	118	−33	+6	+1	−26
Total	**2,575**	**88**	**2**	**2,665**	**2,499**	**57**	**2**	**2,558**	**+76**	**31**	**0**	**107**

Interview key findings:

- There is very strong demand to play netball in Ballarat, with participation currently at capacity due to facility constraints, particularly courts and indoor space.
- To manage overflow, Netball Victoria has established a new competition at Selkirk Stadium, run directly by Netball Victoria, providing opportunities for players who were missing out on teams in existing competitions.
- Future focus includes diversifying the playing group, particularly in response to new migrants and growing residential areas (including areas such as Macedon), and ensuring netball remains accessible and welcoming.
- Alternative and flexible formats are being explored, including 3-on-3 and “street netball”. The Strategy needs to investigate passive play opportunities such as netball rings in parklands and public play areas, particularly in new residential growth areas.
- There is an opportunity to expand informal places to play, including installing standalone netball rings (not combined with basketball), noting basketball spaces are often more male-dominated, while netball provides a safe and inclusive environment for women and girls.
- Facility challenges remain significant, including limited indoor court access during winter, lack of weather cover on outdoor courts, and a broader need to improve inclusive facility design, indicating there is still a long way to go to meet demand across Ballarat.

4.7 Table Tennis Victoria

Table 10: Table Tennis Participation Profile in Ballarat

2025	Female	Male	Non-Binary	Total
Sub Junior (Under 10s)	4	5	-	9
Junior	6	32	-	38
Senior	79	287	-	366
Total	**89**	**324**	**-**	**413**

Interview key findings:

- Registered affiliated player participation is supported by a large casual player base, with regional venues heavily utilised for school bookings, coaching, academies and competitions.
- In Ballarat, there are 113 registered playing members (2025), supported by casual play and strong school engagement. The development of a dedicated table tennis venue with Taraflex flooring was identified as a key future opportunity to support growth and diversification.

- Current programming includes junior and senior coaching, academies, local and pennant competitions, and social table tennis for seniors, with proposed front-of-house and change room improvements identified in the Recreation Infrastructure Plan.
- Governance and programming remain largely traditional, with an older committee structure that is supportive of participation objectives but has limited capacity and confidence to lead targeted diversification initiatives.
- A Victorian Government CALD participation program, delivered with the Regional Sports Assembly and club partners, has resulted in 20 additional participants through the Raising the Net initiative.
- Opportunities exist to expand CALD, disability and Aboriginal participation, with venue management open to para-sport inclusion; Table Tennis Victoria will provide tools and support, noting that future investment in a dedicated venue would significantly strengthen delivery capacity.
- Ballarat's hosting of international events (e.g. Oceania competition) presents a strong opportunity to plan for legacy participation outcomes, particularly if supported by improved or dedicated facilities in the future.

4.8 Volleyball Victoria

Table 11: Volleyball Participation Profile in Ballarat

2025	Female	Male	Non-Binary	Total
Junior	23	4	0	27
Senior	73	119	1	193
Total	**96**	**123**	**1**	**220**

Interview key findings:

- Volleyball Ballarat is a strong and high-performing association, with a clear strategic plan focused on program development and participation growth and is regarded as a benchmark association in Victoria.
- The Association currently hosts four senior divisions, with participation growing strongly in the 13–17-year age group, a key strength of volleyball's participation profile.
- Volleyball participation in Ballarat is becoming increasingly diverse, with strong growth from Filipino and South Asian communities, contributing to broader cultural representation within the sport.
- The Volleyball Ballarat tournament has experienced significant growth, increasing from 22 teams four years ago to 74 teams, highlighting rising demand and popularity.
- The main barriers constraining further growth were identified as court access during peak times and volunteer capacity, particularly when transitioning participants from strong school-based competitions into community junior competitions and Youth State League pathways.
- The existing indoor facility has the capacity to host State League competition, presenting an opportunity to showcase the sport locally and encourage new participation.
- Opportunities were identified for outdoor courts and social volleyball formats, linked to amenities such as toilets and barbecues to encourage participation from culturally diverse groups and activate informal recreation spaces.
- Major League Volleyball, while unaffiliated, operates locally as a social competition and adds to the overall volleyball participation landscape in Ballarat.

4.9 Athletics Victoria

Interview key findings:

- Ballarat has a strong athletics base, with around 800 athletes, including 400 recreational runners and 400 competing members. The running community is particularly strong and represents a major participation opportunity.
- Despite Ballarat having a large multicultural population, this diversity is not well reflected in athletics participation. Only 30–40 participants were reportedly born outside Ballarat (predominantly from the UK), with two Indigenous athletes currently identified.
- Para-athletics participation is low, despite Ballarat having one of the highest rates of children with disability per capita. While links exist with Paralympics Victoria programs, participation numbers remain limited, though early signs of improvement are emerging.
- Athletics remains a heavily volunteer-run sport, with significant reliance on parent involvement. This can be challenging, particularly for Little Athletics clubs such as the Lucas club, which requires parents to volunteer a set number of weeks each season.
- A new high-quality athletics facility will soon be completed at the Ballarat Major Events Precinct. This facility will service competition athletics and training for Ballarat and the region, including schools and community athletics activations.
- Broader activation opportunities include greater focus on informal and passive participation to complement formal club pathways. The new lighting around Lake Wendouree is seen as a positive step towards increasing passive recreation.
- Athletics Victoria highlighted the need for stronger collaboration with recreational running groups.

4.10 Golf Australia

Table 12: Golf Participation Profile in Ballarat

Postcodes	Club Members	Round Players	Driving Range	Simulator	Mini Golf	Total Estimated Golf Participants
3350	1,431	5,759	2,158	548	2003	11,899
3352	292	1,175	440	111	408	2,426
3355	185	744	278	70	258	1,350
3356	131	526	197	50	183	1,087
3357	107	430	161	40	149	887
3358	33	132	49	12	46	272
3364	22	88	33	8	30	181
Total	**2,201**	**8,854**	**3,316**	**839**	**3,077**	**18,287**

Interview key findings:

- Golf participation is strong in Ballarat, with a diverse mix of traditional courses and off-course venues supporting participation growth, including two new indoor golf facilities opening in the past six months.
- Entry-level participation is growing, supported by surrounding regional areas and increased demand for flexible and social ways to play golf, including family-friendly and shorter formats.

- Junior participation in Ballarat is well above the state and national average, while female participation continues to grow, supported by targeted initiatives at clubs such as Ballarat Golf Club and Buninyong.
- Ballarat has emerging strength in disability and inclusion pathways, including being a Special Olympics hub at Mt Xavier Golf Club, with some clubs offering defined participation pathways in partnership with the disability sector.
- Golf Australia highlighted strong alignment with schools through Sporting Schools programs and data-driven national programs that connect students into local club pathways.
- Off-course venues such as X-Golf Ballarat are attracting new demographics, offering social and "come and try" experiences that complement traditional club golf and expand the participation base.
- Golf Australia is progressing the Women in Golf Charter, which includes system-wide review of operations, environments and leadership, with a target of no more than 60% of one gender in leadership roles. Buninyong Golf Club and X-Golf Ballarat are current signatories.
- Ballarat has hosted and continues to host Australian junior, regional and state-based golf events, providing strong exposure and clear pathways for local players.
- Female and CALD representation is an ongoing focus, with Ballarat identified as a priority area and leadership change is already occurring, including female general management roles, noting this is still a work in progress.
- Governance and workforce initiatives include junior girls' scholarships, coach and PGA professional development, and targeted governance programs supporting sustainable club leadership and volunteering, particularly in regional Victoria.

4.11 Little Athletics Victoria

- Ballarat has a diverse athletics network that includes established clubs such as Llanberris and newer or re-established clubs in growth areas like Buninyong and Lucas Estate. Each serves different communities and participation needs across the city.
- Growth-area clubs are important for future participation, particularly in new housing estates and among new migrant communities. Clubs such as Lucas Estate Little Athletics are still establishing themselves and will require time, facility stability and local support to build sustainable participation.
- Recreational running represents the largest participation opportunity, with an estimated 1.07 million recreational runners nationally, compared to only around 400,000 registered competitive athletics participants. In contrast, Little Athletics Victoria supports approximately 20,000 registered athletes, highlighting the gap between participation and competition models.
- Events such as the Ballarat Run Festival and partnerships with parkrun and major marathon events are key tools for engaging recreational runners locally; however, event entry fees of around $280 per participant create a significant barrier for under-represented and lower-income groups, despite high demand.
- Athletics is increasingly shifting from a competition-focused model to a participation-focused model, especially in senior athletics. This change aims to make the sport more welcoming, flexible and accessible to a wider range of ages, abilities and backgrounds.
- Access to facilities directly affects participation, with more venues making the sport easier to engage in. Keeping facilities open and available for informal use supports active recreation, reduces barriers, and complements formal club pathways in line with Athletics Australia's participation strategy.

4.12 State Sporting Associations Key Findings

The following points summarise the key findings from the SSA interviews:

- **Participation trends:** Most SSA's reported stable or growing participation, with strong engagement in junior pathways (e.g. AFL Auskick, Cricket juniors, Netball NetSetGo, Volleyball youth cohorts). Growth is evident in some female and junior cohorts, while retention challenges remain at key transition points (e.g. Auskick drop-off, junior to senior, school to club).
- **Shift toward flexible and modified programming:** Across sports, there is increasing emphasis on modified, social and short-format programs (e.g. AFL Superkick, Cricket Smash Series, walking basketball, social football, 3v3 netball, off-season football, off-course golf, recreational running). These formats respond directly to time pressures, changing lifestyles and the needs of new participants.
- **Strong focus on inclusion:** Many SSA's highlighted initiatives targeting women and girls, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and disengaged youth. Examples include all-abilities programs, wheelchair sport, CALD engagement initiatives, and female-specific coaching pathways. However, most acknowledged that participation from CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and para-sport cohorts remains relatively low and requires further targeted effort.
- **Facilities are a major constraint on participation and inclusivity:** Lack of court access, pitch capacity, indoor space, lighting and weather protection were consistently identified as limiting participation growth and program diversity (notably in netball, hockey, volleyball and basketball). Facility constraints reduce the ability to run social, beginner and inclusive programs alongside competition.
- **Schools are critical entry points:** School-based programs were widely identified as the most effective participation pipeline, particularly for engaging girls, new migrants and beginners. Strengthening school-to-club pathways and increasing education-sector collaboration was a common priority across SSA's.
- **Partnership with Council is essential:** All SSA's emphasised the importance of strong partnerships with Council to align facilities, programming and participation goals. Support is especially needed for inclusive programming, infrastructure investment, activation of informal spaces, promotion, and building club and volunteer capacity to sustain participation growth.

5. Other Key Stakeholders

5.1 Internal Stakeholders Workshop

Otium conducted an internal Council workshop with key staff to discuss Active Ballarat priorities, including competing community demands and the need for fair access to facilities for all groups. The feedback indicated:

- There was concern that sport participation is often focused on formal clubs, with more opportunity to use existing facilities for informal and passive activities, not just organised sport.
- Informal community activity is already happening, such as unaffiliated cricket games and informal senior soccer, indicating demand for less structured ways to be active.
- Many residents are not participating in physical activity because they feel disconnected or unsure where to start, with barriers including poor communication, lack of promotion, accessibility issues and not knowing what is available.
- More targeted programs are required for "quiet groups" which included residents from the CALD community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community (specifically children and young adults) and LGBTIQA+ community.
- Cost was identified as a major barrier, including uniforms, insurance and participation fees, with discussion around Council's role in supporting clubs to help people facing financial disadvantage.
- There is a need for clearer leadership and accountability, including a simple "what works and what doesn't" report, clarity on who leads programs, and how success is measured.
- Participants highlighted the importance of age-specific opportunities, as some people prefer activities designed for their own age group.
- For girls and women, especially those aged 60+, the social aspect of activity is critical to participation.
- Greater focus is needed on informal, always-available spaces, and better activation of areas such as lakes, fitness zones and aquatic precincts.
- Strong support was expressed for better alignment of Active Ballarat with gender equality initiatives, including gender impact assessments and integration with Respect Ballarat outcomes.
- Key priorities identified were:
  - Supporting children and families, especially primary school-aged children.
  - Improving communication about what activities are available, when, and which are free.
  - Creating an interactive map of facilities and activity opportunities.
  - Promoting free use of non-elite facilities, with clear access rules.
  - Expanding free summer activities such as evening yoga around lakes.
  - Strengthening links between gender equality, Respect Ballarat and Active Ballarat.
  - Increasing the number of free activities and events to remove participation barriers.

5.2 Clubs and Associations Workshop

Otium conducted a workshop with Ballarat Sporting Clubs and Associations to understand their priorities and future needs across organised and informal sport. The following points summarise the key themes from the workshop:

- Facility capacity and access are the most consistent challenges across sports. Key issues include limited playing field availability, competition with "major" sports, poor or outdated change rooms, lack of storage, car parking constraints, and declining quality or insufficient number of playing surfaces.
- Facility gaps are limiting participation growth, particularly for indoor sport. Examples included the lack of an indoor cricket training facility, insufficient indoor capacity for netball, gymnastics and volleyball, and facilities not keeping pace with junior growth despite the population increase. Several sports reported waiting lists and players being turned away.
- Cost and affordability are significant barriers, especially for not-for-profit clubs supporting low-income families. Fees for uniforms, facility hire, insurance and travel were frequently raised, alongside the need for flexible, targeted financial assistance rather than one-size-fits-all approach.
- Volunteer capacity is under strain, directly limiting program delivery. Clubs reported difficulty recruiting volunteers, limited development support for committee members, and challenges in sustaining long-term leadership, particularly as participation numbers increase.
- Equity and inclusion gaps were identified. These included barriers to women returning to sport, lack of culturally inclusive pathways, limited para-sport participation, and facilities that do not support mental, cultural or developmental needs.
- Emerging trends show strong demand for casual and flexible participation, including "rock-up and play" formats with no uniforms, memberships or long-term commitment. This was evident across netball, volleyball, disc sports and cricket, alongside ongoing drop-off in the 4–8-year age group and seasonal impacts on sports like gymnastics.
- Participation data points to growing cultural diversity, particularly in cricket (with increasing South Asian representation) and strong growth in female participation in both cricket and football. However, this growth is increasing pressure on grounds and facilities, especially for female-friendly and safe spaces.
- Geographic inequity, particularly in Ballarat's western growth corridor, was a strong theme. If activities, facilities and activation do not arrive early, participation drops sharply and is difficult to recover later.
- There was strong consensus that every club needs a "home" with quality, inclusive infrastructure, including:
  - Indoor facilities (where appropriate).
  - Adequate storage.
  - Gender-appropriate change rooms.
  - Safe and well-maintained playing surfaces.
  - Certainty of tenure to justify investment.
- Clubs emphasised the need to optimise existing facilities, ensuring they are designed, scheduled and activated to maximise use by multiple groups, rather than relying solely on new builds.
- Many clubs strongly advocated that well-run clubs provide unmatched community value and should remain a core focus of Council investment.
- Top key priorities from the workshop were:
  - Ensuring every club and activity has access to suitable facilities, storage and amenities.
  - Improving activation and programming, particularly in under-served areas.
  - Strengthening participation pathways, not just infrastructure.
  - Better coordination, communication and visibility of opportunities.
  - Greater focus on equity, access and inclusion across all ages and abilities.

5.3 Community Panel Feedback

Council conducted a community panel to provide additional opportunity for feedback on 30 April 2026. The following section summarises the answers to two questions asked by the Council.

1. *What are the barriers you face when using facilities to be more active? Particularly regarding in terms of safety and accessibility/welcoming.*
   - Limited public transport routes, poor coverage, and difficulty accessing facilities from some areas.
   - High costs and overcrowding at popular venues reducing access.
   - Safety concerns, including poor lighting and risks for vulnerable groups.
   - Lack of awareness about available activities, facilities, and how to access them.
   - People feeling unwelcome or unsure if spaces are inclusive, especially for disability and cultural needs.
   - Gaps in infrastructure such as footpaths, accessible design, and availability of open facilities
2. *What could the City of Ballarat do to make you more active in the community?*
   - Improve transport options with more accessible, flexible, and better-connected services.
   - Increase promotion and centralised information about activities, programs, and facilities.
   - Strengthen community connections by linking clubs, businesses, and targeted groups.
   - Invest in safer and more accessible infrastructure, including footpaths and diverse recreation spaces.
   - Provide more flexible, varied, and low-commitment activity options at suitable times.
   - Encourage participation through incentives, gamification, “come and try” events, and health referrals.

5.4 LGBTIQA+ Advisory Committee

The LGBTIQA+ Advisory Committee was consulted to provide feedback towards the Active Ballarat Strategy. The following points summarise their feedback:

- Recreation facilities in Ballarat are generally seen as welcoming, but more targeted support and promotion of community-specific programs (e.g. Pride Swim and Gym Night) is needed.
- Inclusion could be improved by auditing and increasing availability of all-gender facilities across recreation venues.
- Evidence suggests LGBTIQA+ individuals in regional areas may have lower participation due to barriers such as embarrassment and lack of social support.
- There is an opportunity to support activities that already resonate with the community, such as bushwalking and hiking.
- Strong recommendation to explicitly recognise and include the LGBTIQA+ community within the Active Ballarat Strategy.

5.5 Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory feedback

Council’s Community Inclusion Officer was consulted about Disability access and inclusion in sports and recreation in Ballarat. The following points summarise their feedback:

- Expand inclusive sport and recreation opportunities through all-abilities programs and targeted disability-specific activities, including programs for people who are blind or have low vision, Deaf and hard of hearing communities, and sensory-friendly participation options.

- Embed universal design principles into stadiums, sporting precincts, and recreation facilities, including accessible seating, Changing Places and accessible toilets, quiet spaces, inclusive change rooms, live captions, communication boards, social stories, and clear accessibility information.
- Support mainstream sporting clubs to build accessible and welcoming environments through policy support, training, networking, and capability building that enable full participation, inclusion, and belonging for people with disability.
- Improve promotion and visibility of accessible sport and recreation opportunities through coordinated campaigns, centralised online information, "what to expect" resources, and inclusive imagery featuring people living with disability participating in activities.
- Position Ballarat as a leader in accessible sport and recreation by attracting accessible sporting events and competitions and promoting these opportunities through tourism and community channels.
- Increase access to inclusive recreation infrastructure and informal activity opportunities, including accessible outdoor pool facilities, advocacy for hoists and Changing Places amenities, and expansion of inclusive play spaces across multiple locations in Ballarat.

5.6 Relevant Council Strategy Feedback

There are several strategies that the City of Ballarat is currently in the process of developing or has recently developed. The following section highlights the community response to those strategies in the context of the Active Ballarat Strategy Refresh.

5.6.1 City of Ballarat Youth Strategy 2027 – 2030 (Currently in development)

The Ballarat Youth Strategy 2027–2030 aims to create a four-year plan that empowers young people aged 12–25 years to reach their full potential in a welcoming, inclusive, and safe environment. As part of the consultation process respondents were asked "What would make it easier to stay mentally/physically healthy in Ballarat?." Following is the summary of the responses.

- **Affordability and cost of living:** Cheaper or free access to gyms, sports, activities, healthy food, transport, and basic services to reduce financial stress, especially for young people.
- **Better access to mental health support:** More accessible, reliable, youth-friendly, long-term mental health services with less stigma, better promotion of services, and support beyond crisis responses.
- **More safe and inclusive social spaces ("third spaces"):** More places for young people to socialise without spending money, including youth spaces, community hubs, parks, creative spaces, and age-appropriate hangout spots.
- **Improved physical activity opportunities:** More parks, green spaces, walking and bike paths, outdoor gyms, sports facilities, beginner-friendly and non-competitive exercise groups, and free or low-cost activities and events.
- **Stronger community connection and inclusion:** More social groups, youth programs, volunteering, community and sporting events, inclusive clubs, and opportunities to build friendships and feel supported.
- **Safer, more accessible environment:** Better transport, safer streets, bike lanes and crossings, improved lighting and park safety, reduced crime, and infrastructure that makes it easier to get around independently and spend time outdoors.

5.6.2 City of Ballarat Children and Family Strategy 2027-2030 (Currently in development)

The Ballarat Children and Family Strategy 2027-2030 produced the following key findings in context of the Active Ballarat Strategy Refresh:

- **Affordability is a major barrier to being active:** Cost of living pressures limit participation in sport, recreation and physical activity. There is strong demand for more free or low-cost activities spread evenly across the municipality.
- **Gaps in access and participation:** Limited after-hours options, long waitlists, transport challenges and services concentrated in central Ballarat reduce opportunities for children and families, particularly those in outer growth areas.
- **Critical age gap (7–12 years):** Children in this age group consistently miss out on structured, age-appropriate physical activity and recreation, falling between early years and youth programs.
- **Health, safety and wellbeing underpin participation:** Trauma, family violence and mental health challenges affect children's ability to safely and confidently engage in physical activity, highlighting the need for trauma-informed, inclusive approaches.
- **Inclusion, culture and place matter:** Culturally safe, welcoming and accessible spaces, with green spaces, parks, walking paths and community facilities, are essential enablers of active participation for all children and families.

5.6.3 City of Ballarat Ageing Well Strategy 2027 – 2030 (Currently in development)

The Ballarat Ageing Well Strategy 2027-2030 has highlighted that there is strong support for healthy and active ageing, with exercise classes continuing and expanding. There are demands for the following:

- Increased number of exercise and activity classes across Ballarat suburbs (Lucas, Mount Clear, Ballarat North, Ballarat East).
- More scheduling flexibility, including additional Friday and afternoon options.
- Expanded strength, balance and movement programs, including chair-based exercise closer to town.
- Continued and expanded dance-based exercise options:
  - Seniors dance.
  - Lucas dance twice weekly (Monday and Thursday).
  - Line dancing and tap dancing.
- More Tai Chi classes, including advanced levels and afternoon sessions.
- Maintain Pilates programs for both beginners and intermediate participants.
- Improved access to aquatic exercise:
  - Classes not limited to mornings.
  - More affordable swimming options and memberships (BALC costs are a barrier).
- Broader range of physical activity opportunities, including programs that appeal to men.

What makes the community a good place to live as people grow older:

- Access to green spaces and walking opportunities (e.g. lake walks, walking tracks).
- Strong sense of connection and social inclusion.

- Availability of sporting, activity and movement opportunities for all ages.
- Safe environments, accessible buildings and well-designed parks.
- Park-based exercise equipment.
- Free or low-cost exercise classes and discounted sporting opportunities.
- Wide variety and breadth of activity choices supporting active, healthy ageing.

6. Key Findings from Stakeholder Engagement

The following points summarise the key findings of the stakeholder engagement for Active Ballarat Strategy Refresh.

- **Participation is strong and behaviours are changing:** Across the community, clubs and State Sporting Associations, participation remains high; however, people are increasingly favouring informal, social, modified and recreational activities over traditional, structured competition. Growth is most noticeable among juniors, women and girls, and recreational participants.
- **Strong demand for flexible and affordable options:** Community members and clubs highlighted the need for low-cost, flexible ways to be active, including "come and try," casual participation, shorter seasons, and pay-per-session models that better suit work, family and health commitments.
- **Inclusion is valued, but uneven:** Stakeholders clearly want to engage people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women and girls, older adults and LGBTIQA+ participants. While many positive programs exist, participation outcomes are mixed and formal data tracking is limited.
- **Cost, transport and awareness remain barriers:** Fees, equipment costs, insurance, travel distance and limited promotion continue to prevent some people from participating, particularly people on low incomes, new migrants and those unfamiliar with local opportunities.
- **Facilities are a big pressure point:** A consistent message from all stakeholders was that limited access to quality facilities is restricting participation. Shortages of courts, ovals, indoor spaces, storage, lighting and inclusive change rooms are affecting both growth and the ability to deliver welcoming, inclusive programs.
- **Informal and recreational activity is a major opportunity:** Walking, cycling, running, lakes, parks, aquatic spaces and fitness zones are heavily used and offer low-barrier active living opportunities that complement organised sport and reach people who are disengaged from clubs.
- **Schools are critical for participation:** School-based programs were consistently identified as the most effective way to introduce children and young people to sport and physical activity, especially girls, culturally diverse communities and beginners.
- **Clubs need support beyond infrastructure:** Volunteers are under pressure, governance capacity is stretched, and clubs need help with promotion, inclusion practices, training and long-term sustainability to keep pace with participation demand.
- **Council leadership and coordination is essential:** Stakeholders strongly supported the City of Ballarat playing a lead role in facility planning, promotion, affordability, activation of informal spaces, and alignment between community needs, clubs and State Sporting Associations.
- **Equity across Ballarat matters:** Growth areas, particularly in the western corridors, need early access to facilities and programs. Stakeholders stressed that if infrastructure and activation lag behind population growth, participation can drop and be hard to recover later.

7. Warranties and Disclaimers

The information contained in this report is provided in good faith. While Otium Planning Group Pty Ltd (Otium) has applied their experience to the task, they have relied upon information supplied to them by other persons and organisations.

We have not conducted an audit of the information provided by others but have accepted it in good faith. Some of the information may have been provided 'commercial in confidence,' and these venues or sources of information are not specifically identified. Readers should be aware that the preparation of this report may have necessitated projections of the future that are inherently uncertain and that our opinion is based on the underlying representations, assumptions and projections detailed in this report.

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