

Aquatic and Community Recreation

FutureNow is the Western Australian Training Council for the creative, leisure and technology industries. The Council is a skills advisory body that represents the voice of industry, advising the State Government on the training and workforce development needs of our industry sectors.

Training package updates and Government funding to support workforce deficit

As the sport, fitness, and recreation sectors recover from COVID-19 shutdowns in Western Australia, employment forecasts for job roles anticipate growth over the next five years¹. There are however still specific subsectors, such as aquatics, where the confidence of employees to return to casual and non-essential roles are creating a workforce deficit². The West Australian Government has responded by investing in funding relevant training, such as the fully-funded swimming instructor course for Year 12 students³ and fee-free training for youth, concession students and job seekers. In addition, the National aquatic and fitness training packages have been updated to align training with the newly released principles from the Department of Health and the Australian Institute of Sport to create safe sport, fitness, and recreation operating environments. The aim to ensure the skills and knowledge of these sector workers are current, up-to-date, and aligned with industry needs.

Industry responses to commercial disruption

The sport, fitness and recreation industry responded to the pandemic by expanding into alternative methods of service delivery, such as fitness instructors offering online personal and group training⁴. This is not possible however for team sports, and many major sports are still being impacted by cancellations or rescheduling. An example of this is the Australian Masters Games which was due to be held in Perth October 2021 and is rescheduled for April 2022. In some cases, sporting events were held with no spectators. This lack of ticket sales has impacted bigger commercial sports who receive a significant amount of money from sales and aligned purchases such as merchandise⁵. The relocation of major sporting events, such as the AFL grand final to Perth, was an adaptive and historical solution demonstrating how this sector is considering alternative ways to deal with COVID-19 impacts and the potential loss of revenue.

Outdoor recreation experiencing growth in participation

Not all sectors within sport, fitness and recreation have experienced a detrimental impact on participation and workforce employment and development. Restrictions in national and international travel found more Western Australians exploring and travelling within their own state. Participation rates, especially in bush walking and mountain biking⁶ have significantly increased. This growth trend was recognised by the State government who have increased funding towards trail development. There are also professional development programs by Trails Future being piloted to upskill and enhance the professionalism of this growth industry⁷. This has been accompanied by strong strategic development, such as the WA Hiking Strategy: Bushwalking and trail running in Western Australia 2020-2030 report.

Mental health benefits through sport, fitness, and recreation participation

Mental health, as well as physical health, has become a focal point in the sport, fitness, and recreation sector. Nineteen per cent of Australian's reported their mental health as either worse or much worse than before COVID-19⁸. The sport, fitness, and recreation industry has been a critical mechanism for providing exercise and social connection to increase individuals' mental health. Regular exercise reduces stress and improves mental health⁹, which is especially important when one in six Australians are experiencing depression, anxiety, or both¹⁰. Being connected to a fitness or sporting community can also enhance mental health¹¹. During COVID-19 lockdowns the daily exercise allowance produced an increase in walking, running, cycling, bush walking and swimming activities.¹² Recent reports found that hikers indicated mental health as one of their major reasons they exercise outdoors in scenic nature¹³, and adult swimmers indicated mental health as one of the key reasons for their participation¹⁴. Sometimes a problem can occur within these sectors when staff, volunteers or participants are unaware of how to handle mental health issues. SportWest, the peak sporting industry body, has recently released a mental health framework to sporting clubs and associations.

Sports broadcasting predicted for continual revenue increase

Continual revenue growth in the sport sector is drawn from the increasing value of broadcasting rights. This revenue flows to the sporting clubs and contributes to increased employment and facility management costs. It is estimated that whilst some of these rights were re-negotiated to be extended because of the COVID-19 period, it is still a large contributor, and is predicted to have a 5-year growth of \$12.8 billion to \$16.4 billion in revenue in 2025-6 within Australia¹⁵.

Growing trend in yoga and pilates

Unemployment in Western Australia is at its lowest since 2013 at 3.9% and there is a new all-time high employment at 1.427 million¹⁶. If this transfers to increased household expenditure this bodes well for the sport, fitness and recreation sectors as consumers spend more money in these areas at periods of extra discretionary income¹⁷. There is a growing trend in yoga and pilates class attendance, especially among the younger female generation¹⁸. This is boosted by a growing health conscious culture¹⁹. Research has found that yoga has over 2.8 million participants across Australia and 1.2 million participating in pilates²⁰.

Shift towards an aging population and potential impacts on workforce and volunteer needs

The sport and fitness industry is also experiencing a shift towards an aging population. It is projected that the 15% of Australians aged 65 or older will increase to 22% by 2056. Data shows that 48% of older Australians indicated they participated in physical activity five times a week with 43% of these active in sport-related activities²¹. With this shift in population, there will likely be an increased need for a workforce and volunteers to service this group. This could in turn create a shortage of workers trained in creating age related sport and fitness programs.

Aquatics and Community Recreation sectors

Training package updates

The aquatic industry is one of the largest employers in the sport and recreation sector²². The aquatics and community recreation sectors have had recent updates to their training packages to keep up with the significant changes that have been happening in this industry. These are mainly from

COVID-19, changes in equipment, and products and the need to train staff to work in multiple areas within a recreation facility²³. This has resulted in a broad range of employment opportunities within these sectors.

Shortage of swimming teachers

As mentioned, there is a shortage in swimming teachers with a predicted shortfall of around 2,000 nationally²⁴. The government is offering funding options to address this issue. There are also roles as lifeguards, with the Australian Lifeguard Service employing over 700 across Australia²⁵. Many are employed at community recreation centres overseeing the patrons using the pools. The challenge with this sector is most swimming teacher and lifeguard roles are casual. Nearly 50% of instructors, lifeguards, and others in the industry indicate that they have a second job²⁶ which could be a barrier to remaining in the industry and being enticed to train in the industry. Shutdowns resulted in 50,000 children missing out on taking part in swimming and water safety lessons²⁷. There is also a flow on effect with swimming teacher shortages causing some primary schools to have to cancel their swimming lessons for students²⁸.

Employment opportunities

The aquatic and community recreation centres however do have a range of full-time employment options with 33,600 full time employees across Australia. Roles can include program coordinator, pool manager and centre manager. Popularity in swimming is increasing and was one of the top 5 activities during COVID-19 lockdowns when exercise was permitted. Aquatic facilities are extremely popular with approximately 5 million Australians either swimming or using these facilities for other activities such as aqua aerobics²⁹.

Water safety awareness and culturally diverse opportunities

Western Australia has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world and we often have access to a range of waterways and swimming pools. As a result, water safety awareness and learning to swim are important contributors to reducing the rate of drownings. In 2019/2020, 258 Western Australians were affected by drowning (both fatal and non-fatal)³⁰. Forty percent of drownings recorded tragically involve people who were born overseas, and Aboriginal children aged 5-14 are 8.6 times more likely to fatally drown than non-Aboriginal children in WA³¹. The Royal Life Saving WA have a range of access and equity projects to create opportunities to break down the barriers to participation in swimming and water safety education.

Regional communities and aquatic facilities

Aquatic facilities play a crucial role in regional communities, especially in promoting social interaction and wellbeing. Often these aquatic facilities are ideal places to visit in typically hot locations in remote Western Australia. Participation at these remote aquatic facilities have even been found to assist in promoting good behaviour among youths and increased school attendance.³²

Upgrading and addition of aquatic and community recreation facilities

Recently there has been a substantial investment in upgrading and introducing new aquatic and community recreation facilities within Western Australia. For example, the City of South Perth Council in March 2021 signed a \$20 million Federal Government grant funding for a proposed Recreation and Aquatic Facility³³ and Lotterywest have allocated \$867,182 to creating a Margaret River Surf Lifesaving Development Centre to enhance training and skill development in surf lifesaving³⁴. These venues will

then in turn create employment opportunities within this sector.

Industry Developments

There are several initiatives presented recently via reports, frameworks and programs within the sport, fitness, and recreation sectors. These include:

[The Australian Sports Commission Corporate Plan - 2021-2025](#)

This plan is targeting two key purposes. To make Australian's stronger through sport, and to build sustainable winning systems for Australian athletes. The potential to inspire Australians over the next decade is a key move and investment, particularly with Brisbane hosting the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games and several other key international sporting event such as the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 to be held in Perth.

[SportWest Mental Health and Wellbeing Community Sport Framework](#)

This framework was developed and distributed to community sporting clubs in 2021. The aim to support quality practice in mental health and wellbeing promotion initiatives, to identify ways to promote mental health and wellbeing and to provide guidance on what to consider when engaging a mental health and wellbeing program deliverer or service provider.

[2022 Women Leaders in Sport Scholarship \(WLIS\)](#)

Sport Australia is striving to achieve gender equity in sport. In 2019, women comprised 24% of CEOs across 63 national sporting organisations (NSOs), and 15% of high-performance coaches. Applications for the 2022 WLIS are now closed however applications for 2023 will likely be held around September and October 2022.

[The Future of Sport Volunteering Insights Report 2021](#)

The estimated value of sports volunteers in terms of the labour they provide is \$4 billion per year. Volunteer involvement in sport was significantly impacted during the COVID-19 period. Whilst some are slowly returning to support the industry again there is concern that not enough will return. As a result, this report shares a vision of thinking and ideas to support the volunteer experience and enticement to these roles.

[The Social, Health and Economic Value of the Australian National Aquatic Industry Report July 2021](#)

This report highlights the significant contribution of the aquatic industry to the overall wellbeing of Australians. It highlights the social benefits, which at times can be under-valued or difficult to measure. It shows that bringing people together, supporting marginalised groups and supporting early learning can be critical ways to support local communities.

Please get in touch

FutureNow continually seeks feedback from the Sport and Recreation sector to facilitate workforce development, and the development and delivery of responsive training and skills sets to meet emerging sector needs. Please get in touch with the Industry Development Manager:

[Kelly Perry](#)

Industry Development Manager - Sport, Fitness and Recreation

0459 984 873 | kperry@futurenow.org.au

References

- 1 2020 Employment Projections – for the five years to November 2025. Occupation Projections. Australian Government Labour Market Information Portal and Sports in Australia Industry Report, IBISWorld, June 2021
- 2 Sport and Recreation – Case for Change Draft – October 2021
- 3 Students invited to dive in to training for swimming jobs, Media Statement, Minister for Education and Training, 12 October 2021
- 4 Frameworks of Operations for Fitness Facilities under COVID-19 Restrictions, August 2020
- 5 How much damage did COVID-19 do to our sporting nation? Here's what the data shows, ABC News, 23 September 2021
- 6 Adventurous minds convene to plan the future of WA's trails, Ministerial Media release, 14 October 2021
- 7 WA Trails and Recreation Forum 2021, Dr Lenore Lyons, Outdoors Great Southern
- 8 Clearing House for Sport (2020): AusPlay: Sport and physical activity reports
- 9 The Social, Health and Economic Value of the Australian National Aquatic Industry, July 2021
- 10 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Household Impacts of COVID-19 survey
- 11 Mind Matter – A healthy mind in a healthy body: How playing sport and being physically active improves mental health, Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
- 12 Sport Australia. Aus-play – Ongoing impact of COVID-19 on sport and physical activity participation June 2021 update.
- 13 WA Hiking Strategy: Bushwalking and trail running in Western Australia 2020-2030 report
- 14 The Social, Health and Economic Value of the Australian National Aquatic Industry, July 2021
- 15 Sport in Australia, IBIS World, June 2021
- 16 WA the safest and strongest State in the nation, Ministerial media release, 11 November

2021.

17 Sport in Australia, IBIS World, June 2021 and Gym and Fitness Centres in Australia Industry Report, IBIS World, April 2021

18 Yoga participation stretches beyond Pilates & Aerobics, Roy Morgan, March 2018

19 Yoga participation stretches beyond Pilates & Aerobics, Roy Morgan, March 2018

20 Gym and Fitness Centres in Australia, IBIS World, April 2021

21 Mature-aged Sport and Physical Activities, Clearing House for Sport, 13 October 2020

22 The Social, Health and Economic Value of the Australian National Aquatic Industry, July 2021

23 Sport and Recreation – Case for Change Draft – October 2021

24 Sport and Recreation – Case for Change Draft – October 2021

25 Australian Lifeguard Service (ALS). Australian Lifeguard Service - Home - Australian Lifeguard Service

26 The Social, Health and Economic Value of the Australian National Aquatic Industry, July 2021

27 Royal Lifesaving WA, email December 2021

28 Hiatt, B. Swimming Lessons take a Dive, The West Australian, December 2021

29 The Social, Health and Economic Value of the Australian National Aquatic Industry, July 2021

30 Annual WA Drowning Report 2019/2020 Royal Life Saving WA

31 Royal Lifesaving WA, email December 2021

32 Royal Lifesaving WA, email December 2021

33 Australasian Leisure Management, City of South Perth moves forward with Aquatic Facility Plans, 23 March 2021

34 Surf's Up! Lotterywest funds for Margaret River Surf Life Saving Development Centre, Ministerial media statement, 9 November 2021