

Connecting through collaboration

Creating connected communities

Strong connections within a community are formed through:



All three of these take time to develop, but once established they enable a community to mobilise and residents to work together towards health, happiness and safety.

Community connectedness can happen at many levels.

Individuals can engage with their local sport, recreation and community groups or just get to know their neighbours.



Community organisations can work with each other and with local and state governments to collaborate and plan ways to help each other.



Building these connections can be a challenge for many communities, but the benefits of creating a more connected community can include everything from healthier individuals and families, to increased resilience.

Signs of success: joining the dots to build a cohesive Western Australia

What a well-connected Western Australian community looks like:



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Our whole community wins



Department of
Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries



Community Connect

How sport and recreation helps build social capital and strengthens communities

One of the many hidden benefits of participating in sport and recreation is the way it helps people connect and forge stronger relationships.

Western Australians love their sport and outdoor recreation. And we have good reason to – competitive teams, well organised clubs, quality facilities and a landscape which effortlessly inspires us to be active.

One of the many hidden benefits of participating in sport and recreation is the way it helps people connect and forge stronger relationships. In other words, sport and recreation helps build the social capital of a neighbourhood, suburb or district, benefitting the community as a whole.

But what is social capital?

Simply, it’s the way competitors and spectators help out at a Country Week sports carnival; the way parents volunteer at a local sports facility; and the way sportspeople develop friendships and work together on and off the field.

The sport and recreation industry, community groups and local and State Government can work together to use social capital to develop social networks, friendships, cooperation and trust – all of which helps build stronger, healthier, happier and safer communities.

Social capital and social networks are resources that bind people together¹ and are the social fabric or glue of communities.²



Broken connections: current barriers

Western Australia is a truly diverse state. This gives rise to a number of challenges around building and maintaining strong connections between all community members. We know from our research that sport and recreation can help address these challenges and improve the lifestyles of all Western Australians, resulting in strong, cohesive and connected communities.

To create the best world possible for all Western Australians, we can use sport and active recreation to address the challenges outlined below:

Social isolation and inclusivity

People are more isolated than ever before. There’s less interaction between neighbours and the extended community and less playing in the street together. This creates a disconnect and lack of trust between people and the places they live.

Culture and participation

Western Australia is a truly multicultural state. While sport and recreation can bring communities from diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds together to participate in a shared activity, the barriers to their participation is higher than other groups. It can include issues like language and cultural differences and sensitivities around female participation as well as the cost of participation.

Places and Spaces

Population growth and changing neighbourhood designs put pressure on public open spaces. This requires clubs and activities to co-exist and come to harmonious use of space. Our State is also large and covers a wide variety of playing conditions which also need to be taken into consideration and made the most of.

Changing norms

The increasing normality of 24-hour, seven-day-week businesses has resulted in shift-work extending outside traditional industries. Between everyday life responsibilities and work commitments, people are finding it more difficult to participate in traditional sport and recreation activities.



Why sport and recreation is the answer

We’ve identified four key areas where sport and recreation plays an important role in strengthening and growing our communities:

Aids the development of social capital

The team spirit that develops among participants during sport activities can also spread to their daily lives¹.

Participating in sport helps people understand – and feel – a sense of community with people who may come from a diverse range of social groups and backgrounds.

Increases trust

Belonging to community organisations increases the level of trust between local residents. Membership of local sport and recreation groups in particular, is strongly associated with a person having high levels of trust within the community.²

Encourages people to exercise

Research shows that the higher the level of neighbourhood social capital, the more people associate participation in sport as a positive and the stronger the likelihood of them participating in sports at least three times per week³. Providing flexibility around how sport and recreation activities are delivered within communities, can also increase participation numbers.

Activates local parks and neighbourhoods

The availability of parks is important for neighbourhood social capital and the participation of young people in physical activities. When social capital is high adolescents are more likely to participate in sport and recreation activities and make use of local parks and open spaces.

1 Coleman, 1988
2 Cox, 1995.

1 Spaaij, 2012.
2 Brown et al., 2014.
3 Prins et al., 2014.