

# Australian Little Athletics

## 1. *Ensure Australia's continued elite sporting success*

- *Identify any areas of duplication within Australia's sporting system and recommend ways to build a more efficient system.*
- *Examine the relationship between the Australian Sports Commission, Australian Institute of Sport, State and Territory Institutes, academies of sport and regional institutes and how this relationship could deliver better athlete pathways.*
- *Recommend opportunities to ensure maximum returns from talent identification programs.*

**NOTE: Please refer to the other questions for supporting information related to this topic.**

Australian Little Athletics remains a uniquely Australian phenomenon as a volunteer based organisation from its early beginnings in 1964 in Geelong, with a small group of children competing in a simple program of running events. Since then, Australian Little Athletics has provided a foundation for Family, Fun and Fitness, by supporting, developing and encouraging more than 2 million young Australians to participate.

Australian Little Athletics is better positioned to activate more young Australians and their families than any other activity, given its unique foundations in basic skills development and enjoyment of Family, Fun and Fitness activities.

As a sporting activity, sports like athletics and swimming share the characteristics of competing and achieving personal improvement, rather than winning. For example, winning is defined in the Australian Little Athletics context as achieving a personal best time, not being first to the finish line. This is an environment where children of all backgrounds and abilities are challenged by the philosophy to Be Your Best™.

The cornerstones of Australian Little Athletics are family and community involvement. Australian Little Athletics has never been the recipient of Federal Government funding, yet today there are more than 95,000 children registered in more than 550 community centres across the nation meeting weekly for Family, Fun and Fitness with the goal of growing participation to 500,000 children by 2012.

## **PROGRAM TO INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

The professionalisation of sports has been occurring on an industry wide basis. Soccer, tennis, swimming etc all now have a single peak body to allow one central national administrative structure and government liaison point. Currently, there is a push to promote a similar organising principle within athletics. This would only serve to duplicate services and transfer the running costs from local volunteers to paid employees at significant additional costs to Australian tax payers.

Athletics Australia is currently responsible for the senior sport of athletics and elite development for champions of the sport. The push to professionalise seeks to build an athletes' pathway based on

performance which results in specialised skills, talent scouting and transitions based on squad formation, coaching and performance, rather than participation and the Family, Fun and Fitness activities.

Australian Little Athletics philosophy of participation is based upon the unique positioning of athletics (as the activity) and is its role as a foundation for all sports. When stripped to its bare essentials for human movement, Australian Little Athletics is about learning to walk, run, throw, jump and basic coordination skills.

As a foundation for all sports, Australian Little Athletics approach to continued participation is to work through integrated partnerships in order to align with involvement strategies as outlined in the Australian Sports Commission – Junior Sport Policy of 2005. In line with the guidelines provided by this policy, getting young people involved requires a strategy that incorporates the following:

- Provide equal opportunity for young people regardless of their ability to reach their potential.
- Avoid letting the need to win override giving all young people a fair go.
- Avoid indicating any negative perceptions about the ability of a participant.

Increasing participation in physical activity also increases the talent pool to sporting clubs.

As a predominantly parent volunteer based organisation, Australian Little Athletics is not in the position to comment on the relationships between Australian sporting bodies. However, with the support of the Rudd Government in providing one-off assistance in the establishment of local clubs within communities of greatest needs, Australia Little Athletic can significantly expand the talent pool, particularly in areas of lower social inclusion. Once clubs are established, local volunteers are then equipped to provide the weekly local programs, requiring less support once the clubs are fully established.

Together, Australian Little Athletics and Australia Sports Commission can coordinate the operations for 'Foundation for all Sports' as the pathway for future sporting engagement for all National Sporting Associations and bodies.

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## ***2. Better place sport and physical activity as a key component of the Government's preventative health approach***

- *Examine Government frameworks to ensure an on-going focus on grassroots and community sport and physical activity.*
- *Examine Government programs to increase participation rates in sport and physical activity, including analysis of existing programs.*
- *Identify and recommend opportunities to break down barriers to participation at junior, adult and senior ages with a view to making it simpler and easier for Australians to participate in the sport or physical activity of their choice, including for women, the disabled and Indigenous people.*

- *Recommend strategies to increase the effectiveness of the promotion of sport by the Federal Government to better communicate positive health and activity messages to the broader community.*

**NOTE: Please refer to the other questions for supporting information related to this topic.**

## COMMUNITY SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The Rudd Government framework, which placed the sport portfolio in the Department of Health underscores its new approach to the benefits of sport, more specifically - participation in physical activity provides, to the general population.

The nature of society is changing and there is increasing importance on physical activity; we are more sedentary and we need to increase activity.

Participation based physical activity that involves the family and school reduces the risk of chronic diseases, helps tackle the overweight and obesity epidemic and contributes to people having a better sense of community.

It is Australian Little Athletics mission to provide opportunities for participation across all Australian communities and families. Australian Little Athletics is seeking to increase its capacity and significantly boost levels of physical activity and the current epidemic of childhood obesity which continues at significant recurrent cost to the Australian government and community.

The cornerstones of Australian Little Athletics are family and community involvement. Today there are more than 95,000 children registered in more than 550 community centres across the nation.

By encouraging children to participate in regular physical activity, Australian Little Athletics helps to lay the foundation for a healthy lifestyle. The emphasis is on participation and personal improvement rather than winning, an environment where children of all backgrounds and abilities are challenged by the philosophy to Be Your Best™.

Australian Little Athletics provides a globally unique capability to provide a foundation for young children and their families, to engage in the great Australian tradition of “having a go”. Critically with today’s increasingly sedentary lifestyle, Australian Little Athletics provides the only community based program that through Family, Fun & Fitness activities can combat the increasing costs and risk associated with poor health and accelerated levels of chronic disease.

Importantly, with relative minor investments by the Rudd Government, Australian Little Athletics can:-

1. Drive the emphasis of community engagement that can lift current participation rates from 67,000 to 350,000 Australian households and 95,000 to 500,000 Australian children.
2. Collaborate with partner bodies to implement a professional coaches and officials program that provides the skills needed at a community level to coordinate these programs.
3. Integrate with Australian Sports Commission to coordinate the operations for ‘Foundation for all Sports’ as the pathway for future sporting engagement for all National Sporting Associations and bodies.

Australian Little Athletics has recently commissioned independent research by Clutch Pty Ltd on the relationships between Sport, Health and Social Inclusion.

The key findings of the Clutch Report, based on a sample of over 3,500 young Australians (between ages 6 – 13 years) and 100,000 Australian adults (14 years and above)

#### Younger Australians

- Children indicated their interest in mass participation sport where they have opportunities for socialisation and family support.
- Boys and Girls aged between 14 to 15 years are nearly equally distributed in Swimming and Athletics Track & Field, unlike the other mass participation sports.
- Athletics Track & Field participation in all age groups from 6 to 15 years is over-represented in higher socio groups (the top 40% of households - “AB” and “C” Quintiles) whether there is regular participation at school or outside school.
- Families from lower socio groups are under-represented in overall sport participation.
- Considering the issue of chronic disease and families there are specific markets of focus for targeting the greatest incidence of overweight and obesity throughout communities in Australia, these are sensitive to the lower socio groups; a natural priority for action.

Australian Little Athletics addresses these imbalances by involving families within the community from diverse backgrounds to take part in Family, Fun and Fitness activities that build a sense of trust and community around little athletics activities. The mission is to develop children of all abilities by promoting positive attitudes and a healthy lifestyle through family and community involvement in athletics activities.

The “Nunga” Little Athletic Championships, run in August 2008, is a recent example in South Australia where the local community has created an inviting environment for the local indigenous community to participate.

The Rudd Government is concerned with social inclusion as well as increasing participation through sport to combat chronic disease. The Federal Government has a unique opportunity to formulate and implement an effective strategy in partnership with Australian Little Athletics to substantially reduce long term chronic disease, improve diet and promote physical activity.

Adopting a whole of government approach to health, education, sport and infrastructure will enable families to live longer and healthier lives, reduce inequalities by mobilising wider and more effective participation.

An integrated approach to physical activity, health and sport at regional and local levels that enhances social inclusion requires the development of structured education and centre development. The benefits of this integrated approach are in reducing the risk factors and increasing the overall awareness and understanding of the influences of diet and physical activity through positive preventive interventions.

Federal and State governments collectively with Australian Little Athletics and Australian Sports Commission can work together to encourage the development and implementation of clubs and centre programs. These programs are aimed at increasing physical activities for families, and

individual associates of the program that are sustainable, comprehensive and actively engage all sectors including civil society, the private sector and the media.

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### ***3. Strengthen pathways from junior sport to grassroots community sport right through to elite and professional sport***

- *Examine the capacity of the system to ensure optimal and efficient delivery of the athlete and coach pathway for any given sport.*
- *Recommend the most effective support and recognition for the coaches, officials, umpires, administrators and volunteers who keep our community clubs alive.*
- *Examine how relationships between the Commonwealth Government and National Sporting Organisations, State Sporting Organisations and Australia's peak representative bodies at key multi-sports competitions may be strengthened to deliver better performance outcomes.*

**NOTE: Please refer to the other questions for supporting information related to this topic.**

## **COACHING PATHWAYS**

Australian Little Athletics currently provides the opportunity for coaching skills development for parents interested in becoming involved over a longer period of time with Australian Little Athletics. It must also be acknowledged that there is a fundamental difference in the provision of coaching, where Athletics Australia relies on paid officials and Australian Little Athletics relies on volunteers.

There is a need and opportunity for career development and accreditation for officials, volunteers and administrator within Australian Little Athletics.

The Australian Sports Commission is focused upon creating a national infrastructure for Junior Sports development through quality coaching and systematisation of the athletics industry.

Australian Little Athletics, through a positive working relationship with the Australian Track and Field Coaches Association, provides accredited basic coaching skills development courses for volunteers.

Volunteers interested in coaching can undertake a basic (Level 1 course) that provides practical coaching skills and techniques for general track and field event at Australian Little Athletics. For some volunteers, this participation creates an interest for higher coaching responsibilities and the desire for further progression into senior athletics by undertaking a (Level 2 courses) that provides specialised coaching skills and techniques for particular track and field events.

Similarly, volunteers who participate as on-field Officials also receive training specific to each event. Many volunteers, who have decided to apply their skills as an Official can be found in senior athletics.

Australian Little Athletics consider all available inputs into the broader athletic development of children (beyond athletics) through the joint management of junior athletics that requires that these be explored jointly between Australian Little Athletics and Athletics Sports Commission as to their future relevance.

## SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION

Australian Little Athletics, unlike schools based programs, provides an avenue for parental role model behaviour, active engagement and promotion of physical activity and reinforcement of healthy lifestyle activities.

Parents have the opportunity through Australian Little Athletics to be involved in both the management of the activity and direct access to their children's enjoyment. Through Family, Fun and Fitness programs, parents are encouraged to be more active. Further there is a perceived benefit to community for parents being able to gather together at Little Athletics events, as summarised by this comment:

*I think if something is worrying the community it is often solved at LA's. The parents get together and we work it out.*

*Focus group participant - March 2008*

There are a number of issues that confront parental involvement that arise from the increasing pressures on parents such as:

- Financial – Increasing mortgage costs and school fees.
- Logistical – balancing the competing demands of having more than one child.
- Structural – the increasing incidence of non-traditional family structures.
- Involvement – the implied role or responsibility of a parent to become an official.
- Responsive – keeping pace with the changing demands of their children.

A comprehensive analysis of the relationships between Body Mass Index, sports centre locations, and socio economic status is available in the Clutch Report, which was commissioned by Australian Little Athletics in 2008.

Whilst volunteers manage the day-to-day running of the centres, there are a number of administrative and financial obligations that, for some lower socio communities, are generally beyond their capability. Communities in lower socio groups generally have limited skills and opportunities to set up local clubs and programs, however, these are also the same communities that would realise the greatest potential benefits of such programs, in terms of reducing the risk of chronic diseases, helps tackle the overweight and obesity epidemic and contributes to people having a better sense of community.

Australian Little Athletics, with the support of the Rudd Government, could address the needs of volunteers in lower socio group by providing assistance in the establishment of local clubs with the local community members. Once clubs are established, local volunteers are then equipped to provide the weekly local programs, requiring less support once the clubs are fully established.

## SPORTING ORGANISATION RELATIONSHIPS

Australian Little Athletics recognises that sporting organisations have different goals from the Family, Fun and Fitness activities.

Sports have a competitive pressure seeking the best little athletes to grow and nurture into proficient older athletes competing for Australia at an international level. The key to true incremental growth in participation for more Australian families is the necessity for Australian Little Athletics to recognise that sporting organisations have different goals from the Family, Fun and Fitness.

To provide a platform, pathway and partnership with specialised sports, Australian Little Athletics must:

1. Increase the range of options available to try and trial for Australian children.
2. Reduce the time investment required by families.
3. Allow multi-participation without conflict.
4. Provide an augmentation to all sports.
5. Provide the fundamental skills required to participate in physical activity with the basis of walking, running, jumping and throwing.

Australian Little Athletics needs to negotiate an agreement with the State Departments of Health, Education and Sport for an agreement between Australian Little Athletics and Australian Sports Commission related sports for a registration system and a code of conduct linked to insurance provisions.

A system needs to be implemented that tracks and traces the transition of the family from sport to sport to create a baseline measure throughout sports development and engagement. This will enable a whole of year strategy for engagement of the family and children.

This system would enable a “recognition program” to acknowledge participation throughout all sports and encourage children to increase their physical activity throughout the calendar year and to move in and out of different sports throughout the year. This supports a diversity of experience and a national family register of physical activity with eligibility for rewards for maintaining a baseline fitness level for children.

**4. *Maintain Australia's cutting edge approach to sports science, research and technology***

1. *Examine the capacity of the system to ensure provision of cutting edge technology, innovation, sport science, sports medicine, applied research to underpin sport performance and development, including ways to maintain Australia's position as leaders in anti-doping.*
2. *Examine the current partnerships in place within these fields and recommend any potential partnerships.*

**NOTE: Please refer to the other questions for supporting information related to this topic.**

Australian Little Athletics is a volunteer based organisation that provides younger children and their parents to participate in Family, Fun and Fitness activities that also develops basic motor skills.

Australian Little Athletics volunteers provides the following program

- On Track – a fundamental motor skill development program.
- Athletics Skills Award Program (ASAP) – Skill competences recognition program for children seeking to specialist in particular track and field events.
- Little Athletic Program for Schools – LAPS – Basic motor skill development appropriate for primary schools children provided by accredited Australian Track and Field Association certified coaches.

With over 95,000 children currently registered and a goal to increase participation to 500,000 by 2012, Australian Little Athletics would be happy to offer this information to support on-going research to sports science, research and technology.

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**5. Identify opportunities to increase and diversify the funding base for sport through corporate sponsorship, media and any recommended reforms, such as enhancing the effectiveness of the Australian Sports Foundation.**

**NOTE: Please refer to the other questions for supporting information related to this topic.**

## **SPONSORSHIP**

From a sponsorship point of view the values base of Family, Fun and Fitness with mass participation and associated market penetration of families is extremely attractive to potential sponsors. With increased collaboration of membership data (cumulative database management) and therefore increased leverage of membership knowledge State/Territory and National sponsorship packages deliver more benefits to sponsors.

Moving from a children's database of 95,000 children participating to family based, structured and coordinated national database of 500,000 children participating with up to 1,000,000 registrations (parents, siblings and extended families) covering 350,000 households builds a platform for reward, recognition and promotion through Australian Little Athletics and greater utility through national coverage and measurement of outcomes. This can also be the basis for the introduction of an alumni database in subsequent years.

Increasing sponsorship returns the financial benefits back to participating families in the form of lower registration fees and special sponsor's offers. The Rudd Government would also benefit through reduced recurrent expenditure commitments whilst supporting greater levels of physical activity in the community.

It is proposed that national sponsors organised through Australian Little Athletics should lead to fair distribution of resources to the States and Territories to cover both administrative costs and participation rates at a local level.

Fundamental to future sponsorship policy are the following:

- The provision of tax deductible status for any sponsorship or donation.
- Promotion must have health, education and well being and must not contradict these themes.
- Adherence to privacy law and limitations on member data usage.
- Compliance to meet sponsors expectations should follow this hierarchy with consistent delivery across the nation to deliver value to sponsors.

## **MEDIA**

Currently with relation to sport and participation for all, the Australian media is focussed on the professional entities of sport and elite sport as well as the problems that have resulted from a lack of participation in general. At this stage the media is fundamentally disengaged from supporting

solutions that activate changes in the community and family activity, which subsequently benefit the health and well being of Australians.

The national media entities have a consistent issue with dissipating levels of community engagement. Over the past 20 years, further fuelled by globalisation of news content this has resulted in significantly decreased subscription to print media nationally as well as falling loyalty to electronic mediums.

This represents a significant opportunity for Australian Little Athletics to generate the support for increased community engagement, serving the joint purpose of increased participation in health and well being and increased connection to local communities.

The key initiatives that should be undertaken with relation to the Media are:

1. Develop a policy and practice that underpins a consistent approach to the effective use of media to enable awareness and the development of the Australian Little Athletics programs and brand.
2. Community leadership to be managed by Australian Little Athletics representatives as a first point of call to represent childhood engagement in physical activity.
3. Establish media partnerships and sponsorships to drive increased engagement through encouraging healthy dietary practices and physical activity.
4. Determine a multilevel strategy that drives program awareness at local, state, territory and national levels.
5. Enable the media to celebrate and communicate positive community change and acceptance of the need to integrate physical activity into everyday life.
6. Clear public messages, simple direct messages need to be communicated on the quality and quantity of physical activity sufficient to provide substantial health benefits.

Further, it is recommended that the following additional community based activities be pursued to increase media coverage.

- Establish its market value as a key “connector” to the community.
- Launch a “heroes” and “little heroes” campaign that leverages successful senior ex-Little Athletics and promotes the participation of current Little Athletics participants.
- Leverage “heroes” Little Athletics publicly and within the registration base to recruit and retain members respectively.
- Focus on local press initiatives on the basis of improved community readership with Local Newspaper Groups.
- Establish a mechanism to publish and promote personal bests in broader forums.
- Investigate the possibility of forming a Little Athletics Alumni database.

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