



Communities
& Justice

MODIFYING YOUR SPORT



A Toolkit

We appreciate the support of the following sport providers:



Guidance notes to assist modified sports programs for older participants

About the guidance notes

We piloted a modified sports program with six sports codes: netball, football (soccer), gymnastics, basketball, softball and table tennis. Using the lessons learned from the pilot, which captured input from all the codes and a number of participants, we have compiled a series of guidance notes to help other codes to put together their own program. There are seven guidance notes, corresponding to the different stages in developing a program.

What is a modified sport?

A commonly played sport that is adapted to suit the needs and skills of older participants. Examples include walking netball (more steps, no jumping or running), walking football/soccer (no running, smaller fields, smaller teams) and gymnastics (structured classes that involve simpler, lower-risk exercises and routines). Modifying sports for older people means that they can continue to enjoy active lives that keep them in touch with others in the community, while using existing community facilities.

General approach to developing a program

The codes in the pilot followed a similar pathway in developing a program, as set out in the diagram below.



1. Modify your sport

Sports usually require some modification to make them easier for older people to participate. The modification is usually done centrally by the Code.

2. Design your program

A modified sport needs to be part of a program. Typically this involves when and where the sport will be played, who will coach or support the players, timing and costs. Most Codes did this centrally, although it may need to be modified slightly by either Associations or Clubs to fit local need.

3. Recruit delivery partners

In the pilot, Codes found delivery partners—Associations or Regions—who could coordinate the program working with local clubs. Where the program involved start-up grants, the delivery partners typically worked with Clubs to identify what the money could be used for.

4. Recruit and support clubs

Clubs deliver the program to participants. Associations or Regions are usually responsible for finding the clubs that are interested in participating, and giving them guidance as to what approaches work best.

5. Make sports work for participants

Program participants have different needs: time, format, willingness to pay. It is important that local Clubs deliver the program in a way that meets the needs of local participants.

6. Promote to participants

Promotion happened mainly in local Clubs, although there was also promotion by some Associations and Codes.

7. Show your success (collecting data)

For Codes that were interested in growing the activity, collecting data to show their success was an important step. This typically involves every level of body; that is, the Code, the Region or Association, the Club as well as participants.

Interpreting this approach for your Code

The approach described in this guide is the typical approach from the pilot. However, you may want to adapt it slightly to suit your circumstance. For example, the program design could happen at the Association level, or the Code could play a bigger role in development and promotion where there was limited capacity or resources in the Clubs. No matter which approach you decide is best for your Code, these guidance notes will give you helpful insights gained from those Codes that have already been through the process. This should shortcut your efforts and help your modified sports be even more successful.

Modifying your sport

We modify sports to create an activity that is satisfying for long-term players, accessible for new players and fun for all, while making the sport safe enough for people to keep playing as they get older. This guidance note covers what you need to think about when modifying your sport, so it is suitable for older people.

What is a modified sport?

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When looking at how to modify your sport, think about the following factors.

People's capabilities change

As people get older, their capabilities change. Typically this results in slower reaction times, reductions in balance, slower game speeds, reduced power/strength (players should be broadly similar) and reduced stamina.

Are there existing modified versions of the sport

Sometimes codes have already been adapted as entry-level versions of the sport; that is, sports for young children. For example, football (soccer) has a model for young people that requires smaller teams and smaller fields. If you have a development pathway for kids, it may be a useful starting point for older people. There are also models of different sports used overseas and interstate; for example, the UK has a version of walking football.

It still needs to be challenging and fun

Participants say that this is very important for them. It may be tempting to design out all risk, but that may also make the sport less exciting. Think about how to balance risk and appeal.

A plan or a package

It's best if the sport is designed to be part of a package—a suite of lessons or a program that runs over a term—so that participants are learning different skills and using different muscle groups.

Think about how the sport fits in with other fitness activities

Participants really enjoyed playing sports when they were coupled with other activities, such as warm-up exercises that culminated in a game.

Examples

The concept of modifying sports for older people has been well tested. Here are some tried and true approaches that have worked in different codes to help you think through how you will modify your sport.

It's more than just the game: thinking through a structured approach

The most successful models have a 'program' that has lesson packs for coaches or trainers to guide activities each week. These are suggested, rather than mandatory.

When the Netball Code adapted their sport for older people, they put together a structure for each session that involved:

- 20 mins of stretch/warm up
- 20 mins of skills development and training
- 20 mins for a game
- Brief cool-down period

They went on to develop a program that ran across a whole term, with different activities each week. The participants really enjoyed this model; they said it gave them a range of activities and—because it wasn't just focused on the game—they generally were active for the full hour. One participant, who experienced both this version and one at a different club where the focus was on the game alone, told us that the mixed approach was so much better that she just didn't want to go back to the one with the game alone.

Briefly, this is how some Codes have adapted their sport

Sport	Modifications
Netball	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structured class of 1 hour• Full-sized court. Modified game play—no jumping, walking/no running, extra step• Session delivered by a coach
Football (soccer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small field. Small team.• Modified game play—walking/no running, no ball above shoulder height• Game only, supervised by a referee
Gymnastics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structured 1-hour exercise class. Programmed to include term-long lesson packs at three levels, depending on skill• Modified approach—eg balance beams are on the floor rather than elevated.• Delivered by qualified coaches; able to be delivered by private operators
Basketball	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full court. Modified game play—walking/no running, lower height hoops
Softball	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full-sized field. Modified game play—T-ball, larger base zones, walking/no running.

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Designing your program

Once you have designed your sport, you need to think about how it will be delivered. This means designing a program that covers aspects like how you will schedule it, how much to charge, who runs it, how to make it attractive to participants. Most state sports bodies have designed their program centrally, sometimes in consultation with regional bodies. This guidance note covers the most important considerations for such design. If you have chosen to design your program locally, refer to Guidance note 5.

Once you have your modified sport, it needs to be turned into a program. A program considers a range of factors that make the program actually work on the ground. Most Codes have designed their program centrally. This guidance note supports bodies who are doing centralised design. If you have chosen to have local design, refer to Guidance note 5.

When designing your program, think about the following factors.

Who does what

A program always works better when the different players are clear on their role. For example, some of the clubs that participated in modified sports say that they were hoping for more communication or guidance. Most modified sports have been developed by the Code, administered by the Association and run through Clubs. Think about what the expectations are of each player, what they might need (eg support such as lesson packs, permission to vary) and what might be acceptable. For example, can Clubs modify the lesson packs, or just the scheduling? Being clear up front can help the speed of rollout and the satisfaction of those delivering the program. You should also consider whether the program will be delivered solely through volunteer Clubs or also through private operators.

How to stream participants

You may want to consider whether you need different approaches for different streams of skill level. For example, gymnastics has three different streams, while other sports have a single stream. One sport tried to couple together the modified sport with a rehab program for injured younger players: older participants felt that this made it harder for them to play a proper game.

Scheduling

Scheduling is an important aspect of making the sport work for participants, and you may need to guide how the sport is scheduled. For example, participants tell us they:

- Like the activity being regular (e.g. 10am every Tuesday during school terms)
- Like the regular commitment, but also may want to miss a week or two; they don't want to feel obliged to attend every week, particularly—as they tell us—they have medical appointments to attend and grandchildren to look after.
- Have existing commitments and are only available at different times of the week—during the day, in the evening or on weekends.

Fees or charges	Most participants say that they want to try the sport before committing. The most successful modified sports offered free sessions, or a free term. You will need to test the willingness of participants to pay for their involvement after that time.
Venues	Consider the needs of your participants and how to offer a good venue. For example, some participants of sports typically offered outside told us they preferred it inside. For others, this was an opportunity to access busy venues in their quiet periods. Accessibility of the venue was an important consideration, both in terms of distance to travel, and ease of access of the facility itself.
Provide a skilled coach or coordinator	Participants appreciate having a skilled coach in charge of each session to cover warm-up, skill development, game play and to manage the group (ensure reasonable skill match, keep the activities flowing, pay attention to the skills and interest of the group each week). If you have resources, this is a worthwhile investment.
Registration	Decide whether registration is important to you, for example for insurance purposes. In the pilot, some Codes registered participants, and where they did it was a central activity.
Other centralised support	Are there any other activities that will be needed that are best done centrally? For example, Netball established a standalone website for walking netball.

Examples

Walking netball on the web

The Netball Code established a standalone website for walking netball. The website was aimed at both potential participants and providers of the sport and included:

- A search function that allowed potential participants to find activities by location
- Player registration, which covered insurance
- The rules
- How potential providers could become part of the scheme.

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Recruit delivery partners (associations or regions)

Once you have designed your program, you will need a body to make it happen on the ground. Most modified sports are delivered through associations or regions, which then work directly with local clubs. This guidance note helps state bodies to work effectively with associations or regions in getting the program going. If you deal directly with clubs instead of associations, see Guidance Note 4.

This guidance notes assumes that you already have a program worked out, and are looking for the first partners to deliver it. You may also have some money or other resources that you can put into rolling out the program. These early delivery partners will test your approach and help you to promote the modified sports program more broadly to other Associations or Regions.

Work with Associations or Regions that are willing

Codes have told us that they typically called for expressions of interest from Associations, or initiated contact with Associations that they knew would be interested and work well. They were looking for success, so went with partners who were going to help make the program successful. The Codes also told us that the demographics of the location were important; they didn't look for partners from areas where the population was relatively young, but instead focused on areas where there were high numbers of people over 55..

Be clear on responsibilities

There are many players in delivering modified sports programs, from the Code, through the Association or Region and to the Club. It's easy to think that others will understand what they have to do, but too often there are misunderstandings. The best programs had clear roles worked out for what would get done centrally, Regionally and in the Club. They also worked out which resources (whether people or money) could be committed and made sure people did what they needed to do.

Offer enough support to make it work

Those involved in rolling out successful programs didn't just develop the program centrally and hand it over. They told us that the early days of the program rollout were really important, and took more effort. They put extra into making sure that the delivery partners, typically Associations or Regions, had the support they needed.

Vary the support according to local need

While support is critical, Codes told us that we couldn't afford to be too prescriptive about what support was available. Clubs in well-resourced locations might need different support from those with fewer resources to call on, and so Codes varied the support on offer.

How some of the pilot Codes recruited and supported delivery partners

Netball NSW called for expressions of interest from Associations, offering some support for the first participants.

- The Code provided the program, paid for and trained the coaches, and offered the central website as a platform to register players as well as some promotion.
- Associations were responsible for recruiting clubs, working with clubs to tailor support and offering some promotion.
- The Clubs were responsible for direct delivery, organising venues, times and equipment as well as local promotion.

Netball NSW also saw potential for private providers to deliver the program. For that reason they developed a licensing model in which private providers delivered Walking Netball in the same way a volunteer club would, being provided with a program and being responsible for scheduling, venues and promotion.

Gymnastics NSW promoted the program through their national conference, delivering in-workshop training for coaches as part of the conference. Once trained, the Associations and Clubs could access the program and were given autonomy in rolling it out. The Association funded coaches, while the Clubs were responsible for scheduling and providing venues. If the Club plans to charge a fee for subsequent terms, then the Club would be responsible for collecting the fee.

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Recruiting and supporting clubs

You have a program of modified sports worked out, and you want to make it happen. Most likely, your program will be delivered through clubs; and while they know their stuff, there are tips that can help make modified sports meet the needs of participants. This guidance note assists state bodies, associations or regions to work effectively with clubs to roll out the modified sports successfully.

You are an Association and want to roll out a program of modified sports. Typically, you will need to recruit Clubs as the delivery point. If you are in the early days, you want your program to be successful, so recruiting Clubs that will work well with you is very important. Whether you run expressions of interest or just approach them directly, a strong partnership will help make modified sports work in your area. This Guidance Note gives you some tips and tricks from pilot Codes about what is useful in working with Clubs.

What to think about when recruiting and supporting Clubs.

Clear responsibilities

It's easy to think that everyone involved in rolling out the program will understand what they have to do, but too often there are misunderstandings. The best programs had clear roles worked out for what would get done by the Association or Region, and what would happen in the Club. They also worked out which resources (whether people or money) could be committed and made sure people did what they needed to do.

Commitment to faithful implementation of the guidelines

There has likely been careful thought given to designing a program that will work for participants, in balancing the risk of injury or worse, with the need for participants to be challenged and have fun. One key step to keeping this balance is having the Clubs agree to implement the guidelines faithfully. This doesn't mean that they can't do some local tailoring (eg of timing, size, associated activities), but it does mean that they can't re-design how it works.

Vary the support according to the capability of the club

Some Clubs are well-resourced while others have more limited access to resources. Pilot codes told us it was better to work with the Club to understand what kind of support they needed, so Associations could target their effort. For example, promotion was one activity that many Associations assisted the Clubs with.

Provide a skilled coach, or coordinator and make sure coaches and supervisors they feel supported

Coaches, facilitators and supervisors are the key people who make any program work. The Codes tell us that they typically developed support materials and ran the training for coaches and supervisors. They also said that they relied on the Associations for keeping in touch with what coaches and supervisors needed, to make sure the program was on track.

Here are some examples of how pilot program Associations worked with Clubs

Some Codes allocated funding to get the pilot program off the ground. Basketball NSW offered funding to six Associations, who in turn passed on the funding to local clubs. They worked with the Clubs to see where funding was most useful. The funding was used for a range of activities, depending on location, including venue hire, equipment and payment for a referee.

Every code highlighted the importance of passing on all the design information and program guidelines to the Clubs and making sure that they understood how it was all designed to work.

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Helping clubs to make modified sports work for participants

You are rolling out a program of modified sports and you want to make sure it meets all the needs of the older participants from your community. Codes that have already rolled out a program of modified sports for older people have given us clues on what participants really value.

What older participants say they want.

- Regular times** Participants want to schedule a regular activity (for example 10:00 am every Tuesday during school terms).
- Flexibility** Participants like the regular commitment, but also may want to miss a week or two; they don't want to feel obliged to attend **every** week, particularly—as they tell us—they have medical appointments to attend and grandchildren to look after.
- Social connections** One of the most important aspects for participants is that they want to spend time with others, so there needs to be at least some focus on building social connections. The program needs to build in time so that members of the group introduce themselves each week and that some simple social activities, like a bring-a-plate morning tea, are scheduled in from time to time.
- Different times** Even though they may be retired, older people have regular commitments and are available at different times of the week—during the day, in the evening or on weekends. Think about the group in your area, when they might be available and consider offering different options.
- Make it free to start with** Participants tell us they really liked being able to test a new activity without having to spend any money; once they feel confident that the program meets their needs, they don't mind paying. Offer free sessions or a free term to help people get used to the new activity.
- Provide a skilled coach or coordinator** Participants appreciate having a skilled coach in charge of each session to cover warm-up, skill development, game play and to manage the group (ensure reasonable skill match, keep the activities flowing, pay attention to the skills and interest of the group each week).

How others delivered their sport to meet participant needs

Netball

In a major metropolitan centre, one club ran a weekly session at on a weekday at 10.00 am. The site they used was accessible by public transport as well as having lots of parking. It was delivered by a coach, who used a structured program developed by Netball NSW. The sessions were initially free, with registrations managed by Netball NSW. This club asked that participants sign up for the term, but come along when they could. The class was typically around 12-15 people each week, almost all of whom had played previously.

The participants were clearly making connections with others: each week, some participants would meet for coffee afterwards, two participants became walking buddies so they stayed active outside the classes, and in the last week, the participants themselves organised a morning tea.

Football

In a high population area on the periphery of the Greater Metropolitan Area, one club ran walking football sessions on a weeknight evening in summer. These free sessions were run alongside a “summer” football competition. The modified sport was delivered by a private operator, which provided a paid umpire. The game was conducted on a drop-in arrangement, and tailored each week to meet the capability of the participants that were present.

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Promoting to participants or players

You want older people in your area to know about and come to your sport; you may need to use slightly different approaches to publicise your activities. This guidance note gives you some tried and true ways to make sure as many participants as possible are aware of the program.

Key elements of good promotion.

Use different communication approaches

Participants respond to different factors: some may be interested in improving their fitness; others may want to meet more people. Use different hooks in your promotion so you appeal to a wider range of potential participants.

Use media channels that people respond to

Participants access information through different information channels. Consider using targeted publications like seniors' newsletters, Seniors Card, local council websites, local newspapers, flyers in places where there are a high number of older people as well as your website and other social media channels.

Word of mouth is very effective

Many participants say they value the views of people in their immediate circle, people they trust. Getting word mouth through those already participating can help to reach out to a wider and wider circle of participants.

Offer free sessions or a free 'term'

Some codes used "come and try days", which were festive open days aimed at attracting people who were curious about the activity and how well it would work for them—but may not have been willing otherwise to commit to a full term, sight unseen.

Make it easy not time consuming

You don't need to create elaborate materials, like posters, to promote the sport. Think about what you already do that you can build on. For example: use any forums you happen to be participating in to promote the activity; enclose a flyer in a regular mailout; put a note on your website.

Use your existing networks (former players, mailing list, local council)

Many organisations and individuals share an interest in making your sport accessible to older people. For example, former players can be passionate about continuing to engage with their sport and can be good advocates or promoters. Local councils, too, often make good partners because they want residents to become active and engaged, and may have specific programs to promote programs for older people. Other potential partners include organisations that also work with older people.

Examples

Different codes have already used a wide range of approaches that may be useful for you to think about. Here are some tried and true approaches that have worked in different codes to help you think through how you will modify your sport.

- Netball NSW partnered with a local council in a Sydney middle ring suburb. The council had a seniors page on their website, with a range of activities for older people: walking netball was promoted as one of those activities. For older people who were actively looking for ideas about what they could do, this was a very effective approach.
- A range of codes produced single-page flyers that they handed out to potential players. For example, Football NSW handed out flyers to older people who were attending club matches. Most codes pinned them up in club halls, noticeboards in facilities like an RSL club, and retirement villages.
- Football NSW directly contacted former players, particularly players who had stopped playing in the last 3-5 years, information they gathered from their database. They sent these former players details about their summer competition, which proved an effective approach.
- The codes came together to staff a combined booth at the annual Seniors Expo. Official representatives from the codes handed out information and answered questions about where people could access the sport and how to participate.

One club gave us a cautionary tale about an approach that didn't work so well. They relied on Facebook to promote its games; it turned out that not many of the participants used Facebook, so it had limited impact. They told us that they learned not to put all their eggs in one basket, and instead try different approaches.

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Show your success

It's great to collect enough information to show the success of your sport. Sometimes you will need this information to apply for funding; other times it will help you tailor how you offer the program, or market it to potential participants. This guidance note covers what you need to think about when setting up and collecting information on success.

What to think about when collecting information.

Be clear who is leading data collection

No doubt there will be many different people involved in collecting data. But it is important to be clear who is the lead on data collection. The role of the lead is to design the data collection process, make sure the data is collected, run the reports and send the information to the right people. If you don't know who is leading, it will be very difficult to gather together the data that you do have and others are likely to just forget about collecting it.

Set up your data collection process early

It's really easy to think that you can come back and work out what information you need to collect once the program has got going. But you never recover the information you miss from those first weeks. If you spend a little bit of time during the program development phase designing what information you want to collect and how you will do so, then you get a much more complete picture of how your program went.

Make it as easy as possible

One of the key design tips is to make collecting information as simple as you possibly can. It's better to have complete information on a few key areas than incomplete information on lots of areas. Really work out the information that is most important to you and collect it in ways that are simple and reliable.

A central website for registering players will help streamline your data collection

If you are able to use an existing central website to register your players, you can use it to help collect data. Registration gives you easy access to participants themselves, so you can send out links to surveys or simple questionnaires or even easy questions.

Provide coaches/facilitators with an easy form to complete each week

It's good to collect basic data, like how many sessions you ran, how many people turned up to those sessions and how many were repeat players. Codes tell us the simplest way to collect this information has been through a simple form that the coach or facilitator fills in each session.

Record a little data each week

You may also want to capture some information about the context, which can help to understand what was going on. For example, the weather will affect how many players turn up and whether they play at all.

Here are some prompts to help you think about what information you need and how to get it

1. Session data sheet

(for coaches/facilitators to complete at the end of each session)

Question	Answer field
1. Club name	[open field]
2. Venue	[open field]
3. Venue type	Indoor/outdoor
4. Number of participants this week	[number]
5. Of the participants (Qn 4), how many had come at least once before?	[number]
OR – session cancelled	Poor weather/ not enough attendees/ other [open field]

2. Player questionnaire

(players/participants to complete at the end of each term or once per year)

Question	Answer field
What sport or activity were you participating in?	Netball, football, gymnastics, basketball, softball, table tennis, [add any others]
How would you rate your satisfaction with the activity or sport (scale of 1 to 5)?	1 = very unsatisfied; 5 = very satisfied)
How often did you participate in this activity	Every week; most weeks; a couple of times; once
What difference has the activity made for you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My fitness has improved • My mobility has improved • My blood pressure has improved • My weight has improved • My cholesterol levels have improved • I can do more than before • I am more social than before • Other • No difference
How could we improve the activity?	(open answer)





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