

## Victorian Active Ageing Partnership (VAAP) Physical Activity Audit and Gap Analysis

### 1. Executive Summary

Physical activity on a daily basis is important for the health and wellbeing of older people. The Victorian Active Ageing Partnership (VAAP) aims to increase opportunities for participation in physical activity for older Victorians, especially in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and among isolated, lonely older people currently not involved in physical activity.

The 2006 'National Physical Activity Recommendations for Older Australians' established physical activity guidelines for older Australians. These recommendations state that older people should be active daily for at least 30 minutes, in as many ways as possible, irrespective of their age, weight, health problems and abilities (Department of Health and Ageing, 2009). There are different ways in which people can be physically active through methods that suit their abilities and interests, including incidental activity, structured activities and leisure pursuits. It is also recommended that older people engage in physical activity, incorporating fitness, strength, balance and flexibility (Department of Health and Ageing, 2009).

As a requirement of the VAAP, an audit was undertaken between November 2015 and February 2016 to examine the availability, variety and accessibility of physical activity opportunities for older Victorians. The aims of the data audit and gap analysis included the following:

- To gain information in relation to the availability, variety and accessibility of physical activity opportunities for older Victorians
- To identify the gaps in the availability, variety and accessibility of physical activity opportunities for older Victorians
- To provide baseline information to guide the future work of the VAAP
- To provide information that may be used to guide work by external organisations.

An audit was undertaken of structured physical activity programs incorporating fitness, strength, balance and flexibility within each Victorian local government area (LGA). It involved a desktop review of the websites of service providers, followed by a data verification process with three of the key service providers in each LGA (local council, community health services, fitness/leisure centres). Data covering the availability of leisure activities, commonly frequented by older people (tennis, golf, croquet and lawn bowls), were also gathered.

The analysis of the audit data was then conducted using statistical analysis software. The analysis examined issues such as:

- Which organisations/groups are providing physical activity programs for older adults?
- What physical activity programs are provided?
- Which providers are providing which programs?
- What is the range of programs available per LGA
- How much do programs cost (general, by provider or by program)?
- How frequently are programs run?
- What assistance exists to support older people to participate?

The data analysis showed that:

- A total of 4469 physical activity opportunities, consisting of 2741 structured physical activities and 1728 leisure activities, were available for older Victorians
- Gentle exercise (land) was the most commonly identified structured physical activity program (23.6%), followed by yoga/Pilates (16.4%) and walking activities (15%). Tennis (980 clubs) was the most commonly available leisure activity followed by golf (377 clubs)
- Neighbourhood houses and community centres were the largest provider of identified structured physical activity programs (27%), followed by fitness/leisure centres (20%) and community health services (16%)
- The majority (41.5%) of structured physical activity programs identified through the audit and for which cost data was available, were priced between \$5-9 per session, followed by 31.7% of programs being either free or costing no more than \$4
- The mean and median sessions costs of structured physical activity programs varied across LGAs, although some LGAs had median sessions costs of \$10 or more
- Nearly 15% of structured physical activity programs, for which the data were available, had some form of assisted or referral pathway in place
- Nearly 14% of structured physical activity programs, for which the data were available, were found to offer transport assistance, the most common form of which was via a community bus
- Language and cultural support, in the form of interpreters or an activity having a specific cultural focus, was identified in 7.7% of structured physical activity programs
- Almost 93% of structured physical activity programs, for which data were collected, were led by professionals with only 6% of programs being led by volunteers

The gap analysis identified:

- There were 12 LGAs where four or less of the types of structured physical activities within the scope of the audit were identified and almost two-thirds of these LGAs are in the top 50% of the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage
- The number of identified physical activity opportunities per LGA against the population of persons aged 55+ years for each LGA provided the number of persons aged 55+ per identified physical activity opportunity. The results showed that the most favourable ratio as being 43 persons per identified physical activity opportunity with the least favourable being 930 persons per identified physical activity opportunity
- The ten LGAs with the most favourable ratio of number of persons aged 55+ per identified physical activity opportunity (range 43–99) were all small rural LGAs with populations less than eight thousand persons aged 55+ years

- Information provision and access regarding the physical activity opportunities for older people is an issue of concern to both service providers and older people
- The cost of structured physical activity programs is dependent on the type of programs being offered and the provider, however, it is important that there is an even spread of price levels in any LGA to cater for people in varying financial circumstances
- It would be valuable to determine whether the cultural diversity profile of structured physical activity program participants matches the cultural diversity of an LGA's population
- Assisted and referral pathways may assist in overcoming the 'information and communication gap', as service providers act as the information resource, rather than older people having to find the information and physical activity options themselves
- The issue of transport may also be overcome by altering the service provision model to incorporate an outreach approach where the class 'travels to the older people', rather than the older people travelling to the class

Based on the analysis of the data relating to the provision of physical activity opportunities for older Victorians, the following recommendations are made:

1) That the Victorian Government, via the VAAP:

- ensure that the work of the VAAP links with other key Government work, such as that flowing out of the 'Ageing is Everyone's Business' report and the 'Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015–2019'
- disseminate the LGA data from this initiative to local service providers to encourage its review at a local level
- bring the findings of the current report to the attention of decision-makers at the state and local levels
- explore various models of assisted/referral pathways for older people to engage in physical activity and disseminate the findings to relevant stakeholders
- showcase practice examples involving organisations that have effective channels and modes of information provision and communication in place, or have worked to overcome the 'communication' barrier previously
- disseminate guidelines and tools to facilitate best practice in the delivery of physical activity opportunities for older people.

2) That decision-makers and service providers at the local level:

- come together to review and discuss the data relating to the local provision of physical activity opportunities for older people and the broader findings of the gap analysis to promote a more integrated and coordinated approach to service provision featuring:
  - A range of physical activity opportunities offered by various local service providers at a range of prices
  - The establishment of working partnerships between service providers to minimise duplication and to maximise the reach and availability of physical activity opportunities
  - Assisted/referral pathways that are effective and within the current resource base
  - Strategies to address transport issues such as the use of community buses, the

engagement of volunteer drivers and/or an outreach model of conducting physical activity classes

- More extensive utilisation of community channels to enhance information provision to older people and among service providers regarding locally available physical activity opportunities
- Review of the cultural diversity of the older people participating in physical activity opportunities to determine its correspondence with the cultural diversity of the local population and the development of strategies to better engage CALD older people in physical activity
- The possible use of older volunteers as peer leaders and mentors, taking into account appropriate training and skills
- Strategies to better engage socio-economically disadvantaged older people in physical activity

It is important to note that the results of the audit are only indicative of the work being done throughout Victoria to provide opportunities for physical activity for older people. The intention of the audit was never to map every single physical activity opportunity for older people throughout Victoria and the VAAP Coordination Team is aware that there will be other activities on offer by a diverse range of service providers. Neither was the intention of the audit to compare the 'performance' of local government areas or individual organisations, but rather make broad observations of the current delivery of services.

Despite its limitations, an audit of this magnitude focusing on the physical activity opportunities available for older Victorians has not been previously undertaken. Therefore, the information gathered is valuable in 'providing a picture' of the current situation in Victoria in early 2016.

This audit and gap analysis will act as a valuable resource in guiding some of the future work of the VAAP. It is also hoped that it will provide local service providers with an up-to-date snapshot of the physical activity opportunities for older people in their local government area and some evidence to enhance service delivery and collaboration at a local level.



MONASH University