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ROYAL COMMISSION INTO VICTORIA'S MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM SUBMISSION BY CRICKET VICTORIA

Cricket Victoria is pleased to make a submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

Cricket's role in building stronger, healthier communities

Sport plays an important role in our communities by bringing people together with shared goals and a sense of purpose. Our role in regional and rural communities has long been recognised as fundamental to the social fabric of towns and regions where the community comes together around their love of sport.

Cricket's significance in these areas is broader than on-field participation – it is a crucial support network and a nexus for community cohesion, events and activities.

Sport can also be an important support network for people of all backgrounds. The World Health Organisation in its report '*Social Determinants of Health – The Solid Facts (2nd ed.)*' notes that social support helps give people the emotional and practical resources they need. Belonging to a social network of communication and mutual obligation makes people feel cared for, loved, valued and encourages healthier behaviour patterns.

Cricket clubs in Victoria and around Australia provide this social and support network and is at the heart of our aim to be a sport for all and to unite and inspire communities through cricket.

Cricket's participation base and diverse demography

With Victoria's total participation figure of 448,608 contributing to the national total of 1,650,030 - the largest number of participants recorded in the history of the sport in Victoria and Australia - our clubs and associations are playing a vital role in the health and wellbeing of Australians.

Together, Cricket Victoria and Cricket Australia are focussed on making our sport an inclusive and safe space for people from all backgrounds. This helps foster a strong sense of community at our clubs and to provide people with a broader network of contacts that they can turn to for support.

The current data demonstrates a significant increase in the number of women and girls playing cricket, and sport in general, over the past five years which is testament to the commitment we have to making cricket a sport for all.

In a diverse cricket community, almost 30% of players in Victoria are female, while 87,135 participants are from a multicultural background. 8,863 people living with a disability and 4,985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders chose to participate in Victorian cricket.

The strategic focus on inclusion

Victorian and Australian cricket respects and promotes the importance of social inclusion as a determinant of health and in supporting that strategy have made significant investments in both the disability sector and LGBT+ sector.



In a report commissioned in June 2019 by Cricket Victoria which examined the health and social impact of participation in cricket for people with intellectual disabilities, the survey findings and player interviews revealed a number of physical, mental and social benefits associated with their participation in cricket.

Players experienced a range of positive psychological and emotional outcomes from their involvement in the game, including enhanced feelings of wellbeing, increased self-confidence and self-esteem. For many of the respondents, cricket also facilitated the development of meaningful social connections for players.

In addition, Cricket Victoria continues to lead LGBT+ research nationally and internationally and has published several research projects to address barriers to participation and fan engagement in cricket.

This included the release of our *Trans and Gender Diverse Participation Guidelines* which has set the standard for inclusion in cricket in Victoria. These guidelines state that people have the right to participate in community cricket in the gender category they identify with or feel most comfortable participating in. These guidelines are now part of a broader program of activity with cricket clubs and associations to further develop sustainable participation now and into the future.

Cricket Victoria was also awarded the Highest Ranking State Sporting Organisation for the second year running at the Pride in Sport Awards. The Pride in Sport Index™ (PSI) is an initiative of the Australian Human Rights Commission and Sport Australia and is the first and only benchmarking instrument specifically designed to assess the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI+) people within Australian sport and sporting organisations.

Using our public profile to empower conversations

The major sporting codes are also now beginning to take a leading role and community voice in understanding the effect and impact of mental health on elite athletes and how to support these cases in a working environment.

In cricket, as in the AFL and other codes, high profile players are now beginning to be more confident and feel supported in referencing mental health challenges and to take time away from their professional responsibilities to manage their mental health. Cricket Victoria currently employs staff dedicated to player development and mental wellbeing, servicing both the Victorian Men's and Women's Teams. This includes access to psychology and other support services and forms part of a wider program of personal and professional development of our elite and pathway athletes.

With its high public profile, sport becomes an important role model for other sectors and individuals in destigmatising mental health in the community.

Our opportunities for development

While cricket has much to be proud of, there is still more to be done in our sector.

The importance of sport championing inclusion and diversity at all levels is seen in the Equal Play study (*Symons, O'Sullivan, Borkoles, Andersen, & Polman, 2014*). Funded by depression and mental health initiative beyondblue, it aimed to determine the mental health impact of homophobic bullying on same-sex attracted and gender diverse Australians aged between 14-23 years old in sport and physical education. The results revealed that more frequently experienced verbal



homophobia led to higher scores on depression, anxiety and stress in both physical education and sport environments.

Sport and physical education-based homophobia can have a significant impact on the mental health of LGBT+ youth, and Cricket Victoria's partnership with the Proud2Play organisation is one way cricket is trying to reduce barriers to participation and developing welcome and inclusive clubs and competitions for LGBT+ participants and volunteers.

Research undertaken by Roy Morgan Research for Cricket Australia revealed that a significant proportion of girls and their parents who did not play cricket tend to have a negative view of cricket clubs as somewhere that is not an enjoyable environment for girls or supportive of women participating. This perception has been driven by a combination of inadequate resources for female cricket, lack of appropriate club and changeroom facilities and a need increase the representation and visibility of women at clubs and in leadership positions.

Our education footprint

As previously noted, making cricket an inclusive and safe sport is a key priority for both Cricket Victoria and Cricket Australia and the change process is well underway.

Cricket Victoria's Girls Leadership Program provides Year 7 and 8 Girls with the opportunity to develop their leadership skills via an interactive online program and a face-to-face forum. The aim of the program is to encourage young girls to continue their leadership journey through the early years of secondary school enabling them to become positive role models as they develop into future leaders. In the four years Cricket Victoria has conducted the program, more than 1,000 students have participated.

Cricket Australia has a community partnership with Movember to help raise awareness of men's health issues, with mental health an increasing focus for the organisation as awareness of the mental health crisis impacting men has gained focus. The partnership uses cricket's profile and reach into the community and through the Australian Men's Team to build awareness of the campaign and to reach the target market of young males and reducing the stigma around talking about mental health issues.

Cricket, at every level, is committed to improving mental health for all Victorians who engage with our sport and for the broader community.

Cricket Victoria is happy to make itself available to the Commission, through additional written submissions or interviews, if further information is required.

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Cricket Victoria