

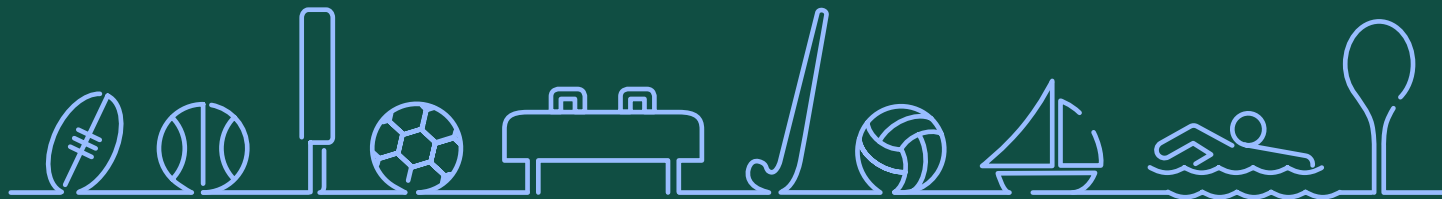
# Sport participation in Victoria 2015–2022 Research Summary

This summary outlines key findings and insights from the 8th year of VicHealth's and Sport and Recreation Victoria's joint research project into organised community sport participation in Victoria.



This report provides information across 10 popular sports for which we have participation data for the years 2015–2022. These sports are: Australian rules football, basketball, cricket, football (soccer), gymnastics, hockey, netball, sailing, swimming, and tennis. Based on data provided by state sport governing bodies, the research compares participation rates across age, sex, and region between 2015–2022.

Figure 1: Sports included in the Sport Participation Research Project

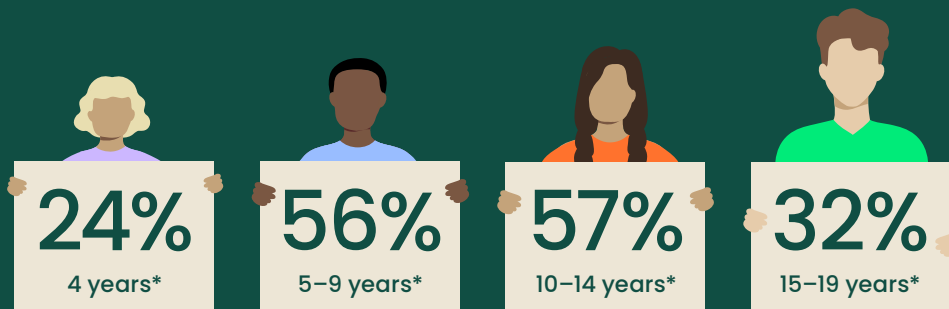


Note: golf and bowls did not provide data for 2019 and are not included

## Key findings at a glance: organised sport participation Victoria, 2022

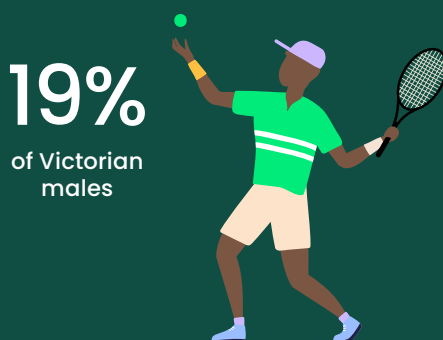
All percentages represent the sport participation rate for the total Victorian population

Over half of all sport participants (52%) are aged between 4–14 years. The sport participation rate is highest among children and adolescents 10–14 years (57%) and drops significantly during late adolescence (15–19 years, 32%).



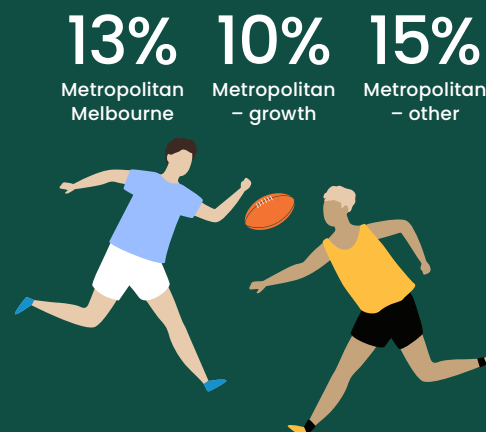
\* % of age group participating in sport

The sport participation rate across all ages is higher for males than females.



Sport participation rates are higher in regional Victoria compared to metropolitan Melbourne.

Metropolitan-growth areas have considerably lower sport participation rates compared to all other regions.





## Recovery of organised community sport post-COVID-19

From 2015–2019 participation in community sport rose by over 119,229 participants, before being significantly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions in 2020.

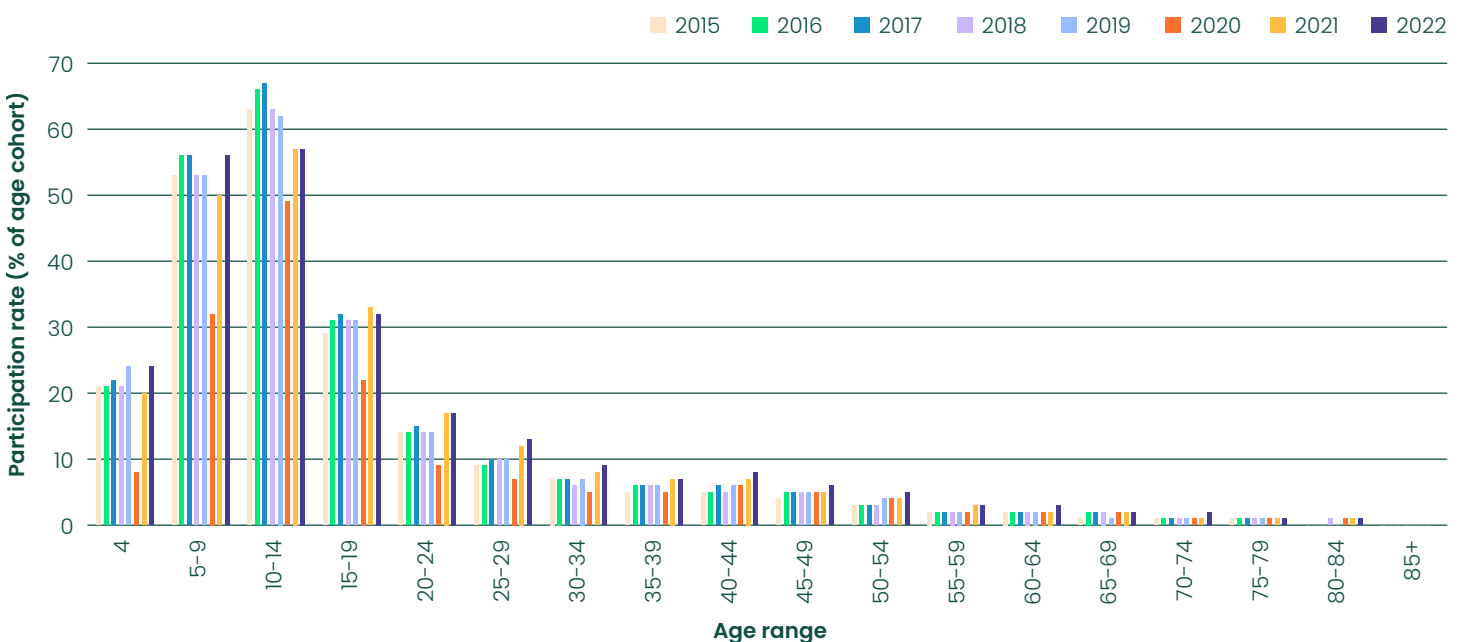
The overall participation rate dropped below 10% in 2020 before increasing to 13% in 2021 and peaking in 2022 at 14%, which represents 924,235 Victorians.

The total participation numbers and participation rate (of the Victorian population) across the sports (involved in the research project) were:

2015	2016	2017	2018
749,037   12.6%	827,974   13.4%	857,400   13.6%	844,992   13.1%
2019	2020	2021	2022
868,266   13.4%	637,263   9.5%	866,736   13.2%	924,235   14.1%

2022 represents the highest year of overall participation in sport in Victoria, since the Sport Participation Research Project commenced in 2015. In 2022 there were 175,198 more Victorians playing community sport than in 2015. The participation rate in 2022 was 1.5% higher than in 2015.

**Figure 2. Overall participation rates 2015–2022, Victoria: by age**

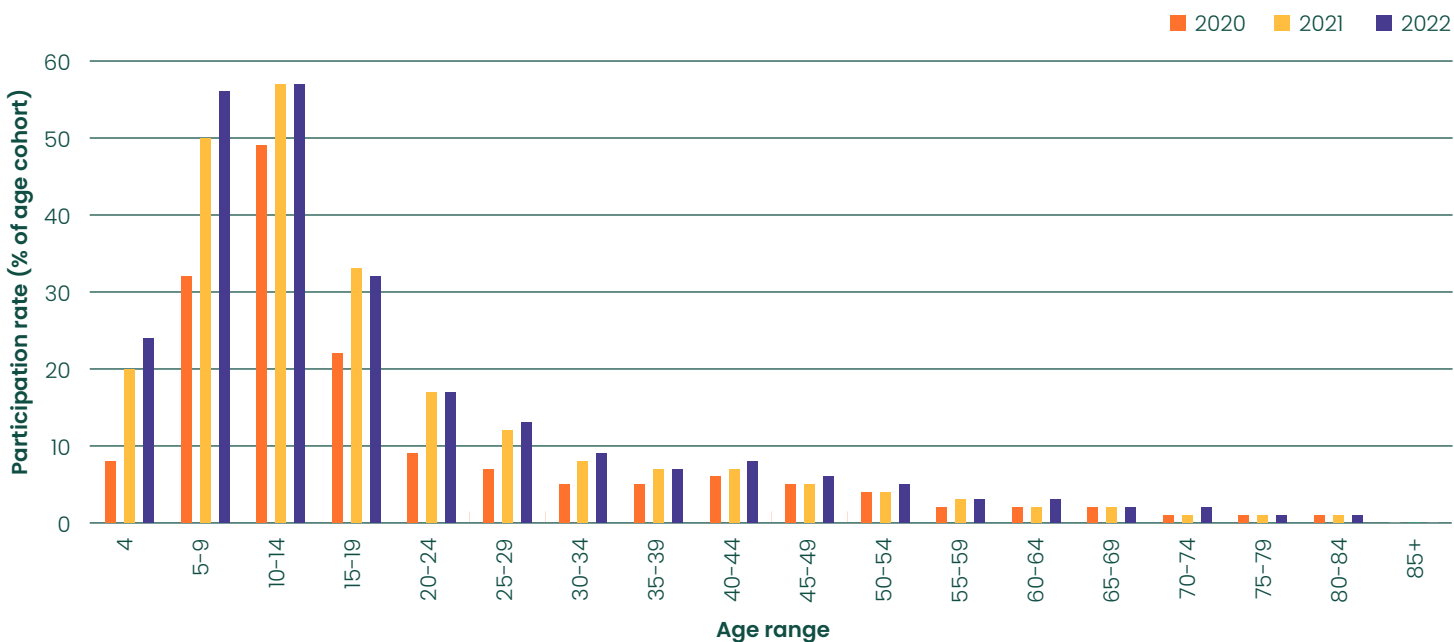


In 2022, participation for those aged 20+ was higher than previous years. Participation peaked at ages 10-14 as per previous years. However, participation for those aged 10-14 in 2022 was lower than previous years. For those aged 10-14 years the participation rate peaked at 67% in 2017 before dropping to 57% in 2022.

Participation for those aged 15-19 has remained fairly steady between (29-33%) excluding the COVID-19 restrictions period (2020).

Looking at trends post-COVID, In 2022, participation was higher than in 2021 for all ages except for those aged 15-19.

**Figure 3. Sport participation rates: 2020-2022, Victoria: by age**



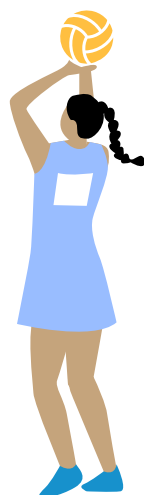
The overall male participation rate was 1% higher in 2022 (18.6%) than in 2021 (17.6%).

The overall female participation rate was slightly higher in 2022 (9.7%) than it was in 2021 (9.0%), and is just slightly higher than pre-COVID participation rates.

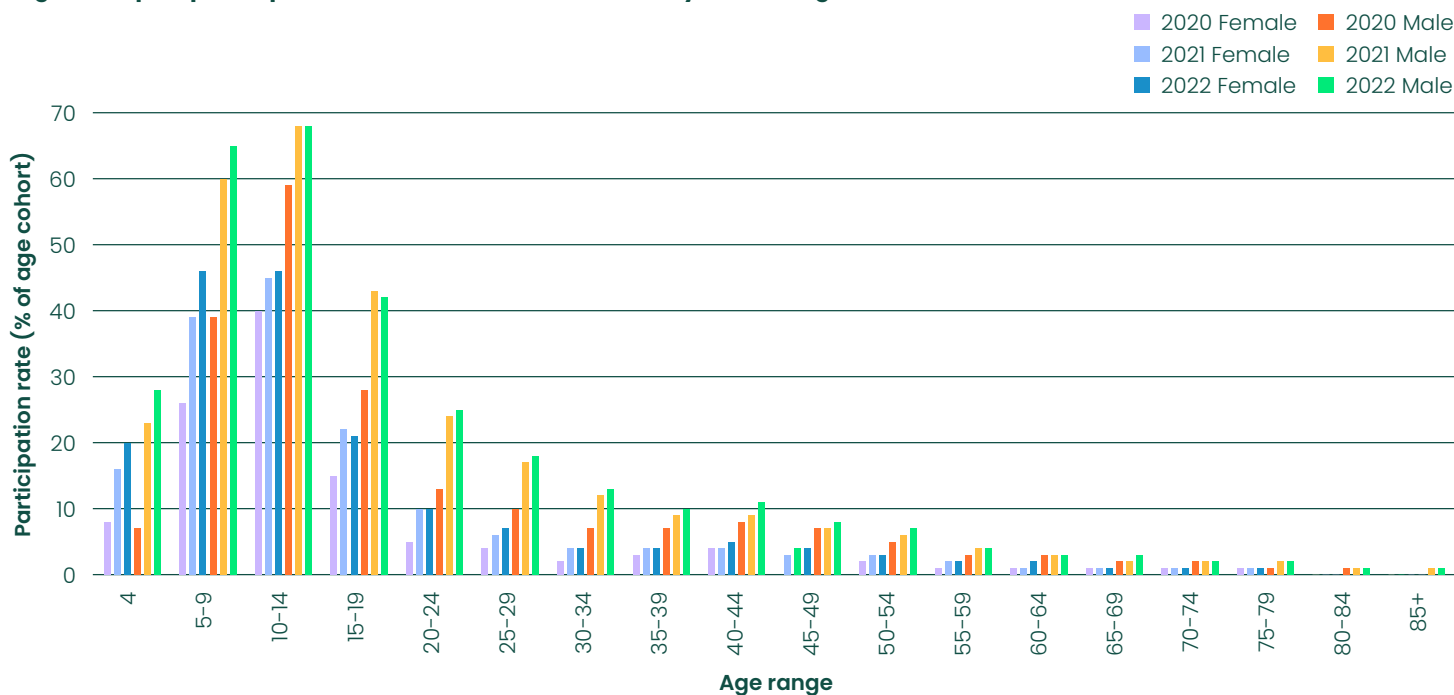
2022  
**18.6%**  
↑  
2021  
**17.6%**



2022  
**9.7%**  
↑  
2021  
**9.0%**



**Figure 4. Sport participation rates: 2020–2022, Victoria: by sex and age**



### For females:

- Participation was higher in 2022 compared to 2021 for those aged 4-14 years, 25-29, 40-44 and 60-64 years.
- The participation rate in 2022 was 9.7% compared to 8.7% in 2015 and pre COVID-19, 2019 9.6%
- Participation amongst those aged 15-24 was lower in 2022 compared to 2021.
- Participation was highest for those aged 5-9 and 10-14 with both age cohorts having 46% participation rate.
- Participation for those aged 15-19 (21%) was less than half of the participation peak of children aged 5-14 (46%).



### For males:

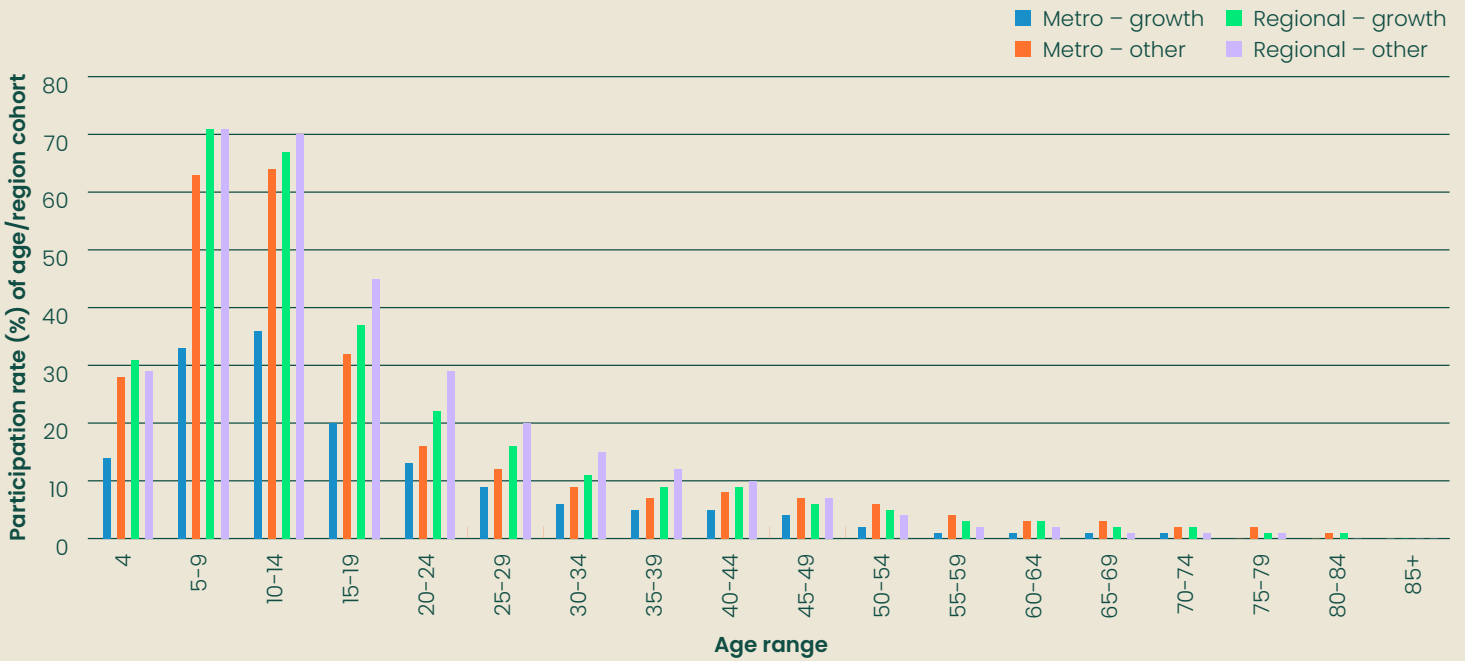
- Participation was considerably higher than females across the lifespan.
- Participation was higher in 2022 compared to 2021 for those aged 4-14 years, 20+.
- Participation amongst those aged 15-19 was lower in 2022 compared to 2021.
- The participation rate in 2022 was 18.6% compared to 16.6% in 2015 and pre COVID-19, 2019 16.8%.



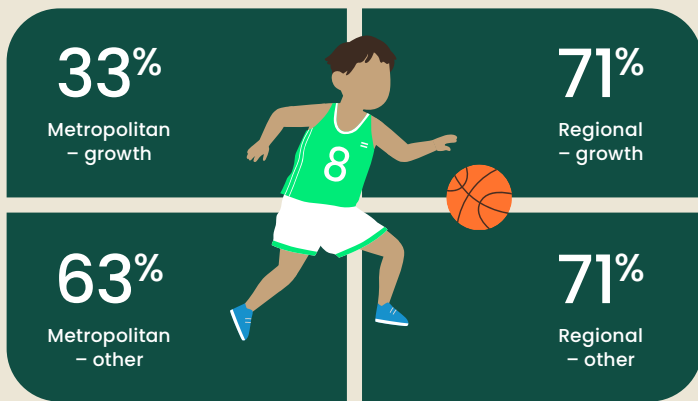
# Sport participation by region

Overall, participation rates are higher in regional areas compared to metropolitan Melbourne. Further, the participation rates are much lower in metropolitan- growth areas across all age groups, compared to metropolitan- other regions.

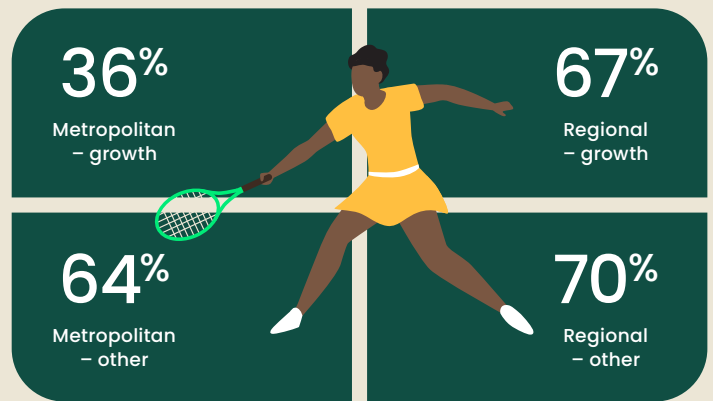
**Figure 5: Participation rates, 2022, Victoria: by region and age**



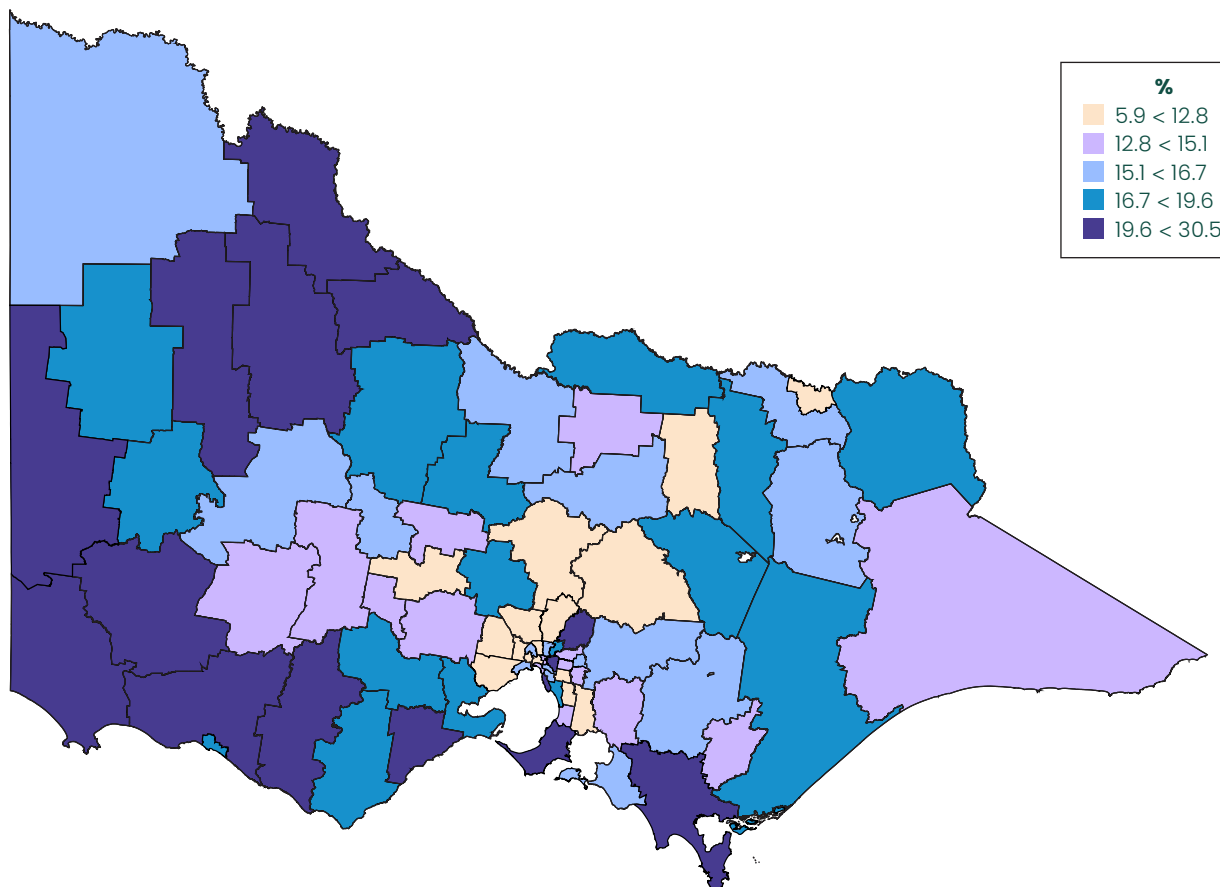
## Participation rates for 5-9 year olds by region



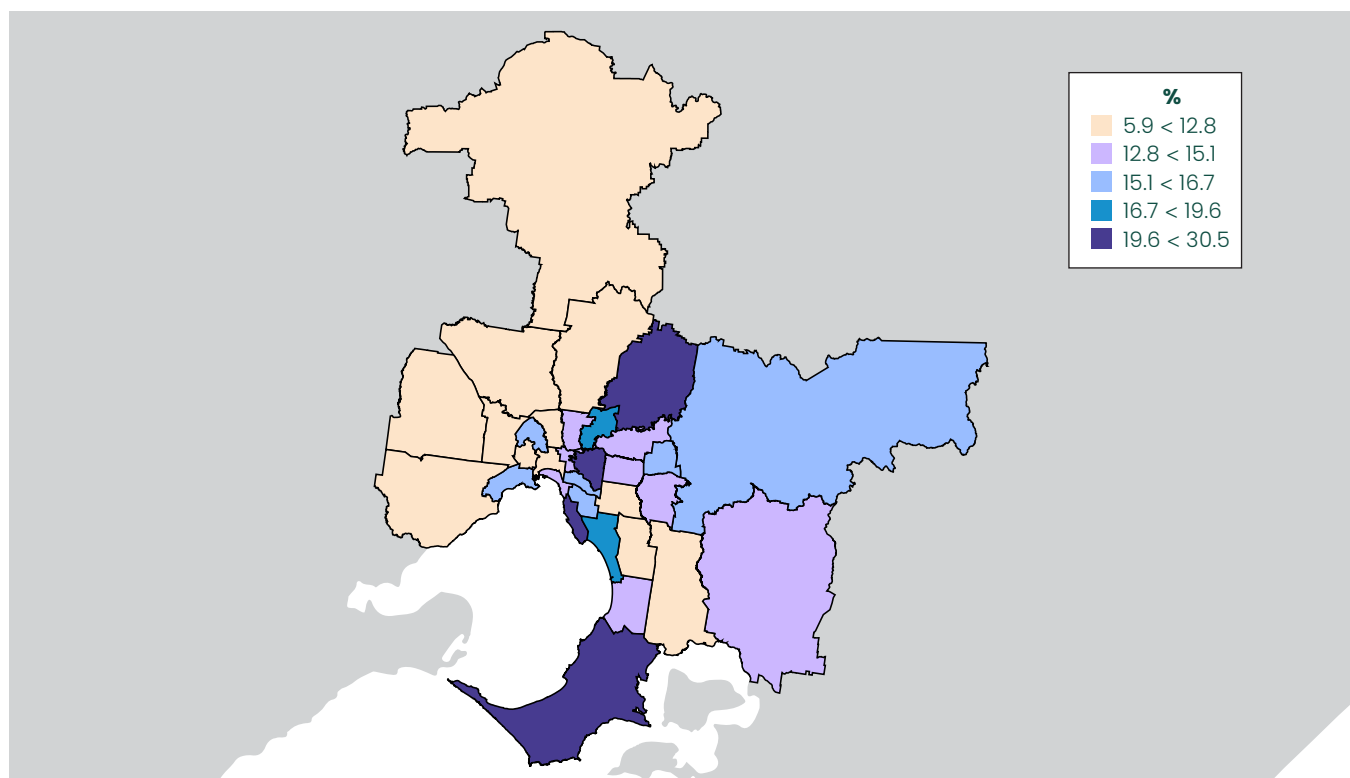
## Participation rates for 10-14 year olds by region



## Map 1: Participation rates, 2022: Victoria by LGA



## Map 2: Participation rates, 2022: Metropolitan regions, by LGA



The rank in participation across local government areas (LGAs) did not differ considerably from 2021 to 2022 however, the participation rate across LGAs have considerable range. The lowest participation was in Greater Dandenong (5.9%) and highest in Southern Grampians (30.5%).

The participation rate was higher in 2022 compared to 2021 in nearly all LGAs.

**Table 1: Participation rates, 2021–2022, Victoria: by Local Government Area<sup>1</sup>**

LGA name	Participation rate <sup>1</sup> 2021	Rank <sup>2</sup> 2021	Participation rate <sup>1</sup> 2022	Rank <sup>2</sup> 2022
<b>Metropolitan – growth</b>				
Cardinia (S)	13.0	1	13.9	1
Casey (C)	9.4	3	10.3	3
Hume (C)	8.1	6	9.0	6
Melton (S)	7.9	7	8.7	7
Mitchell (S)	11.2	2	12.5	2
Whittlesea (C)	9.4	4	9.9	4
Wyndham (C)	8.6	5	9.7	5
<b>Metropolitan – other</b>				
Banyule (C)	16.0	6	17.4	5
Bayside (C)	24.6	1	25.4	1
Boroondara (C)	20.5	3	21.0	3
Brimbank (C)	6.3	24	6.7	24
Darebin (C)	12.0	19	12.9	19
Frankston (C)	13.2	15	13.9	16
Glen Eira (C)	15.8	7	16.4	8
Greater Dandenong (C)	5.3	25	5.9	25
Hobsons Bay (C)	14.6	12	16.4	9
Kingston (C)	16.2	5	17.0	6
Knox (C)	14.0	14	14.9	14
Manningham (C)	12.2	18	13.2	17
Maribyrnong (C)	10.2	21	11.4	22
Maroondah (C)	15.7	8	16.3	10
Melbourne (C)	7.3	23	8.3	23
Monash (C)	11.1	20	12.2	20
Moonee Valley (C)	14.9	11	16.6	7
Merri-Bek (C)	10.2	22	11.8	21
Mornington Peninsula (S)	19.4	4	20.1	4
Nillumbik (S)	20.8	2	21.7	2
Port Phillip (C)	12.8	16	13.1	18
Stonnington (C)	15.2	10	15.7	12
Whitehorse (C)	14.4	13	15.1	13
Yarra (C)	12.5	17	14.0	15
Yarra Ranges (S)	15.4	9	15.8	11
<b>Regional – growth</b>				
Ballarat (C)	14.6	6	15.1	6
Bass Coast (S)	15.5	3	16.0	4
Baw Baw (S)	15.0	5	15.9	5
Greater Bendigo (C)	16.0	2	16.9	2
Greater Geelong (C)	15.2	4	16.8	3
Moorabool (S)	14.4	7	14.7	7
Surf Coast (S)	21.1	1	25.2	1



LGA name	Participation rate <sup>1</sup> 2021	Rank <sup>2</sup> 2021	Participation rate <sup>1</sup> 2022	Rank <sup>2</sup> 2022
<b>Regional – other</b>				
Alpine (S)	14.5	31	16.1	26
Ararat (RC)	13.9	34	14.0	36
Benalla (RC)	10.8	40	12.2	39
Buloke (S)	31.0	1	29.3	2
Campaspe (S)	16.9	21	16.7	24
Central Goldfields (S)	15.2	29	15.1	30
Colac-Otway (S)	19.2	11	19.3	13
Corangamite (S)	26.1	3	26.6	3
East Gippsland (S)	13.2	36	14.5	34
Gannawarra (S)	20.5	8	19.6	11
Glenelg (S)	20.2	9	20.5	10
Golden Plains (S)	16.7	22	18.0	19
Greater Shepparton (C)	15.2	27	14.8	32
Hepburn (S)	10.9	39	11.4	40
Hindmarsh (S)	19.0	12	19.2	14
Horsham (RC)	17.7	15	19.6	12
Indigo (S)	15.4	25	15.4	28
Latrobe (C)	13.8	35	14.5	35
Loddon (S)	18.0	14	16.8	23
Macedon Ranges (S)	17.4	17	18.4	17
Mansfield (S)	15.9	23	17.1	22
Mildura (RC)	14.8	30	15.5	27
Moira (S)	17.3	18	18.1	18
Mount Alexander (S)	14.2	32	15.0	31
Moyne (S)	24.1	4	24.3	6
Murrindindi (S)	12.7	37	12.8	37
Northern Grampians (S)	15.4	26	16.6	25
Pyrenees (S)	15.5	24	14.5	33
Queenscliffe (B)	21.2	6	25.4	4
South Gippsland (S)	20.6	7	20.8	7
Southern Grampians (S)	29.3	2	30.5	1
Strathbogie (S)	13.9	33	15.2	29
Swan Hill (RC)	20.1	10	20.8	8
Towong (S)	18.4	13	18.5	16
Wangaratta (RC)	15.2	28	17.2	21
Warrnambool (C)	17.1	19	18.0	20
Wellington (S)	17.5	16	18.6	15
West Wimmera (S)	16.9	20	20.7	9
Wodonga (RC)	12.0	38	12.3	38
Yarriambiack (S)	22.4	5	24.9	5

**Legend:** B = Borough, C = City, RC = Rural City, S = Shire.

<sup>1</sup> The LGA ranking is within each of the four regions: Metropolitan- Growth; Metropolitan- Other; Regional – Growth; Regional – Other.

## Discussion

A strength of this research project is the longitudinal nature of annual analysis and reporting demonstrating changes to participation over time.

Whilst COVID-19 restrictions impacted participation in sport significantly, overall participation in community sport in Victoria is at its highest since 2015. However, participation in children aged 10-14 was lower in 2022 than in the years prior to COVID-19. Since 2015 participation in sport has grown by 175,198 individuals to a total of 924,235 and grown from 12.6% to 14.1% of the Victorian population.

### Age

There have been some changes in participation trends in recent years. Whilst participation continues to peak for ages 10-14, the increase in participation compared to pre-COVID is largely in the adult cohorts.

Over half of Victorians aged 5-14 play community sport, however, participation for those aged 10-14 has considerably declined in comparison to previous years. The sharp participation dropout during adolescence (15-19) remains, and adolescents' participation rate was also lower in 2022 compared to 2021.

There has been much discussion and advocacy for a focus on children and youth in recent years, including retention (Eime, Harvey et al. 2020, Eime, Charity et al. 2022) and provision of new play formats as outlined by Eime, Westerbeek et al., in the Sport4Me paper (Eime, Westerbeek et al. 2023). However, the recent declining trends in participation for those aged 10-14 is of concern.

Many children and youth enjoy the competitive focus of community club-based sport, and especially when they have the required skills and commitment that enables involvement (Eime, Westerbeek et al. 2023). However, this form of participation is not suitable for all children and youth; and societal leisure-time preferences have changed dramatically over recent years. Many children and youth dropout of the current traditional sport model, but without other opportunities to play organised sport. Re-engaging children and youth in sport requires new community sport participation models (Eime, Westerbeek et al. 2023).

The Sport4Me concept is about listening to the voices of the children and youth who would like to play sport, just differently, and in a more flexible, inclusive format that focuses on friends, fun, physical literacy, skill development and play (Eime, Westerbeek et al. 2023).

Historically, participation significantly declines during adolescence for those aged 15-19 years, however this latest research is demonstrating that the dropout of participation in sport is occurring earlier, amongst those aged 10-14 years.

**The main recommendation that we derive from this year's analysis is that focused strategic policy development to retain and re-engage children and youth in sport is critical.**

We advocate for the sector to take on board the principles of the Sport4Me concept and deliver another organised sport offering to children and youth that meets their needs, particularly those who have dropped out of community club-based competitive sport and still want to remain engaged in playing sport, just differently. This will require new investments and sport development focus that meets the changing needs and motivations of children and youth, to participate in organised sport.

Children and youth are the lifeblood of a vibrant community sport system and without them receiving focused policy attention and program development, community sport will suffer significantly. This will impact not only the health and wellbeing of individuals but the social fabric of Victorian communities (Eime, Charity et al. 2022). Research has highlighted the issue and provided an evidence-based solution through the Sport4Me concept (Eime, Westerbeek et al. 2023).

**It is recommended that the specific decline in participation for those aged 10-14 is carefully monitored and research is conducted to understand the motivations and desires to return to playing sport. Further, the research needs to investigate from the voices of the children and youth, what the key elements of newly developed participation programs need to be.**

On a positive note, it can be concluded that there is increased participation of adults which represents 33,055 more adult Victorians playing community sport in 2022 compared to 2021.



## Gender

Women and girls are still underrepresented in community sport participation. There are currently 279,323 less females than males playing sport. The increase in participation for males from 2021 to 2022 represents 33,129 more players whilst the increase for females was 24,441. This represents an increased participation rate of 1.05% for males and 1.08% for females.

In the pre-COVID period (2015-2019), the changes in participation rates were more positive for females than for males in seven age groups (4-14, 20-24, 30-34, 65-74 years), and across all age groups combined.

In the COVID period (2020-2021), the changes in participation rates were less positive for females than for males in all age groups.

From 2021-2022 the changes in participation rates were more positive for females than males for ages 5-14 years.

For the whole period 2015-2022, the changes in participation rates were more positive for males than for females in all but the three youngest age groups (4-14 years).

**It is recommended that there is a continued strategic focus on engaging, retaining and re-engaging women and girls in playing sport.**

## Region

Participation in community sport remains highest in regional areas. Participation in metropolitan growth areas remains considerably lower across all age groups. Only 33% of children aged 5-9 in metropolitan growth areas play sport compared to 71% in regional growth areas. Participation is only slightly higher for those aged 10-14 in metropolitan growth areas (36%) compared to 70% in regional other areas. Metropolitan growth areas are likely to have a greater proportion of families with children compared to established metropolitan areas, and children and youth are much more likely than adults to play community sport. Children and youth in these growing areas need the opportunities to play community sport.

Further, there are some LGAs that have much lower participation than other LGAs. Within specific LGAs some of these differences in participation in community sport can be attributed to the access to facilities and other leisure-time activities, as well as factors such as socio-economic status and cultural diversity (Eime, Harvey et al. 2017, Reece, McInerney et al. 2020, Spaaij, Luguetti et al. 2023).

**It is recommended that there is a strategic focus on increasing participation in metropolitan growth areas and accessibility to facilities and associated programs and competitions.**

**It is recommended that there is a strategic focus on specific LGAs with lower participation.**





## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is positive that overall participation numbers in organised sport in the Victorian population have increased considerably in 2022 compared to 2021. However, this research demonstrates that participation is not equal across age, gender and region. Whilst some of these trends are well established there are recent (participation decline) trends in relation to age (particularly children and adolescents) that require strategic attention by policy makers and program developers.

Based on the most recent research evidence delivered by this project, there is a need to focus policy, investment, strategy, programs and research for children and youth. The decline in participation during adolescence has been a well-known (yet concerning) trend, however the drop in participation for those aged 10-14 has emerged as an exception to overall recent participation increases, and as such requires immediate attention.

A strategic focus on participation for women and girls and LGAs with lower participation as well as for metropolitan-growth areas is warranted.

## About this research

The Sport Participation Research Project concerns the analysis of data on organised sport participation in Victoria annually since 2015, and this now includes 13 sports in total. There have been some sports that have recently joined the project. This report integrates and summarises sport participation across ten major sports from 2015 to 2021. This project reports on participation levels (numbers of registered participants and participation rates per head of population) and participation trends, for the Victorian population as a whole, and for various population segments. The project aims to provide a reliable measure of organised sport participation in Victoria to inform planning, decision making and investments for State Sporting Associations, all levels of government, funding bodies and sport participation promoters, particularly relating to participation initiatives and facility planning.

## Acknowledgements

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We acknowledge Vicsport as a valued member of the project steering committee.

The State Sporting Associations involved with this research are: AFL Victoria, Australian Sailing (Victoria), Basketball Victoria, Bowls Victoria, Cricket Victoria, Football Victoria, Golf Australia (Victoria), Gymnastics Victoria, Hockey Victoria, Netball Victoria, Rowing Victoria, Swimming Victoria, and Tennis Victoria. This report contains data for 10 of the sports, those who have been involved with the project since 2015 and have provided data for each of the years since.

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VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.



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