



SECTOR
PROFILE

Sport and recreation



HumanAbility



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1. Sector profile

The sport and recreation sector provides physical activity participation opportunities to the entire community. Subsectors include sport, fitness, aquatics, and outdoor recreation.

About 84% of Australians, or 18,427,000 people aged 15 and over, participate in sport or physical activity at least once a year, and over 14 million participate at least once per week.¹

The prominent position of sport within Australian society, both at elite and community levels, enables it to be a force for social change, including by increasing recognition of women and people with disabilities as sporting role models.²

Through its various activities sport contributes to key national strategies such as the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032, the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030, Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021–2031, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, National Preventative Health Strategy 2021–2030, and Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality.³

Participation in sport and recreation is a key method to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians at all stages of life.⁴ Regular physical activity provides significant physical and mental health benefits, including the prevention and management of noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diabetes. Participation also reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, enhances brain health, and can improve overall wellbeing.⁵ Recent research suggests that exercise can be more effective than medication or counselling when treating mild to moderate symptoms of depression, psychological stress, and anxiety.⁶

While providing a setting in which communities can connect, volunteer, and improve health, the sector also contributes significantly to the Australian economy, generating an estimated \$32 billion annually in sales and supporting 128,000 full-time jobs.⁷

Australia will host more than 16 major sporting events between 2022 and 2032, including the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Brisbane in 2032, creating over 90,000 jobs in Queensland and 123,000 jobs in Australia. The quantifiable economic and social benefits of these events are estimated to be up to \$8.1 billion for Queensland and \$17.61 billion for Australia.⁸



1.1 Occupations and demographic insights

The sport and recreation sector includes diverse subsectors and a range of occupations. The largest occupation groups (based on ANZSCO codes) are sports coaches, instructors and officials, fitness instructors, sportspersons, and fitness/sports centre managers. Other core roles in the sector covered in this profile include lifeguards, swimming coaches, outdoor adventure guides and sports administrators.

This sector profile will focus on the following subsectors, which have the largest share of employment within the sports and physical recreation activities occupations.⁹

- Sport industry – including sports coaches, instructors, officials, and administrators
- Fitness industry – including fitness instructors and centre managers
- Aquatics industry – including swimming coaches, lifeguards and centre managers
- Outdoor recreation industry – including outdoor adventure guides and instructors



Profile of the sport and recreation sector¹⁰

210,843
employed



57%
are female

54%
are part-time



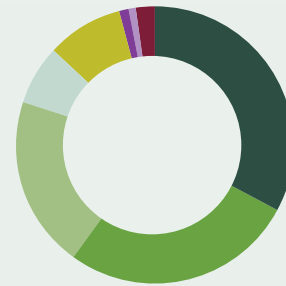
2%
identify as
First Nations

27%
work outside
the capital city



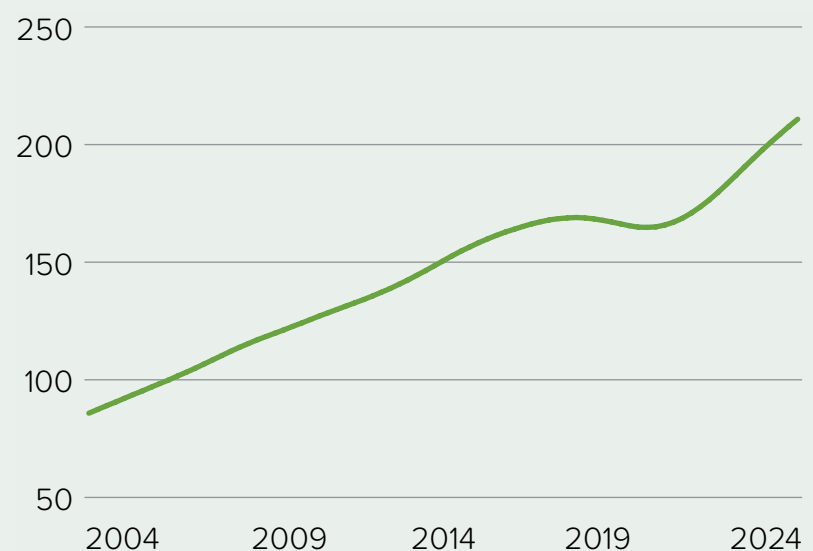
Employment by state

- New South Wales **33%**
- Victoria **27%**
- Queensland **20%**
- South Australia **7%**
- Western Australia **9%**
- Tasmania **1%**
- Northern Territory **1%**
- Australian Capital Territory **2%**



Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Employment over time (thousands)



Employment projection

2029 **215,800** employees



2034 **228,800** employees



Table 1: Profile of key sports and recreation occupations in HumanAbility's scope¹¹

Occupations (per ANZSCO)	Number Employed Feb 2025	Female share (%)	Median weekly earnings	Median full time hourly earnings	Part time share (%)	Median age	Projected employ- ment May 2034
All occupations in Australia		48		\$43		39	
Fitness Instructors 4521	38800	63	\$1288	\$34	68	35	43800
Outdoor Adventure Guides 4522	3600	44	NA	NA	23	28	3800
Outdoor Adventure Instructors 452215	1700	47	NA	NA	51	27	NA
Sports Coaches, Instructors and Officials 4523	55800	57	\$1286	\$34	80	21	62200
Swimming Coaches and Instructors 452315	12000	75	NA	NA	92	22	NA
Sports Umpires 452322	4900	28	NA	NA	98	16	NA
Sportspersons 4524	14400	40	NA	NA	65	22	65
Lifeguards 452414	5000	39	NA	NA	85	21	NA
Amusement, Fitness and Sports Centre Managers 1491	18500	38	\$1806	\$48	26	36	19400
Fitness Centre Managers 149112	6100	51	NA	NA	38	35	NA
Sports Centre Managers 149113	4900	44	NA	NA	37	39	NA
Sports Administrators 139915	2900	41	NA	NA	25	38	NA



Women represent a high proportion of fitness instructors and sports/swimming coaches, but are underrepresented in sports umpiring, lifeguarding, administration, and outdoor leadership roles. The median age of sports umpires is just 16 and the median age of swimming and sports coaches are 21 and 22 respectively. Meanwhile, the median age of centre managers, sports administrators and fitness instructors is over 35.

Some of these ABS and JSA figures differ from industry collected data. For instance, the Australian Sports Commission reports that 44% of officials over the age of 15 are women.¹² Royal Life Saving Australia reports that women represent 47% of lifeguards, and that 55% of swimming and water safety teachers are over the age of 45, with only 25% under the age of 25.¹³ It should be noted the data presented is of those working in the industry as part of their main job. This may cause a differentiation between the presented data and industry collected data.

The nature of working arrangements within the sector is highlighted in the figures, with most roles having a lower portion of full-time employees than the national rate of 69%. Swimming coaches, lifeguards and sports umpires have very low rates of full-time employment. Recent research by the Outdoor Education Innovation Hub (OEIH) identified a low portion of full-time roles in outdoor educator and activity instructor roles. The study noted that, while 83% of senior managers were employed full-time, only 43% of employees held full-time positions, with nearly half (46%) of these being secondary school teachers.¹⁴

Current size

An estimated 210,843 people are employed in sports and physical recreation activities.¹⁵ This is anticipated to increase to 228,800 people by 2034.¹⁶

1.2 Forecast growth

Enrolments in SIS Sport, Fitness and Recreation Training Package qualifications have declined in recent years, with the sharpest decline in 2022 of 6.8% (7,710 enrolments).¹⁷ This is in line with broader VET sector trends of declining enrolments across most sectors other than the health and social assistance related training packages, reflecting both changing job market demand and funding priorities.¹⁸

There are a small number of qualifications within the training package that do demonstrate stability or growth in student numbers. The Certificate II in Sport Coaching has remained relatively stable, reaching 5,515 enrolments in 2023, which is only slightly below pre-pandemic levels.¹⁹ The Certificate III in Outdoor Leadership has grown modestly from 1,265 enrolments in 2019²⁰ to 1,340 enrolments in 2023²¹ – an increase of approximately 6%.²²

The Certificate III in Fitness has consistently maintained a very high volume of student enrolments, even growing during the pandemic. Over the five years from 2019 to 2023, enrolments increased from 29,000 to 42,010, representing a growth of approximately 45%. This qualification offers skills to work as a gym instructor or group fitness instructor. The outcomes from this qualification are positive, with above national average results, including 38% of students undertaking this qualification exiting income support and 57% going on to complete further VET qualifications.²³



Enrolments in SIS Sport, Fitness and Recreation Training Package qualifications have declined in recent years, with the sharpest decline in 2022.

Table 2: Enrolments and completions in key sports and recreation qualifications, 2023²⁴

Note: For qualifications marked with *, please note that enrolments and completions totals include figures for corresponding (preceding) versions of the qualification where the data source indicated activity occurring in 2023. In such cases, note that Indigenous and disability percentages refer only to the current version of the qualification, except for the Certificate I in Sport and Recreation, the Certificate II in Sport and Recreation, and the Certificate III in Sport, Aquatics and Community Recreation, where associated data for the current version were insufficient.

SIS10122 Certificate I in Sport and Recreation*



Indigenous: Enrolments **15.5%**; Completions **5.8%** Disability: Enrolments **16.7%**; Completions **9.4%**

SIS20122 Certificate II in Sport and Recreation*



Indigenous: Enrolments **7.0%**; Completions **5.2%** Disability: Enrolments **2.7%**; Completions **2.3%**

SIS20321 Certificate II in Sport Coaching*



Indigenous: Enrolments **5.2%**; Completions **4.7%** Disability: Enrolments **2.6%**; Completions **2.0%**

SIS20419 Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation



Indigenous: Enrolments **3.9%**; Completions **3.6%** Disability: Enrolments **2.6%**; Completions **2.2%**

SIS20221 Certificate II in Sport – Developing Athlete



Indigenous: Enrolments **43.9%**; Completions **52.9%** Disability: Enrolments **0%**; Completions **0%**

SIS30115 Certificate III in Sport and Recreation



Indigenous: Enrolments **4.0%**; Completions **4.1%** Disability: Enrolments **4.7%**; Completions **3.5%**

■ Enrolments ■ Completions

SIS30421 Certificate III in Sport – Athlete

| 40

| 32

Indigenous: Enrolments 0%; Completions 0%

Disability: Enrolments 0%; Completions 0%

SIS30521 Certificate III in Sport Coaching

■ 3,034

■ 829

Indigenous: Enrolments 4.2%; Completions 3.7%

Disability: Enrolments 0.5%; Completions 1.3%

SIS30619 Certificate III in Outdoor Leadership

■ 1,347

■ 460

Indigenous: Enrolments 2.5%; Completions 1.3%

Disability: Enrolments 4.1%; Completions 3.0%

SIS30321 Certificate III in Fitness*

■ 41,975

■ 11,265

Indigenous: Enrolments 4.2%; Completions 3.8%

Disability: Enrolments 4.5%; Completions 4.0%

SIS31022 Certificate III in Sport, Aquatics and Community Recreation*

■ 8,439

■ 1,976

Indigenous: Enrolments 3.5%; Completions 7.5%

Disability: Enrolments 6.3%; Completions 3.5%

SIS40115 Certificate IV in Sport and Recreation

| 144

| 48

Indigenous: Enrolments 11.3%; Completions 14.0%

Disability: Enrolments 0%; Completions 6.1%

SIS40221 Certificate IV in Fitness

■ 11,332

■ 4,525

Indigenous: Enrolments 2.9%; Completions 2.6%

Disability: Enrolments 4.8%; Completions 4.6%

SIS40321 Certificate IV in Sport Coaching

| 100

| 51

Indigenous: Enrolments 0%; Completions 0%

Disability: Enrolments 0%; Completions 0%

■ Enrolments ■ Completions

SIS40421 Certificate IV in Sport Development

| 122

| 87

Indigenous: Enrolments **6.0%**; Completions **7.0%**

Disability: Enrolments **0%**; Completions **0%**

SIS40621 Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership*

■ 950

| 353

Indigenous: Enrolments **2.7%**; Completions **1.0%**

Disability: Enrolments **7.9%**; Completions **7.3%**

SIS50115 Diploma of Sport and Recreation Management

| 272

| 80

Indigenous: Enrolments **2.6%**; Completions **4.0%**

Disability: Enrolments **5.3%**; Completions **4.8%**

SIS50310 Diploma of Outdoor Recreation

| 27

Completions: **not yet available**

Indigenous: Enrolments **0%**; Completions **not yet available**

Disability: Enrolments **6.7%**; Completions **not yet available**

SIS50215 Diploma of Fitness

| 17

| 9

Indigenous: Enrolments **0%**; Completions **n/a as below 10**

Disability: Enrolments **0%**; Completions **n/a as below 10**

SIS50321 Diploma of Sport*

■ 908

| 425

Indigenous: Enrolments **2.0%**; Completions **1.9%**

Disability: Enrolments **7.0%**; Completions **6.1%**

SIS50421 Diploma of Outdoor Leadership*

| 94

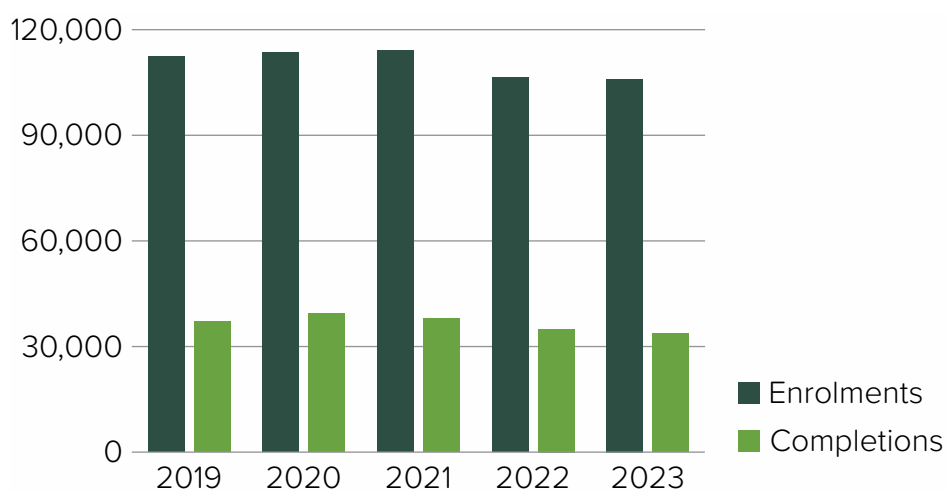
| 39

Indigenous: Enrolments **0%**; Completions **0%**

Disability: Enrolments **9.1%**; Completions **8.7%**

■ Enrolments ■ Completions

Table 3: Total enrolments and completions for sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package), 2019–2023²⁵



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Enrolments	112,380	113,550	114,140	106,430	105,980
Completions	37,170	39,395	37,990	34,955	33,725

While enrolments slightly increased from 2019 through to 2021, there has been a decline in enrolments and completions in 2022 and 2023.



Gender

Enrolments and completions in sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package) by gender, 2023²⁶

Females accounted for **41.5%** of enrolments and **42.1%** of completions

Males represented **57.7%** of enrolments and **57.0%** of completions

People who identified as 'Other' made up **0.2%** of enrolments and **0.2%** of completions

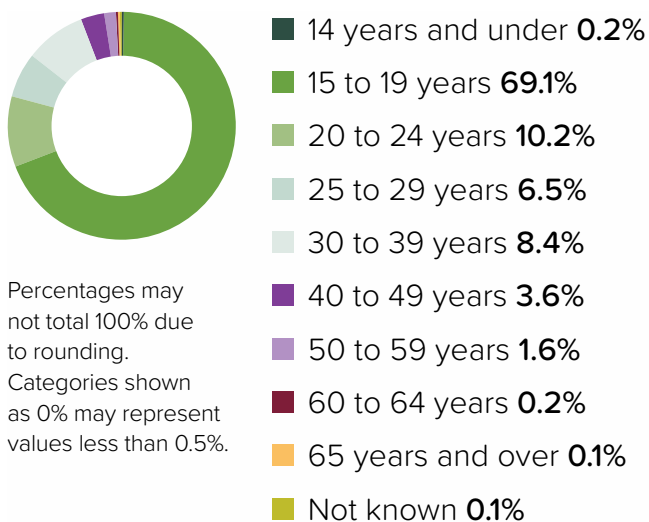
Not known: Enrolments 0.6%; Completions 0.7%



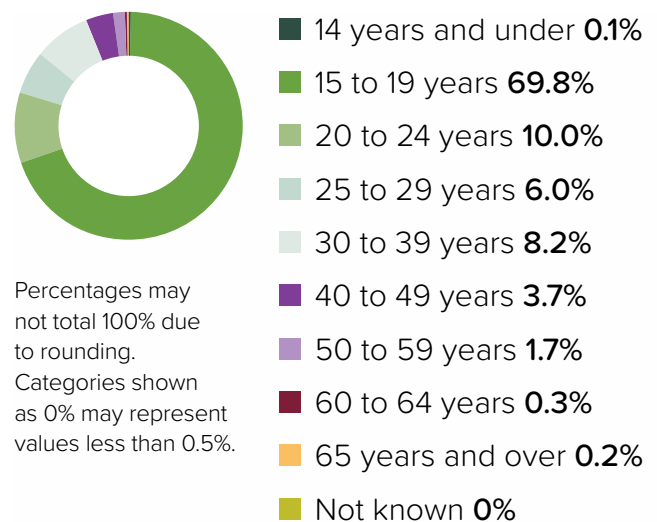
While women represent 57% of the sport and recreation workforce, they represent less than half of the enrolments in SIS training package qualifications. This is considerably less than other care and support sectors and indicates that there is not the same gender imbalance within sport and recreation.

Age

Enrolments in sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package) by age, 2023²⁷



Completions in sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package) by age, 2023²⁸



There is a heavy skew towards younger student enrolments within the SIS Sports and Recreation Training Package. This further highlights the young age of the workforce highlighted in section 1.1. The figures also indicate that the qualifications have a strong uptake within VET in schools.

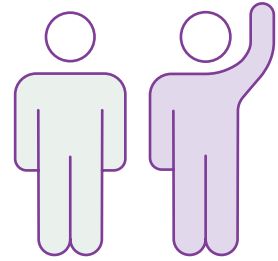
First Nations

Enrolments and completions in sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package) by First Nations people, 2023²⁹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners represented **4.2%** of enrolments and **3.6%** of completions

Non-indigenous learners accounted for **81.2%** of enrolments and **79.6%** of completions

Not known status comprised **14.7%** of enrolments and **16.9%** of completions



First Nations students represent 3.6% of completions within the SIS qualifications. There is a relatively high portion of students within the not known category in regard to reported identity.

Disability

Enrolments and completions in sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package) by students living with disability, 2023³⁰

Learners with a disability made up **3.8%** of enrolments and **3.3%** of completions

Learners without a disability represented **66.6%** of enrolments and **69.7%** of completions

Not known status comprised **29.7%** of enrolments and **27.0%** of completions

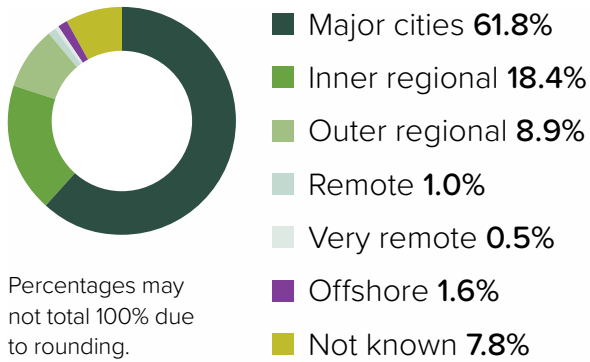
People with a disability represent 3.3% of completions within the SIS qualifications. There is a relatively high portion of students within the not known category in regard to having a disability.



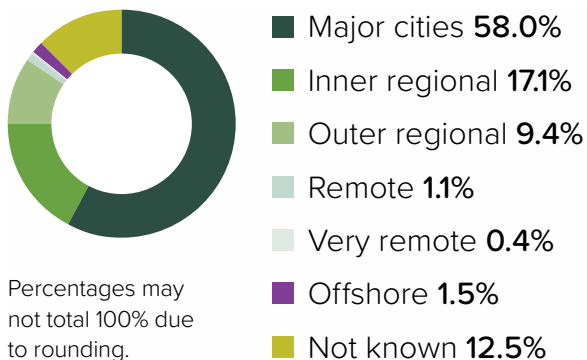
Geographic location

Remoteness³¹

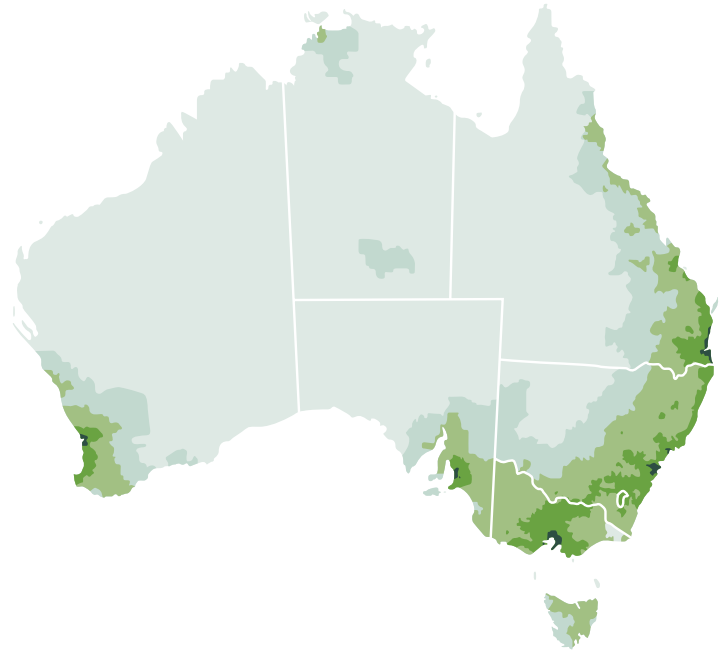
Enrolments in sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package) by remoteness, 2023³²



Completions in sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package) by remoteness, 2023³³



Most enrolments and completions are from students located in major cities. Remote and very remote students represent a very small portion of students.



Major cities had the highest enrolments (**61.8%**) and completions (**58.0%**)

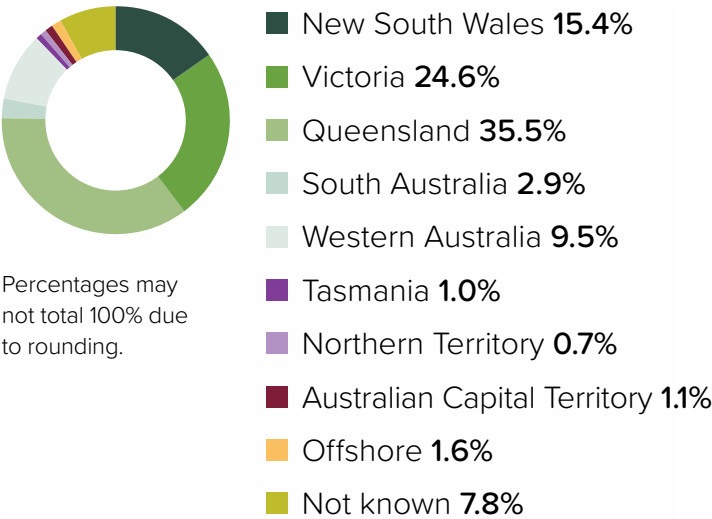
Students in **Very remote** and **Remote** areas comprise approximately **1.5% of overall enrolments** and **1.5% completions**



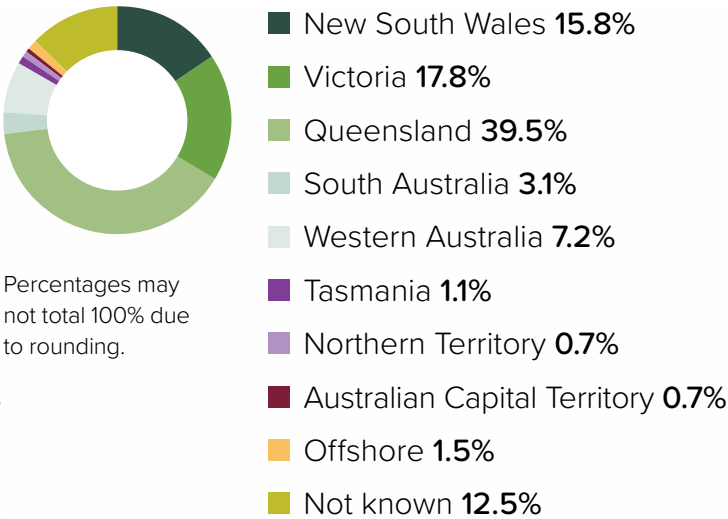
Geographic location

State/territory

Enrolments in sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package) by state, 2023³⁴



Completions in sport and recreation qualifications (SIS training package) by state, 2023³⁵



Queensland represents the highest portion of students of any state or territory. This potentially indicates a positive focus on an active lifestyle and a strong uptake of SIS qualifications withing VET in schools in that state. Offshore engagement in SIS qualifications is low, highlighting the importance of in-person teaching in these qualifications.



Queensland led enrolments and completions in sport and recreation qualifications.



Traineeships

Across the SIS Sports and Recreation training package, traineeship commencements from 2020 to 2024 show a clear seasonal pattern, with peak uptake occurring in the January – March quarter.

Commencement numbers were 1,090 in 2020, 1,315 in 2021, and 1,425 in 2022, before falling to 595 in both 2023 and 2024. In contrast, the remaining quarters each year accounted for only around 100–300 commencements combined, likely pointing to a strong relationship between the school year and traineeship enrolment patterns, including during secondary education through a VET in school program.³⁶ Many more males than females enrol in the SIS traineeships.

Gender³⁷

While overall enrolments in SIS qualifications are weighted toward males (females making up an average of just 39% of enrolments across the training package in 2023), a small number of qualifications show greater gender balance. Certificate III and IV in Outdoor Leadership, Certificate I and IV in Sport and Recreation, and Certificate II in Sport Coaching all have close to or slightly higher female participation. Notably, Certificate III in Aquatics and Community Recreation shows significantly higher female enrolment, with females making up 72% of students.

1.3 Workforce mobility, retention and attrition

Table 10: Mobility rates, sources and destinations among key occupations³⁸

Occupation (per ANZSCO)	Percentage of people moving out of occupation	Top 3 prior occupations (People moving from)	Top 3 subsequent occupations (People moving to)
Fitness Instructors 4521	9.8%	Sales Assistants (265), Waiters (135), Bar attendants and baristas (115), Sports Coaches, Instructors and Officials (115)	Amusement, Fitness and Sports Centre Managers (120), Sales Assistants (General) (80), Other Natural and Physical Science Professionals (70)
Outdoor Adventure Guides inc instructors 4522	2.6%	Sales Assistants (General) (55), Waiters (20), Checkout Operators and Office Cashiers (15)	Secondary School Teachers (25), Sales Assistants (General) (20), Education Aides (10)
Sports Coaches, Instructors and Officials, including swimming coaches and other umpires 4523	10.0%	Sales Assistants (General) (185), Waiters (125), Checkout Operators and Office Cashiers (105)	Sales Assistants (General) (255), Primary School Teachers (220), Child Carers (160)
Sportspersons 4524	10.0%	Sports Coaches, Instructors and Officials (95), Sales Assistants (General) (90), Checkout Operators and Office Cashiers (55)	Sales Assistants (General) (100), Sports Coaches, Instructors and Officials (90), Bar Attendants and Baristas (65)
Amusement, Fitness and Sports Centre Managers 1491	3.9%	Fitness Instructors (120), Sales Assistants (General) (45), General Managers (35)	Fitness Instructors (65), General Managers (45), Advertising, Public Relations and Sales Managers (15)

Mobility data is only available at the 4-digit ANZSCO level, which limits visibility. However, this higher-level data suggests notable movement between key occupations – with Fitness Instructors becoming Centre Managers, Outdoor Adventure Guides becoming Secondary School Teachers, and Sports Coaches becoming Primary School Teachers and Child Carers (Early Childhood Educator).

Shortages

None of these occupations at the 4-digit level are on Jobs and Skills Australia's (JSA) national occupation shortage list, although some occupations at 6-digit level are in shortage in some jurisdictions (e.g. Fitness Centre Managers in NT, Outdoor Adventure Instructor in NSW; and Swimming Coach/Instructor and Gymnastic Coach/Instructor nationally).³⁹ However, the industry regularly reports shortages, with multiple factors contributing to this situation. See section 3.1 for fuller discussion and analysis of labour force challenges.

1.4 A thriving sport and recreation workforce can enable other care and support sectors to thrive

Physical activity is beneficial to health and wellbeing and, conversely, physical inactivity increases risk of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and other poor health outcomes. Together, physical inactivity and sedentary behaviours are contributing to the rise in NCDs and placing a burden on healthcare systems. People who are insufficiently active have a 20% to 30% increased risk of death compared to people who are sufficiently active.⁴⁰

The benefits of prevention extend beyond reducing chronic conditions and living longer, healthier lives. Prevention generates benefits by reducing pressure on the health budget, increasing workforce participation and productivity, and improving the health of future generations.⁴¹

Exercise is used as an early intervention tool in the management of mental health, with the Australian and New Zealand Clinical Guidelines for mood disorders noting the positive impact of lifestyle changes such as exercise on the management of depression, anxiety and

psychological distress.⁴² For example, a recent study reviewed more than 1,000 research trials examining the effects of physical activity on depression, anxiety and psychological distress. It showed exercise is an effective way to treat mental health issues and is up to 1.5 times more effective than medication or counselling in managing depression.⁴³

Mental health improvements are also a key benefit of growing the sport and recreation industry and workforce. Exercise for mental health is the number two trend in the fitness industry in Australia,⁴⁴ and outdoor programs are increasingly being recognised for their therapeutic benefits, particularly for young people and people with disabilities.⁴⁵

There is a growing body of evidence that physical activity can reduce loneliness, especially when participation occurs with others. A systematic review and meta-analysis concluded physical activity can contribute to a decrease in loneliness throughout life.⁴⁶

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who participate in sport are 3.5 times more likely to report good general health and 1.6 times more likely to have no probable serious mental illness.⁴⁷

An additional benefit of sport and recreation participation is the impact on educational outcomes. A recent longitudinal study, which followed the sports participation of over 4,000 Australian children from age 4 to 13, found that continued sports participation during school years was linked to lower absenteeism, better attention and memory, higher NAPLAN and end-of-school scores, and higher odds of going on to study at university.⁴⁸



Case study

Strength for Life – COTA WA

Exercise programs for older people are a leading fitness industry trend. The Council on the Ageing Western Australia (COTA WA) runs an innovative Strength for Life program that encourages older Australians to participate in exercise sessions led by qualified professionals.

COTA identified a real need for tailored fitness programs for older adults. Strength for Life Program Manager WA, Kairi Watty, says, “Exercise programs offer numerous benefits critical to older Australians. They tackle social isolation and support improvements in physical and mental health. However, the primary advantage we’ve seen from Strength for Life is helping participants maintain their independence for much longer.”

In WA, Strength for Life has over 6,000 active participants and 47 registered providers across the state. Referrals are made from a general practitioner to an exercise physiologist, physiotherapist or fitness instructor. Following an initial assessment, participants are enrolled in an ongoing, tailored exercise regimen.

“COTA WA generally represents individuals over 65 years of age,” Kairi says, “but Strength for Life is aimed at people aged over 50. We know that the sooner someone starts regular exercise, the easier it becomes to sustain good health, ultimately easing the strain on aged care services.”

“There is considerable focus on aged care facilities and care packages, which is essential. However, a key part of supporting older Australians also involves preventive health and promoting healthy living.”

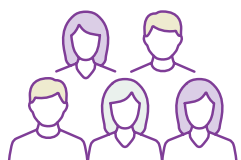
The Strength for Life program also operates in South Australia and the ACT.



2. Government and Reform Initiatives

Federal and state levels of government are taking active steps to strengthen sport and recreation. Investment is being directed into infrastructure, leadership development, volunteer programs, and major sporting events, with several initiatives tied to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Broader strategies focus on enhancing participation, building workforce capability, and promoting organisational sustainability.

2.1 National initiatives



Sector-wide

National Preventative Health Strategy 2021–2030

The National Preventative Health Strategy 2021–2030 presents the opportunity for Australia to build a sustainable prevention system for the future – building on previous success and momentum, addressing the increasing burden of disease, reducing health inequity, and increasing preparedness for emerging health threats. It sets in place many policy goals in relation to physical activity, including a greater role for the Australian sport sector in preventative health action through increasing physical activity and improving mental health within the community.⁴⁹

Sport Horizon, The National Sport Strategy 2024–2034

Sport Horizon, The National Sport Strategy 2024–2034 was published in October 2024. It sets the direction and aspiration for Federal, state and territory governments, communities and sporting organisations to create thriving systems. The Strategy seeks to promote

meaningful career pathways, and access to learning and development opportunities. It pledges to recognise the economic and societal value of volunteers, to help sustain a strong, capable and diverse workforce and support the ongoing viability of the sector. The Strategy also commits to building capable organisations and a workforce that utilises world-leading knowledge and practice.⁵⁰

Major Sporting Events Legacy Framework

The Major Sporting Events Legacy Framework was released by the Australian Government's Office for Sport in August 2024. Its purpose is to provide guidance to sporting organisations seeking government support and to help the Government consider which proposals offer the greatest return on investment and broadest legacy impacts and benefits.⁵¹ Australia will host more than 16 major sporting events from 2022–2032.⁵² In February 2023, the Federal and Queensland Governments each committed to contribute \$3.4 billion to infrastructure for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.⁵³

Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan 2022–2026

The Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan 2022–2026 outlines the actions the sector will take to achieve the vision for volunteering in Australian sport: “People from all walks of life see and realise opportunities to contribute to individual, club and community goals in a way that suits them.” Australia's sport and recreation workforce includes over 2.8 million sport volunteers who contribute an estimated \$4 billion of labour value each year. This plan is important, because sporting clubs, major sport events and organisations such as Scouts rely heavily on the assistance of volunteers in their delivery.^{54 55}

2.2 Commonwealth and jurisdictional initiatives

Table 11: Government initiatives affecting the sports and recreation workforce

Government	Government led initiatives
Australian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Australian Government's \$200 Million Play Our Way program (2024–25 to 2026–27) included \$55.6 million offered under the stream of Participation and Equipment, and \$136 million in sporting grants, helping more than 100,000 women and girls enjoy better facilities at their local clubs and addressing the additional barriers girls face in sport participation. • Critical venue infrastructure will be funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments under the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games Intergovernmental Agreement. The \$7.1 billion venue infrastructure program will reshape some of Queensland's most significant venues and precincts, leaving a legacy for the community well after 2032. • The Australian Sports Commission manages a suite of programs as part of its key strategic focus area to “build the capability of sport and the people involved”. This includes, but is not limited to, the abovementioned Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan as well as the Australian Sport Learning Centre, the Sports Governance Foundations course, the Gender Equity in Sports Governance Policy, Women Leaders in Sport, AIS Elevate program, National Generation 2032 Coach program, and programs to support elite athletes to transition their careers after retiring from competition. Further, the ASC provides annual funding as well as targeted grants to many National Sporting Organisations and National Sporting Organisations for People with Disability (NSO/Ds), with a high proportion of such funding used to employ staff to support NSO/D operations as well as deliver specific programs across high performance sport and sports participation.
ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBR, Next Move, Sport and Recreation Strategy 2023–2028 includes building the skills and scale of the sport and active recreation workforce, including volunteers, to address sector challenges and opportunities.⁵⁶
Northern Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Northern Territory Sport and Active Recreation Strategic Plan: 2021–2025 includes strategies for workforce development by supporting the capability of athletes, coaches, officials and volunteers.⁵⁷
New South Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Office of Sport Strategic Plan 2024–2028 aims to focus on organisational health and sustainability of the sport and active recreation sector.⁵⁸

Government	Government led initiatives
Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be an estimated \$200 billion in Queensland Government procurement opportunities leading up to the 2032 Brisbane Games.⁵⁹ • The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games Legacy Strategy, Elevate 2042, sets out the impact the Games will have 10 years after they are completed.⁶⁰ • The Active Queenslanders Industry Alliance have released a comprehensive 10-year workforce plan for the state.⁶¹
South Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in major sporting events include the AFL Gather Round, LIV Golf Tour Down Under, and the Adelaide International.⁶²
Tasmania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasmania Academy of Leadership and Sport was created in conjunction with the Hobart Hurricanes, the Tasmania JackJumpers, the Tasmania Devils and Netball Tasmania and TasTAFE.⁶³
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the Change Our Game call to action, which aims to increase the number of women and girls participating in sport and active recreation, from grassroots through to senior leadership roles.⁶⁴ • Launch, in July 2024, of the Sustainable Volunteer Workforce Program and the Strengthening Regional Community Sport Program.⁶⁵
Western Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries supports people and industry development through the Governance and Industry Development Team, sports consultants and regional offices.⁶⁶



3. Opportunities and challenges

The community's appetite for sport and recreation participation continues to grow. To meet this demand with a relatively young workforce, with a small number of full-time employees, the sector needs significant investment in training and ongoing education to keep activities safe and the industry sustainable.

Figure 7: The seven workforce challenges identified for the care and support sectors





3.1 Labour force shortages

The sport and recreation industry regularly and broadly reports workforce shortfalls across the sector, which could hinder the industry's ability to sustain its current growth trajectory.

For example:

- 74% of outdoor recreation operators report difficulties in finding skilled professionals,⁶⁷ with an average shortfall of nine workers per organisation in the outdoors industry.⁶⁸
- The aquatic industry estimates an annual shortfall of 5,000 workers per year.⁶⁹
- Swimming coaches/instructors are listed on the Jobs and Skills Australia Occupational Shortage List as being in shortage nationally.
- Outdoor adventure instructors, sports umpires, fitness centre managers, and sport administrators are also in shortage in some states/territories.

Stakeholders also report skilled staff shortages nationally across the fitness, aquatics, and outdoors subsectors. All shortages are exacerbated in regional and remote areas.

An exploration of how sport and recreation roles can be included within the skilled migration program is one possible method of alleviating these shortages.

Many roles within the industry have a relatively young workforce, including coaches, officials, umpires, and lifeguards. And while other occupations – such as fitness instructors, centre managers and outdoor adventure instructors – tend to have an older workforce, they all rely on a high proportion of casual, seasonal, or part-time workers.

Australia's sport and recreation workforce is also supported by over 2.8 million sport volunteers who contribute an estimated \$4 billion of labour value each year. Sporting clubs, major sport events and community sport organisations rely heavily on volunteers.^{70 71 72}

“Scout volunteers are key participants in training and programme delivery. While the primary workforce consists of trained staff, volunteers assist in specific areas. Volunteers often support us during large-scale events, complementing our staff.”⁷⁵

“The complexity of the industry, casualised workforce and numerous short-term skill sets contributes to high staff turnover.”⁷³

“The casualisation of the industry and transient nature of the workforce has created an instability and vulnerability which impacts attraction and retention.”⁷⁴



The workforce underpinning the National Sport Strategy 2024 – 2034

The decade of major sporting events leading up to and including the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games creates a window of opportunity to reimagine Australian sport and bring about unprecedented cooperation and alignment of the sport sector.⁷⁶

A measurement of success in the National Sport Strategy is the provision of a sustainable Australian sport system, including employment and workforce opportunities.⁷⁷ A strong sport and recreation workforce is vital to many of the plan's priorities, including to:

- Grow diverse representation in a range of roles, such as athletes, coaches, administrators, officials, volunteers and journalists, so individuals see themselves represented and feel a sense of belonging.
- Embed inclusivity in design by involving those with lived experience in the development and implementation of policies and programs.
- Increase rates of participation and other involvement in sport for all age groups (including coaching, officiating and

volunteering) to promote population wide health, social and community benefits, including physical literacy and skills development.

- Continue to empower and support coaches, officials, other staff and volunteers to access development and training opportunities and increase capability to support their athletes and teams.
- Promote meaningful career pathways and access to learning and development opportunities, and recognise the economic and societal value of volunteers, to help sustain a strong, capable and diverse workforce and support the ongoing viability of the sector.
- Embrace an evidence-based approach to policy, championing data driven insights and translating research to practice.

HumanAbility has the opportunity to engage directly with government, policy makers and the sport and recreation industry to help ensure many of these priorities are met. This can be done by taking an evidence-based approach to measuring the sport and recreation workforce and ensuring access to tailored, accessible, fit-for-purpose training opportunities.



Olympic and Paralympic Games workforce

The Olympic and Paralympic Games in Brisbane in 2032 will create a surge workforce of over 90,000 jobs in Queensland and 123,000 jobs in Australia.⁷⁸ While many of these jobs will be related to infrastructure, event management, hospitality, security and tourism, there are also roles that will rely directly and indirectly on the sport and recreation workforce, volunteer coordination and capability, and essential support roles such as first aid that relate to the full range of qualifications under HumanAbility's remit.

This considerable surge workforce (and supporting volunteer base) that is required provides a challenge and an opportunity for the training system in the lead-up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Games also present an opportunity to leverage off the surge workforce and the increased interest in sport and recreation participation the events will generate.

The Games provide a powerful platform to boost enrolment in nationally recognised training, as well as related qualifications in volunteer coordination and first aid. Workforce development efforts must also account for the inclusive and accessible participation required to support both Olympic and Paralympic events, and could further leverage disability-related qualifications to strengthen integration across sectors.

There is an opportunity for HumanAbility to work closely with both Olympic and Paralympic Games stakeholders to build pathways into the sector and retain skilled workers and volunteers well beyond 2032. With coordinated planning, the surge workforce generated by the Games could form the foundation for a more resilient, skilled, and inclusive sport and recreation workforce – leaving a legacy that extends across the broader care and support economy.



3.2 Skills Gaps

One flow-on effect of labour force shortages and a low portion of full-time industry roles is the exacerbation of skills gaps within the sector. Employers describe needing to take on people in training, without all the required skills. Peak bodies face pressure to reduce training requirements, which has the potential to exacerbate skills shortages and have negative impacts on professionalism and retention.

“Training is needed for volunteers and professional development opportunities are needed for existing staff.”⁷⁹

“Employers in the sector take on new recruits with minimum qualifications or training due to the immediate demand for staff.”⁸⁰

Employers have described a growing need for mental health training for their staff. This reflects the role of sport and recreation professionals in supporting participants’ overall health and wellbeing.⁸¹

Practical training initiatives present an opportunity to address skills gaps. A huge 77% of outdoor recreation organisations host students for work placements, with a further 15% open to offering such opportunities. Addressing recruitment barriers will be critical to ensuring a sustainable and highly skilled workforce.⁸²

Volunteers also require ongoing training. The Australian Sports Commission’s Volunteer Resource Hub provides a one stop shop for industry resources, for attracting, supporting and celebrating sport volunteers in Australia. This includes training in coaching, governance, first aid, responsible service of alcohol, and grant writing. There is also an opportunity for HumanAbility to review active volunteering qualifications, to ensure they meet the needs of the sector.



3.3 Training and Qualification Issues and Limited Career pathways

Stakeholders have reported limited career pathways and knowledge of pathways within the sector. In the outdoor industry, just 46% of organisations report having clear career pathways for employees.

Additionally, retention rates are an issue, with many graduates leaving the industry within the first three years due to limited professional development opportunities or moving into other sectors as they complete other training and education.

Structured career pathways and ongoing professional development are essential for improving retention and ensuring workforce sustainability.⁸³

Stakeholders have also called for the development of appropriate skill sets that can lead to entry level employment in the sector.⁸⁶

The sport and recreation sector relies on the completion of training outside of nationally recognised qualifications. Coach training is generally provided by sport governing bodies and many roles ask that employees or volunteers hold certifications such as first aid, and working with children checks.

There is also an opportunity to explore training opportunities in roles that are cross-sectoral. For example, there is a strong correlation between fitness roles and health roles. Bush kinder, fitness for mental health, swimming instruction, sport coaching, nature therapy, and lifestyle coordination are also examples of roles where sport and recreation intersect with the early childhood education, health, and aged care sectors.

“There are barriers to enter employment due to qualifications and skills sets being difficult to obtain. Unpaid placements are also impacting course completion rates.”⁸⁴

“There can be improvements in alignment between training packages and industry requirements (including licencing requirements), advancing technology and job roles.”⁸⁵





3.4 Diversity and Inclusion

The benefits of diversity and inclusion in sport participation are well known.⁸⁷ Sport plays an important role in helping shape community discourse and contributes towards Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality.⁸⁸

The demographics of the Australian Sport and Recreation Workforce are not well known, recorded or reported, highlighting that more work needs to be done in this area. There are international examples of work being done in this space. For example, the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) in the UK compile a Workforce Insights Report that breaks down the workforce population by age, gender, disability, socio-economic status and ethnicity.

The available evidence suggests there are improvements needed to develop the diversity of the sport and recreation workforce in Australia. For example:

- While 28% of all Australians are born overseas, just 13% of the aquatics industry workforce were born overseas.⁸⁹
- While approximately 49% of Australian sport and recreation administrators and 64% of team managers are women, women make up just 22% of CEOs across 65 Australian Sports Commission funded National Sporting Organisations.⁹⁰

Federal and state levels of government have made women's sport participation a priority in policy development over the last decade, and in September 2024 the Australian Government announced the launch of the National Gender Equity in Sport Governance Policy to address the underrepresentation of women in sports leadership, including mandated gender equity targets.⁹¹

The policy encourages all professional and community sporting clubs and leagues to adopt gender equity targets, and requires the governing bodies and funded peak bodies of the Australian sport sector to reach the following targets by 1 July 2027:

- 50% of all board directors are women and/or gender diverse
- 50% of chairs/deputy chairs are women and/or gender diverse
- 50% of specified sub-committee members are women and/or gender diverse.

Gender equity in sport leadership is an important step on the road to creating equity in sport and improving opportunities for women within the sport and recreation workforce.

In recent years there has been substantial growth of women playing in and competing at the top levels of traditionally male-dominated sports. By comparison, the number of women officials has not increased at the same rate. A recent study found that to improve officiating environments for women, commitment to and strategy for reform is needed at a broad, institutional level, and at a local, interactional level. This includes specific education and inclusion initiatives, targeted development pathways, investment in infrastructure and policy, and ongoing analysis of change.⁹²



Case study

Yushan Luo

Yushan Luo is an Outdoor Adventure Leader in regional Victoria. Following her passion for the outdoors has enabled her to balance a busy life as a mother and student with a career that energises her daily.

“I think a career in the outdoors teaches you and others that life can be fun. I think that the industry just teaches you to enjoy life,” she says.

The casual nature of the outdoor recreation industry has enabled Yushan to work in a freelance capacity and to transition through a variety of roles. “I have a three-year-old daughter and am currently studying. These commitments need to take priority over work at times.”

While the flexibility the industry offers has been beneficial, as Yushan completes a master’s degree in teaching, she is now looking for secure long-term opportunities.

She says, “I believe opportunity belongs to those who are prepared. I enjoy learning, it makes me feel young.”

As a Chinese woman in the outdoor industry, Yushan believes her presence has an added benefit. “I’ve had students write notes to me saying that outdoor education can be a bit of a painful experience but seeing another Chinese woman at camps helps them to feel calm in a challenging setting. Helping people push through their personal boundaries in the outdoors is so rewarding. My advice to anyone thinking about a role in the industry is to follow your heart and everything else will fall into place.”



3.5 Data and evidence

Despite its significance in the lives of Australians, the sport and recreation sector does not have particularly comprehensive workforce data.⁹³ Peak bodies within subsectors conduct workforce surveys; however, there isn't a coordinated national, sector-wide approach to collecting sport and recreation workforce data, beyond current JSA and ABS methods.

This makes it difficult for the sport and recreation industry and workforce to be accurately reflected in broader policy settings. It also hinders the ability to plan for future workforce needs, and makes it difficult to accurately assess workforce trends, economic impact, diversity, or training needs.⁹⁴

There is a need for a coordinated approach within the sector to gather and analyse workforce data that will enable the sector to drive better policy and training alignment and strengthen sector planning and training pipelines.

Workforce data

There are international examples that demonstrate the collection of quality workforce data that can drive better policy and training alignment and strengthen sector planning and training pipelines. HumanAbility has identified areas that require further examination in Australia, including:

- Until recently, ANZSCO data for the sport and recreation sector was largely at the four-digit level, grouping vastly different roles together (e.g. lifeguards and professional athletes under “sportspersons”), making workforce insights difficult to extract. Further analysis of the newly available six-digit data could help improve sector understanding and workforce planning.

- Concerns have been raised by the sector that seasonal and part-time employment results in many workers being classified under other industries, leading to workforce underreporting in census data.
- Regional and remote workforce dynamics are poorly understood, despite the sector serving as an important employment entry point in these areas.
- Skills shortages may not be accurately reflected in data and workforce planning, particularly in high-demand areas such as water safety, outdoor recreation, and fitness.

There is an opportunity for HumanAbility to work with stakeholders, government representatives and policy makers to capture more comprehensive workforce data and undertake research to identify gaps in evidence and data collection. This would assist the sport and recreation workforce to be accurately reflected in broader policy settings, to plan for future workforce needs and to accurately assess workforce trends, economic impact, and training needs.⁹⁵



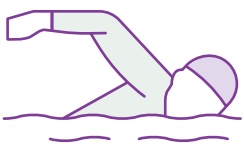
3.6 Policy and regulatory settings

There is no legal requirement for industry personnel to hold an occupational licence in the sport, fitness and recreation industries. However, there are several industry-led voluntary registration or accreditation schemes. These schemes provide a framework for self-regulation and provide best practice for an identified job role or industry sector.

The Australian Adventure Activity Standards and related Good Practice Guides provide a good-practice framework for outdoor adventure activities with dependent participants. These are being reviewed in 2025 to ensure they meet industry needs.












Workplace and participant health and safety remains a key issue for the sector. An alarming trend, particularly in aquatics, is the increased incidence of violence in the workplace, often directed at or involving staff. At a national level, there are understood to be more than 2,000 acts of assault, abuse and aggression towards lifeguards annually. This has prompted Royal Life Saving Australia to launch a public campaign, titled Keep Your Cool at the Pool.⁹⁶

There is a strong need for well trained, skilled and qualified staff in the fitness, aquatics, outdoor and sport subsectors to provide the community with access to safe sport and recreation participation in settings that are also safe and appropriate for workers.



Workplace and participant health and safety remains a key issue for the sector. An alarming trend, particularly in aquatics, is the increased incidence of violence in the workplace, often directed at or involving staff.

4. Roadmap

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Sport and recreation	<p>Review the SIS Outdoor Recreation and Leadership qualifications</p> <p>Status: Underway</p> <p>Overview: The functional analysis research stage has been completed and work has commenced on initial qualification drafts. The team will continue to work closely with the Technical Committee, industry and Subject Matter Experts during this process.</p> <p>Timing: September 2024 May 2026</p>	  
Sport and recreation	<p>Workforce Data</p> <p>Work with stakeholders to capture more comprehensive workforce data. This will enable the sport and recreation industry workforce to be accurately reflected in broader policy settings, to plan for future workforce needs and accurately assess workforce trends, economic impact, and training needs.</p> <p>Responsibility: HumanAbility, Industry Peaks</p>	
Sport and recreation	<p>Achieving the priorities of the National Sport Strategy</p> <p>Engage directly with government and the sport and recreation industry to assist in achieving the priorities of the National Sport Strategy – ensuring the sport and recreation workforce is developed in line with an evidence-based approach, has access to the required training opportunities, and is supported by a strong VET workforce.</p> <p>Responsibility: HumanAbility</p>	      



Labour force shortages



Skills gaps



Training and qualification issues



Limited career pathways



Lack of diversity and inclusion



Data deficiencies



Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Sport and recreation	<p>Volunteer and workforce training</p> <p>Consult with industry stakeholders to scope opportunities for volunteer and workforce training in the lead-up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games and strategies for leveraging off the surge workforce that the games will provide.</p> <p>Responsibility: HumanAbility</p>	    
Sport and recreation	<p>Linking sport and recreation with health, care and support industries</p> <p>Consult with industry stakeholders to scope opportunities for further exploratory work in linking the sport and recreation workforce with the health, care and support industries, given the emerging research regarding the role that sport and recreation plays in preventative health (physical and mental).</p> <p>Responsibility: HumanAbility</p>	     
Cross-sectoral	<p>Productivity Commission 5 Pillars Inquiry</p> <p>Analysis of productivity gains in the care and support workforce. To contribute to the Productivity Commission Quality Care and five pillars inquiry.</p> <p>Responsibility: HumanAbility and the Productivity Commission</p>	
Cross-sectoral	<p>Migration strategy</p> <p>Encourage government to commence consultations on an Essential Skills Pathway (as per the Migration Strategy) to grow the workforce, whilst maintaining ethical recruitment standards.</p> <p>Responsibility: Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs</p>	 



Labour force shortages



Skills gaps



Training and qualification issues



Limited career pathways










Lack of diversity and inclusion



Data deficiencies



Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Cross-sectoral	<p>Technology and Artificial Intelligence</p> <p>Targeted engagement: Technology, AI and the Care and Support Workforce</p> <p>Discussion paper: For example: Augmentation of the care and support workforce, worker pipelines into care and support.</p> <p>Collaboration with Future Skills Organisation (FSO) on their Digital Skills project.</p> <p>Responsibility: HumanAbility</p>	  
Cross-sectoral	<p>Research the drivers of low completion rates in key qualifications</p> <p>Status: Commenced June 2025</p> <p>Overview: This project will discover the completion rates in our sectors, subsectors and courses; identify risk factors and protective factors; and design strategies to bolster completion rates. Evidence and solutions will be drawn from workshops, interviews, documentary analysis and extensive data analysis and triangulation. Deliverables include reports, issues papers, and enrolment and completion data from NCVER on HumanAbility's bespoke, interactive dashboards.</p> <p>Timing: 2025–2026</p>	   



Labour force shortages



Skills gaps



Training and qualification issues



Limited career pathways





Lack of diversity and inclusion



Data deficiencies



Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Cross-sectoral	<p>Microcredentials: Examining the current use of shorter forms of training to support future guidance of skills development in the care and support sectors</p> <p>Improve access to an increasing range of microcredentials for educators and teachers in areas of identified need</p> <p>Status: Commencing mid-2025</p> <p>Overview: Microcredentials are rapidly increasing in number and variety, and have been identified by stakeholders from all sectors, and by the Workforce Working Group of the Education Ministers Meeting, as a potential or partial solution for quality professional learning.</p> <p>This project will: a) identify, categorise and quantify current microcredentials in our sectors (structure, content, relationships to existing accredited training); 2) map current microcredential offerings using the categorisation; 3) analyse skills and knowledge gaps that may be suitably addressed through quality microcredentials; and 4) develop a framework and recommendations for how microcredentials could support professional learning.</p> <p>Together, this provides practical tools and advice for employers, learners and peak bodies.</p> <p>Timing: To be completed by the end of 2027.</p>	 



Labour force shortages



Skills gaps



Training and qualification issues



Limited career pathways









Lack of diversity and inclusion



Data deficiencies



Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Cross-sectoral	<p>Earn While You Learn (EWYL) models</p> <p>Status: Launched June 2025</p> <p>Overview: This project responds to challenges including workforce shortages, retention and skill development (especially in regional and remote areas) and placement poverty through consideration of strengthening the use of Earn While You Learn models in the care and support sectors.</p> <p>The objectives are to identify and categorise all the EWYL models used in or suited to HumanAbility sectors, map these to the most critical skills and occupation gaps, and codevelop models based on most promising examples. It will develop clear, evidence-based and practical guidance and solutions drawing on quantitative data, documentary analysis and stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>Timing: 2025–2026</p>	  
Cross-sectoral	<p>VET Care and Support Workforce research</p> <p>Status: Underway</p> <p>Overview: The first stage of this research project sought to understand the profile of the VET workforce in our sectors, including pathways in and out. Through multiple surveys (reaching over 1000 responses), workshops and interviews, we discovered rich insights. Initial findings were shared in April 2025, with full findings from stage one to be shared later in the year.</p> <p>Stage two of this research will investigate sector-specific challenges and issues, while stage three will investigate and support industry-led solutions to these challenges.</p> <p>Timing: 2024–2026</p>	  



Labour force shortages



Skills gaps



Training and qualification issues



Limited career pathways






Lack of diversity and inclusion



Data deficiencies



Policy and regulatory settings

Industry sector	Initiative	Challenges addressed
Cross-sectoral	<p>Data and Evidence Gaps research</p> <p>Status: Commencing 2025</p> <p>Overview: The care and support sectors face many intersecting data challenges, including lack of granularity, timeliness, accessibility, incomparability, inaccuracy and missing information. Noting that the introduction of OSCA will address some of these issues when it comes into effect, this research project responds to remaining challenges using a mixed-methods approach, to 1) identify and map stakeholder data gaps; 2) understand the implications of the data gaps; and 3) identify or develop strategies to address these gaps, including triaging or sequencing our priorities, and identifying the external stakeholders best-placed to implement solutions in the short and long term.</p> <p>Timing: Commencing 2025</p> <p>Dependent on: Australian Government departments engaging with HumanAbility on existing data available, providing data to HumanAbility and/or undertaking to develop nationally consistent approaches to data collection where this does not exist. It also will be influenced by implementation of OSCA.</p>	  



Labour force shortages



Skills gaps



Training and qualification issues



Limited career pathways



Lack of diversity and inclusion



Data deficiencies



Policy and regulatory settings

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