

## Chapter 5

# Advancing Health through Sport

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Commonwealth member countries recognise that healthy individuals are central to social and economic development. They are therefore committed to providing the highest attainable health for all their citizens. The Commonwealth implements programmes address global health issues such as: non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, HIV and AIDS, communicable diseases, and mental health. Sport offers direct benefits for health and can provide an effective context for delivering health education.

### 5.1 Policy priorities

The Commonwealth's health priorities are framed by the Millennium Development Goals and other emerging issues on the global health agenda, notably the rise of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In response to significant worldwide health challenges, the Commonwealth implements programmes that address the following:

- *Non-communicable diseases (NCDs)* include diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases and account for an estimated 60 per cent of global deaths. Most (80 per cent) of these occur in low- and middle-income countries, making NCDs a critical global health priority that is not confined to 'rich' nations. NCDs are addressed by action to prevent or modify four key risk factors; obesity, physical inactivity, excess alcohol intake and tobacco.
- *Maternal and child health:* 60 per cent of all maternal deaths and 40 per cent of infant deaths take place in Commonwealth countries. Reducing child mortality and improving maternal health as specified in the Millennium Development Goals are key focuses for the Commonwealth.
- *HIV and AIDS:* Commonwealth countries represent approximately 30 per cent of the world's population but carry 60 per cent of the world's HIV/AIDS burden. Enabling universal access to prevention programmes, treatment, care and support is a Commonwealth priority.

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- *Communicable diseases* (CDs): In addition to combating HIV and AIDS, Commonwealth health priorities include addressing communicable diseases including malaria and tuberculosis.
- *Mental health* is also a Commonwealth health policy concern. The socio-economic pressures of poverty and stressful living conditions are recognised risks to mental health for individuals and communities.

Resource and workforce shortages, which undermine healthcare systems, present a challenge across the Commonwealth. The use of 'e-Health' to deliver health care through ICT (information and, communication technology), especially in countries with a shortage of health care professionals and limited resources, is an increasing priority across the Commonwealth.

## 5.2 How sport can contribute

Sport is a popular and enjoyable form of physical activity, making it an appropriate mechanism for encouraging children, youth and adults to be active in a variety of contexts. It can also provide an effective context for delivering health education (Jones-Palm and Palm 2005). Sport can therefore contribute to several Commonwealth health priorities including reduced health-care costs, increased productivity, and healthier physical and social lifestyles and environments.

- Sport offers several direct benefits for health (WHO 2003). Regular physical activity provides men and women of all ages with a wide range of physical and mental health benefits. Becoming active through sport also encourages greater health awareness in individuals and supports other lifestyle changes including improved diet and reduced use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs (Bakadi 2007). Establishing these behaviours in childhood and youth supports healthy lifestyles in adulthood and later life (Conway 2011).
- Sport has special relevance to the critical health priority of non-communicable diseases. The direct contributions that sport can make to health address several of the risk factors for NCDs, especially physical inactivity and obesity (WHO 2003). As many NCD risk factors are developed or acquired in childhood and adolescence, the popularity of sport with

young people makes it especially valuable for establishing healthy lifestyles.

- Sport offers valuable indirect benefits for health when it is used as a mechanism for delivering health education (Jeanes 2011). Many sport programmes deliver HIV and AIDS information and messaging related to other health issues including alcohol and drug abuse. Sport supports the MDGs as a useful vehicle for providing young women with health information on child and maternal health.
- Sport can also contribute to strategies to address mental health (Knechtle 2004). Mental disorders account for 13 per cent of the global burden of disease and often coexist with other medical factors, such as substance abuse and the harmful use of alcohol, and greater exposure to domestic violence and abuse for women and children. Provision of mental health services can therefore be as important to countries’ development as addressing physical health (WHO 2012).

Table 5.1 sets out how sport can be used to support health in the areas of combating NCDs, improving maternal health, combating HIV and AIDS and promoting mental health.

**Table 5.1 Sport and the Commonwealth’s health policy priority areas**

<i>How sport can contribute</i>	<i>Considerations for policy formation and development planning</i>
<b>Combat non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (Commonwealth priority area)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-communicable diseases pose a significant threat to health and sustainable development (Inniss 2012). Being physically active through sport addresses one of the four key risk factors for NCDs.</li> <li>• As many NCD risk factors are developed or acquired in childhood and adolescence, being physically active through sport is important for allowing young people to establish healthy lifestyles throughout the lifespan (WHO 2003).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise preventative health measures, including sport and physical activity, as critical components in health policy and strategy.</li> <li>• Support initiatives to make sport and physical activity more widely available, emphasising the creation of safe spaces for sport and physical activity in communities, and embedding sport in school curricula.</li> </ul>

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**Table 5.1 Sport and the Commonwealth's health policy priority areas (cont.)**

<i>How sport can contribute</i>	<i>Considerations for policy formation and development planning</i>
<b>Combat non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (Commonwealth priority area) (cont.)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming active through sport also encourages wider health awareness and supports other lifestyle changes including improved diet and reduced use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs (Jones-Palm and Palm 2005; Baumert et al. 1998).</li> <li>• The experience gained from using sport in efforts to tackle communicable diseases can be applied to the growing challenge of non-communicable diseases. In particular sport programmes, and sporting role models, can reinforce health education and messaging to reduce risk factors for NCDs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise initiatives to increase physical activity amongst young people, women, people with disabilities and those who are not in education, training or employment (Commonwealth Youth Forum 2007).</li> <li>• Engage athletes and young people as advocates, role models and health project volunteers to emphasise the importance of healthy lifestyles.</li> </ul>
<b>Improve maternal health (MDG 5)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport can play a role in child and maternal health by providing a platform for health education. Sport programmes for female empowerment can include sessions where health information is discussed and participants are educated on sexual and reproductive health, HIV and AIDS, and nutrition and hygiene (Kay 2009).</li> <li>• There is evidence that participants share the health knowledge they receive in sport programmes with other girls and women in families and communities (Kay 2009).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate health messaging and education, supported by appropriate expertise, into community sport initiatives targeting girls and young women.</li> <li>• Include physical activity provision in maternal health programmes.</li> </ul>
<b>Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport can be used as an effective platform to deliver health messaging and education to combat HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases, and can provide social support to those affected.</li> <li>• Sport can be used as an outreach tool for engaging hard-to-reach groups of young people in HIV and AIDS health education programmes (Clark et al. 2006) and integrated with peer education approaches to train young people to provide life skills information on HIV and AIDS to their peers. Research has shown this can be more effective than conventional approaches in improving knowledge and attitudes amongst young people through the use of alternative communication and peer leader support (Delva et al. 2010; Marco et al. 2009).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate health education as a key component of sport programming and delivery.</li> <li>• Utilise sport events for health messaging, awareness raising and education campaigns.</li> </ul>

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**Table 5.1 Sport and the Commonwealth’s health policy priority areas (cont.)**

<i>How sport can contribute</i>	<i>Considerations for policy formation and development planning</i>
<b>Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDG 6) (cont.)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive and well managed sport programmes can also provide a positive input in the lives of those already infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and form part of a community response to break down stigma attached to diseases such as HIV and AIDS (Delvaa et al. 2010; Njelesani 2011).</li> </ul>	
<b>Mental health<sup>6</sup> (Commonwealth priority area)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being physically active through sport offers individual mental health benefits (Knechtle 2005; Seiler and Birrer 2001).</li> <li>• Additionally the social interactions and community fellowship inherent to many sport programmes can provide a support network for mental health sufferers.</li> <li>• Sport can be effective in engaging groups that are especially at risk of mental ill health, such as marginalised youth, displaced populations and homeless people.</li> <li>• Using sport to support mental health has relevance to wider health concerns addressing communicable and non-communicable diseases as mental disorders are often associated with a range of other priority health issues, including HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health, and violence and injuries.</li> <li>• The use of sport in conflict situations can be a diversionary tool, temporarily alleviating mental health pressures prompted by environmental uncertainty.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate sport and physical activity provision and referrals into holistic mental health strategies and support services.</li> <li>• Provide appropriate sport and physical activity programming for population groups at greater risk of mental health issues.</li> </ul>

### 5.3 Case study examples

Health is fundamental to social and economic development and is a high priority across all Commonwealth countries. It is also a major focus within the SDP sector, especially in the area of HIV and AIDS. There are therefore many documented examples of how different countries in the Commonwealth use sport to support some of their main policy priorities for health.

### Kicking AIDS Out! Network

Initiative	Kicking AIDS Out! is an international network of organisations working together to use sport and physical activity as a means of raising awareness about HIV and AIDS and motivating positive behaviour change in youth. The network believes that sport and physical activity are effective ways of attracting youth while serving as creative mediums to facilitate and share positive messages about HIV and AIDS and other critical health issues affecting youth. Sport and physical activity are used to build awareness about HIV and AIDS while also encouraging peers to discuss issues affecting their lives and their communities. Programmes implemented by member organisations integrate sport skills and life skills through movement games, role-play, drama and other cultural and recreational activities. Capacity building is central to the success and sustainability of Kicking AIDS Out. The network develops programmes to train coaches, trainers and leaders to build capacity at the individual, organisational and community level.
Policy context	United Nations Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS, June 2011; supported by Commonwealth HIV and AIDS Action Group (CHAAG).
Further information	<a href="http://www.kickingaidsout.net">www.kickingaidsout.net</a>

### PNG Games – Papua New Guinea

Initiative	The PNG Games targets youth, women and men and older citizens. It provides an avenue for social contact and is also intended to improve the quality of the sport system at all levels from grass roots up. The PNG Games concept is driving behaviour at the community level and there is evidence of increased sports and physical activities at the Ward, District and Provincial Levels. Community coaches, sports administrators, volunteers and sports leaders are trained under the Community Sports Education Program and use these opportunities to put their knowledge and skills into practice. Sport is an effective mobilisation tool. The PNG Games attracts 10,000 athletes and officials from the country's 22 provinces and 15,000–20,000 spectators and supporters. With so many people attending, HIV and AIDS survey and awareness is conducted during the Games and athletes and officials are given HIV goody bags with various items such as t-shirts, brochures and condoms.
Policy context	Papua New Guinea Sports Foundation Strategic Plan
Further information	<a href="http://www.sportingpulse.com/assoc_page.cgi?c=2-7798-0-0-0&amp;SID=208455">www.sportingpulse.com/assoc_page.cgi?c=2-7798-0-0-0&amp;SID=208455</a>

### Sport for Health – Tonga

Initiative	Tonga's Sport for Health programme is part of the Tonga Sport for Development Program, a partnership between the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and the Government of Tonga's Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth and Sport and Ministry of Health. Sport for Health aims to reduce the burden of non-communicable disease in Tonga. The project has two connected activities: strengthening the capacity of the Tonga Netball Association (TNA) to increase opportunities for Tongans, especially girls and women, to participate in quality sport activities; and a targeted Sport for Health intervention, harnessing the improved capacity of TNA to develop a programme focused on women and girls. The Sport for Health intervention uses a social marketing approach: target a specific audience; develop specific health-related behavioural objectives for that audience; take a holistic approach to engendering behaviour change; and conduct a baseline and measure the target group's progress. Through the programme, sport is being used to support health in mobilising women and girls to engage in healthy behaviours; as a setting to educate women and girls about health-related behaviours; and as a means to empower girls and women to take the lead in improving health behaviours in their communities.
Policy context	Hala Fonoga: Ki Ha Tonga Mo'ui Lelei – Path to Good Health: Tonga National Strategy to Prevent and Control Non-Communicable Diseases (2010–2015). The 42nd Pacific Island Forum declared NCD as a crisis and called for a holistic government approach.
Further information	<a href="http://www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/international/programs/pacific/tonga">www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/international/programs/pacific/tonga</a>

### Jump Rope for Heart – Caribbean

Initiative	The Jump Rope for Heart (JRFH) is a programme designed by the Caribbean Sport and Development Agency. The programme encourages primary school children to adopt healthy lifestyle activities and informed nutritional meal choices. It is facilitated by teachers and community volunteers and combines the simple, low cost, indoor/outdoor fun-filled physical activity of jumping rope with an integrated curriculum approach that has the potential of infusing health information and education into other subject areas.
Policy context	Strategic plan of action for the prevention and control of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDS) for countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) 2011–2015.
Further information	<a href="http://www.caribbeansportanddev.org">www.caribbeansportanddev.org</a>

### National Strategy for the Ageing Population – Singapore

Initiative	Singapore's overarching strategy for its ageing population has been produced through collaboration between the public and private sectors as well as civil society. The strategy includes identification of three to five easily accessible sports for seniors that will promote cardiovascular health, balance, strength and flexibility and the creation of multi-tiered outreach programmes, with modest incentives, to motivate seniors of all ages and abilities to take up these sports. The collaborating agencies have also set national standards for sports participation and sports safety for seniors and introduced pathways and positions for them to continue contributing to their sporting communities throughout their lifetimes. As well as helping seniors retain a sense of purpose in their lives, these initiatives help meet the demand for administrators, coaches and officials in national sports associations.
Policy context	National Strategy for the Ageing Population, Singapore.
Further information	<a href="http://www.vision2030.sg/proposals/pathways-for-sporting-seniors/">www.vision2030.sg/proposals/pathways-for-sporting-seniors/</a>

### Get Active – Scotland

Initiative	The Scottish Association for Mental Health runs a national programme to improve mental health through sport and physical activity. Get Active aims to bring about improvements in mental health and well-being through lifelong improvement of self-esteem and emotional resilience; (ii) Community-wide improvements in social inclusion and participation; and (iii) Improved sporting and recreational facilities to include the support needs of people with mental health problems. There are four strands to the programme: community engagement pilot projects; a national awareness-raising campaign focusing on the links between healthy bodies and healthy minds; a learning and education component providing practical training for frontline staff to empower them to make a positive contribution to people's self-esteem and morale; and a national event to bring together the learning points from the first years of activity.
Policy context	Scotland Performs: National Performance Framework – Improve Mental Well-being National Indicator.
Further information	<a href="http://www.samh.org.uk/our-work/national-programmes/get-active.aspx">www.samh.org.uk/our-work/national-programmes/get-active.aspx</a>