

Strength in Community:

Evaluation of the Australian Pride in Sport Festival

Institute for Health and Sport

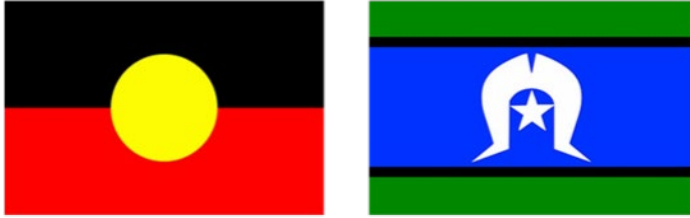
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Acknowledgement of Country



Victoria University acknowledges, recognises and respects the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Bunurong/Boonwurrung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung of the Kulin who are the traditional owners of University land in Victoria, the Gadigal and Guring-gai of the Eora Nation who are the traditional owners of University land in Sydney, and the Yulara/YUgarapul people and Turrbal people living in Meanjin (Brisbane).

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Executive Summary

This report details the commissioned evaluation of the Pride in Sport Festival, which was delivered by ACON's Pride in Sport team, with the support of an Australian Sports Commission 'Play Well' grant.

Researchers who have reviewed inclusion and diversity programs implemented in sport settings have found few initiatives focused on the needs of the LGBTQ+ community (Jeanes, et al., 2019). This is despite clear evidence that LGBTQ+ people participate in sport less and have more negative experiences when they do (Denison et al., 2020).

By focusing on the LGBTQ+ community, The Pride in Sport Festival aimed to address and mitigate the barriers to participation LGBTQ+ individuals face, fostering a welcoming and supportive environment for all participants.

The specific objectives of the Pride in Sport Festival were to:

- 1. Increase LGBTQ+ Participation:** Significantly increase the participation rates of LGBTQ+ individuals in sports through targeted competitions and activations.
- 2. Promote Inclusivity:** Enhance the sports culture to be more inclusive and accepting of diversity, particularly of LGBTQ+ athletes, through education and visibility initiatives.
- 3. Build Community and Support:** Establish a supportive network for LGBTQ+ individuals in sports, offering resources, mentorship, and advocacy to support their sports journey.

The Pride in Sport Festival officially ran from December 2024 to April 2025. A total of over 80 events and activations for the LGBTQ+ community and allies were delivered throughout the festival. The festival empowered a wide range of Delivery Leads across multiple states and territories to organise LGBTQ+ inclusive events - some for the very first time.

The purpose of this evaluation is to identify and measure the effectiveness and impact of the program using multiple evaluation methods. This report should be considered as a research-informed assessment of the program. The aim of the report is to allow for learning and nation-wide program improvements to enhance LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport. The literature that focuses on solutions to LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport is still somewhat in its infancy, however, a review of this literature revealed seven features that helped inform the overall evaluation of the Pride in Sport Festival.

To evaluate the Pride in Sport Festival, evaluators have drawn from survey data of participants in the festival and qualitative responses from interviews with Delivery Leads. In addition to the formal research methods, the evaluation team also attended all the Pride in Sport Festival 'roundtables' and recorded the monthly partner meetings.

In the survey data, individual participants were unequivocal in their praise for the activations they attended. Many participants claimed that their new experience would lead to increased physical activity levels because they now felt like sport could be part of their lives. Over the festival period, the Pride in Sport team also facilitated supported education sessions and built and sustained a strong community of diverse stakeholders in the sport ecosystem.

In addition to achieving the funding objectives, the Pride in Sport Festival demonstrated success against each of the seven features identified in the literature review as ground-breaking, research-informed approaches to enhancing inclusion for LGBTQ+ people in sport. As such, the Pride in Sport Festival undoubtedly delivered on its promise to 'set a new standard for accessibility and engagement in sport'.

Background

Australian Sports Commission (ASC) Play Well Strategy and funding

Improving demographic diversity in recreational sport has been a major focus of sport policy makers over the last two decades (Cunningham, 2019; Spaaij et al., 2016). Governments want traditionally underrepresented or marginalised groups to gain the psychosocial and health benefits that can come from sport participation (Eime et al., 2013).

In Australia, Play Well is the ASC's current sport participation strategy. It has been developed to create sporting environments and experiences, where individuals of all ages, backgrounds and abilities can come together to access the benefits of sport. Play Well is underpinned by the evidence that participating in sport improves physical and mental health, social connection and cohesion, and national productivity. Sport participation plays a significant role in enriching the lives of Australians and their communities, however, when not managed well, sport can become an unsafe, exclusive, intimidating, and unhealthy environment. Poor culture can deprive individuals of the safety they need to engage with and bring their full selves to sport. It can also create exclusive, intimidating, and unwelcoming environments that lead to decreasing rates of involvement. Consequently, individuals and communities miss out on the benefits that sport can provide (ASC, 2023).

One area of diversity that has received limited funding and attention is addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ people. Storr (2021) highlights that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are still commonplace and embedded in the culture of Australian sport, yet compared to gender, cultural and disability diversity, LGBTQ+ diversity is not given the attention that other forms of diversity attract (Storr, 2021). Researchers who have reviewed inclusion and diversity programs implemented in sport settings have found few initiatives focused on the needs of this community (Jeanes, et al., 2019). This is despite clear evidence that LGBTQ+ participate in sport less and have more negative experiences when they do.

To address the exclusion of LGBTQ+ community in sport, ACON's Pride in Sport team successfully applied for funding through the ASC's Play Well participation grant scheme. Pride in Sport is a part of ACON's Pride Inclusion Programs. The Pride Inclusion Programs is a social initiative of ACON, Australia's largest health organisation specialising in community health, inclusion, and HIV responses for people of diverse sexualities and genders. ACON's Pride in Sport team were ideally placed to deliver a nation-wide program due to their knowledge and expertise, trusted relationships in and outside of sport, and reach.

Pride in Sport's 'Australian Pride in Sport Festival' aimed to enhance the visibility, inclusivity, and participation of the LGBTQ+ community in sports. By focusing on the LGBTQ+ community, the Pride in Sport Festival aimed to address and mitigate the barriers to participation LGBTQ+ individuals face, fostering a welcoming and supportive environment for all participants. By hosting a series of competitions and activations during a defined festival period, the project sought to break down barriers to sports participation and celebrate diversity and pride within the Australian sporting community.

Pride in Sport Festival Objectives

The specific objectives of the festival were to:

- 1. Increase LGBTQ+ Participation:** Significantly increase the participation rates of LGBTQ+ individuals in sports through targeted competitions and activations.
- 2. Promote Inclusivity:** Enhance the sports culture to be more inclusive and accepting of diversity, particularly of LGBTQ+ athletes, through education and visibility initiatives.
- 3. Build Community and Support:** Establish a supportive network for LGBTQ+ individuals in sports, offering resources, mentorship, and advocacy to support their sports journey.

Pride in Sport Festival Format

The Pride in Sport Festival was designed as a national calendar of LGBTQ+ led activities which aimed to welcome new participants into sports and celebrate the achievements of queer sporting communities. The Pride in Sport Festival provided a range of pro-bono, financial and in-kind support to organisations across Australia to gather, activate and grow.

Sporting organisations at all levels, and of all types, were encouraged to engage with the Pride in Sport Festival through a range of grant funding and program delivery activities. Support provided by Pride in Sport included: direct financial assistance through the Pride in Sport Festival grants program; provision of project management support and policy guidance; community education programs and coach/official training; participation in marketing campaigns and promotion; joint delivery of community activations at targeted events.

Grant funding was allocated to sporting organisations through a competitive process. 42 applications were received, covering all Australian States and Territories, apart from the Northern Territory. Applications represented 26 different sports and three Universities. Applications were assessed by a panel of four Pride in Sport team members and prioritised the following areas: Inclusivity reach; Engagement depth; Alignment with Pride in Sport Index goals; Feasibility and scalability; Budget utilisation, and Overall innovation. 33 applicants were successful, although in many instances budgets were scaled back to allow more of the resources to spread to as many organisations as possible. Successful applicants represented New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. Sporting organisations were also able to 'self-fund' activities and still be part of the Pride in Sport Festival.

The Pride in Sport Festival was promoted by Pride in Sport through social media, EDMs, and a dedicated Calendar of Events webpage. The Calendar of events page provided key dates and links to all festival activities, including education sessions, workshops, interactive activities, and sport-delivered initiatives. The Pride in Sport Festival officially ran from December 2024 to April 2025, although some modifications were made to this schedule due to funding and contracting delays. A total of over 80 events and activations for the LGBTQ+ community and allies were delivered throughout the festival.

Evaluation methodology

Pride in Sport commissioned Victoria University to evaluate the festival. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify and measure the effectiveness and impact of the program using multiple evaluation methods. This report should be considered as a research-informed assessment of the program. The aim of the report is to allow for learning and nation-wide program improvements to enhance LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport.

The approach to the evaluation is based on Collaborative Evaluation principles adapted to an LGBTQ+ specific sport context (Oatley & Harris, 2021; Sirdenis et al. 2019; Spaaij & Schailée, 2022). The evaluation team deliberately engaged key program stakeholders (Pride in Sport staff and the delivery partners of key activations) actively during the evaluation process. This collaborative approach is designed to provide meaningful results and enhance the usefulness of evaluation findings. The evaluation methodology had two main components 1) Survey and 2) Interviews with Delivery Leads. The evaluation was granted ethics from Victoria University's Low Risk Ethics Panel: HRE24-17.

Survey

People who attended any of the Pride in Sport Festival events and were 18 years or older were invited to fill in a 10–15-minute survey. Activation or event Delivery Leads ('Delivery Leads', hereafter) asked interested persons to scan a QR code to be directed to the survey, which appeared on a flyer in person at the event. Events that collected contact information of attendees also emailed the survey link to participants after the event. The survey was constructed based on Play Well specific questions and further questions were added by the evaluation team to generate LGBTQ+ inclusive specific data. Questions included: demographic questions, questions evaluating the festival activities, and questions about their sport participation, LGBTQIA+ allyship and attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people, mood, sport team/club connectedness, and positive body image. The evaluation team had planned to undertake a follow-up survey 4 weeks after the activation to measure longer-term outcomes of participation, but unfortunately no respondents opted in for this. 107 respondents completed the survey, from 12 distinct organisations' activations(s). Data was analysed using the program SPSS including frequencies and crosstabs (for descriptive statistics).

Interviews

Following the completion of the festival, evaluators conducted online discussions with ten participants (8 x Delivery Leads for specific activations; and 2 x Pride in Sport Festival project team members) to gain insights into the processes and outcomes of the festival. The sessions were conducted online (via zoom or Teams) and ranged from 45- 90 minutes. The plan was to conduct these interviews in small groups but due to scheduling difficulties, evaluators had to undertake the interviews mostly as 1:1 sessions. Principles of appreciative inquiry (Coughlan et al., 2003; MacCoy, 2014) guided the interview questions. The purpose of the interviews was to gather an overall picture of the features of successful activations and any challenges that leaders faced in achieving their aims.

Evaluation report

To evaluate the Pride in Sport Festival, evaluators have drawn from the survey data and qualitative responses. In addition to the formal research methods, the evaluation team also attended all the Pride in Sport Festival 'roundtables' and recorded the monthly partner meetings. The evaluators also had access to the individual activation acquittal reports, and media generated by Pride in Sport, and the clubs and organisations involved in the Pride in Sport Festival to inform their analysis.

The report is divided into five sections as follows:

- 1) A literature review that explores what features might lead to successful LGBTQ+ inclusive initiatives in community sport.
- 2) A snapshot of the survey results. These results show how the participants felt about their experiences and results link directly to the Play Well objectives as well as the specific objectives set out from Pride in Sport, at the activation delivery level.
- 3) A comprehensive analysis that takes into consideration the Pride in Sport Festival as a whole - concept, delivery and participant outcomes. This part of the report specifically assesses the Pride in Sport Festival against the seven features of successful LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives as identified in the literature review.
- 4) Three separate case studies are presented to showcase what a successful LGBTQ+ inclusive activation, with potential for long-term benefits looks like. Here three different organisations are selected (a State Sporting Organisation, a private provider, and an LGBTQ+ specific club) to show how, with the financial support of the micro grants, and the educative and community support provided by the Pride in Sport Team, delivery partners can be empowered to design and deliver unique experiences that can lead to meaningful LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport.
- 5) Conclusions.

LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport: a review of relevant literature

Overview of the state of play

To introduce the topic of LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport from a research perspective, an overview of relevant scoping reviews is provided below. This 'state of play' demonstrates that there has been sufficient research that has exposed the problem of LGBTQ+ exclusion and harm in sport however much less attention has been paid to solutions. For example:

- In a scoping review, Shaw and Cunningham (2021) found 260 articles related to LGBTQ+ discrimination, exclusion and inclusion in sport. Within the review the authors identified seven different themes that research related to LGBTQ+ topics in sport have attended to. Under the management and advocacy theme Shaw and Cunningham (2021) found seven papers that had a focus on solutions for inclusive and affirming spaces at the community level, which is relatively few compared to those papers that have explored and revealed instances of exclusion and harm.
- Denison et al. (2020) discuss the lack of research focused on identifying practical, pragmatic, and scalable solutions to stop the discrimination and exclusion of LGBTQ+ people in sport. They also identify that broad-brush, or "one size fits all" approaches have proven ineffective in driving diversity changes in other settings and may confound and ignore the unique challenges, needs, and factors underpinning discrimination, stigma, and exclusion of the subgroups of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Kavoura and Kokkonen (2020) acknowledge that research on gender and sexual diversity in sport has advanced during the last decade and it is nowadays recognised that we need a better understanding of how to facilitate inclusive sport cultures that allow all people to participate as themselves. However, in their scoping review, they identified five interconnected themes with the theme most closely related to facilitating inclusion 'strategies for social change' not receiving as much in-depth research and theorising as the others (Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020).
- Herrick et al. (2022) also identified the apparent lack of focus on solutions in research centred on LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport. Focusing broadly on physical activity (including sport), they comment: "For decades, physical activity contexts have been inherently exclusionary toward LGBTQ+ participation through their perpetuation of practices and systems that support sexuality- and gender-based discrimination. Progress toward LGBTQ+ inclusivity within physical activity has been severely limited by a lack of actionable and practical suggestions." (Herrick et al., 2022).
- Furthermore, Herrick et al. (2022) state that over the past several years, inclusivity initiatives have been created with the intention to better support LGBTQ+ communities within physical activity. However, the development processes and evaluation of inclusivity initiatives are often unclear. (Herrick et al., 2022)

From problems, towards solutions

In the sections that follow, some of the most relevant literature that does provide a link to understanding solutions is outlined in further depth. The sections are divided as follows:

- the established evidence-base of LGBTQ+ exclusion and harm in sport
- the significant difference between attitudinal and cultural change
- a need for defining and creating 'safe spaces'
- who should bear responsibility for LGBTQ+ inclusion and safety in community sport?
- future research

The established evidence-base of LGBTQ+ exclusion and harm in sport

There is an established evidence-base of quantitative and qualitative research that has documented the significant harms experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals in all levels of sport, including at the community level. As Brackenridge et al. (2008), Denison et al., (2021), Shaw (2019) and Storr (2021) all highlight, there are specific political reasons why this research has seemingly not been fully 'heard' and actioned. The established evidence-base is re-stated below for readers who may not be so familiar with this literature. It should be noted, however, that while establishing a case for change and monitoring change is an important part of work in this area, attention from researchers and practitioners should now move beyond establishing the problem to properly designing and evaluating specific solutions.

- In Australia, research indicates that homophobia and sexism are significant stressors for LGBTQ+ people within community sport (Symons et al., 2017). There is a wide body of quantitative research providing evidence that LGBTQ+ people experience discrimination in sport, and this has a range of negative impacts on their mental and physical health (Denison et al., 2020)
- Denison and Kitchen (2015) found 82% of their participants had witnessed or experienced homophobic behaviour in sport, including verbal insults and slurs, bullying, physical assaults, and threats of violence. Most gay and bisexual males (71%) and half (50%) of gay and bisexual females in their study believed homophobia to be more common in team sporting environments than in general society, and only 1% of participants believed LGB people are completely accepted in sport environments.
- A large international study involving LGBTQ+ participants from all European Union countries (N = 5,524) also found that 82% of participants had witnessed homophobic or transphobic language in sport in the past 6 months and 90% of participants considered homophobia and transphobia to be a current issue within sport settings (Menzel et al., 2018).
- The predominant nature of both witnessed and experienced homo- and transnegativity is verbal, as almost all LGBT+ people report experiencing verbal jokes, disparagement, slurs, insults and offensive remarks (Harttman-Tews et al., 2020).
- Denison et al. (2020) found strong, consistent evidence that LGBTQ+ individuals continue to experience discrimination and exclusion across sporting contexts. Studies conducted by researchers in a wide range of sport settings now provide evidence that LGBTQ+ people regularly experience discrimination and exclusion in sport, citing 16 separate studies from 2007-2018.
- Drummond et al. (2021) found that across 39 sports in South Australia including football, rugby, soccer, swimming, tennis, cricket, softball and golf, almost 40% of

respondents who identified as LGBT+ felt unsafe or vulnerable in the sporting location because of gender identity and sexual orientation.

- Existing studies persistently demonstrate the ways in which individuals who identify as LGBT+ experience both implicit and explicit forms of discrimination which tend to range from dealing with heteronormative assumptions made within sport contexts (Halbrook et al., 2019; Trussell et al., 2018) to outright hostility expressed through homophobic, biphobic and transphobic abuse (Baiocco et al., 2018; Denison and Kitchen, 2015; Hargie et al., 2017).
- Even with adoption of LGBTQ+ inclusivity initiatives, discrimination, harassment, and exclusion are still relatively common within physical activity contexts, such as fitness facilities, fields, and locker rooms (Herrick & Duncan, 2018a; Herrick & Duncan, 2020).
- While the knowledge on the topic is extensive, the body of work described above continues to be largely based on the experiences of lesbian and gay athletes, while bisexual, transgender and intersex identities continue to be underrepresented in the literature. Moreover, calls to examine how gender and sexual minority identities intersect with other categories of socio-cultural difference (e.g. race, ethnicity, age, class, disability) remain largely unanswered. Only a limited number of studies consider the diversity of LGBT+ people within the context of sexual orientation, gender identity and combinations of intersectional identities (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2020).

The significant difference between attitudinal and cultural change

Although it is reasonable to assume that attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people are improving in and outside of sport settings, particularly amongst young people, a large and diverse body of quantitative and qualitative research has found LGBTQ+ people continue to experience discrimination and exclusion in sport settings. Echoing, Cunningham and Hussain (2020) it is a “paradox” that “on the one hand, prejudice and discrimination limit the access and opportunities for LGBT athletes. On the other hand, an increasing number of (professional) teams are reaching out to the LGBT community” (p. 2) through events such as pride games or the creation of rainbow-themed merchandise.

In the research cited below it is identified that there is a significant difference between individual’s attitudes and intentions and supporting cultural change to facilitate safe and affirming experiences for LGBTQ+ people in sport.

- Data from a project on LGBT+ institutional practices by Storr et al. (2021) indicated disparities between attitudes, which may be more accepting towards sexual minorities, and behaviours. That is, current evidence suggests that the reported supportive attitudes may not convert into actual changes in behaviours, for the inclusion of LGBT+ people (Storr et al. 2021).
- Denison et al. (2020), cite four studies where homophobic language (e.g., faggot, dyke) is also commonly used in sport by athletes, regardless of whether they also claim to have positive attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people.
- In community sport settings, Spaaij et al. (2019) have found people claim to be inclusive and accepting of diverse groups to conform to prevailing social norms that value diversity, and including LGBTQ+ people, but they do not also change their exclusionary or discriminatory behaviours.

- Sport organisations can be guilty of quick fixes in the area, parading in pride marches or at Sydney Mardi Gras, capitalising on media interest around social issues such as marriage equality, or tweeting to endorse events such as International Day Against Homo/Bi/Transphobia (IDAHOBIT). In analysis of practices of LGBT + inclusion though, we are left with empty promises and a commitment which is not enacted and followed through (Storr, 2021).
- A recent examination of LGBTQ+ exclusion from sporting organizations, demonstrated how the efficacy of inclusivity initiatives are limited if they are enacted as an image or representation of diversity without reaching the everyday “lived spaces” and producing real life implications (Lawley, 2020)
- LGBTQ+ participants in Herrick et al.’s (2022) study emphasized that genuinely LGBTQ+ inclusive spaces needed to go beyond ‘performative allyship’. Although the prominent display of Pride flags and stickers may support LGBTQ+ navigation of contexts, this practice must be backed by real and meaningful efforts toward LGBTQ+ inclusivity (Herrick et al., 2022).
- Storr (2021) found that generally, staff within sporting organisations have supportive attitudes towards LGBT + inclusion, however, these are not always accompanied by behaviours and actions such as activism and endorsement; in other words, staff do little to put these LGBT + inclusive attitudes into practice. Some sporting codes spend time on, and direct resources to engaging with LGBT + diversity, but generally have not moved past this stage. They create and modify specific policies central to LGBT + diversity, stage pride rounds and social events, and build awareness campaigns (Storr, 2021).
- Similarly, critique has been made of initiatives that focus solely on education and resources. Researchers and practitioners often suggest a need for educational resources or training programs, yet over the last two-decades, dozens of online and printed educational programs, resources, and manuals on LGBTQ+ inclusion and diversity have been created. There is no published evidence that creating these resources has improved the sport experiences of LGBTQ+ people or that they are valued and used by sport managers and coaches (Denison et al., 2020). According to Denison et al. (2020), it would be prudent to conduct rigorous evaluations of existing materials before additional charitable or public funds are used to develop additional training resources.
- Even when there are organisational attempts to show solidarity and support for LGBTQ+ people in sport, these can often be interpreted as shallow, or ‘rainbow washing’ (Shaw & Cunningham, 2021).
- The research that explores the gap between individual attitudes and cultural change predominantly draws from the scholar Sara Ahmed (2012) who explains that, where diversity initiatives allow people to “fit in” to institutional spaces, this is often done by “folding” these people into institutional norms, thus doing nothing to actually change these norms. This is an important feature of change and should be remembered when designing strategies for LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport.
- This is not to devalue Pride and awareness raising initiatives - any high-profile and regulatory changes are a valuable part of the ‘corporate landscaping’ against which sporting activity takes place. However, the efficacy of these initiatives is limited if it is simply an image of diversity to be “celebrated” and “consumed” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 69) without reaching the everyday “lived spaces” – the locker rooms, pitches and stadia – experienced within sporting institutions (Lawley, 2020).
- Therefore, if organisations and clubs are seeking to make sporting environments safer and more inclusive it is important that caution is taken not to equate individual

attitudes about LGBTQ+ people, or 'performative' rainbow rounds, with meaningful cultural change. Without proper education and support for change there is a risk that some attempts to create inclusive spaces can lead to pseudo-inclusive climates (Piedra et al. 2017).

A need for defining and creating 'safe spaces'

The concept of 'culture' might be difficult to attend to in practical initiatives. To help clarify this from a solutions perspective, the literature that speaks about 'spaces' as being the places where sporting experiences take place is highlighted below. Focusing on 'spaces' seems to be helpful in making a more concrete distinction between attitudes, behaviour and culture. Importantly many LGBTQ+ participants across the papers reviewed here spoke about safe and unsafe spaces. For example:

- Many LGBT+ people, especially trans and gender diverse individuals, do not yet perceive sporting environments as a safe space in which to engage and participate. Perceptions of (un)safe sporting spaces across LGBT+ communities mean sport is not necessarily somewhere they can attend or be themselves (Storr et al., 2021).
- In Herrick et al. (2022), although the concept of a safe or safer space was not strictly defined, it was commonly used by participants to insinuate that at present, physical activity spaces are not safe and/or could be safer for LGBTQ+ participation.
- Lawley (2020) published a whole paper, deeply theorised, on 'spaces. Lawley argues that change initiatives are only effective if they engage with individual spaces within sports institutions rather than at a blanket institutional level. Lawley (2020) encourages change initiatives to focus on the spaces where sport takes place – the locker rooms, pitches, stadia, etc. - where the effects of heteronormativity are both generated and experienced. The "lived space" is the embodied and directly experienced context and is the site of power relations which produce both gendered sports spaces and the marginalisation experienced by LGBT participants.
- For many LGBTQ+ people who are not currently participating in sport, a safe space is a supportive, community space that prioritises social connections, belonging and wellbeing. For example, in Herrick et al. (2022), they found that LGBTQ+ people were more inclined to participate in group physical activities if there is a LGBTQ+ social component.
- LGBT community sports groups are a form of LGBT inclusion initiative. Rather than engaging directly with mainstream sports spaces, they have emerged as a "counterspace" and as queer alternative spaces to subvert the 'heterosexist culture' (Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020). LGBTQ+ clubs certainly have a role to play in creating options for LGBTQ+ people wanting to participate in sport, but they cannot be the sole offering, as Shaw and Cunningham (2021) note gay and inclusive sport organizations have been criticized for their exclusionary practices, especially when it comes to trans and gender diverse participants.
- Lawley (2020) argues that LGBT sports groups can reinforce stereotypes that LGBT people are outsiders to mainstream sports spaces. LGBT sports groups create counter spaces which present different norms for their participants, but by moving away from mainstream sports spaces they too can sometimes have a limited ability to widen the impact of their change to the mainstream, and indeed often find themselves replicating normative behaviours and assimilating to the norms of mainstream governing bodies. In both cases, they skirt around rather than fully engage with the lived spaces where effective change can be realised (Lawley, 2020).

- According to Herrick and Duncan (2018b) a safe space must be defined and created with an intersectional lens that considers the differences within the LGBTQ+ community as well as the common threads. Denison et al. (2020) echoed this, stating that intersectionality is an important theoretical concept and in practice, tailored approaches will likely be needed – put simply: stopping homophobic language by teenage athletes will likely require a very different approach than that used to stop the state-sanctioned exclusion of trans people.
- Transgender people are increasingly being recognized as those who are discriminated against, even within inclusive sport organizations (Lawley, 2018). Whereas transgender's focus is primarily on gender identity rather than solely on sexuality, gender and sexuality are related, complex concerns. According to Lawley (2018), transgender participants may find themselves isolated and excluded from LGBQ inclusive sport organizations, compounding the challenges that trans people confront in sport.
- Based on the literature, there is a nuanced and tenuous relationship between LGBTQ+ exclusivity and inclusivity, wherein many participants advocated for the creation of LGBTQ+ only spaces and programs but there are identified issues with this separatism. There is a need to consider both forms and centring 'safety and inclusion' at the heart of both, should be a priority. It is recommended that organisers of LGBTQ+ programs should ideally utilise co-design principles to create bespoke experiences that are safe, affirming and fun.
- As Sara Ahmed (2006) conceptualises, safety shapes how bodies are made to either "feel at home" or feel unwelcome in certain spaces. Research and evaluation of LGBTQ+ strategies and initiatives should not just focus on measuring the number of participants but pay attention to how participants 'feel' in sport spaces.

Who should bear responsibility for LGBTQ+ inclusion and safety in community sport?

- The engagement and increased awareness of the need for LGBT+-focused diversity work within sport has been driven largely by LGBT+ communities themselves, in response to their ongoing experiences of homophobia/transphobia and discrimination and a desire to broaden sports participation opportunities within their community (Jeanes et al., 2019). However, the personal toll and impact on volunteers and members who give extensive time towards the groups and their clubs through diversity work are significant for many LGBT+ people (Storr et al., 2021).
- In recent decades there has been a growth in groups which engage in campaigning and advocacy for LGBT issues in sport, alongside "categorical" (Elling et al., 2003) LGBT community sports organisations which provide sporting activities specifically to LGBT participants, with many areas of crossover between the two (Lawley 2020).
- Lawley (2020) discussed how in 'mainstream' LGBT+ inclusion attempts there are a myriad of power relationships at play. Lawley (2020) highlights the relevance of the gatekeepers or people in positions of power and influence over specific spaces where sport takes place when considering policy and diversity initiatives. Lawley (2020) argues that these gatekeepers can play an important role in connecting the broader institutional celebratory, symbolic gestures (Pride Rounds etc) and the implementation of practices to create 'safe' spaces (Lawley, 2020).
- Resistance by sport 'managers' in LGBTQ+ inclusion is well documented. Shaw's (2019) study for example revealed that managers self-identified as "inexpert" in this

area. This means that they acknowledged solutions were needed but felt addressing LGBTQ+ inclusion was complex and established themselves as “inexpert” around how to move forward (pg. 254). Shaw describes this as a form of resistance to this area of diversity because acknowledging the need for solutions but taking a position of “unknowing” allowed managers to symbolically be “seen to be doing something positive; however, by establishing a lack of knowledge in the area, they are also able to avoid final responsibility for pursuing change” (pg. 254).

- To overcome resistance by sport managers, it is important to provide opportunities to foster collaborative relationships within and between sport organisations, community clubs and LGBTQ+ people, organisations and groups. Providing scaffolded support for sport managers who are legitimately unsure of how to navigate the complexity of LGBTQ+ diversity, can facilitate mainstream sport managers to become much-needed champions within their sector (Cunningham & Sartore, 2010)
- Herrick et al. (2022) point out the need to balance valuing LGBTQ+ voices and experiences with appropriate compensation. They note that as a part of inclusivity training for staff, members that self-identify as LGBTQ+ should be invited to speak on their lived experiences. However, the task of educating and informing staff should not fall solely to LGBTQ+ and other marginalized communities (Herrick et al. 2022). Any labour and time provided by communities should be compensated and respected by the fitness corporations and sporting organizations requesting assistance (Herrick et al., 2022).
- Drummond et al. (2021) highlight another problem which is that clubs are struggling to create strategies with respect to the way in which they develop LGBTQ+ policies and then implement the practices. Many of the clubs are essentially run by volunteers often with little or no formal education, knowledge and understanding around issues associated with inclusivity where gender and sexual diversity is concerned (Drummond et al., 2021). It is not uncommon for clubs to be almost 100% reliant on volunteers to keep the club functioning. This includes coaching, committee membership, fund raising and transport to name few areas. Some volunteers may be opposed to creating change for LGBTQ+ inclusion; others may be champions for the cause, while others simply may not care. However, this does not make them less valuable to the club, as most volunteers are doing what they perceive to be the best thing for the organization. Drummond et al. (2021) state that education is the key, which they acknowledge, is “easier said than done.” The need to develop education tools is incumbent upon the governing bodies for the clubs to implement in the best way they see fit. How this is done is a significant question that requires further consultation. Another significant question is who pays for this? (Drummond et al., 2021)

Future research

While this literature review has been prepared with the objective of informing an evaluation, there are a few final comments about the future of research about LGBTQ+ inclusive sport that are instructive as they point to the gaps that new initiatives (if evaluated in collaboration with researchers) could address.

- Future research must explore and evidence the positive impact that affirming and welcoming sport environments can engender amongst LGBT+ people. Building an evidence base on how sport can positively enrich the lives of LGBT+ people, and under what conditions, will enhance research and practice. Sport can have a positive social impact through targeted programs, but we need to better understand the mechanisms and climate that foster such positive outcomes (Storr et al., 2021).

- To improve inclusivity initiatives, there exists a pressing need to listen to LGBTQ+ communities to identify meaningful and practical solutions to eliminate discrimination and generate genuine inclusivity across physical activity contexts (Herrick et al., 2020).
- Sports initiatives designed to change heteronormative cultures which marginalise and exclude LGBT participants are a complex effort which needs to engage with heteronormative cultures in the multiple, heterogeneous, institutional lived spaces in the sporting organisations in which they are found. Rather than relying solely on regulatory changes and campaign slogans, comprehensive education and training is needed to translate and disseminate the messages of these campaigns throughout these spaces (Lawley, 2020).
- Further research is also required, for example, on the nature and scale of inclusion within gay and inclusive organizations, and the realities of “grass roots” sport and sexual and gender inclusion, and move towards finding an inclusive space in organizations that realizes the potential for income, revenue, and new memberships by reaching out to marginalized groups but does not succumb to the trap of rainbow-washing (Shaw & Cunningham, 2021).

Conclusion

The aim of this literature review was to guide a research-informed evaluation of the Pride in Sport Festival. Attempting to find solutions to LGBTQ+ exclusion and discrimination in sport is a complex issue with many layers to be addressed. The literature that focuses on solutions to LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport is still somewhat in its infancy. There are a few key takeaways from this literature review, however, that can help inform evaluations of LGBTQ+ inclusion initiative or strategy such as the Pride in Sport Festival.

- 1) Acknowledge discrimination and harms but also focus on celebrating inclusive practices.
- 2) Focus on cultural change rather than attitudinal change.
- 3) Focus on creating safe spaces for positive, affirming experiences especially for new participants.
- 4) People with responsibility for designing and delivering LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives should be cognisant of intersectional differences within the LGBTQ+ community.
- 5) An explicit acknowledgement should be made of the volunteer-heavy community sport sector and where possible eliminate instances of ‘diversity tax’ for LGBTQ+ people.
- 6) Provide a supportive environment to those in sport organisations who would otherwise feel “inexpert” and unwilling to try new initiatives.
- 7) Evaluation of initiatives should not be solely driven by participant numbers but should also include the analysis of experiences (safe, affirming and fun).

In the section that follows, results from the survey are presented. This section has a focus on the delivery of the activations that formed part of the Pride in Sport Festival, from the perspectives of participants. Following the presentation of survey results, the Pride in Sport Festival concept and outcomes are assessed considering the findings of the literature above.

Survey results

Demographics of respondents

107 people completed the survey. The specific ages of participants were not collected, but respondents were asked which decade they were born, with participants birth year ranging from 1950s – 2000s. Most participants were born in the 1990s (43%), followed by the 1980s (16%) and 2000s (16%). Therefore, the sample reflects mostly millennial/Gen Z participants.

In terms of gender identity, 62.6% of the respondents self-identified as men or male, 24.3% were women or female, and 11.2% identified as non-binary. 17.8% responded yes to the question: 'does the sex you were assigned at birth differ from your gender identity'. This means the survey includes responses from a larger proportion of trans and gender diverse people than population estimates.

85% of respondents identified as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

In terms of cultural identity, 1.9% of respondents identified as Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and 23.4% self-identified as culturally and, or linguistically diverse.

12.3% of respondents said they had an ongoing disability or physical condition that restricts their life in some way.

Respondents represented 12 different 'activations' across the festival and represented the following sports: Dodgeball, Roller Derby, Rugby Union, Softball, Multisport (University), Squash, Surfing, Swimming, Tennis, Volleyball, Water Polo

12.6% of respondents hosted an activation and 87.4% were participants.

Respondents were also asked to select what role they had in the Pride in Sport Festival.

This was divided as: 89 players, 7 coaches, 5 volunteers, 3 paid staff and 3 'other'.

Perspectives of participants

Survey snapshot

- ❖ **50%** of respondents had never participated in the sport before the activation.
- ❖ **75%** of respondents said that the program increased the amount of physical activity they participated in per week.
- ❖ **96%** of respondents said they would remain this active after the conclusion of the program.
- ❖ **100%** of respondents would recommend the program or event to others.

Factors supporting participation

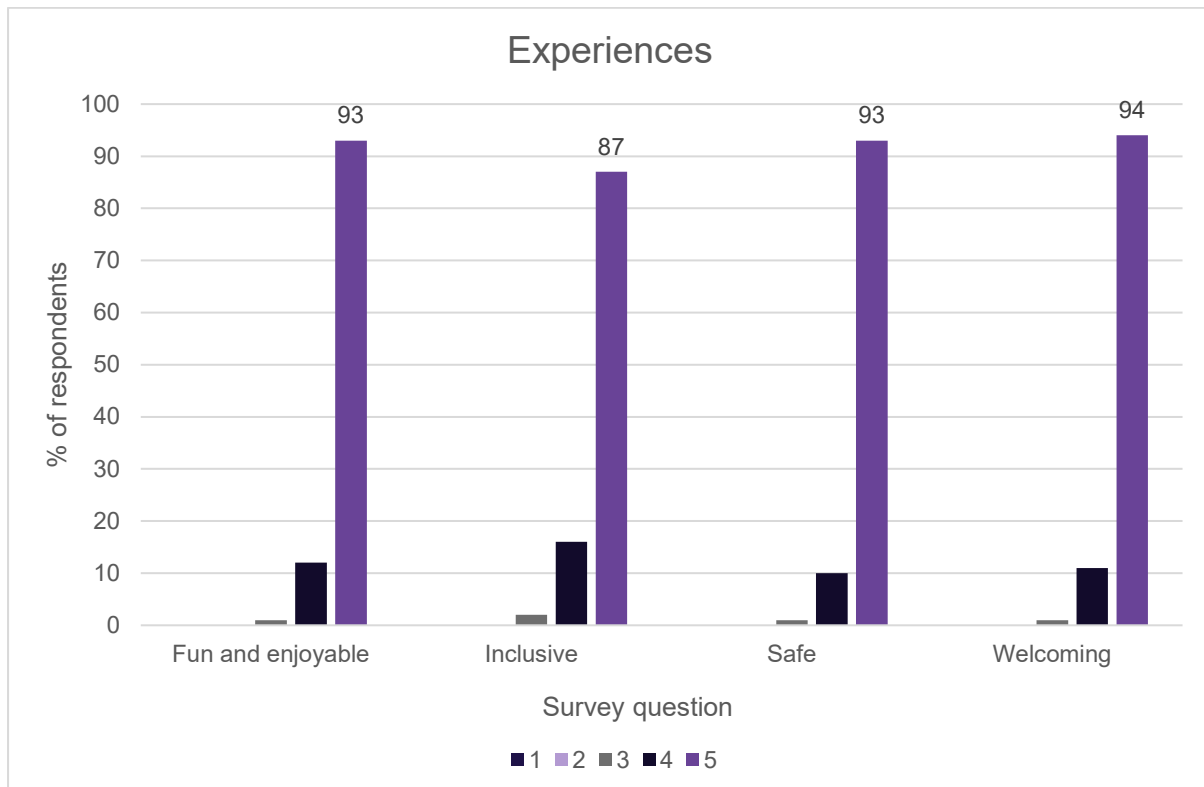
Respondents were asked to select factors that supported them to participate in the activations. Respondents could select more than one option.

Results to this question are presented in order from top to bottom according to frequency of selected. Note that easy, safe, fun, social, time, and skills/fitness appear here as the most selected factors supporting participation in the activations.

Reason	Number	Percent of cases
It provided an easy, safe, and fun way to try something new	70	66%
It was social	69	65.1%
It was on at a time that suited me	68	64.2%
Provided an opportunity to improve my skills/fitness	68	64.2%
It was cheap/free	62	58.5%
It didn't require a long-term commitment	40	37.7%
It was close to where I live/work/study	38	35.8%
It was culturally and/or socially relevant and sensitive to my needs	33	31.1%
Caters to my needs as a person with a disability	4	3.8%

Experiences

Respondents were asked to rate their experiences against a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (extremely unsatisfactory) to 5 (extremely satisfactory) for fun and enjoyment; inclusivity; safety; and how welcoming the experience was. Participants were overwhelmingly satisfied with their experiences of the activations, scoring mostly 5s (extremely satisfied) and 4s (satisfied), with only 1-2 scoring neutral, and no dissatisfaction scores (1s or 2s) at all, as shown in the graph below.



Reasons for recommending the program to others

- ❖ 100% of respondents said they would recommend the program to others.

Respondents were also asked to write why they would recommend the activation to others. 33 respondents entered open text responses.

Some examples included:

- The inclusive community atmosphere was really amazing.
- It set an inclusive place for queer people to get involved and ask questions about sport. I felt so welcomed by a club who provide a safe space for queer members.
- A non-threatening environment to try out a sport.
- The people that ran the event were amazing and lovely, they were so friendly and welcoming. They tried to make it as fun as possible and I really enjoyed it.
- Encourages a healthy lifestyle and actively participate in the community.

The top fifteen words used in open text are presented below in a word cloud. Presenting these responses in this way illustrates the strengths of the activations from the participants' perspectives. There was very consistent messaging across the activations that the experiences were fun, inclusive, welcoming, LGBTQ+ safe, and social.



LGBTQIA+ attitudes, allyship, body image, and mood

The survey also included a cluster of questions around allyship and attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community, in-group ties to LGBTQIA+ members within the sport, and individual measures of mood and body image. These questions were mostly intended to be used in the follow-up survey to measure change (or not) over time. Unfortunately, because no respondents elected to opt-in for the follow up survey, the data to these questions is difficult to interpret. However, a few key factors stand out for this cohort and could be useful in future evaluations.

For example, this cohort overall had very positive feelings towards the LGBTQIA+ community scoring 5.54/6. They also reported a mean of 3.81 for the BAS-2 body image scale, indicating they had moderate/high body appreciation while playing sport. And the cohort reported a mean of 5.87/7 for belonging/ties, indicating the cohort overall felt very connected to LGBTQIA+ people in their team/sport.

Research-informed success markers

Snapshot of success

Feature	Achieved	Relative Rating ★ ★ ★
1) Acknowledge discrimination and harms but also focus on celebrating inclusive practices	✓	★ ★
2) Focus on cultural change rather than attitudinal change	✓	★ ★
3) Focus on creating safe spaces for positive, affirming experiences especially for new participants	✓	★ ★ ★
4) People with responsibility for designing and delivering LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives should be cognisant of intersectional differences within the LGBTQ+ community	✓	★
5) An explicit acknowledgement should be made of the volunteer-heavy community sport sector and where possible eliminate instances of 'diversity tax' for LGBTQ+ people	✓	★ ★ ★
6) Provide a supportive environment to those in sport organisations who would otherwise feel "inexpert" and unwilling to try new initiatives	✓	★ ★ ★
7) Evaluation of initiatives should not be solely driven by participant numbers but should also include the analysis of experiences (safe, affirming and fun)	✓	★ ★

Demonstrated Examples

In the following section, findings from the survey and the qualitative aspects of the evaluation are drawn to together to describe the ways in which the Pride in Sport Festival measured up against the markers for success established in the literature. The examples help to provide further insights into the strengths of the festival, and context for the 'relative ratings'. It is acknowledged that it is impressive that the Pride in Sport Festival achieved all the markers, illustrating that the Pride in Sport Festival was 'cutting-edge' in terms of an LGBTQ+ inclusion initiative. The relative ratings are added to provide some guidance to the Pride in Sport team about where the specific strengths lay. While most of the examples focus on the strengths of the festival, as highlighted across the interviews and other materials, there are a few areas for improvement identified.

Celebrating inclusive practices

Acknowledge discrimination and harms but also focus on celebrating inclusive practices [★ ★]

By focusing on the LGBTQ+ community and leveraging the visibility of a festival concept, Pride in Sport aimed to create an inviting and celebratory environment that encouraged initial engagement. This aim was recognised by Delivery Leads. For example:

I think having this, this festival as a regular and the funding available as a regular thing could really support, I guess, programs at universities, programs at community clubs, regular events that that these clubs sort of may already be doing to some extent, but also let them elevate it and let them reach more people. The activations allow for that bridging of that gap between having someone able to come along to a come and try, and then converting that into what is their journey beyond that. Maybe they found that actually, this sport isn't for them, and they're glad they had a go. Or is there a path for them, to say, actually, I really love this activity. I'd like to do it regularly. I'd like to make it part of my life. [Delivery Lead, UD]

It was a significant feature of the festival that mainstream sports organisations were supported with activations and events to increase participation of the LGBTQ+ community in sport, as well as LGBTQ+ clubs. Bringing together Delivery Leads from such a wide spectrum allowed for learning and celebration to co-exist. This was especially noted at the monthly roundtables – where palpable ‘queer joy’ emanated from the discussions. The positive environment that the Pride in Sport team fostered allowed for Delivery Leads to feel that doing inclusion work doesn't have to be a chore but can also be fun and rewarding. This seemed to be especially important for Delivery Leads who were new to LGBTQ+ inclusion and were not connected to members of the community.

There was deliberate support for LGBTQ+ clubs, and the rationale for this clearly reflects the idea that initiatives should acknowledge discrimination and harms but also focus on celebrating inclusive practices:

The LGBTQ+ clubs are growing themselves, but those clubs exist because of ongoing challenges in sport and so it's nice to be able to support them in some way. [Project team member, Pride in Sport, CD]

It was noted in some interviews, however, that the LGBTQ+ clubs would like to see their role more clearly articulated:

I come from a sport that's already prioritizing LGBTQ+ inclusion, obviously, so in my head it does make sense for it to be about platforming pride and putting pride into mainstream sports, like, especially with the fact that they wanted people to, like, display a website statement and stuff like that like that. It felt very much that their goal was to shift existing sporting institutions which might have a more mainstream background and it just felt a bit funny being a sport

with, like, really strong LGBTQ membership like, they were trying to support us to do more of that, when I'm like, no, we're actually doing that. And so, like, a bunch of their resources didn't super translate for us. Which was, again, fine, yeah. But like, just felt like we played a different role in the ecosystem. [Delivery Lead, KX]

This is an important consideration as buy-in from the LGBTQ+ clubs is important to the success of the whole of ecosystem approach the Pride in Sport Festival is trying to achieve.

I think it's important for sports, or for specific teams or specific leagues that are already really doing the work with inclusivity, or sports that are, you know, like, a bit weird and a bit gay, to put it really fondly. Like, I think it's so important that we are, like, supporting those sports and also because, you know, maybe being a bit outside of the mainstream, like an avenue for people that don't think sports is for them, I think that's still really important, and kind of allowing those groups or those sports, those leagues, to keep hosting events like this. But I always think it should be like 50/50 because there are also people that want to play, you know, your traditional sports, that deserve to have a place as well, and even if, like, I think if the sports or the clubs that have a long way to go can start moving forward, that's really, really important. I think in sport as a whole, the more that we can like come together to be an inclusive space the better. [Delivery Lead, LG]

It is important to continue to balance the needs of both mainstream sports organisations and the LGBTQ+ clubs in their inclusion efforts. As one of the Delivery Leads (not from an LGBTQ+ club) aptly put it, it's about providing choices:

It should be available as a choice. And you know, not everybody from LGBTQI+ plus community or allies have the choice to turn up to any club or as privileged as what some of us are, so that it should be, it just, it should just be an opportunity and a choice. [Delivery Lead, LN]

It should also be noted that the LGBTQ+ clubs who were supported had very high rates of participation in the survey and very positive experiences overall, LGBTQ+ clubs clearly still function as significant places for enhancing LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport and physical activity, and as such, should be supported and celebrated.

Joining this club has brought so much joy to my life. As a new resident of Australia, gaining queer friends was something I was nervous would take me a long time, but I can say after only a few weeks I felt like a proud member of the team. [Survey participant, 73]

A recommendation for this section is to recognise and celebrate more of the work of LGBTQ+ clubs during the festival, and perhaps incorporate their work more into the training and educational resources as exemplars of inclusive practice.

Cultural change

Focus on cultural change rather than attitudinal change [★ ★]

The strategy behind the Australian Pride in Sport Festival for increasing and sustaining participation in sport and physical activity was comprehensive and multifaceted. The philosophy behind the festival concept and the deliberate choices made by the highly experienced and knowledgeable Pride in Sport team was clearly aimed at moving beyond attitudinal change. The wrap-around activities and community support provided to Delivery Leads clearly demonstrated an intent to bring in those people ready to work towards cultural change.

We've had 10 years now where the amount of work that focused on integrity, governance and policy means that - and this is backed up in our own survey data - that we've largely cleaned up shop inside sporting organisations, but we are at that point now, where we can work with many sports that have established policies, we can work with them at the front line actually making these sort of concrete changes because if we don't reach community, the policy's not going to make a difference. [Project team member, Pride in Sport, CD]

Individual Delivery Leads were positioned as knowledgeable and capable and were empowered to design and deliver their own activations with embedded support and appropriate education where necessary. The supplementary education that was provided included: LGBTQ+ Awareness; Empowering Allies; Trans and Gender diverse awareness; LGBTQ+ Inclusion for coaches. Pride in Sport were able to target specific training to Delivery Leads where required. Funded organisations were also required to make an organisational commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion on their website. Pride in Sport also overtly referred to, and tried to avoid, 'rainbow washing'. This was explicitly mentioned on the festival website in the FAQs and in interviews with project leads:

If this was simply providing no strings attached funds to people, what we will see is branded water bottles, which is not going to raise awareness. It's not going to challenge stigma. It's not going to, you know, make the sort of changes that we need to see at a whole sport level and even at an inclusive sport level... One of the strings attached to the festival was that they needed to have a position on inclusion. They needed to make a statement publicly about what the club's values are, what the club's position is when it comes to discrimination, bullying, harassment, vilification. Too many people leave that unsaid, and that is a problem. And so, the strings were really important to us. Yes, we're giving them agency over how they spend their money and what type of activation works for them. But, you have to have some conversations with us about understanding your sport. The education's there. But also, you know, that policy piece, that visibility piece. [Project team member, Pride in Sport, CD]

Some Delivery Leads also recognised the importance of doing more than an activation, and really used the activation to spark broader change and commitment for the future.

I got a good feeling just seeing new people having a great time, having fun, laughing and giggling because it's my sport, and they're having fun in it, yeah, but I think the most important takeaways are there's a presence on our website, in our newsletter, on our socials and we found someone who is happy to start pushing it here instead of me. I don't have the time to push it, and I'm not the right person. I'm not in the community. [Delivery Lead, KS]

One come and try event might not lend itself to be considered 'cultural change' but the way the festival was cleverly designed with layers of support and such a wide range of activations funded, the collective impact of the come and try activations was profound. The Pride in Sport Festival community were involved in collectively changing the culture of the national sport ecosystem.

sport is quite heavily underfunded and there are key people in these organisations that have that spark that want to be able to create cultural change and they want to get more LGBT people playing sport. So, I feel like, for me, this festival gave people a reason. [Project team member, Pride in Sport, ED]

One of the more innovative activations involved 'mainstream' university clubs working with LGBTQ+ community clubs to design and deliver their activation. This type of collaboration and co-learning is an excellent example of the power of the festival concept in delivering more than a come and try day but something that inspired and works towards cultural change.

In our multisport event, the aim was that our university sporting club would partner with the LGBTQ+ community club. It gave our university clubs exposure of how to run an inclusive event, which is part of their learnings, being an allyship club, to also engage together to see how they can work together. And the aim was obviously to promote LGBTQI+ inclusion, but also show that we're trying to increase opportunity and choice for community, and that they should have choice and opportunity as much as everybody else. And so really trying to, I guess, start that process and encourage clubs to continue to be welcoming and inclusive. [Delivery Lead, LN]

It is highly recommended that future iterations of the festival support Delivery Leads who are trying to be innovative and prioritise those working collectively toward cultural change.

Safe spaces

*Focus on creating safe spaces for positive, affirming experiences
especially for new participants [★ ★ ★]*

It was clear through the survey results that participants found the activations to be 'safe spaces'. Pride in Sport were clear in their intent to bring this program to where sport takes place. The community come and try sessions took place across a wide range of pools, beaches, fields and courts and was very clearly targeted at reaching the people.

Similar sentiments about safe, welcoming and affirming spaces were received by participants and Delivery Leads. Several quotes are presented below to demonstrate the consistency with which people described the Pride in Sport Festival activities in relation to safe and welcoming spaces.

It was super welcoming, super beginner friendly and super queer friendly. Sport can be very gendered or sometimes I can be unsure if my sexuality will be judged. In this environment playing with all genders meant nonbinary folk could get involved and I didn't have to worry about my sexuality, and I felt more comfortable with having body hair as a woman. It was also great to try out before committing and knowing there's an intra-club comp means I get to play in a social environment that's less competitive, which I had trouble finding in the past. [Survey participant, 48]

And so there was, it was so funny. You'd look across the activation and there'd be a hockey ball, but then there would just be people vibing in the middle of the field. So, I think we got to create a really, really good, warm, welcoming, low barrier, yeah, participation opportunity. [Delivery Lead, LN]

Everybody who was there just had a fun day. It was, it was a lot of fun. The [external LGBTQ+ organisation] people we work with are just fantastic. And they reported back to saying how great it was for their group to get on a court, hit a tennis ball, and feel that they were in a place where they were welcomed and accepted. [Delivery Lead, EL]

One of the guys posted, this is my favourite part of the week is going to this. You know, another one of our lesbian members shared one of the posts and said, this is one of, one of my new safe spaces that I really enjoy going to, [Delivery Lead, EM]

The Pride in Sport Festival supported and delivered an incredibly wide range of unique activations. It is impressive to see how clearly aligned these activations were with aspirations of safety. The Case Studies on pages 37-39 also highlight some of the features at the delivery level that help create safe spaces for the participants. Future iterations of funding could prioritise those using co-design principles to define and create safe spaces (especially to target a broader range of participants - see section on intersectionality and diversity).

Intersectionality and diversity

People with responsibility for designing and delivering LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives should be cognisant of intersectional differences within the LGBTQ+ community [★]

The Pride in Sport team were very clear on their understanding of intersectionality and trying to support clubs to think about diversity within the LGBTQ+ community:

Across the queer sports sector, we often have inclusion without diversity. And so, we're very keen to see how these clubs can grow in a way that recognises that either through offering activities that cater to a different age or a different skill level or by engaging in some of some of that reflective process to recognise why is it that they tend to attract only a certain cultural demographic. That getting clubs (especially the LGBTQ+ clubs) to ask themselves questions about inclusion and diversity is always the hardest part. A lot of them believe because they exist, they have ticked every necessary box. [Project team member, Pride in Sport, CD]

The same level of acknowledgement of intersectional differences did not really come through in the interviews with Delivery Leads, however. Indeed, some Delivery Leads new to LGBTQ+ inclusion were somewhat homogenising in their language, and some of the LGBTQ+ clubs really had to be pushed to answer questions about diversity (including even considering gender diversity in their membership). It should also be noted that the gender breakdown of participants, while encouraging in the non-binary and transgender identifying participants, still skewed heavily toward men/males (in the survey, at least). Some events had more cultural diversity than others but there is room for improvement in the delivery of activations that cater for a broader range of people. Utilising the Australian Sports Commission (2025) Road map (Intersectional framework) in education sessions and workshops could be very helpful for future iterations of the Pride in Sport Festival (see also, Lambert et al. 2025).

Reducing 'diversity tax'

An explicit acknowledgement should be made of the volunteer-heavy community sport sector and where possible eliminate instances of 'diversity tax' for LGBTQ+ people [★★★]

Like the previous section on intersectionality and diversity, the Pride in Sport team certainly acknowledged the tensions and issues around who should bear responsibility for LGBTQ+ inclusion initiatives, and the broader cultural change required.

As a project lead indicates below there was a deliberate decision to fund coaches for some activations. This is especially important for those in the LGBTQ+ clubs.

It lends itself to that discussion about the responsibility that sits on us to fund and create our own inclusive spaces. ... It was nice to know that coaches were being paid, that officials were being supported and that, yeah, that's kind of important to us. [Project team member, Pride in Sport, CD]

The sentiment about paying coaches was shared with Delivery Leads as a particular benefit and positive aspect of the Pride in Sport Festival.

The most meaningful thing was being able to pay coaches, which we had a big chat about in the roundtables, yeah. Because, you know, for some a lot of clubs, that's pretty stock standard. But for us, we rely a lot on volunteer coaches, and so being able to pay coaches and have the session feel really supported and like, mean that participants were able to have a really positive experience, rather than like, yeah, sometimes when we run things like this, it's like, a bit messy. We're not able to, like, you know, support people answer all the questions or take as much time as we want. So, I think being able to deliver, like, a higher quality program where coaches are supported directly, was really, that was, that was what was cool [Delivery Lead, LG]

The question of who is responsible and who should pay for inclusion initiatives is an important one that resonated across all the interviews. As has been highlighted in previous sections, the strength of the festival was made possible through the collective power of the activations. LGBTQ+ community, allies and supportive sport providers all came together as one united, movement committed to LGBTQ+ inclusion. This idea of 'strength in community' is the at the heart of the Pride in Sport Festival concept. This unification of such disparate areas of the sport eco-system was only possible through government funding that allowed a paid Pride in Sport staff member to co-ordinate the program, make all the valued connections, and offer marketing, administrative and educational support throughout the duration of the festival. As such, even with paid positions, funding and burnout is an issue with creating a sustainable program at this national scale.

As a Pride in Sport member eloquently put it:

This can't exist solely because of the philanthropy and energy of one human. It has to be something that we can move forward with in a way that isn't going to crush or disadvantage any of the people taking part. [Project team member, Pride in Sport, CD]

Several of the Delivery Leads also expressed a sense of weight and cost that is associated with providing volunteer-run activities for LGBTQ+ members.

I did, go to a round table, and I'm fairly certain that every single person there was, like, a paid staff member on behalf of their sporting institution, which is fine, but like, yeah, as a volunteer I didn't have a lot of time to be there. So, I think, like, some of that's a lot harder if you ask. And I think the type of support you're offering is going to be different if it's someone who's in a paid capacity or someone not. [Delivery Lead, KX]

We really focused on, I guess, on the Pride in Sport festival aspects of bringing new people into the sport and making sport more accessible for the LGBTQI plus community, and because obviously we are volunteer run, and we really try and keep costs down for our members as much as possible to maintain that accessibility. So, we see grants and sponsorships of this nature quite important to our future and future of other community clubs as well [Project team member, Pride in Sport, ED]

It was interesting to see one Delivery Lead relishing the support of new volunteers that the Pride in Sport Festival sparked.

It was a quite a lot that landed on me to start off with. Now we've got all these extra members who are keen to get involved and things like that. So, I've trained up an extra coach. I've got a couple other guys who are keen to train up to be a coach as well. Yeah. And you know, in the coming three or four months, we've got the next AGM, where I'm planning to get a lot more of these new people onto the committee. So, I've already got somebody who's taken over social media, you know, I've got somebody who's organizing social events. So, it's, it's getting there now, which is really good, because I'd love to be able to step back a little bit just be a coach, or, you know, join in a little bit more. But you know that stuff takes time. [Delivery Lead, EM]

While there should be an expectation that volunteer work should not always fall on the shoulders of LGBTQ+ community members, perhaps more energy could be invested into the 'volunteer' stream of the festival to support the delivery and promotion of the festival and encourage creative ways of inspiring new volunteers into LGBTQ+ sport (beyond coaching roles). Festival organisers could work on a strategy to facilitate people with relevant experience and skills to support LGBTQ+ initiatives - either through a volunteer collective, a 'come and try' volunteering matching service or an 'air tasker' for LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport. By focusing on increasing the volunteer base, especially within the LGBTQ+ community this could be another way to bring LGBTQ+ people into sport in an easy, non-threatening way, and they may move from volunteers to participants.

Building supportive environments

Provide a supportive environment to those in sport organisations who would otherwise feel “inexpert” and unwilling to try new initiatives [★ ★ ★]

One of the major strengths of the Pride in Sport Festival was the positive and encouraging way that Delivery Leads were supported in their journey to designing and delivering and LGBTQ+ inclusion activation.

One of the really key things that we wanted to teach people was how easy it is to be inclusive. So, once you kind of open that door and give them the opportunity, it comes in so many different forms. [Project team member, Pride in Sport, ED]

This goal was skilfully executed by the Pride in Sport team and clearly resonated with the Delivery Leads. For example, in response to a question about advice they would give to a future host, one of the Delivery Leads replied:

Firstly, just to do it, just to give it a go, yeah. And then also to ask questions, to ask questions to the community, to pride in sport, because then you find out what you don't know. So just ask as many questions as you can, and just to do it, because I think a lot of people are afraid, afraid of it, afraid of what they don't know, or something they haven't done before. But I think hopefully it can only have a good outcome. [Delivery Lead, HC]

Interestingly when Delivery Leads were asked about challenges, most spoke about logistical issues with contracts and timing. No-one mentioned that they felt ill-equipped to do the work. One participant spoke about not being the “right person” to continue to this work, but this participant also completed training, attended all the round tables and was enthusiastic about future initiatives.

One of the resounding successes of the Pride in Sport Festival was the connections and community that was built, and Pride in Sport provided an essential ‘bridging role’ that allowed sport organisations to have a go, but in their own safe and supportive environment.

Having an organisation with people with lived experience that work in this area to connect with and creating that connection with an organisation that knows what they're doing and knows what they're talking about to bounce off ideas, ask for help, make mistakes, not know the right thing to say, and just be able to have a space where we can give them confidence and give them reassurance and give them guidance. ...We understand sport and we understand LGBT communities, and we can kind of help them put the pieces together because they have the skills, they have the knowledge, but they just need the confidence to go through with that and we're able to facilitate those conversations and have the resources to be able to give that back to them and for them to be able to go for it on their own. So, I can guarantee every person that engaged in the pride and sport festival this year now knows more, has more confidence and understands how to implement an inclusive participation focused activation idea more than they did before. [Project team member, Pride in Sport, ED]

This goal was clearly achieved, with many of the Delivery Leads speaking at length about how much the support and connections with other LGBTQ+ organisations outside of sport were so pivotal to their success.

I think that for our first time, having the connection with [LGBTQ+ org] was great, because the people that were in that community obviously knew that that was a safe community for them, and that if they were going to be part of something, then that was a trusted company. I think it would be different if we didn't have that, and we would be going out on our own to sort of find the participants, because we've done a lot of work in this space, and that's what's important for me to build now. But I think working with them, they kind of knew this is our community, and so this is a safe activity for us to do. So, we're really lucky with that. [Delivery Lead, HC]

the key to the whole thing is getting a partnership going with a local LGBTQ advocacy group like we have with [our partner], they are so supportive, and obviously, so important in getting the word out to the community. Yeah, I think that that's, a very important step for any sport who wants to hold a similar event, to do, to engage with a local group like that. [Delivery Lead, EM]

This final quote beautifully captures how a Delivery Lead that might have once been in the category of self-identifying “inexpert” did not use this as an excuse for inaction and instead utilised the support from Pride in Sport to design and deliver something new, for new participants.

I knew I needed some help from people in the community. To word things better, to make sure I'm not putting my foot in the mouth all the time, to target some more specific advertising with the wording. [Delivery Lead, KS]

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Pride in Sport team continue their work in community sport, and share their success of building community, facilitating productive relationships, and providing visibility and educational support through the Pride in Sport Festival. The Pride in Sport team provided an exceptionally supportive environment to facilitate those working (or not yet working) towards a safer, more welcoming sporting environment for LGBTQ+ people.

Expand evaluation methods

Evaluation of initiatives should not be solely driven by participant numbers but should include the analysis of experiences (safe, affirming, and fun)

[★ ★]

The evaluators aimed to gather qualitative data (group discussions with leaders of activations) and quantitative data (post-activation and follow-up surveys from leaders and participants) about participants' and leaders' experiences and outcomes of the Pride in Sport Festival. However, some pivots had to be made as response rates for the survey and focus groups were not as expected. Respondents to the survey did not add details to be contacted for the post-activation follow-up survey, which made it very difficult to measure impact over time. Likewise with the focus groups, evaluators had to pivot in many instances from a group interview to a one-on-one interview because scheduling was challenging. This is the nature of working with volunteers in already time poor and sometimes over-surveyed population (LGBTQ+). This meant that while the evaluators had hoped to evaluate changes in attitudes and perceptions in relation to the festival, this was not possible. Instead, the evaluation focus was on program effectiveness and looking at the strengths of successful activations, how to improve future iterations of the Pride in Sport Festival, and sustain progress made towards greater LGBTQ+ inclusion in community sport across Australia.

The Pride in Sport team acknowledged the issues with survey recruitment and drop-out post-activation. Delivery Leads expressed sentiments aligned with a more qualitative approach and focus on journey towards lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity and the Pride in Sport team were interested in exploring qualitative responses in-line with the research (literature review) and the activation Delivery Leads' insights.

While we do have sort of a harder metrics on, how many people convert, and can we get the club growing? It's more about what the other side of the story is. Just giving people a taste of team sport. And even if they found that, oh, you know, [this sport], isn't, for me, maybe I want to do something that's a little bit different, or maybe a little bit less regular... they might think, oh, well, actually, I'm going to give another club a go, or things like that. You might see someone join our [activation], and then suddenly they show up somewhere else, and it's like, oh, okay, they're obviously trying things out and maybe we're just the first step in that journey for them finding that community. [Delivery Lead, UD]

Recommendations for the future of the Pride in Sport Festival

Overall, the Pride in Sport Festival should be considered an impressive initiative in its breadth, depth, and meaningful engagement with, and for, LGBTQ+ communities. The Pride in Sport Festival clearly achieved its stated aims and is an excellent starting point for future programs. Several recommendations were made in the previous section to enhance the program outcomes and impact in future iterations:

- to continue to recognise and celebrate the work of LGBTQ+ clubs during the festival, and perhaps incorporate their work more into the training and educational resources as exemplars of inclusive practice.
- to support sport organisations and Delivery Leads who are trying to be innovative and prioritise those working collectively toward cultural change.
- funding could prioritise projects and activations using co-design principles to define and create safe spaces (especially to target a broader range of participants).
- utilise the Australian Sports Commission (2025) Road map (Intersectional framework) in education sessions and workshops.
- consider expanding the 'volunteer' stream of the festival to support the delivery and promotion of the festival and encourage creative ways of inspiring new volunteers into sport (beyond coaching roles).
- Pride in Sport to continue this work in community sport, and share their success of building community, facilitating productive relationships, and providing visibility and educational support through the Pride in Sport Festival.

One additional recommendation from the Delivery Leads that did not fit into the previous sections was about the timing and naming of the festival. All Delivery Leads really resonated with the festival concept, especially as it connected to Pride. However, most Delivery Leads also said the timing was confusing with when they delivered their activations and whether or not they were part of the Pride in Sport Festival. For example:

I love the like festival concept, but I think if it is a festival, then it kind of needs to be within a really narrow, narrow parameter. [Delivery Lead, HC]

And:

If the festival went for a shorter time, would it have more impact? Because everyone would be saying the same thing at the same time, but delivering that is difficult for small clubs, small sports, multi-sport, you know, two or three activations. The workforce is really small, and the funding wasn't massive. So, you know, ideally, to condense it would be better, but practically, it's probably not practical at all. I don't think running it across the 12 months is a bad idea. I just think calling it a festival and running it across the year is a bit contradictory. I just had a few people hang on, it's a festival. How long does it go? [Delivery Lead, KS]

As the above quotes illustrates, there is not an easy answer but consideration to the length of the festival does need to be made for future iterations of the festival. It is recommended that co-design principles could also be used here to workshop ideas. As seen in the final quote below, those delivering the activations are in a good place to make helpful suggestions.

It could be an actual type of day, because, I know, because it was kind of like a virtual festival, like everyone was doing their thing, and, you know, all around the country, so it kind of maybe in some places, got forgotten about, or it didn't get seen, because it wasn't an actual, like, a physical thing. Other than the actual activations, it might help to say, like, okay, this is the start of the festival, and launch in all these cities, or wherever we could do it, where it's kind of a communal place. [Delivery Lead, HC]

Case studies

In the next few pages, three activations that exemplify success are highlighted. The three case studies draw on elements of the quantitative and qualitative data and are used to demonstrate the ways in which different activations all contributed to achieving the objectives of the Pride in Sport Festival – both at the activation delivery level and more broadly at the collective festival level.

Three different organisations have purposefully been selected (a private provider new to LGBTQ+ inclusion, a State Sporting Association and a LGBTQ+ sporting club). These case studies are also diverse in terms of the history and backgrounds of the Delivery Leads and where they are on their LGBTQ+ inclusion journey. What the case studies have in common is that all Delivery Leads attended roundtables, connected with community, and took advantage of administrative and marketing support provided by Pride in Sport.

The case studies highlight the power of the festival concept. Specifically, how Pride in Sport balanced their aim of empowering individuals and organisations to have a go and to provide bespoke activations that are meaningful to their context, while also ensuring that those activations took place in a broader network of learning, connection and support.

The case studies demonstrate that enhancing LGBTQ+ participation and safety in sport and physical activity doesn't always require a large amount of funding at the delivery level. When individuals and organisations are supported by paid professionals with expertise in LGBTQ+ sport and/or health, this can have a positive impact both on participants and Delivery Leads, and inclusion attempts are more authentic and likely to go beyond 'good intentions' to achieve meaningful change.

Squash SA – State Sport Association

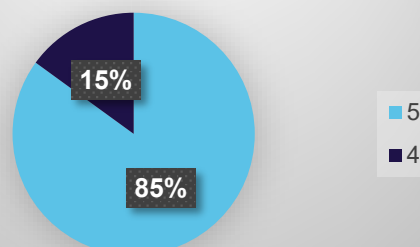
Squash SA had not run or promoted any activities for the LGBTQ+ community prior to the Pride in Sport festival. Squash SA used their micro grant to collaborate in a multisport 'come n try' with Adelaide University, and then hosted two of their own activations at separate courts. The come 'n' try sessions generated good participation levels and led to one participant agreeing to head up the Rainbow Racquets Adelaide group and to help build participation, which may eventually result in a Rainbow Racquets Adelaide Club becoming incorporated. Key features of success here were: Delivery Lead being open to learn; consideration given to the choice of courts and emphasising safe and welcoming environments; and commitment to building relationships and collaborating with other partners.

I just thought there's probably a lot of people out there that feel safe enough to play squash in our clubs, but probably don't feel safe enough to be themselves. And that didn't sit right with me. So yeah, I just wanted them to feel happier and be them, feel themselves, and they could be whoever they wanted at sport. In my sport.

(Delivery Lead, Squash SA)



How fun and enjoyable was your experience



Scale from 1-5, 1=unsatisfactory, 5=extremely satisfactory. 48% response rate for this activation

I think you don't know what you don't know. All the education was good, and I got something from everything but we're flat out as a small sport, and I have spent a lot more time on the Pride festival than I thought I would in the beginning, and because it's been a bit of a feel-good thing, I've made it my priority... I felt like I had so much to learn - I still do have so much to learn.

(Delivery Lead, Squash SA)

Let's go surfing! – Private provider

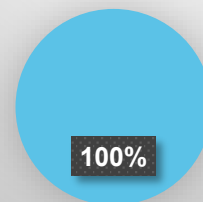
Let's go surfing in partnership with Trans Health used their micro grant to provide an exclusive beginner surf lesson at Bondi Beach to 13 new participants. Successful features of this activation included: Lowering the barriers to access through providing transfers; partnering with an LGBTQ+ health organisation to establish trust and support recruitment; providers/leaders being open to listening and learning; and prioritising providing a safe and welcoming experience instead of focusing solely on skill development.

Hearing that the clients had never felt welcome was hard because I've never had that. And I thought, Well, why not? How can we help them be comfortable in the ocean? I think a lot of the world just assumes that people feel okay everywhere, but that's not the case.

(Delivery Lead, Let's go surfing)



How fun and enjoyable was your experience?



Scale from 1-5, 1=unsatisfactory, 5=extremely satisfactory. 50% response rate for this activation

Afterwards we heard that they thought, this is their place. This is something they can do and that they felt comfortable as well. That it was a safe space for them to come and give it a go. But it's not just about the surfing aspect, but that Bondi is another place where they can feel safe and welcome. So that was, that was huge, to hear that from them. And some of them are thinking, okay, the beach is now my extra hobby, where, if I'm feeling a bit stressed, or, you know, when I need something, the beach is now my place to come to.

(Delivery Lead, Let's go surfing)

Aqualicious Sunshine Coast – LGBTQ+ Club

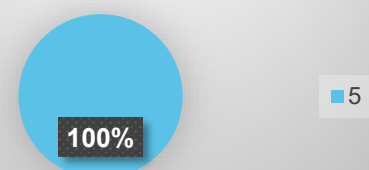
Aqualicious Masters Swimming club used their micro grant to expand their offerings from Brisbane to the Sunshine Coast. They offered two free come and try sessions and 50% off standard coaching fees for four months. They witnessed membership growth (doubled in size over the period of the activation), media promotion and increased visibility for LGBTQ+ sport ([QNews story](#)), and the formation of a spin-off running club. Aqualicious actively worked on debunking myths that you had to already be a good swimmer to join the club and intentionally sought out a more gender diverse participation base. Successful features of this activation included: utilising the Sunshine Coast Pride network; in-person recruitment and face to face engagement; understanding community needs; reducing cost barriers; use of the Pride in Sport press release template.

I'm in another club as well, and it's not as though I feel unwelcome there or anything like that, like they, you know, I'm completely open with them and that, and they ask questions and then absolutely no issue whatsoever. But what I find in the other club is I'm the gay member, as opposed to just being a swimmer. So, I think what you find with the LGBTIQ clubs is you can just go there and just be yourself and not be the gay member or anything like that.

(Delivery Lead, Aqualicious)



How fun and enjoyable was your experience?



Scale from 1-5, 1=unsatisfactory, 5=extremely satisfactory. 43% response rate for this activation.

It's really hard to connect with the community because on the Coast we're so dispersed. And what I find with a lot of the members of the swimming club is they come, and they join because they want that connection with the community, as opposed to the actual sport. Like a lot of them say, I'm not here to swim, I'm here for the social aspect.

(Delivery Lead, Aqualicious)

Conclusions

The Pride in Sport Festival was meticulously designed to align with, and advance, the objectives of the Play Well Participation Grant Program, particularly focusing on enhancing inclusivity and participation in sports among underrepresented groups.

Central to the approach was the strategic deployment of events and initiatives aimed at the LGBTQ+ community, a group historically marginalised in sports settings. The festival empowered a wide range of Delivery Leads across multiple states and territories to organise inclusive events -some for the very first time. In the survey data, individual participants were unequivocal in their praise for the activations they attended. Many participants claimed that their new experience would lead to increased physical activity levels because they now felt like sport could be part of their lives. The Pride in Sport team facilitated supported education sessions and built and sustained a strong community of diverse stakeholders in the sport ecosystem.

As such, the Pride in Sport Festival delivered on the ambition to augment all four pillars of the Play Well participation strategy:

- ✓ Empowering people and organisations
- ✓ Activating places and spaces
- ✓ Driving lifelong involvement
- ✓ Building connections

In addition to achieving the funding objectives, the Pride in Sport Festival demonstrated success against each of the seven features identified in the literature review as ground-breaking, research-informed approaches to enhancing inclusion for LGBTQ+ people in sport. As such, the Pride in Sport Festival undoubtedly delivered on its promise to 'set a new standard for accessibility and engagement in sport'.

The Pride in Sport team has the right mix of expertise, national reach, educational resources, community legitimacy and connections to continue to carry out meaningful, ground-breaking work in community sport. However, it is acknowledged in the research, and throughout this evaluation that long-term funding is needed to support programs such as the Pride in Sport Festival.

Prioritising a funding stream for LGBTQ+ sport inclusion work is important to support this type of multi-layered approach and encourage the sport sector to commit and engage more extensively with addressing homophobia and transphobia in sport and developing inclusive and safe sporting spaces.

I think particularly with what we're seeing in the US and the UK, and just in the sports world more generally, particularly around people who are gender diverse or trans, like having that backing from an organization like Pride in Sport that is just reinforcing the fact that sport is for everyone, and it always should be. I mean, it's amazing that we have Pride in Sport to be able to do that. I think events like the Pride in Sport festival, are really important for that purpose, so that it gives sports which have not historically been super inclusive, like a platform, and an opportunity to be like, yes, we can be a safe space for you. [Delivery Lead, LG]

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