

# Participation

Creating pathways for everyone to  
take part



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Imagine your club is thriving: you have great facilities, friendly members, and a strong committee. But when you look closer, you notice something missing: few, if any, members with disability. Why is that?

**For many people with disability, getting involved in sport isn't as simple as showing up.** There are often multiple barriers to overcome before they even reach the playing field.



Some might rely on support workers whose hours don't match your training times. Others can't afford to attend because support work costs double on weekends, when most sport happens. A parent might want to bring their child who uses a wheelchair, but there is no accessible parking near the field. Another potential member may love sports but needs hours of preparation before leaving home, and by the time they're ready, training has already started.



**Sometimes, the biggest barrier isn't physical, it is feeling unwelcome or out of place.**

Participation is more than playing; it is about belonging. When clubs create flexible, respectful, and accessible environments, they help people discover not just sport, but community, confidence, and connection.

## **Where to start?**

Everyone joins a sport for a reason: to learn, to socialise, or to compete. Clubs that understand these motivations and address barriers from the start can attract and retain more people with disability, at every level.

### **5 ways to create pathways for everyone to participate:**



- 1 Offer flexible ways to play**
- 2 Make your programs adaptable**
- 3 Reduce financial barriers**
- 4 Foster a safe, inclusive club culture**
- 5 Engage families and the wider community**

# 1

## Offer flexible ways to play

Not everyone wants or can commit to the same type of sports experience. Flexibility encourages participation.

- Offer different entry points such as social or skills-based sessions, and modified competitions.
- Allow players to train without the pressure of playing games every week.
- Host open days or come-and-try sessions that are free or low-cost.
- Provide short-term or casual memberships for people who can't commit to a whole season.
- Promote mainstream, inclusive, and disability-specific pathways equally, so everyone finds a suitable fit.
- Create pathways between your teams and leagues so people can keep growing as their skills develop.



## 2

### Make your programs adaptable

Programs that adapt are programs that last.

- Modify sessions or equipment where possible (e.g., smaller teams, shorter games, adjusted rules).
- Offer or connect people to wheelchair, low-vision, or other adaptive programs.
- Provide inclusive coach training (see Pillar 3 Coaching).
- Learn how to guide players toward the next step (e.g., classification, regional, or elite programs). Reach out to Inclusion Solutions, Sport Inclusion Australia, Paralympics Australia, or your SSA for support.
- Share positive stories and photos of people with disability participating. Visibility matters.



**It is not about doing everything, it is about doing something that helps someone new take part.**





### 3

## Reduce financial barriers

Cost is one of the biggest factors limiting participation. Clubs can make a difference by offering flexibility and support.

- Provide tiered memberships (social, training-only, family rates).
- Offer payment plans, season discounts, or volunteer credit (e.g., lower fees if you help out).
- Accept KidSport and Companion Cards so carers or support workers can attend for free.
- Keep spare or loan equipment for pre-season, trial periods, and beyond.
- Offer discounts for concession card holders, students, or people seeking work.
- Be transparent about costs. Unexpected expenses can be a barrier.

# 4

## Foster a safe, inclusive club culture

An inclusive culture makes participation sustainable. Nobody wants to feel like a burden or an afterthought. Instead, we all deserve to feel respected, supported, and valued.

- Create a buddy system so new players have a go-to person for guidance and support.
- Encourage carpooling between members and families. It builds connections, and helps overcome transport barriers.
- Use inclusive language and positive messaging in communication and at events.
- Promote team and club unity by organising opportunities to socialise. Consider shared meals, end-of-training catchups, or social events.
- Celebrate achievements of all members equally.
- Include inclusion goals in your code of conduct.





## 5

### Engage families and the wider community

Families, carers, and community networks often shape a person's ability to participate, so include them in your planning.

- Review training and game schedules to better suit families and people with disability who rely on support workers. (Remember: support work is often charged at higher rates on weekends, making participation more expensive.)
- Encourage family involvement: volunteering, cheering on from the sidelines, or helping with club roles.

- Partner with local disability services, schools, and NDIS community partners to reach people who may not know your club exists.
- Build relationships with women's, Aboriginal, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) organisations to make programs culturally safe.
- Offer women-only sessions or culturally sensitive spaces when appropriate.
- Allow flexibility in uniforms to support comfort and religious, gender, or cultural needs.





**Inclusion grows  
when people  
feel seen,  
respected, and  
supported.**



# Rethinking “all-abilities” programs

Many clubs introduce “all-abilities” or disability-specific programs with the intention to make sport more welcoming and accessible. But **it is worth taking a step back and asking: what does inclusion really look like in practice?**

**“All-abilities” can mean different things to different people.** For some, it is a positive, low-pressure space where they can try sports and build confidence. For others, it can feel too separate, like it is only for people with disability. True inclusion isn’t one-size-fits-all. It is about offering choice, flexibility, and connection.





## Things to consider:

- **Does your “all-abilities” program genuinely welcome everyone**, or has it become a separate space for people with disability only?
- If your club runs a disability-specific team or program, that is great, but **make sure participants still have pathways to connect, socialise with other members, and move across teams or leagues** as their skills, confidence, or goals grow.
- **Consider your scheduling and facility usage.** Do your “all-abilities” or disability teams train at times and places that help them be part of club life, or are they isolated on another night when no other training is held?
- **Are you creating genuine relationships between members, or unintentionally keeping groups apart?**

## Inclusive practice in action

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- 1 Design programs that let people move easily between social, development, and competitive levels.**
- 2 Provide shared opportunities.** Organise team dinners, social events, and club days where everyone comes together.
- 3** Talk to participants about what they want from their sport experience and **adjust programs based on feedback.**
- 4 Be proud and transparent in your language.** Use “all-abilities” or “disability-specific” where appropriate, but don’t let labels limit participation or connection.

**“All-abilities” should be a doorway, not a destination.**

Whether someone starts in a disability-specific program or a mixed team, they should always feel part of the club, not apart from it. **Inclusion means building bridges, not boundaries.**

# Every small action your club takes can break down a barrier for someone.

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Participation starts with access, but it thrives through connection, respect, and belonging.

By building flexibility into how, when, and where people can play, your club opens the door to more players, families, and community members, creating a strong, more inclusive sporting culture for everyone.





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