



CHANGE OUR GAME

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Enhancing Participation Pathways for Women Coaches in Community Sport

Introduction

The experiences of women coaches in community sport are diverse and can be influenced by a range of factors, including governance, culture, policies, and sport coaching pathways.

This summary outlines key findings from research that examined the environment for women coaches in three major sports that have a predominance of men in coaching roles – football (soccer), basketball and Australian rules football.

The research explores the key barriers experienced by women coaches, including selection and development pathways, and identifies recommendations for both sport governing bodies and community sporting clubs to provide further support for women coaches at a community sporting level.

Research overview

This research was delivered by La Trobe University researchers, in partnership with Northern Football Netball League, Basketball Victoria and Football Victoria, with funding from the Victorian Government's Office for Women in Sport and Recreation.

The researchers' previous review of research into the experiences of women coaches within community sport¹ highlighted that:

- women coaches are under-represented in community sport, despite increased participation rates of women and girls in sport.
- the sport coaching environment is not a positive, nor a welcoming one for many women coaches.

Three stage research design

1.

Stage 1 – Coaching Policies and Practices

Detailed content analysis of the policies and practices of each sport organisation in relation to the governance of sport coaching and their recruitment strategies for women coaches.

- How effectively are women represented in the governance networks that oversee community sport coaching?
- What recruitment strategies do sport organisations use to attract women coaches and are they designed in relation to the motives of women coaches?

2.

Stage 2 – Coach Recruitment Practices

Structured interviews of key managers and staff from each organisation each focused on the efficacy of current recruitment practices for women coaches and their understanding of the barriers faced in increasing participation rates for women in coaching roles.

- Do policies and practices match up with the experiences of women coaches?
- How effective are the current recruitment practices for women coaches?
- How do they understand and manage barriers for women coaches in the sport they manage?

3.

Stage 3 – Experiences of Women Coaches

Semi structured face to face interviews with 20 current women coaches from each sport focused on their individual experiences in sport coaching.

- How do women coaches navigate coaching pathways in comparison to their men counterparts?
- What education, training and support programs are required to support the development of women coaches?
- What relationships (e.g. mentor, peer-support) are critical for women coaches to feel supported in their role?
- What supports are needed for women coaches of various identities to overcome potential biases or barriers (age, race, ability etc.)?

Understanding the current environment for women coaches

This research identified that women coaches experience a range of challenges and barriers as a community level coach. These influence their opportunities to take on coaching roles, through to their development pathway and remaining as a coach in sport.

Challenges and barriers for women coaches in community sport



- Women and girls are not well represented in the governance networks that oversee community sport coaching.



- A culture of leadership dominated by men at club level, especially amongst club presidents, who make decisions about coaching appointments.
- Selection processes for coaches are very informal and do not provide a transparent process for women to apply or express interest for coaching roles.



- Lack of targeted strategies used by sport organisations to attract women and girls to coaching roles.
- Limited understanding of the messages that would resonate with prospective women coaches and policies to support a more inclusive environment for women coaches.



- Women coaches struggle to navigate coaching pathways in comparison to men coaches, citing time constraints and the scheduling of coach training not accommodating care responsibilities.
- Women and girls often have unstable tenure in coaching appointments and experience a continual pressure to prove their worth as a coach compared to men coaches.

Actions to improve environments and pathways for women coaches in community sport

This research identified there are a range of actions that can be taken to improve the environment for women coaches in community sport.



State sporting organisations

State sporting organisations provide the policies, training and development, and resources to support community clubs and associations in engaging women and girls in coaching roles.

Improve the inclusion of women and girls as community coaches

- Ensure women coaches have a voice with state sporting organisations.
- Ensure greater inclusion of women in coaching, which may require special pathways or assistance (such as subsidised costs) for women coaches.
- Ensure equality in state sporting organisations' media and publicity, including representation of women coaches.

Have policies, practices and resources to support women coaches in community clubs

- Implement gender equity policies for coaching that have clearly stated goals for achieving gender equity in the state sport organisation, develop plans for achieving these goals, and monitor progress.
- Develop and share best practices and policies around culture and support for a safer coaching environment.
- Define and reinforce the term coach as non-gendered, through generational and cultural change, so that people making coach appointments are focused on ability rather than gender.



Community sporting clubs and associations

Community clubs and associations have the greatest influence in the recruitment and retention of women and girls into coaching roles, as well as providing a supportive club culture.

Key factors that improve club culture to be supportive of women coaches

- 1. Governance** - Ensure women and girls are represented in the governance networks that oversee community sport coaching. *Example:* coach selection committees.
- 2. Parental attitudes** - Improving supportive attitudes of parents towards having women and girls in coaching roles. This includes a focus on reducing men wanting to provide unwarranted advice about how women should coach. *Example:* showcase supportive behaviours towards women and girls.
- 3. Men as allies** - Enabling men to be allies in supporting women and girls in coaching roles, which is seen as central to changing the culture and attitudes towards women as coaches within clubs. *Example:* men speaking up to advocate for equal participation.

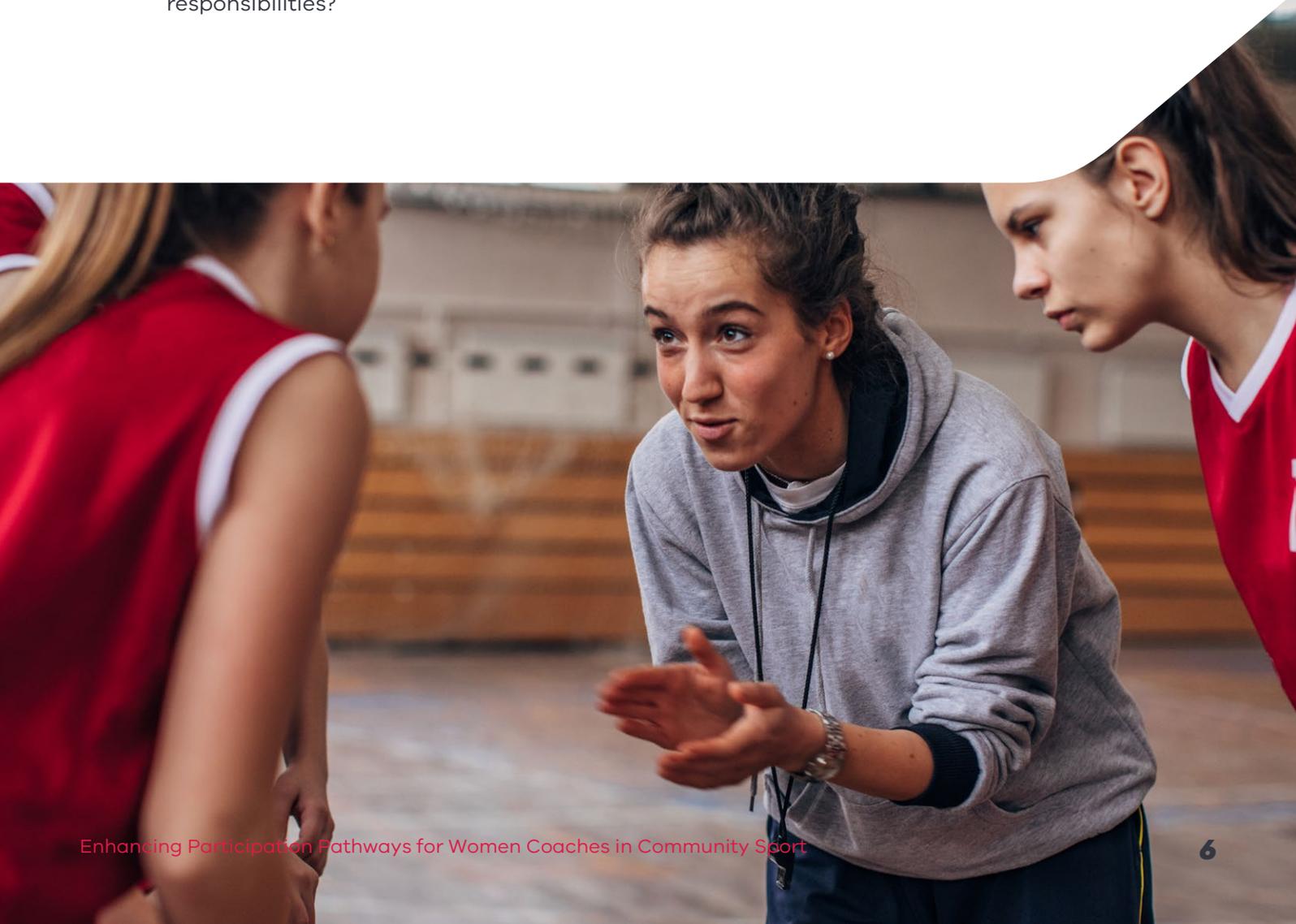
Steps to recruit and retain women coaches



Questions for community sporting clubs

The following questions can help community sporting clubs to self-assess, and take action to support women coaches:

- Do you have women involved in the club's decision making on coaches?
- Do you actively manage the game day environment, so parents and spectators are supportive of women and girls who are coaching?
- Do you have men who can be allies in supporting women coaches within your club?
- Do you have a target for the number of women and girls in coaching roles?
- Do you advertise coaching roles within your club that are specifically for women or girls?
- Do you provide flexible options for women and girls to coach teams or athletes, for example: coaching in pairs or groups to provide flexibility for any carer responsibilities?
- Do you provide bespoke induction and training opportunities for women coaches?
- Do you facilitate a peer network of women and girls in coaching roles?
- Do you provide mentors to actively support women coaches in their first season?
- Do you seek feedback from women coaches on their experiences and commit to improving their experience through club plans and communications?
- Do you actively promote the achievement of women and girl coaches in your club?
- Do you provide pathway opportunities for women to further develop in their coaching?



References

Baxter, H., Hoye, R. & Kappelides, P. (2021). Female volunteer coaches in community sport: A scoping review and research agenda, *Journal of Amateur Sport*, 7,1 (64-94) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17161/jas.v7i1.13774>

LaVoi, N. M. (2016). *Women in Sports Coaching*. (1st ed., Routledge Research in Sports Coaching Series).

LaVoi, N. M., & Dutove, J. K. (2012) Barriers and Supports for Female Coaches: An Ecological Model, *Sports Coaching Review*, 1(1), 17-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2012.695891>

LaVoi, N.M., McGarry, N.M. & Fisher, L.A. (2019). Final thoughts on women in sport coaching: Fighting the war. *Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal*, 27(2), 136-140. <https://doi.org/10.1123/waspay.2019-0030>.

Acknowledgements

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely.

We acknowledge the ongoing leadership role of the Aboriginal community on gender equality and the prevention of violence against women. As First Peoples, Aboriginal Victorians are best placed to determine a culturally appropriate path to gender equality in their communities.

This is a summary of research carried out by La Trobe University, *Enhancing Participation Pathways for Female Coaches* (Russell Hoye, Pam Kappelides and Haley Baxter 2021)

This research was funded by the Victorian Government, through the *Change Our Game* Research Grants Program.

