

facilities

# safe sports facilities



**MAKING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SAFER AND MORE ACCESSIBLE**



# Safe sports facilities: making physical activity safer and more accessible

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# contents



2	<b>Minister's foreword</b>
3	<b>Introduction</b>
4	<b>How can service providers help?</b>
4	Legal obligations
5	Identifying client needs
6	Choosing the right location
6	Improving access
7	Personal safety
8	Lighting
8	Avoiding danger spots
9	Signs
9	Changing rooms and toilets
10	Maintenance
10	Childcare
11	Creating the right atmosphere
11	Social activity
13	<b>Facility grants program</b>
13	What is it for?
13	How to apply
14	<b>Further information</b>

## Minister's Foreword

With the growing community awareness of the benefits of regular exercise to our health, it is increasingly important that every member of our community has fair and equitable access to these benefits.

Some people feel discouraged from taking part in sport or other physical activity by factors such as their cultural background, disability, fears for their personal safety, isolation or cost. Women and girls, particularly, are under-represented in physical activity, both Australia-wide and in New South Wales. Often, this is simply because they don't feel safe or comfortable using sporting facilities. That is why careful thought about the design and maintenance of facilities is vital if women and girls are to become more active and healthier.

By encouraging sport and physical activity providers to think about and act on these issues, we can be better assured that our facilities are developed with the needs of all the community in mind.

The New South Wales Department of Sport and Recreation has developed Safe Sports Facilities: Making Physical Activity Safer and More Accessible, in consultation with other relevant agencies. This booklet provides a clear and straightforward guide to improving existing facilities, or designing new ones, so that everyone is encouraged to participate. This guide underpins the New South Wales Government's commitment to a fairer and healthier society.



John Watkins MP

Minister for Sport and Recreation  
Minister for Corrective Services  
Minister for Fair Trading

# Introduction

Safety in public places, at home, at work and at leisure is important to the whole community.

People are more likely to participate in sport or physical activity if they believe the environment in which they will be participating is safe and meets their needs. It is therefore, in the interests of the whole community, including service providers, to ensure all community members can participate safely, easily and comfortably in physical activity. If sport and physical activity facilities are designed with these priorities in mind, there is a greater likelihood that they will be used.

Such facilities include fitness and leisure centres, ovals, pools, courts and sports fields.

This brochure provides a guide to assessing, designing and modifying sport and physical activity facilities. While it focuses particularly on the needs of women, it emphasises the need to improve safety for everyone.



# How can service providers help?

A well-designed sport or physical activity facility attracts people and encourages them to use it. The way a facility is managed and its atmosphere, can either encourage or discourage people's active involvement in sport or physical activity. Service providers can increase their membership and participation revenue by addressing these issues so they more adequately meet the needs of their clients and prospective clients.

Providers of physical activity programs should be receptive to both the needs of clients and the relevant legislative requirements when using, designing or modifying a facility.

## Legal obligations

It is important that facility structures and equipment comply with laws, regulations, rules and standards. Local councils can provide information about current legislative requirements. Facilities are required to be designed in accordance with the Building Code of Australia (BCA) and the relevant Australian Standards.



Service providers should be aware of their obligations under current legislation and select or design facilities accordingly. In addition, they should consider how well the design, construction and maintenance of a facility complies with the relevant standards.

## Identifying client needs

Service providers are responsible for establishing the best possible environment in which people can be physically active. They should ask their clients where they would prefer the sport and physical facility to be, and what safety needs, access requirements and other factors influence their choice of facility and therefore their participation. Consultation with clients will help providers meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community.

Consultation processes may include:

- questionnaires
- individual interviews
- focus groups
- forums.

Assistance with consultation processes can be provided by state and local government officers involved in planning and development issues.



It is also important to consider the needs of potential clients in the consultation process and the special needs of particular groups, for instance, people with children, people who don't speak English confidently, or people who have work or family commitments at particular times. Because women are under-represented in sport and physical activity in Australia, it is particularly important for providers to understand and cater for their special needs, so that more women will take part in future.

## Choosing the right location

Providers should consider the following factors when selecting a site or venue for sport, recreation and physical activity. Generally, in terms of safety and accessibility, a well-located facility will be:

- ✓ on land of appropriate size and aspect
- ✓ close to adequate, regular public transport (bus, train, taxi and ferry)
- ✓ close to safe pedestrian and cycling networks
- ✓ situated in areas of high public use
- ✓ close to shops and other services
- ✓ surrounded by suitable land use and not physically isolated
- ✓ perceived positively by the community
- ✓ well maintained
- ✓ close to existing and potential clients
- ✓ designed to provide opportunity for natural surveillance (ie. in clear view of passers by)
- ✓ located in an area that has provision for long-term expansion

- ✓ in an area that has available and appropriate infrastructure
- ✓ easily accessible by emergency services ( i.e. police, ambulance, fire brigade).

## Improving access

Clients have varying needs that must be satisfied to ensure their easy and equitable access to sport and recreation services. Providers should ensure that the facility selected caters for all members of the community, including those with restricted mobility, and has:

- ✓ a car park with adequate spaces, that is close to the facility entrances and is easy to find and enter
- ✓ clearly marked car spaces for disabled people and carers with prams
- ✓ well lit, smooth paths between the car park and the building entrance for wheelchair and pram access
- ✓ ramping throughout the facility to ensure that people with disabilities, elderly people and carers with prams have easy access

- ✓ opening hours that cater for the needs of all clients (ie. early starts, after hours and weekend opening)
- ✓ nearby access to police and emergency services (including medical services)
- ✓ unrestricted access for emergency services (gates should be locked for security but easily unlocked in emergencies).

## Personal safety

Community concerns about personal safety affect the way people participate in all aspects of daily living. If they feel uncomfortable or unsafe they may be deterred from taking part in sport and physical activity.

Sport and recreation venues of all sizes can put simple and effective safety measures in place that will benefit both clients and staff. These include:

- ✓ ensuring regular surveillance of the facility by local authorities or security guards to prevent potential crime
- ✓ providing adequate staffing of the facility (at least two staff present at all times)

- ✓ fitting security devices (locks, grilles, alarm systems and security cameras) that do not prevent exit from the building in case of emergency
- ✓ displaying prominent notices, both inside and outside the facility, stating that drugs or alcohol are not permitted, nor kept on or near the premises
- ✓ ensuring public telephones are available, accessible and well-maintained, both inside and outside the facility
- ✓ ensuring access to help from nearby facilities if it is needed
- ✓ limiting noise in the area (so that clients and staff can be heard if in trouble and trying to attract assistance)
- ✓ establishing evacuation procedures and ensuring easy access to emergency exits and stairs.



## Lighting

Appropriate lighting of sport and physical activity facilities is a significant, low-cost way of preventing people, particularly women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly, from feeling vulnerable at night. Service providers should ensure that:

- ✓ adequate lighting is provided in the facility car park, at entrances and exits, and on paths and surrounding streets
- ✓ bus shelters, benches and seats are well lit
- ✓ lighting is adequate in sheds, toilet blocks and unlocked empty rooms
- ✓ there is adequate lighting to safely participate in the activity (in accordance with the Australian Standard for Sports Lighting AS 2560)
- ✓ outside lights have a timing device or a light-sensitive switch so that they turn on automatically
- ✓ vandal-proof lighting is used to minimise ongoing maintenance
- ✓ trees and bushes do not conceal lighting.

## Avoiding danger spots

Small confined areas, such as lifts, storerooms, fire stairs, empty unlocked rooms, dark recessed entrances, gaps in tall shrubbery, parking lots and isolated sections of a building can become danger spots for vulnerable passers-by. Such areas can hide potential assailants, particularly at night. Providers should check that:

- ✓ appropriate landscaping is used (minimising concealing shrubbery)
- ✓ surrounding planting is well lit and does not obscure lighting
- ✓ planting provides no potential hiding places
- ✓ trees or other climbable objects are not close to fences
- ✓ potential entrapment areas that cannot be improved are well lit and/or alarmed.

## Changing rooms and toilets

The design and standard of changing rooms affects the extent to which people will use them. Appropriate change facilities offer privacy and an adequate number of showers and toilets.

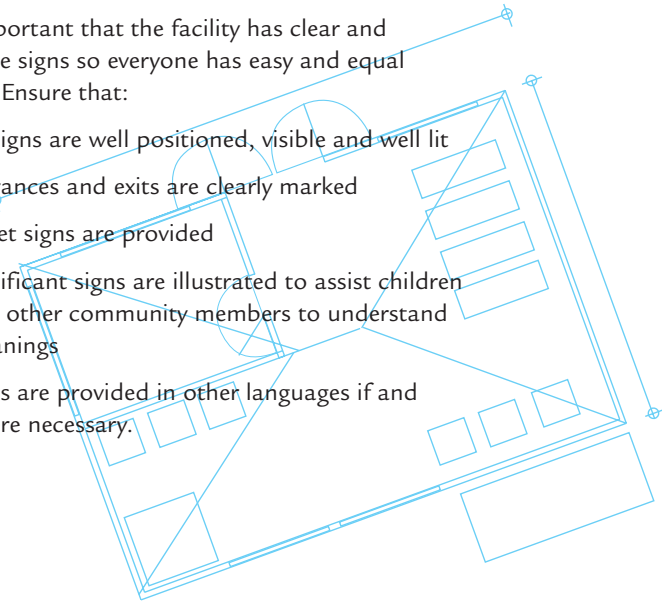
Good changing and toilet facilities have:

- ✓ toilet and shower doors that shut and latches that work
- ✓ outward opening doors to prevent obstruction if a person is on the inside and needs assistance
- ✓ regular care to keep them clean, tidy and hygienic
- ✓ prominent notices encouraging the use of showers and toilets before and after activities
- ✓ rubbish bins in changing areas
- ✓ shower and changing facilities that cater for privacy needs
- ✓ comfortable mothers' rooms and baby change facilities
- ✓ lockers available at low or no cost
- ✓ provisions for families to change together so that parents can look after young children
- ✓ separate men's and women's toilets
- ✓ toilet and change facilities for people with disabilities.

## Signs

It is important that the facility has clear and accurate signs so everyone has easy and equal access. Ensure that:

- ✓ all signs are well positioned, visible and well lit
- ✓ entrances and exits are clearly marked
- ✓ street signs are provided
- ✓ significant signs are illustrated to assist children and other community members to understand meanings
- ✓ signs are provided in other languages if and where necessary.



## Maintenance

The appearance of a facility, including its cleanliness, will affect the way clients feel about it and therefore how much they use it. The swift removal of rubbish, graffiti, and other signs of vandalism, will help people feel more comfortable when participating in activities. It is also vital for the safety of all those using the facility, that surfaces, fittings, equipment, air conditioning and grounds are maintained regularly and thoroughly.

A well maintained facility has:

- ✓ a maintenance plan and an inspection program
- ✓ good general maintenance and cleaning (i.e. no broken fences and light bulbs and no rubbish lying around)
- ✓ areas used for physical activity that are in good and safe condition
- ✓ children's play areas attached to the facility that are in good and safe condition
- ✓ a process or system to ensure that litter, graffiti and signs of vandalism are quickly removed and any damage repaired.



## Childcare

Childcare facilities and services at sport and physical activity centres make it easier for people caring for young children to be involved in the activities. Service providers designing, modifying or selecting a facility should think about:

- ✓ evaluating and monitoring the quality of the current childcare facility and service
- ✓ taking the opportunity to design an appropriate facility and service that meets legislative requirements and client needs
- ✓ ensuring compliance with the requirements of legislation and regulations relating to the provision of childcare.

Further information on the provision of adjunct childcare is provided in the Childcare Guidelines for Sport, Recreation and Fitness Organisations. These are available from the Department of Sport and Recreation. Contact details are provided at the end of this booklet.

## Social activity

The social aspect of sport and physical activity is important. Many participants continue being involved in physical activity for the social benefits. Providers should consider whether their facility offers:

- ✓ areas inside and outside where clients can socialise before and after using the facility
- ✓ an adequate and affordable range of food and drinks.



## Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the facility will have a significant effect on membership, client satisfaction and staff morale. If the facility is well maintained and provides a friendly, open atmosphere, most people will feel good about using it. When assessing a facility, service providers should consult with clients and staff, especially women and other target client groups and invite them to participate in the assessment. They should ask clients for their initial feelings about the facility and how the atmosphere might be improved.

A sport and physical activity facility that is welcoming for all community members will:

- ✓ employ staff who are friendly and approachable
- ✓ provide childcare facilities at minimal cost and adopt a child-friendly approach
- ✓ ensure women get an equitable share of the equipment and facilities
- ✓ have sessions for women only, or sessions that cater for the needs of special groups (for example, those with specific cultural requirements or older people)
- ✓ employ appropriately qualified female instructors
- ✓ ensure that female staff are on duty for female-only sessions
- ✓ allow female-only sessions at times which offer maximum safety (e.g. not late at night)
- ✓ have considered use of mirrors and glass walls that are placed to protect privacy
- ✓ ensure that the facility's layout prevents unwanted attention being paid to clients, particularly women
- ✓ have appropriate pictures or images displayed throughout the facility
- ✓ ensure the interior design of the facility is comfortable (i.e. the use of colour, furniture and standard of fittings is appropriate)
- ✓ be aware of research that has identified body image as a major factor leading to eating disorders amongst women and encourage sensible exercise and eating practices
- ✓ provide up-to-date information specifying exercises and exercise machines that are suitable for women and other members with special needs.



# facility grants program

The New South Wales Department of Sport and Recreation, through its Regional Sports Facility Program and Capital Assistance Program, offers assistance to those intending to develop and modify facilities.

## What is it for?

Grants are available from the Department under this program to assist local government authorities and "not for profit" sport and recreation organisations to develop community-oriented sport and recreation facilities.

## How to apply

Details of the Facility Grants Program are available from the New South Wales Department of Sport and Recreation regional offices. Eligible applicants must complete an application form and, together with supporting information, forward this to the appropriate Department of Sport and Recreation regional office by the required closing date. Applications are assessed on an annual basis in accordance with information contained in the application guidelines.



## Further information



For more information contact the New South Wales  
Department of Sport and Recreation on **13 13 02**  
or visit the Department's web site at [www.dsr.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au)

Additional information may be obtained from the  
Department's Operations Directorate on tel: **(02) 9923 4372**  
or the Community Participation Unit on tel: **(02) 9923 4202**

