

INQUIRY INTO CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Organisation: Athletics Australia and Athletics NSW

Date received: 18 August 2016

The Hon. Bronnie Taylor, MLC
Chair
Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

By e-mail: Committee.SocialIssues@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mrs Taylor.

On behalf of Athletics Australia and our Member Association, Athletics New South Wales, I thank you and your Committee for the opportunity to contribute to the *Inquiry into childhood overweight and obesity* (the Inquiry).

Athletics Australia acknowledges the current concern that exists around childhood obesity and the broad and deep impact that this has on the individual and collective health of our nation. We also acknowledge that the solution to this situation cannot be resolved through the endeavours of one industry, agency or approach. Rather, a cooperative and complementary strategy across industries and agencies is required to activate a series of interventions that can shift the current trajectory of the health of our children.

To that end this short submission outlines the current activity related to the terms of the Inquiry and offers additional recommendations for consideration by the Committee.

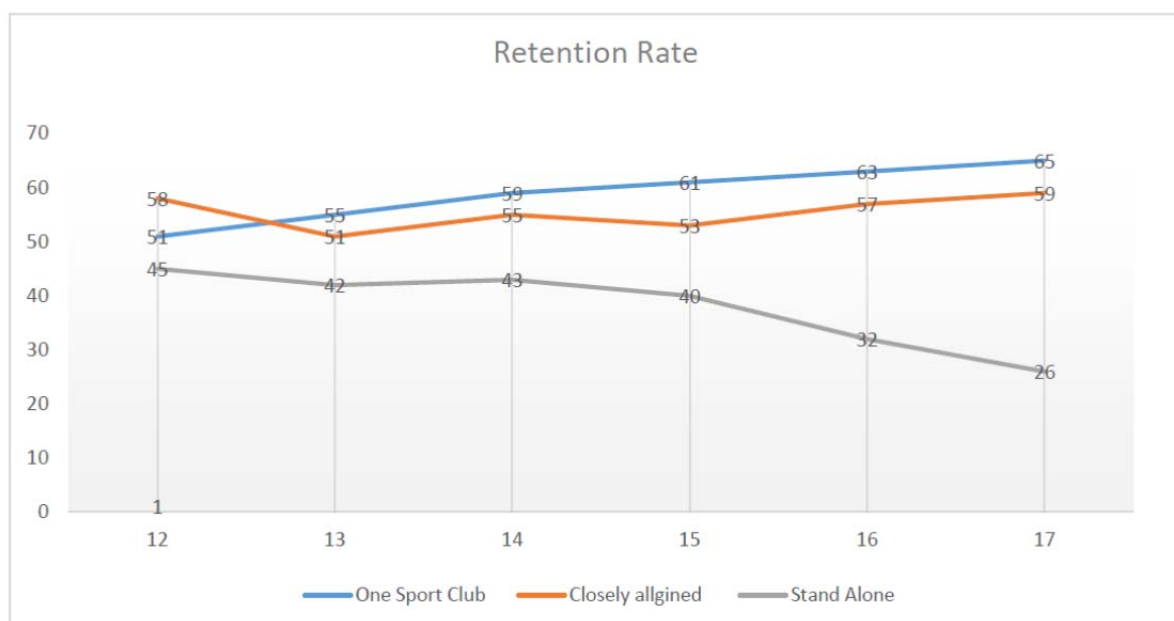
Current Activity

Athletics is regarded as a foundation sport, this means that its delivery to children in their formative years is critical to them developing the fundamental movement skills and then physical literacy required to engage in many sports other than Athletics as well as developing and maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle. Professor Richard Telford, AM PhD, has stated that *"a physically literate child possesses the competence, confidence and motivation to enjoy physical recreation and sport; and inadequate physical literacy creates increased risk to psychological, social and physical well-being"*.

Research has also shown that the quality of the experience that children receive has a defining impact on the likelihood that they will continue with the sport, try other sports or whether being and healthy and active will be a hallmark of their future lifestyle. In acknowledging this, Athletics Australia has been a driving force in rolling out the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) Kids' Athletics program as a complementary initiative to the activity provided through Little Athletics Centres. Kids' Athletics is primarily delivered to Primary School children through the Australian Government's Sporting Schools initiative.

Kids' Athletics has been developed using the principles of game sense, these principles provide increased opportunity for non-physiological development of the child as opposed to the traditional drills approach to children's sport. These non-physiological outcomes include decision making, team work, resilience, and creativity. The program has been aligned to the Australian Health and Physical Education Curriculum so as to ensure that it complements the educational activities of schools and their teachers in what has been recognised as a crowded curriculum.

One of the largest challenges that Athletics experiences is the pathway separation between Little Athletics and Athletics Australia which in an operational sense requires participants to move from one club to another once they reach 16. This has been identified as disincentive or barrier to ongoing participation. This has been validated by research undertaken by an independent consultant in conjunction with Athletics New South Wales (ANSW) and Little Athletics New South Wales (LANSW) through funding from the New South Wales Office of Sport. This research (see graph below) showed that retention rates for stand-alone clubs, that is junior and senior clubs operating without closer cooperation, dropped from 45% at 12 years of age to 26% at 17 years of age. This is compared to "One Sport Clubs" where retention rates were 51% at 12 years of age and increased to 65% at 17 years of age.



In recognition of these findings NSW and LANSW are working to improve athlete retention to decrease the participation drop off in the teenage years. The approach is to move towards a "One Sport Club" which can be seen as a child's athletics club for life. Additionally, the NSW RunNSW program is encouraging people to take in recreation running as an alternative to more traditional club athletics but with the goal of keeping people healthy, active and connected to their broader community.

Recommendations

The following are offered as options for the Committee to consider that can contribute to addressing the concerns of childhood obesity. These do have a focus on the role of athletics but would be valuable contributors to a holistic strategy or campaign.

1. Ongoing support provided to ANSW and LANSW to increase the alignment between the two organisations. This includes the rollout of the “One Sport Club” model to better retain people in sport.
2. Support and promotion of activity and events that highlight recreational and group running as options for people to enter or maintain a social activity lifestyle, especially important for teenagers and adolescents as identified in the Australian Sports Commission’s Market Segmentation research.
3. An emphasis on Primary School aged children being provided with inclusive and engaging athletics offerings that develop the fundamental movement skills critical for a life of being physically active and healthy.
4. Support for upskilling Primary School teachers to have the confidence and competence to deliver activities that develop the fundamental movement skills critical for a life of being physically active and healthy.
5. Support for sporting organisations to identify appropriate sponsors and/or partners that promote a healthy and active lifestyle.

Should you wish to discuss any of the above information further please either contact me via
or for any New South Wales specific questions can I ask that you
please contact Duncan Tweed, CEO Athletics NSW, via

Regards

James Selby
General Manager
Program Development