

**INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO CHILDHOOD
OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY**

Organisation: National Rugby League Limited

Date received: 6 September 2016



The Greatest Game of All

21 August 2016

The Hon Bronnie Taylor MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Chair

National Rugby League Ltd (NRL) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Social Issues' *Inquiry into Childhood Overweight and Obesity*.

The NRL's mission is to bring people together and enrich their lives. In pursuing this mission we deliver a number of programs that encourage young people to participate in our game and deliver community programs that utilise the reach of rugby league to deliver important messages about health and wellbeing, education and respectful relationships. Our participation and community programs help address childhood overweight and obesity by encouraging participation in sport and delivering important messages about health and wellbeing.

Community Programs

The following information provides an overview of NRL community programs that contribute to health and wellbeing:

NRL Wellbeing

Rugby League's new Wellbeing program aims to harness the NRL's popularity to empower and educate students to value wellbeing in their own lives. The program is delivered in primary schools and is designed to meet the content descriptions of ACARA and the New Zealand Curriculum Objectives for students in Years 3 and 4 (some parts of this resource could also be adapted for students in Years 5 and 6). Providing a holistic view of health, each of the seven comprehensive lessons establishes strong links between Nutrition, Physical Activity and Mental Health to our overall wellbeing.

National Rugby League Limited

Rugby League Central, Driver Avenue
Moore Park NSW 2021

Locked Bag 5000
Paddington NSW 2021

T +61 2 9359 8500
F +61 2 9359 8555

nrl.com
ABN 23 082 088 962



The NRL Wellbeing resource features Literacy and Numeracy tasks as well as Critical Thinking activities and a practical component. It can be used by teachers as individual lessons or a complete unit of work.

The NRL Wellbeing Program was introduced in 2015 with great success, with over 1000 schools participating in the program across Australia and New Zealand.

The NRL Wellbeing Program is currently funded by the NRL. To expand the scope and reach of the program we would like to identify further funding opportunities.

Rugby League Reads

The NRL runs a program called Rugby League Reads, which features game-themed English syllabus magazines, teaching resources and a series of short stories that inspire children to read and improve their literacy skills, as well as deliver important messages about health and wellbeing.

The Rugby League Reads magazine features a 'Reading Captain' from each Club focusing on a range of texts taught in primary schools including factual and literary texts. It is suitable for Years 3 - 6, and features articles such as "Healthy Body and Mind", which teach readers about healthy foods and hydration.

The Rugby League Reads "League Stars" readers are suitable for Kindergarten to Year 2 students. League Stars assists with the development of competent, independent readers by engaging students through their interest in sport- specifically Rugby League. All 16 NRL clubs and many high-profile players feature in the books, effectively engaging students in the joy of reading for a purpose and interest. A number of the books deal specifically with health and wellbeing, including "NRL Lunchbox", "Train like a Bronco!", "Eating Around the World" and "Training with Luke"

State of Mind

The NRL's State of Mind program, in partnership with leading health experts (Headspace, Lifeline, Kids Helpline, Black Dog institute and Le Va), aims to increase mental health literacy, reduce the stigma around mental illness, start positive conversations and encourage individuals to seek assistance.

The program utilises 'State of Origin' – Australia's most viewed TV product – as the major platform to profile and act on the issue of mental illness. The campaign activation includes television commercials featuring State of Origin stars such as Paul Gallen, Robbie Farah, Cameron Smith and Nate Myles; digital and social media messaging; in-stadium activations with our expert partners; distribution of resources including "z-cards" directing people to service providers; and "Can We Talk Forums" delivered in partnership with News Limited.

In 2016 the State of Mind program has expanded to include the delivery of a 6-point Grassroots Plan to local rugby league clubs. The 6-point plan is as follows:



1. *Resource pack* – Clubs are sent a welcome pack which includes program information, information stand (life size players), partner information, assets, event information and ideas.
2. *Education and Support workshop* – Clubs receive a 1.5 hour program delivered by NRL Ambassador, NRL Health officer and expert partner to increase mental health literacy and help seeking behaviours, targeting senior players and coaches/admin staff. This workshop includes information about the links between nutrition and mental health, encouraging participants to focus on their overall wellbeing.
3. *State of Mind Action Plan* - Implementation of a Mental Health Policy to provide the Club guidance on mental wellbeing and how to respond if there is a mental health incident.
4. *Event Day* - Awareness raising event for the broader Club.
5. *Recognition and incentive* - Plaque/certificate along with Ambassador visit to celebrate the Club's certification as a State of Mind Club.
6. *Reporting and feedback* – Yourtown has been engaged to undertake measurement and evaluation.

The NRL takes a holistic view to wellbeing, as there is a direct link between mental and physical health. Accordingly the State of Mind program includes important messages about nutrition and hydration as a contributing factor to maintaining mental wellbeing.

The Queensland Government has committed \$1 million to support the rollout of the program to 220 communities. In NSW the program is being delivered to 20 Clubs utilising NRL funding. Discussions are ongoing with the NSW Government about support for the further rollout of the program.

NRL Ambassador Program

The NRL Ambassadors are retired NRL players who are passionate about using their profile to create a positive difference in the community. With a strong focus on regional and remote areas, the NRL Ambassadors deliver standalone programs or join pre-existing events to promote health and wellbeing, respect, inclusiveness and education messages.

In 2016 there are 40 NRL Ambassadors who come from a range of clubs and backgrounds.

The NRL Ambassador program is very successful achieving a number of significant outcomes such as:

- Reaching on average 120,000 children per annum;
- Making approximately 400 appearances per annum presenting all NRL Community programs /initiatives;
- On average 1900 hours spent annually in the Community; and
- Expansion of the program in 2015 to include the first female ambassadors.

The Ambassadors could be utilised to support NSW Government programs promoting health and wellbeing messages targeted to young people in NSW.



Indigenous Youth Summit

The NRL encourages Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth to value health and wellbeing, education and to aspire to achieve meaningful employment, training or further education whilst embracing their unique culture and identity through participation in the All Stars Indigenous Youth Summit. The Summit is held in conjunction with the Harvey Norman Rugby League All Stars game each year, which will be hosted in Newcastle for the first time in 2017.

The All Stars Indigenous Youth Summit enables participants to interact with other young leaders through a series of workshops, activities and discussions. Participants develop skills that allow them to become strong leaders within their respective communities.

To be eligible for nomination to attend the All Stars Indigenous Youth Summit an individual must be:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or Maori (Warriors participants only) and be accepted in their community as such;
- a student enrolled in Year 11;
- currently participating in an NRL-endorsed community program;
- demonstrating leadership and involvement in school and community activities;
- committed to the attainment of school studies and employment; and
- achieving high attendance at school (minimum 85%).

As part of the experience participants are also offered the opportunity to engage with members of both All Stars team through interactive workshops and join in on the pre-game entertainment prior to the All Stars Match.

Whilst the program's major focus is preparing participants for employment or further education, there is a very important focus on sessions on physical and mental wellbeing.

The 2017 All Stars Indigenous Youth Summit and Harvey Norman Rugby League All Stars game will be held in Newcastle, which is the first time the event will be held outside of Queensland. There is an opportunity to use this platform to promote NSW Government health and wellbeing messages to participants, who as leaders in their communities will be able to share those lessons with other young people.

Koori Knockout

In its 46th year the NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout is a celebration of everything that is wonderful about Aboriginal culture. It is often referred to as a modern day 'corroboree' where families gather, reunite as a community and commemorate past glories and those who have passed on.

The event is held on the October long weekend each year with the venue dependent on the host team. Since its early years the winner of the Knockout also wins the right to host the event in a community of their choice the following year; this has seen the



event held throughout NSW. This year's event will be hosted by the Redfern All Blacks and held at Leichhardt Oval.

The event consists of competitions for men, women and youth and participation continues to grow. In 2015 there were a record number of teams registered with over 130 teams (more than one third youth teams) participating and according to local Police saw in excess of 40,000 people attend across 4 days.

Over recent years the event has been utilised to promote key social messages and invite service providers to share information on programs and initiatives, with a very strong focus on health and wellbeing. This has proven an excellent opportunity to promote positive messages and encourage community members to make a difference in their lives and the broader community.

Significantly the event is also drug and alcohol free and smoking within the grounds is banned, allowing the promotion of key social messages, along with programs and initiatives to Aboriginal people in a safe and healthy environment.

The event is considered the pinnacle of the rugby league calendar for many Indigenous players, thereby encouraging participation throughout the year to ensure selection in their community's team.

Participation Programs

The NRL is committed to growing the number of rugby league participants. We invest significantly in participation programs and have also entered into a strategic partnership with Touch Football Australia to promote active sport participation and broaden the opportunity for people to be part of the rugby league community.

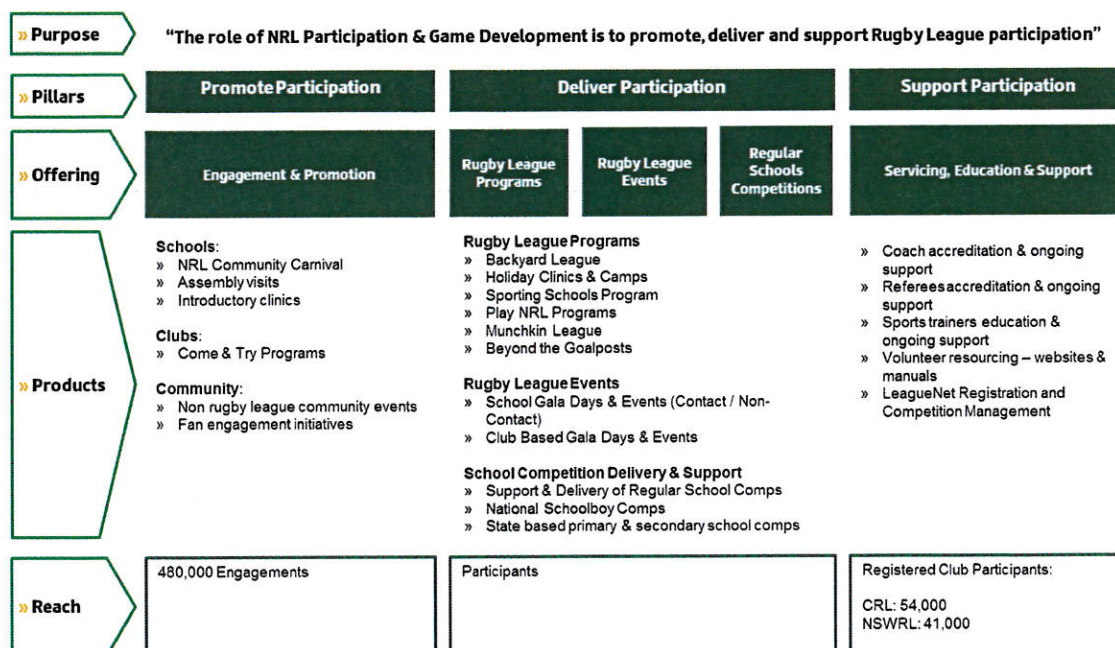
In 2015 there were 1.4 million participants playing a form of rugby league, whether it be touch, tag or tackle. The fastest area for growth in the game is female participation, with women's participation in club rugby league rising by 26% last year. There are now 400,000 females playing a form of rugby league and importantly more than 170,000 of these are schoolgirls, which will hopefully lead to continued participation in years to come.

In NSW the NRL employs 66 full time staff and over 100 casual staff to deliver a range of programs to encourage people to participate in rugby league. We give away over 100,000 footballs annually across NSW. We distribute over 75,000 ticket offers to school participants annually as part of a strategy to promote the game and encourage people to participate in rugby league.

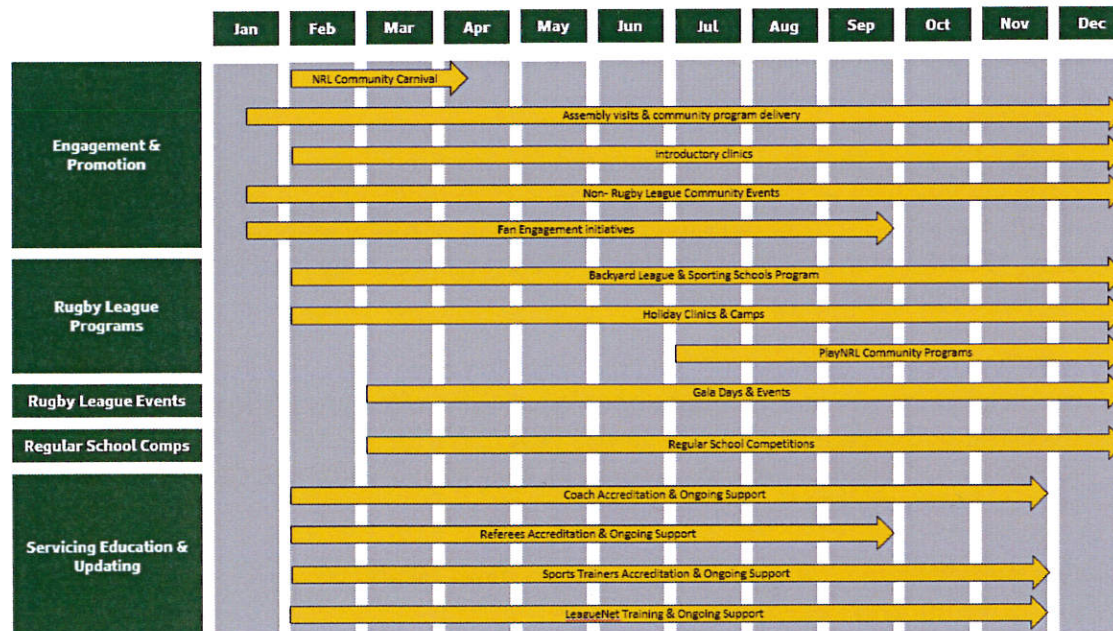
Our participation strategy is based around three pillars:

1. Promoting participation
2. Delivering participation programs
3. Supporting participation

The table below will provide the Committee a good overview of the activities undertaken under each pillar.



The following table provides an overview of the delivery schedule for the various participation programs:





NRL Community Carnival

Now in its 16th year, the Community Carnival is one of the significant ways in which the NRL demonstrates the Game's commitment to making a difference in the community and encourages participation in rugby league. The carnival involves NRL ambassadors and players from each of the 16 Clubs visiting remote and regional towns across Australia and New Zealand, encouraging participation in rugby league and delivering important social messages to hundreds of thousands of young fans.

This year's NRL Community Carnival was extremely successful:

- More than 255,000 children participated across Australia and New Zealand;
- 965 schools were visited and 77 Junior League clinics were held across Australia and New Zealand;
- Reached 383 towns across Australia and New Zealand; and
- Significant media and social media coverage and reach – \$4.4 million in advertising space, 3,576 media reports and a combined social media reach of 9.7 million.

The NRL Community Carnival is currently funded by the NRL. To expand the scope and reach of the program we would like to identify further funding opportunities. The carnival could be an opportunity to deliver important health and wellbeing messages to young people in partnership with the NSW Government.

Backyard League/Play NRL Sporting Schools

The NRL Backyard League and Play NRL Sporting Schools programs are delivered in Infant and Primary schools across NSW.

Kindergarten to Year 2

The early childhood program is delivered by an NRL Game Development Officer involves modified, non-contact, safe and age appropriate activities that develop an introduction to and understanding of rugby league.

The program uses story based learning to assist young students to grasp the skills and concepts of rugby league. Lessons have been designed alongside a story where students practice locomotor movement skills. Students learn to be aware of space and game boundaries and practice personal safety.

Year 3 to Year 6

The primary school program aims to introduce students to rugby league in a safe, non-competitive and fun environment. The program equips students and teachers with the tools to play a version of our game in any setting while delivering important education, health and welfare messages. The units are based on game play and involve the students in active learning. The program allows the facilitator to use both questioning and direct instructions appropriate to student understanding and development.

The program has been developed to cater for a range of learners, and has been designed to improve participant understanding of 'why' and 'how' rather than simply what to do. Games are stopped at regular intervals and participants are challenged



to reflect on their participation in order to mature the play. Students are encouraged to think strategically about game concepts and will become tactically aware and be able to become decision makers during the game.

The NRL recently partnered with Dr Greg Forrest from the University of Wollongong to test the effectiveness of the program which is underpinned by an innovative games and sports teaching approach. The research findings suggest there is strong evidence that the new Backyard League program improves game play understanding and is closely linked to higher levels of motivation, increased participation and more positive attitudes towards playing games and sports.

Backyard League and Play NRL lessons can be incorporated into the school's classroom timetable. Alternatively, we also offer schools the option to run a before or after school program for students. Programs can be conducted over five consecutive weeks or any alternative that is most convenient for the school. The In-School program comprises of five lessons of 30-45 minutes with activities based on students' age and ability. All activities are modified to encourage maximum involvement and enjoyment for all participants.

Munchkin League

Munchkin League is a new and exciting Early Childhood Development Program. The program is designed specifically for 3-5 year olds, of all abilities and skills, and runs over eight 45 minute sessions.

A philosophy of learning through play, promotes physical activity in a fun and interactive environment. Children are supported and encouraged by qualified Early Childhood educators.

Munchkin League engages children in learning fine and gross motor skills, problem solving abilities and communication and teamwork. The program supports social and emotional growth and assists children to develop independence, self-confidence and self-awareness. Munchkin League provides an opportunity for children to learn to respect others, try something new and make lots of new friends.

Munchkin League was launched this year in Queensland. The NRL is considering rolling out the program in NSW in 2017, with a focus on Western Sydney and regional NSW.

Harmony Programs

The NRL and NSW Rugby League run harmony and multicultural tournaments each year. These tournaments provide opportunities for players and volunteers from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities to participate in teams that represent their community, culture or nation of Origin.

The annual Harmony Cup is a 9-a-side competition held in Western Sydney, for players that have not achieved selection in the NSWRL Harold Matthews Cup Junior Representative competition. Teams that participate included Rugby League Samoa NSW, Cook Islands, NSW Maori, NSW Indigenous, Australia-Fiji, Italy Young



Azzurri, Africa United, a combined Mediterranean Rugby League team, Malta Heritage, NSW Tonga, Latin Heat and Lebanon.

The Cabramatta Nines is an open age 9-a-side tournament, held in Cabramatta in Sydney's South West. It comprises 32 teams representing clubs and countries hailing from a variety of regions such as Europe, Asia, South America and the Pacific Islands. National representative teams that participate include Greece, Malta, Ireland, Niue, Cook Islands, Philippines and Thailand, Canada, Chile and El Salvador.

These programs are designed to encourage participation in rugby league, as well as celebrate the rich tapestry of cultures that make up our game.

Beyond the Goalposts

The NRL offers a range of secondary school programs to help students meet curriculum needs through accredited courses in coaching, refereeing and sports first aid. These programs are aimed at providing students with the opportunity to gain qualifications and experience in the numerous pathways available in the game. Students participate in a number of events/activities, organised by NRL Game Development Officers who mentor the student's learning journey. Students are provided with all of the necessary knowledge and skills required to try their hand at refereeing, coaching or sports first aid with no need for previous experience or involvement.

The NRL designed Beyond the Goalposts program is financially supported by the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy and can be incorporated into a range of ACARA accredited Secondary School courses. The program is delivered in regional NSW, with a strong focus on Western NSW, the South Coast and North Coast. Each year approximately 4,000 students participate in the program.

Importantly the program helps address the shortage of referees and coaches which is an impediment to growing participation in sport.

Support programs

One of the major challenges facing sport is ensuring there are enough coaches, referees, trainers and volunteers to enable ongoing participation growth. The NRL deliver national accreditation programs, which have been approved by the Australian Sports Commission for coaches, referees and sports trainers. In 2015 we delivered

- 402 Coaching Courses for 4,900 participants
- Reaccreditation activities for 2,000 coaches
- 177 Refereeing Courses for 1,500 participants
- Sports Trainers:
- 2000 people participated in face to face and 8,500 in online training for sports trainers

(N.B. the above are national statistics)



Rugby League Junior Competitions

There are three formats of rugby league for junior participants – Mini League, Mod League and Junior International competitions.

Mini

Mini League is focused on meeting the needs of younger children and caters for boys and girls aged 5 - 8/9 years. The philosophy of Mini League centres on maximum involvement and encourages learning through play without the pressure of abiding to the strict laws of the adult game. To be eligible to participate in Mini League a child must have attained the age of five before registering to a junior rugby league club. To promote involvement, enhance skill development and provide a fun and enjoyable experience for participants in a safe, non-competitive environment, the rules for these age groups have been modified.

Mod

Mod Leagues are focused on the 9-12 years age group for boys and girls, when the demands of adult rugby league is still too much, but the simpler Mini League is not challenging enough. To promote involvement, enhance skill development and provide a fun and enjoyable experience for participants in a safe, non-competitive environment, the rules for these age groups have been modified. Mod Leagues are also played under the National "Safeplay Code". The Safeplay Code has been developed to emphasise safety and good conduct within the game of Rugby League by creating the best possible on-field environment and actively controlling undesirable actions.

Junior International

Junior International competitions encourage players to build upon the fundamental skills learned during Mini and Mod Leagues. Competitions exist from social to junior representative levels. While games are played under the same rules as the adult game, for teams in Under 13 - Under 15 age groups, matches are also played under the National "Safeplay Code".

New Rugby League Formats

NSW Rugby League will pilot new alternative formats of Rugby League this year, with new Weight and Age competitions and a Friday night 'Carnival of Football' concept. The modified Rugby League competitions are for all age groups, with a focus on making the game fun, safe and family time friendly.

Three new programs are being offered:

1. The w8s (Weight for Age) program provides an opportunity for young boys and girls to participate in Rugby League in a format which reduces the size difference between children aged 9-12.
2. The m8s (Mates) program is designed for high school-aged players and will be age-based between 12-15 years.
3. Friday Night 9s is open to Under-17s and Open Mens and will look to match the atmosphere of that of a carnival, with DJs, food trucks, and onsite entertainment set to ignite Manly.



Program and Age	District	Duration	Venue	Dates
w8s Under-10s & 12s	Parramatta	4 weeks (Thursday)	Richie Benaud Oval, North Parramatta	1 Sep – 22 Sep
w8s Under-9's & 11s	Campbelltown	4 weeks (Thursday)	Warren Ritchie Oval, Milton Park, Ingeburn	20 Oct – 10 Nov
m8s Under-12s & 14s	North Sydney	4 weeks (Thursday)	St Ives Showground	6 Oct – 27 Oct
m8s Under-13s & 15s	St George	4 weeks (Wednesday)	Scarborough Park, Kogarah	21 Sep – 12 Oct
FN9s U17s & Opens	Manly	6 weeks (Friday)	Millers Reserve, North Manly	23 Sep – 28 Oct

The alternative formats are not designed to replace the traditional 13-a-side game, rather to supplement those competitions and increase the number of people playing rugby league.

Recent participation research conducted by NSWRL revealed that unevenness of competition was a major factor in the drop out of players from the game and a reason why some parents were reluctant to allow their kids to take part. Given the different rates at which young people grow and mature, both physically and mentally, the w8s format is designed to address the concerns of participants and parents.

Conclusion

The NRL would welcome the opportunity to work with the NSW Government to address the challenges posed by childhood overweight and obesity. We have a number of community programs that could be utilised to deliver important messages about health and wellbeing to young people and enhance existing NSW Government programs. In addition our commitment to growing participation in all formats of rugby league will help increase overall sports participation rates, thereby having a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of young people in the community.

Should the Committee have any further questions please feel free to contact me on

Yours sincerely

Jaymes Boland-Rudder
Head of Government Relations and Campaign Management