

Sporting clubs prove an ideal setting for prevention

Do sporting clubs promote healthy behaviour?

While most sporting clubs make a positive contribution to our health and wellbeing, some have cultures that promote alcohol misuse, smoking and unhealthy foods, which impacts on their players, members and spectators. In fact, local and international research has found that alcohol consumption among members of community sporting clubs is markedly higher than in the general community and 'binge' drinking is common. The potential negative impact of this sort of culture on children and adolescents when they are developing their views on what constitutes a healthy or 'normal' lifestyle is of concern. Research suggests clubs are keen to promote healthier behaviours, but often lack the confidence to implement the necessary changes. This makes sporting clubs – often the centre of community life – an opportune environment for prevention.

What is Good Sports?

The largest and longest-running prevention program for sporting clubs in Australia is Good Sports, which is run by the Australian Drug Foundation. Through government funding, the program provides free support for community sporting clubs to help make them healthier, safer and more family-friendly places.

Good Sports clubs commit to progress through three levels of accreditation over three to five years, increasing their commitment to changing practices and policies around alcohol and smoking management as they advance. Level one accreditation focuses on ensuring clubs abide by liquor licensing laws and responsible service of alcohol (RSA) training of bar staff; level two accreditation focuses on the provision of alternative food, drink and revenue-raising; and level three focuses on policy development, review and enforcement. The staged approach takes into account the club's readiness to change and enables progressive improvements to be embedded within the club before setting greater expectations at the next level.

How effective is Good Sports?

Good Sports has been thoroughly evaluated, and has shown positive results. For example, early research suggests that rates of risky alcohol use decrease as clubs move through the program. The clubs experience many other positive changes including an increase in membership, particularly among females, young people and non-players. A recently completed randomised controlled trial of Good Sports (submitted for publication) demonstrated positive program outcomes, supporting these strong results.

Good Sports is also cost-effective. A recent economic analysis undertaken by KPMG demonstrated that in 2011 to 2012 alone Good Sports is estimated to have averted well over 1,300 alcohol-related falls, assaults and road accidents (combined) and saved the economy almost \$14 million. Very few community-driven, community-owned alcohol management initiatives have achieved this magnitude of success.

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Good Sports is an example of the positive benefits that can come from implementing a simple yet effective program. For this reason Good Sports has now been adopted by over 6,500 clubs around Australia. It is often incorporated into wider community initiatives such as liquor accords and local alcohol management plans as a key way of tackling alcohol problems in the important setting of sporting clubs.

Case study: Sale Tennis Club

What was the issue?

Weekend tennis was turning into long drinking sessions at the Sale Tennis Club in regional Victoria, to the point where the club had a reputation around town for its heavy drinking culture.

And the solution?

The Sale Tennis Club joined the Good Sports program, knowing that support from the Australian Drug Foundation would be key to altering its members' attitudes towards alcohol.

By working through the program the underlying problems were identified and a strategy was developed that would significantly change the way the club dealt with alcohol including:

- Relocating the bar area so it no longer dominated the clubrooms
- Changing bar opening hours
- Hosting free RSA courses for members and appointing RSA-trained bar staff
- Offering a wider option of drinks at the bar, including more light beers, and low and non-alcoholic drinks
- Shifting from tap beer to packaged beer
- Increased security and monitoring of alcohol consumption
- Getting rid of 'happy hour', BYO and takeaway sales
- No longer including alcohol as part of awards, raffles or club prize pools
- Promoting an informal 'buddy' system to combat drink driving

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What's been the impact?

Since implementing the Good Sports program, the Sale Tennis Club has:

- Increased membership and community participation
- A positive community image
- Strong relationships with and support from local police, council (Wellington Shire) and businesses
- Developed a successful funding strategy that doesn't rely on alcohol sales

These fantastic results have led to the club being named the National Good Sports Club of the Year, and a finalist in the Community Sporting Club of the Year award as part of the Department of Planning and Community Development's Community Sport and Recreation Awards in 2011. It has also been made a Regional Centre Partner of Tennis Australia.

References for this fact sheet are available at: druginfo.adf.org.au.

Further information

The DrugInfo website has information on:

- Fact sheets for sporting clubs
- GoodSports.com.au
- Help and support

Go to druginfo.adf.org.au

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