

# ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH SPORT: A REVIEW OF SPORTING ORGANIZATIONS' WEBSITES<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT WERE WE INTERESTED IN?

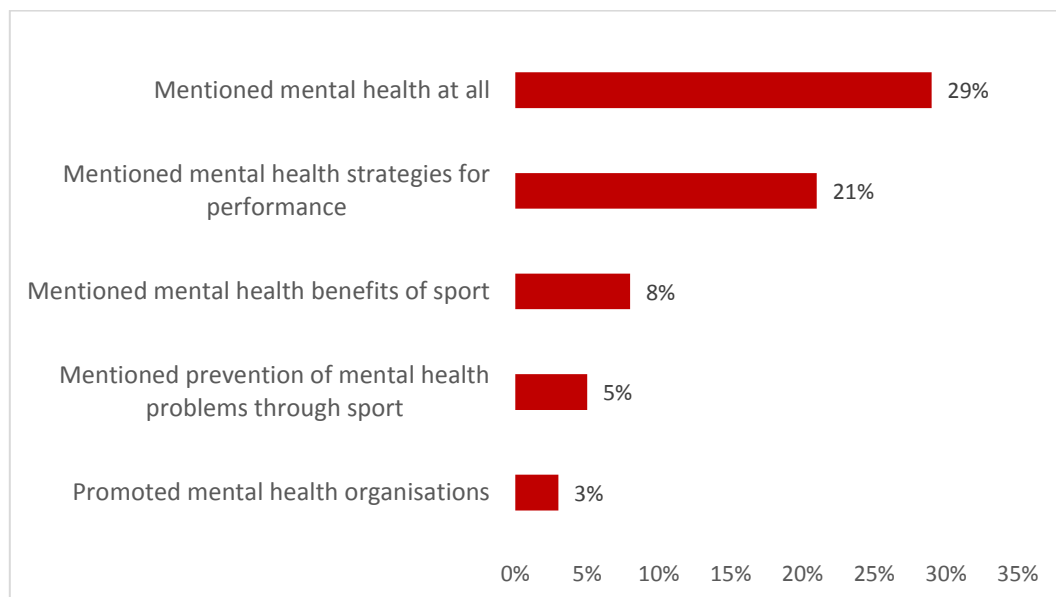
We know that sports participation is beneficial for both physical and mental health. This is great for adolescents – did you know about 14% of Australian adolescents aged 12 to 17 years will have a mental health problem in a given year?<sup>2</sup> We wondered whether the sporting environment is a good place to provide mental health education. After all, nearly 70% of Australian adolescents play sport each week.<sup>3</sup> So to begin with, we looked at what is already being done about mental health in a range of different sports.

## WHAT DID WE DO?

In 2015, we looked at national Australian websites for all 56 sports represented in the Olympic Games, as well as six of the most popular sports: AFL, NRL, netball, cricket, touch football and Oz tag. We searched peak body websites for any mentions of mental health, including links with other mental health initiatives, and the content of coaching programs where possible.

## WHAT DID WE FIND?

In brief, of the 62 sports websites searched:



Some websites (11%) indicated mental health was an important topic and they had taken action to raise awareness, decrease stigma, or promote help-seeking (e.g. one-off television campaigns, or ‘mental health rounds’ of the sport). Two good examples include the NRL’s State of Mind campaign, and the Australian Drug Foundation’s Good Sports program<sup>5</sup>. Netball and AFL had both offered mental health training to coaches in WA, but in general coach guidelines did not contain mental health content, even when they talked about “winning mentality”, “motivation” or “supporting the team”. Very few of these campaigns or activities were evaluated

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Though there is growing concern about mental health problems in adolescents, in general, sporting organisations could play a larger role in promoting positive mental health and preventing mental health problems. It’s likely that programs would be effective if they targeted different levels in a sporting club (e.g. coaches, athletes, managers), were based on up to date evidence, and focused on improving mental health knowledge and reducing associated stigma.

## Further reading

1. Liddle SK, Deane FP, Vella S. Addressing mental health through sport: a review of sporting organizations’ websites. *Early Interv Psychia*. 2017; 2:93-103. DOI: 10.1111/eip.12337. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/eip.12337/full>
2. Lawrence D, Johnson S, Hafekost J, Boterhoven de Haan K, Sawyer MG, Ainley J, et al. The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents: Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Canberra; 2015. <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/mental-pubs-m-child2>
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation, Australia, 2013-14*. 2015. Available from: <http://www.abs.gov.au>
4. [www.nrlstateofmind.com.au](http://www.nrlstateofmind.com.au)
5. [www.goodsports.com.au](http://www.goodsports.com.au)

