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HEALTHIER TOGETHER

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026 - 2028

Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across Victoria where Walking Football for Health takes place. We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who continue to nurture the world's oldest living cultures.

We recognise that the act of walking together holds deep meaning on these lands - where stories, knowledge, and connection to Country have been shared on foot for countless generations. As we come together from many lands and cultures through Walking Football for Health, we honour the shared spirit of movement, belonging, and care for one another and the land.

May this sport help us walk gently on Country, build stronger communities, and continue the journey toward health, respect, and reconciliation.



The Process

Our approach combined sector insight, organisational analysis and participant voice to build a clear and confident path forward.

The development process included:

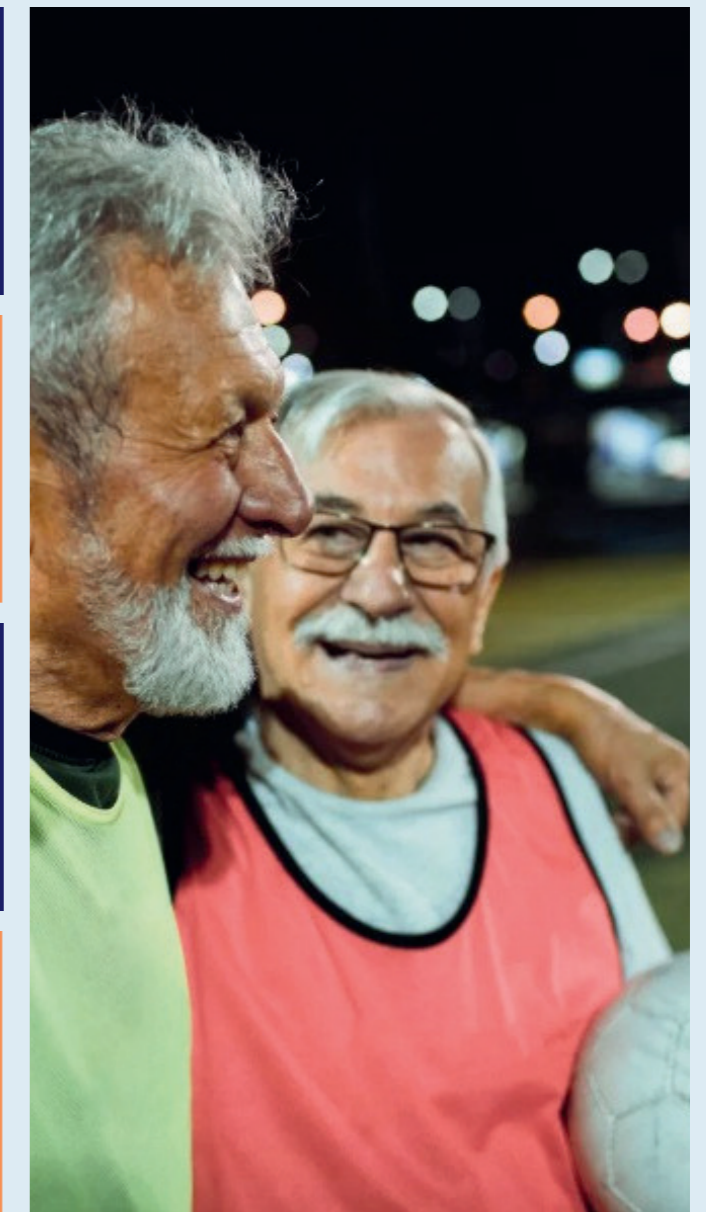
Comprehensive Environmental Scan: Analysis of current and emerging technological, social, health and sporting trends influencing participation, community connection and ageing well in Victoria.

Future-Focused Leadership Workshop: Collaborative exploration of long-term aspirations, risks and strategic priorities to align ambition with practical realities.

Organisational Capability Review: Assessment of internal systems, governance, partnerships, resources and delivery models to understand strengths and areas for development.

Participant Experience & Cohort Analysis: Integration of participant data and independent analysis to understand engagement across gender, age, ability, cultural background and skill level – ensuring the strategy reflects lived experience.

Targeted Stakeholder Engagement: Consultation across the sport and community ecosystem to test assumptions, validate findings and strengthen alignment.



This layered and cross-validated process ensures the strategy is grounded in evidence, shaped by experience and built for sustainable growth.

Our thanks go to all involved parties for their commitment to the process and insights offered.

What is Walking Football?

-  A low-impact, small-sided version of football (soccer) designed so people of all ages and abilities can play safely.
-  No running, no contact, no tackles - reducing injury risk and making movement accessible.
-  Played at a social, conversational pace, emphasising enjoyment, connection and wellbeing.
-  Easy to join: minimal equipment, simple rules, and sessions that fit into everyday life.
-  A format that places belonging before winning, creating inclusive environments for all genders, backgrounds and abilities.
-  A proven way to boost physical activity, reduce isolation, and support healthier ageing.
-  Delivered locally across Victoria through a growing network of community partners.

Walking Football is scalable. It offers:

- Low-cost participation
- Low infrastructure burden with adaptability across facility types
- Volunteer-led delivery
- Preventative-health alignment
- Social cohesion orientation



Sport for everyday Australians

Only 11% of Australians aged 15+ participate in organised sport at least once a week (Ausplay 2024). By age 55, just 17% of Australians participate in organised sport once a year. Traditional sporting models are not consistently catering to this demographic, while our population is rapidly aging.

Our sporting preferences are changing. Australians increasingly prefer flexible, social, low-impact formats that keep them active and connected (Australian Sports Commission, 2024).

At the same time, health, wellbeing and social connection remain national priorities and societal challenges. Older adults are facing rising rates of loneliness, chronic conditions, mobility limitations and digital exclusion.

Solutions for an aging population

Walking Football is proving popular amongst older Australians seeking accessible, social and achievable ways to stay active and connected. The low-impact activity supports management of chronic conditions and prevention of non-communicable diseases.

From competition - to connection

Walking Football delivers informal, flexible and fun activities that focus on connection and belonging over winning. This reduces social isolation and boosts mental health outcomes.

Sport that centers inclusion

Walking Football nurtures an environment and programming that encourages all genders, backgrounds and abilities. It provides a low risk, low impact re/entry point into physical activity for inactive adults, including ageing Australians.

Organised sport done differently

Local, community-led organised sport opportunities are still in demand, but they must be proactively designed to meet the needs of modern Australians. Walking Football 4 Health Victoria centres this premise and designs its system architecture accordingly.

Why Walking Football Matters to Victoria?

We are building community-based preventative health infrastructure, through sport.



Supports aging in place



Strengthens community cohesion and resilience

Facilitates preventative health outcomes

Reduces loneliness

Our Vision

Bringing out the best of humanity through lifelong sport pathways that deliver movement, connection and shared purpose.

Our Mission

To do sport differently by delivering welcoming, inclusive experiences designed by and for our community.

How we believe change happens

Walking Football 4 Health Victoria exists to respond to declining participation, rising social isolation and the health challenges facing Australians.

We believe that:

- ✓ When people feel welcome, valued and safe, they return.
- ✓ When participation is designed around belonging rather than winning, more people stay engaged long term.
- ✓ When we intentionally close experience gaps across gender, culture, ability and skill level, retention strengthens and sporting communities diversify.
- ✓ When participants stay engaged for years – not months – the health, wellbeing and social benefits compound.
- ✓ When sport is locally embedded and partner-supported, access and value improves and impact becomes sustainable.

By focusing relentlessly on participant experience, inclusion and local partnerships, we create the conditions for long-term health, community connection and organisational sustainability.

Our logic



What We'll Deliver

The difference we'll make won't be found in documents or programs - it will be felt by the people who play.

We will shape:

1

Healthier, more
connected
communities

2

Vital participants with
improved wellbeing

3

Sustainable
foundations for
organisational growth

4

Expanded reach
across Victorian
communities

How we'll do it

Our approach will set us apart as an organisation and sport.

- ✓ We will stay focused on improving lives and communities.
- ✓ We will continuously monitor our impact - the value we deliver and the social contribution we make.
- ✓ We will deliver programs equitably, while valuing all participants equally so that everyone benefits.
- ✓ We will empower and work with our community, to design outcomes and the game, together.
- ✓ We will align with regional priorities and collaborate with local sport, health and community leaders to strengthen existing ecosystems, not duplicate effort.

What We'll Focus On

Proactive improvement in these areas will deliver us the impact we want to see. These are the four areas that will be central to our attention and resources.

Inclusive
Culture



Participant
Experience



Engagement &
Advocacy



Governance &
Systems



What We'll Focus On



Inclusive Environments

Creating spaces where people feel relaxed, respected and able to take part in a way that suits them.

We will:

- ✔ Resource our valued coaches and referees to facilitate supportive, welcoming and inclusive behaviours
- ✔ Keep access simple and affordable so cost and complexity never stop someone from turning up
- ✔ Continually review and strengthen behavioural standards to protect the social, inclusive intent of Walking Football
- ✔ Implement and continuously refine safe reporting and feedback mechanisms
- ✔ Diversify and adapt our offering for different groups of people and expand our Walking Football Festivals
- ✔ Consistently monitor and address disparities in experience data across gender, cultural background, disability and age
- ✔ Collaborate with local groups and participants to pick up early signals about what feels welcoming - and fix what doesn't.

Why this matters:

We collectively succeed when people feel safe to bring their whole selves to the game - and feel that they belong. Our culture determines whether people stay and thrive or disengage and leave.

Annual Deliverables:

1. Review our membership diversity relative to our community/population diversity to identify improvements.
2. Through data-driven insights, annually monitor and review accessibility barriers faced by different sectors of our community to inform our growth strategy.
3. Deliver inclusion training to our coaches, referees and administrators.

What We'll Focus On



Participant Experience

Designing the sport around our community's needs - and continually improving it using regular feedback.

We will:

- ✔ Make participant safety a non-negotiable foundation of our sport
- ✔ Monitor belonging and experience equity across cohorts
- ✔ Use cohort-based insights to identify friction points in the participant-experience
- ✔ Co-design improvements with our community to keep the sport enjoyable, safe and human-centred
- ✔ Share experience data openly to spark improvement across every venue and program
- ✔ Continuously upskill and guide our session leaders to respond to the needs of the community.

Why this matters:

When we pay attention to how we make people feel - those that are staying, those that are walking away and those that never engaged to begin with, we have a wider community perspective informing sport's design and delivery.

Annual Deliverables:

1. Survey participants against known experience drivers, with half yearly check ins (smaller survey) to inform improvements and reduce experience gaps.
2. Conduct co-design sessions at least bi-annually to ensure participants are engaged in program and accessibility improvements.
3. Conduct coach and administrator training in participant-led sport delivery.



What We'll Focus On



Engagement & Advocacy

Growing awareness, building partnerships and championing the values of Walking Football 4 Health Victoria, its participants and their diversity.

We will:

- ✔ Build strong relationships with all levels of government, health services and community groups
- ✔ Champion and advocate for the diversity of our membership - and the needs of the individuals within it
- ✔ Capture and share stories and data that demonstrate the sport's value to people and places
- ✔ Advocate for investment that recognises Walking Football as a health and wellbeing asset
- ✔ Support programs and deliverers with simple tools to engage their communities effectively
- ✔ Explore referral and social prescribing pathways with primary care providers
- ✔ Position Walking Football as a scalable community-based health intervention
- ✔ Elevate wider community voices so the strategy evolves with the community's needs

Why this matters:

These efforts build awareness, strengthen community connections and help more people recognise Walking Football 4 Health Victoria as a welcoming and impactful pathway to better health and wellbeing.

Annual Deliverables:

1. Develop and promote three case studies each year for our members, partners and investors, that focus on the social and personal impact we make.
2. Develop and annually review/maintain a Partnerships Strategy.

What We'll Focus On



Governance & Systems

Building a reliable backbone that keeps the sport and organisation running smoothly and safely.

We will:

- ✔ Develop operating systems that are clear, streamlined and easy for volunteers to use
- ✔ Develop our board and administrative team to grow our capacity and capability
- ✔ Maintain transparent processes for decision-making, finances and risk
- ✔ Strengthen policies that protect participants, volunteers and the organisation
- ✔ Apply continuous improvement cycles informed by Participant Experience data
- ✔ Invest in tools that make administration light and communication consistent
- ✔ Report regularly to participants and partners on progress, performance and impact

Why this matters:

These foundations protect participants, support those delivering the game, and give participants and partners confidence that Walking Football 4 Health Victoria is well run and sustainable.

Annual Deliverables:

1. Establish, monitor and maintain an operational plan inclusive of pragmatic steps to reduce our risk, grow our capacity and capability.
2. Annually audit our operational capacity and capability.



Three-Year Action Plan - Year 1

Year 1 focuses on establishing the foundations required for Walking Football 4 Health Victoria to grow sustainably. The priority is building clarity, safety, and trust – strengthening governance, communicating our strategic direction, and embedding our culture of listening to participants. These early steps will ensure the sport grows on strong, participant-centred foundations.

Year 1

ESTABLISH

Laying the foundations and setting the tone

Focus Areas: Consistency, safety and trust.

- Clarifying and communicating the new strategic direction - purpose, values and standards
- Capturing and applying new participant experience insights, co-designing improvements with participants and building our culture of listening
- Solidifying governance and safety systems in accordance with the audit plan
- Building board capability and capacity
- Establishing a customer relationship management (CRM) system and tracking retention
- Establish essential coach and referee training programs
- Building early confidence with participants, partners and funders
- Establish new partnerships to aid local delivery and increase organisational revenue
- Activate 10 locally supported community sites with retention above 75%

Three-Year Action Plan - Year 2

Year 2 focuses on embedding the systems, behaviours and partnerships that support consistent and reliable delivery. Building on the foundations established in Year 1, the focus shifts to strengthening capability, applying participant insights, and ensuring inclusive practices are consistently reflected across the participation base.

Year 2

EMBED

Building consistency and strengthening governance

Focus Areas: Quality, learning and reliability

- Embedding inclusive behaviours and experience standards across the participation base
- Strengthening inclusion training for administrators, coaches and referees
- Embedding our culture of data collection and insights application across the sport
- Building consistent adaptive delivery practices to implement improvements and engage diverse audiences
- Continue strengthening governance structures and board capability in line with audit plan
- Embed place-based and organisational partnerships and slowly expand number of stakeholders the sport is consistently engaging with
- Beginning to show reliable, repeatable impact across diverse audiences
- Activate 15 locally supported community sites with retention above 75%

Three-Year Action Plan - Year 3

Year 3 focuses on expanding the reach and impact of Walking Football 4 Health Victoria. With strong foundations and reliable systems in place, the organisation will scale its delivery through new partnerships, locations and communities – while maintaining its commitment to participant experience, inclusion and community wellbeing.

Year 3

EXPAND

Scale impact without losing the heart of the game

Focus Areas: Impact, credibility and sustainability

- Showcase the sport's adaptability for diverse audiences
- Elevate and amplify the sport's communication to new locations, stakeholders and partnerships with proven case studies and operating models
- Elevate board and workforce capability with dedicated insights and education
- Start to scale locations into new regions through place-based partnerships
- Continue and reinforce our relentless focus on participant experience insights as a point of difference for our sport.
- Expand the number of place-based and organisational partnerships, building capability and a portfolio of diversified, sustainable investment
- Prepare the organisation for its next strategic chapter
- Activate 20 locally supported community sites with retention above 75%

What We'll Measure

What we measure, matters. It determines what we stand for, what we'll be held accountable for, and ultimately who we are as an organisation. That's why we will focus on clear indicators that we know are most important for our success and emphasise building the systems and processes to capture the data and apply it to inform everyday decisions.

Primary Measures:

These reflect the heart of the strategy and are our highest priority metrics of success.

- Participant rate of belonging
- Participant Net Promoter Score
- Volunteer Net Promoter Score
- Participant retention rates
- Participant accessibility scores
- Self-reported wellbeing change as a result of program participation
- Experience equity gap (difference in belonging and Net Promoter Score across age, gender, CALD, disability)
- Number and quality of community partnerships

Secondary Measures:

These are important for planning and sustainability and we believe will result from an intensive focus on our Primary Measures.

- Number of participants
- Number and distribution of locations
- Diversity indicators (age, gender, CALD, disability, access needs, rural/regional/metro split)
- Number of volunteers (admin, referees, coaches)
- Funding diversity and organisational financial health