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Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Economics,
Industry and Recreation

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT

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CRICKET
ACT



17 October 2025

Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation

ACT Legislative Assembly

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RE: Cricket ACT Submission – *Inquiry into Barriers and Opportunities for Participation in Community Sports in the ACT*

Cricket has always held a special place in Canberra. It is played with pride in schoolyards, suburban ovals, premier grounds and backyards. Now, more than ever, the sport is on the cusp of transformative growth as the ACT enters a new era of growth and expansion.

Cricket ACT (CACT) has a rich history in community sport with a purpose to enrich & unite our community through sport. To do this we need safe, welcoming, inclusive participation for all ages and backgrounds, and create quality experiences that lead to lifelong involvement, whether as players, volunteers, coaches, officials or fans. Cricket ACT underpins this by four strategic pillars concentrated on participation growth, quality experiences and a sustainable future.

Cricket ACT's Strategic Priorities:

- **Participation Growth** - Attracting 5–12-year-olds and their families, and growing entry-level programs designed for all abilities, First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.
- **Elite Teams & Systems** - Establish a high-performance system that enhances the performance capability of identified players, coaches and officials, through the provision of clear and compelling pathways, performance support mechanisms and high-quality facilities.
- **Sustainable Future** - Embrace sustainability principles and effectively manage the sustainability impact of business activities and decisions to ensure our game is best placed to meet future demands, opportunities and aspirations.
- **Quality Experience** - Create leading participant, volunteer and fan experiences, offerings and facilities that are fit for purpose, create excitement and enjoyment, and enhance the cricket experience.

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These objectives are set out in the Cricket ACT Strategic Plan- '*Thriving on and off the field*' 2022 – 2026.

This submission aims to provide insight into the specific needs of cricket, including how a lack of planning and access creates a barrier to participation, as well recommendations on how to better utilise policy, programs and infrastructure to increase overall participation in community sport across the ACT.

The following areas have been considered:

- Effectiveness of the implementation of the ACT Government Sport and Recreation Strategy 2023–2028
- How access to community sports facilities is planned and delivered for locals of all ages, abilities and backgrounds
- Barriers to participation in community sport
- Lessons from successful strategies used in the ACT and external stakeholders
- Opportunities to improve participation rates (policy, programs, infrastructure)
- Policy; ownership, funding and operating arrangements of sports facilities
- Any other relevant matters Concerning participation in community sport

Effectiveness of the implementation of the ACT Government Sport and Recreation Strategy 2023–2028

The ACT Government's CBR Next Move: Sport and Recreation Strategy 2023–2028 sets a vision of "*All Canberrans moving more*" and emphasises capability building, welcoming and inclusive experiences, and places & spaces. Cricket ACT's experience is that many elements are being advanced, particularly workforce capability and facility upgrades, yet further focus in the following areas will accelerate impact:

- **Welcoming & inclusive experiences:** CACT programs embed inclusivity and connection (e.g., Accessible Sports Day, Lord's Taverners All Abilities Multi Sports Day, targeted CALD engagement & programs) and demonstrate strong alignment to the Strategy's inclusivity pillar. Season highlights included over 100 deaf and hard-of-hearing students and approximately 150 students with disabilities engaged through multi-sport days, with junior participation reflecting significant CALD representation (42%). These outcomes illustrate effective local delivery under the Strategy's inclusivity aims.
- **Places & spaces:** Recent increased engagement and ongoing co-investment into cricket infrastructure projects have allowed for accelerated facility redevelopment across the ACT. The co-investment has been made possible through the Australian Cricket Infrastructure Fund (ACIF) and ACT Government funding. Since September 2023, the ACIF has contributed over \$560,000 in funding to local projects, helping to unlock approximately \$2.5million in total cricket infrastructure upgrades. It has supported the delivery of 15 successful projects in the ACT, to address critical needs in the cricket community.
 - Key upgrades delivered with ACIF support include:

- **Practice Net Facilities:** 6 new or refurbished synthetic practice net complexes for training.
- **Turf Wicket Renewals:** 4 turf wicket block reconstructions to protect and rejuvenate quality playing surfaces.
- **Pavilion Improvements:** 3 clubhouse/pavilion upgrades to provide modern, inclusive amenities for players and supporters.
- **Other Amenities:** Construction of new shade structures and an equipment storage shed to support club activities.

Each of these projects have been a success because of the collaborative investment approach, leveraging the ACIF funding to unlock or multiply contributions from clubs, schools and government. This supports CBR Next Move’s “Places & Spaces” priority; continued pipeline investment is required for turf sustainability and capacity.

- **Capability & capacity:** Coach accreditation and development have been significantly strengthened across 2024/25, with 10 community courses delivered and more than 80 coaches accredited, including 12 graduates from representative-level courses, featuring female and multicultural coaches to support greater sector capability.

To further boost reach and effectiveness, CACT introduced a dedicated calendar of upskilling opportunities, ensuring coaches and volunteers have regular access to tailored development programs throughout the year. In addition, two dedicated coach developer roles have been established, each focusing on either the north or south regions of the ACT.

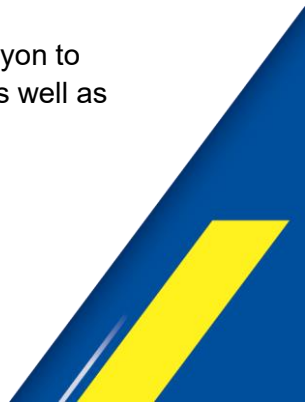
This strategic segmentation allows the coach development manager to broaden their impact, providing more localised support and ensuring that diverse player and volunteer groups receive targeted coaching development.

These initiatives enable CACT to run specialised workshops and courses that address the unique needs of juniors, women and girls, culturally diverse communities, and representative players, creating a robust pathway for coaches at all levels and driving sustained improvement in capability and capacity.

How access to community sports facilities is planned and delivered for locals of all ages, abilities and backgrounds

CACT works closely with the ACT Government and local cricket clubs to prioritise facility upgrades, accessibility, and equitable scheduling. Recent projects demonstrate a co-investment model that improves quality and availability across regions (e.g., Aranda District Playing Field practice nets & Deakin West Oval practice nets).

For cricket, winter renovation windows and soil changes (e.g., the conversion of Lanyon to Merri Creek soil) are critical planning factors to ensure playable wickets in-season as well as the longevity of the game based on cricket soil supply & availability.



Sustained capital infrastructure and maintenance planning is essential to meet demand across juniors, women and girls, and social formats. Currently, there is no long-term plan or vision for community sporting infrastructure outside of the pre-approved election commitments. Having a multi-year facility investment plan in place will allow for all sporting codes to plan ahead, allowing greater co-investment into community facilities.

In addition to this, CACT design inclusive program pathways, school engagement with transitions into clubs, holiday programs, and modified social formats, so facilities serve all ages and abilities, with ACT Intravision Meteors involvement, indoor training facility access, and Manuka Oval activations to inspire participants.

Barriers to Participation in Community Sport

Based on CACT's and key stakeholder experience:

- **Facilities capacity and quality:** Demand for turf wickets, practice nets and lighting exceeds supply. Maintenance cycles and weather resilience constrain availability and consistency. Another practical barrier is field preparation, even a process such as maintaining consistent grass heights during cricket season have unintended negative impacts. Inconsistent grass length may compromise the playability and fairness of outfields, especially for junior and social games, and can limit accessibility for participants with diverse needs. Thoughtful management of such details is crucial to ensuring facilities truly support inclusive participation.

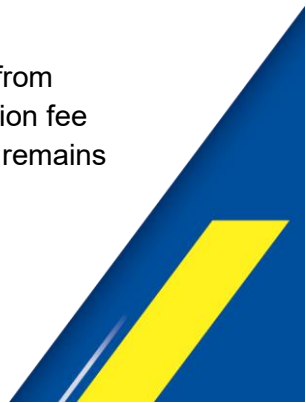
As part of the CACT Infrastructure Strategy, intensive provision and accessibility analysis was made, identifying priority locations for new facilities or targeted upgrades, optimising the efficiency, equity and sustainability of the overall facility network.

Within this analysis:

- **Accessibility** - measures the equity of access the population has to its nearest facility, expressed in minutes of drive time (in optimal driving conditions). It indicates how easily participants can reach infrastructure and highlights spatial strengths and deficiencies across the ACT.
- **Provision** - builds on accessibility by assessing the population within each facility's catchment. This provides a measure of the serviceable population per facility, incorporating both facility density and population density. In doing so, provision illustrates the extent to which each practice net, wicket or oval is able to meet local demand.

Together, these measures establish a robust framework for understanding the distribution and capacity of cricket facilities, highlighting where pressures are most acute and where future investment should be prioritised.

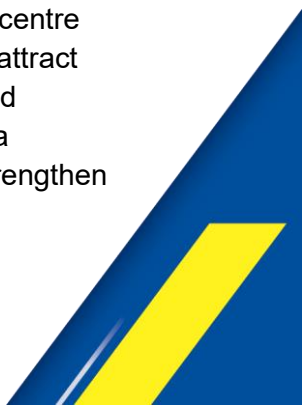
- **Cost and fees:** Registration and club levies can deter families & individuals from returning to play cricket year-on-year. Reforms such as integrating the affiliation fee into player registrations were introduced to streamline costs, but affordability remains



a pressure point. The Community Impact of Cricket in the ACT report states cricket across the ACT contributes over \$13.5 million per annum to the ACT economy, with a lifetime community health benefit of over \$14.2 million. Working with the ACT Government to ensure the affordability and sustainability of future facility hire costs are considered as part of barriers to increasing participation. Cricket ACT will continue to advocate for pricing transparency, capped hire costs, and tiered fee models to ensure facility hire remains affordable for junior and community cricket.

- **Volunteer capacity and capability:** Clubs rely on volunteers; structured training and recognition are needed to sustain delivery quality and reduce burnout. Our expanded coach education helps, but more support is required at the club-administration level.
- **Scheduling and format fit:** Traditional competition timing doesn't always suit families, women and girls, or new participants. Flexible formats (e.g., "Smash Series") and tape-ball/social cricket increase accessibility, yet wider adoption needs facility and policy support.
- **Inclusion barriers:** CALD families, First Nations communities, and people with disability benefit from tailored programs, culturally safe environments and clear transition pathways, however this is still inconsistent across all suburbs and sports. Our targeted events and programs demonstrate impact but require scale.

Lessons from Successful Strategies used in the ACT and external stakeholders

- **Co-investment facility model:** Delivering upgrades through combined funding (Government > club > community) builds ownership and long-term care while ensuring every participant has access to a new or upgrade cricket facility, whilst still participating in junior cricket.
 - **Inclusive mass-participation events:** Accessibility-focused days and female-only coaching and courses create welcoming entry points and accelerate community trust and participation growth.
 - **Clear female participation roadmap:** *The DRAFT Preliminary Female Cricket Roadmap 2025* consolidates learnings since the 2019–2022 Female Cricket Development Plan and proposes targeted school-to-club transitions, girls-only competitions and integrated coaching pathways – an approach consistent with global best practice in female sport growth.
 - **Strategic alignment and messaging:** Cricket, despite being one of the largest users of public open space, can be viewed by parts of government as a cost centre rather than a community investment. This perception limits the sport's ability attract sustained public funding, especially in a competitive and resource-constrained environment. By reframing cricket in the eyes of the ACT Government as a vehicle for community impact, rather than a cost centre, Cricket ACT can strengthen
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its advocacy for continued and increased infrastructure investment and influence of government priorities.

Opportunities to Improve Participation Rates (Policy, Programs, Infrastructure)

Policy & Funding

- Multi-year, sustained facility renewal program for turf wickets, practice nets and lighting, prioritising suburbs with substantial population growth will significantly increase the participation rates, not only for cricket but for all community sport. Aligning with “Places & Spaces” in CBR Next Move; embed maintenance funding to protect investments and increase the longevity of existing infrastructure without diminishing the quality.
- Supporting club fee relief and targeted subsidies for entry-level participants and new female teams, leveraging national funding streams (e.g., Grassroots Cricket Fund grants and Women & Girls Bonus programs) to reduce cost barriers locally.

Programs & Formats

- Scale flexible offerings (e.g “Smash Series”, tape-ball, mums & daughters) across more venues and time slots to meet demand from time-poor families and new participants.
- Expand school-to-club pathways and holiday programs with ACT Meteors player involvement and structured club support to improve conversion and retention.
- Grow female coaching & officiating through dedicated courses, mentoring and recognition, building trusted environments for girls’ and women’s participation.

Workforce (volunteers & coaches)

- Invest in club administrator training, safeguarding compliance, and governance capability to match the Strategy’s capability pillar – extending the coach-development success model to volunteers and committees.

Lighting Infrastructure

- Investing in fit-for-purpose and Australian Cricket Community Cricket Facility Guideline compliant lighting infrastructure. Lighting enables more flexible and adaptive participation opportunities, allowing cricket to shift training and competition outside of daylight constraints. Evening lighting expands programming into twilight hours, supports mid-week competitions, and improves player welfare by allowing play during cooler parts of the day in summer.
- On their own, cricket lighting projects can be cost-prohibitive, however, collaborating with winter sport codes present an opportunity to get lighting project across the line. By strategically identifying opportunities to improve capacity and activate underutilised venues, Cricket ACT can partner and support grant applications and in return, co-fund lighting upgrades to meet cricket’s needs.



Policy: Ownership, Funding and Operating Arrangements of Sports Facilities

Cricket ACT supports the following:

- Transparent asset plans for cricket specific and community sports facilities with defined ownership, life-cycle costing, and winter renovation schedules that protect playing standards.
- Shared-responsibility models (Government > club > community) to co-fund upgrades and maintenance, ensuring equitable access and local stewardship. Recent ACT projects demonstrate strong outcomes under co-investment.
- Evidence-led prioritisation in line with CBR Next Move's Places & Spaces and Welcoming & Inclusive priorities, focusing upgrades where participation growth (women & girls, juniors, CALD) is occurring or latent, and ensuring accessible amenities (lighting, changerooms, inclusive design).
- Utilisation of the Cricket ACT Infrastructure Strategy & Community Impact of Cricket in the ACT report to make informed decisions supporting the strategic direction Cricket ACT are moving for all facility matters.

Any other Relevant Matters Concerning Participation in Community Sport

- **Community partnerships and messaging:** Partnerships such as the *Toyota Good for Cricket Program* nationally, illustrates how corporate alignment can reduce cost barriers and lift club fundraising, supporting local participation growth.
- **Strategic outcomes and momentum:** Cricket ACT has experienced the highest percentage increase in junior cricketers across Australian Cricket over the last decade, driven by inclusive growth among women and girls and the South Asian community; continued investment will sustain this momentum for wider community health and social outcomes.

Conclusion and recommendations

Cricket ACT welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important Inquiry and reaffirms its commitment to fostering inclusive, accessible, and sustainable community sport across the ACT. As outlined throughout this submission, cricket is uniquely positioned to deliver broad social, health, and economic benefits through strategic investment in infrastructure, inclusive programming, and workforce development.

To unlock the full potential of community sport, Cricket ACT recommends a coordinated approach that aligns government policy, funding, and facility planning with the lived experiences of participants, volunteers, and clubs. Prioritising affordability, flexible formats, and equitable access; particularly for juniors, women and girls, CALD communities, and people with disability, will ensure that cricket continues to thrive as a sport for all.

Cricket ACT remains committed to working collaboratively with the ACT Government, stakeholders, and the broader community to deliver on the vision of "All Canberrans moving more," and to ensure that cricket remains a powerful vehicle for connection, wellbeing, and lifelong participation.