

HEALTHY SPORTS CLUBS

A framework for sports clubs to create healthy change



INCLUSIVE UNIFORM GUIDE FOR SPORTS CLUBS

Introduction

Uniforms have a functional and symbolic purpose in sport. They are designed with technical fabrics to enhance the wearer's performance and comfort. They also promote team spirit and identity, and can create a sense of belonging and pride.

However, uniform policies that are inflexible and do not consider the needs of individuals can discourage participation in sport. The variety and range of uniform options, or lack thereof, can significantly influence people's perceptions of sport and engagement with sport.

Inclusive uniform policies are therefore an important consideration for sports clubs who are seeking to maximise uptake, participation and retention in their sport.

Who benefits from an inclusive uniform policy?

Inflexible uniform policies can influence participation for everyone. However, certain groups in our community may be more likely to disengage from sport when uniform policies don't meet their needs.

Women and Girls

For junior female players, 'shyness about wearing sporting uniforms' and 'self-consciousness about body image, wearing uniforms' have been identified as key barriers to participation in sport.¹ The majority (58%) of Australian girls say they do not wish to wear a dress or skirt during sports, with 85% preferring to wear shorts and a t-shirt.²

Furthermore, many women and girls express concern about the visibility of period products under body-hugging garments during sport. Sixty-four percent of girls would also prefer to wear dark coloured bottoms, citing concerns about leakage during their periods.² Low awareness of the availability of period-friendly sportswear as an alternative to traditional period products is a further barrier to sustained participant in sport for some people.³

Culturally and Religiously Diverse People

In some cultures and religions, garments form an important part of a person's identity and can be representative of a person's alignment with that culture or religion. Garments could include headwear, such as a hijab or turban, as well as clothing that provides the appropriate amount of coverage. When a sports uniform policy does not allow these garments, and/or prescribes garments that do not align with a person's cultural or religious beliefs, this can be a key barrier to their participation in sport.⁴



Trans and Gender Diverse People

For many transgender and gender diverse people, clothing represents a way to express and reaffirm their gender identity. Uniform policies that designate uniform items according to gender can prevent transgender and gender diverse people from choosing and wearing the clothing that best fits their identity.⁵

People with a Disability

Some people with a disability may require adaptive clothing to meet their mobility or safety needs. For example, it is important that clothing is well-fitted and will not become snagged in any assistive equipment a person may use, such as wheelchairs. Other considerations can include the use of fabrics that meet a person's mobility and sensory needs (such as soft, stretchy material), and garments that fasten in a way that maximises independence with dressing as well as safety (for example, garments that fasten at the front and are secured with ties, magnets, clips or non-sharp pins). Players may also wish to wear additional items that cover more body surfaces such as the legs, arms and/or head, and may need to wear medical or prosthetic devices.⁶

Developing an Inclusive Uniform Policy

Policy Checklist

An inclusive uniform policy should have the following features:

- Specifies the acceptable options for the official team uniform.
- Specifies additional items that players may wear to increase coverage or suit accessibility or religious requirements.
- Specifies the safety requirements of uniforms and other attire/accessories.
- Raises awareness of the availability of inclusive attire, such as religious sportswear (e.g. sports hijab, modest swimwear), adaptive sportswear and period-friendly sportswear (e.g. absorbent swimwear, underwear, shorts and leggings).
- Is broad enough to allow players to choose the uniform that best suits them (e.g. doesn't specify requirements based on gender*).
- Considers the affordability of the prescribed uniform items.

*If gendered uniforms are necessary, sporting organisations should ensure that appropriate sizes are available and design uniform options that are suitable for different body types and shapes.⁵

Examples of additional items that players may be allowed to wear include:

- Bike shorts, full length leggings or tracksuit pants worn beneath dresses/skirts/skorts/shorts/unitards/leotards.
- Fitted long sleeve tops, t-shirts or singlets worn beneath dresses/tops/unitards/leotards.
- Any religious garment deemed safe for the sport.
- Modified attire for people with a disability or medical condition.
- Sportswear that functions as a period product.



Policy Template

Visit the [Healthy Sports Clubs website](#) to download an inclusive uniform policy template to edit and implement at your own sports club.

Advocacy Tips

The uniform guidelines and policies set out by your club's local association, State Sporting Association (SSA) or Regional Sporting Assembly (RSA) may restrict the types of uniforms you are able to offer. However, as a member of your relevant association, there may be opportunities for you to advocate for changes to these guidelines and policies.

Most associations will have a staff member responsible for supporting their affiliated clubs and associations, including receiving and acting on feedback about their community's needs. If you have received feedback from your community and believe there is a case for change, you are encouraged to contact the relevant association.

Below are some tips for effective communication with your local association, SSA or RSA:

- Be clear who you are representing (i.e. your sports club or association), and that you are a member of the association you are contacting.
- Clearly state what the problem is and what change you would like to see.
- Explain how the change will benefit the community. Is there a particular community group who will benefit, such as women and girls, culturally and linguistically diverse people, trans and gender diverse people, or people with a disability?
- Share specific examples that demonstrate why inclusive uniform policies are important, such as the experiences one of your players or someone in your community.

By advocating to your association, you can amplify the voices of those in your community who would benefit most from safer and more inclusive sport.

Acknowledgements

Wording for the policy checklist and policy template was adapted with permission from the Frankston District Netball Association Inclusive Uniform Policy 2023.

References

1. Queensland State Government. Barriers to physical activity and strategies to encourage female participation. Unknown year.
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4. VicHealth. Resource 29: Flexible uniform policy. Unknown year.
5. Australian Human Rights Commission. Guidelines for the inclusion of transgender and gender diverse people in sport. 2019
6. Vinderbilt University Wondry Centre for Innovation. The adaptive clothing resource guide. 2023