

Outside The Locker Room – Pre-Budget Submission

29 January 2021

Problem	The increasing mental health challenges amongst teenagers and young adults and the increasing demand for mental health services.
Solution	Expand Outside the Locker Room’s Program to reach 330 new schools and sporting clubs targeting 45,000 participants aged between 15 and 30.
Cost	\$5.2 million over 3 years

Introduction

Established in 2015 and a not-for-profit organisation, Outside the Locker Room (OTLR) is a recognised and highly popular community program committed to providing team-focused mental health education and welfare support to sporting clubs and schools across Australia.

The vision of OTLR is “to connect lives and communities through conversation”.

Outside the Locker Room is a unique mental health organisation. The principal focus is on young people through their involvement in sport and education, and to understand and manage the challenges they face on a daily basis. Our reputable model has been successfully identified with over 200 local sporting clubs and schools accessing our program across Australia.

The focus on sport and education recognises that:

- i) these activities bring young people together,
- ii) offer the prospects of achievement and self-esteem; and
- iii) highlight poor mental health.

Outside the Locker Room’s training modules have been designed in partnership with mental health and youth service experts and is delivered by both trained program facilitators and registered mental health professionals.

Our service delivery has two components:

- i) face-to-face educational sessions; and
- ii) free 12-month app-based welfare support.

Although COVID presented challenges with the face-to-face component, OTLR we were able to effectively substitute either an online session or a facilitated session with our dedicated welfare team, who offered free immediate support for participants’ mental health.

Statistics indicated that 75% of mental illnesses emerge before the age of 25, OTLR education sessions focus on; suicidal ideation, general mental health, drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, and cyber bullying. OTLR also offers programs for suicide postvention within our school and sporting communities.

During the COVID pandemic, OTLR continued to support community sporting programs and assisted young people with strategies to deal with the additional challenges of social isolation: which was a factor that resulted in the loss of “rhythm” from school closures and the absence of normal sporting seasons.

The OTLR program is an important part of the Australian youth mental health landscape and complements other initiatives such as Headspace.

Although there are many programs supporting youth mental health, it is evident that a “one size fits all approach” is not effective.

Brief Executive Summary of Recommendations/Asks

Outside the Locker Room is seeking to partner with the Australian Government to expand our mental health and wellbeing program across Victoria, NSW, Queensland and Western Australia.

The expansion aims to include:

- 80 sporting clubs and 20 schools across Victoria
- 80 sporting clubs and 20 schools across New South Wales
- 80 sporting clubs and 20 schools across Queensland
- 100 sporting clubs and 50 schools across Western Australia

Outside the Locker Room is willing to collaborate with the Australian Government to identify the locations / regions across each State that will gain the most benefit and impact from the Program.

With this expansion OTLR anticipates that the program will reach around 46,000 people between the ages of 15 - 30 over a three-year period and target 330 schools over that same period.

The organisation has invested in team members completing their Mental Health First Aid Instructor Course. This enables the program to provide formal Mental Health First Aid Certificates to participants at sporting clubs and schools around Australia. We aim to offer this training at a heavily discounted rate to reach as many people as possible.

Outside the Locker Room is seeking funding of \$5.2 million over 3 years from the Federal Government to expand the existing program and target new locations of need as identified by the Federal Government.

The Issues that Need to be Addressed by the Federal Government

The Australian Government's national sports plan – *Sport 2030* – articulates a clear direction for sport in Australia with the goal of ensuring that Australia is: “the world’s most active and healthy sporting nation, known for our integrity and sporting success”.¹

Sport 2030 has four key priority areas which are intended, when fully implemented, to aid the foundations for Australia to succeed in sport to 2030 and thereafter.

These include:

- Build a more active Australia - more Australians, more active, more often;
- Achieving sporting excellence - national pride, inspiration and motivation through international sporting success;
- Safeguarding the integrity of sport - a fair, safe and strong sport sector free from corruption; and,
- Strengthening Australia’s sport industry - a thriving Australian sport and recreation industry.

As more people become involved in sport, an important issue that relates to that of the expectations, performance, success and failure of sporting organisations which requires effective management. The importance of sport in young Australians’ psyche makes it both a critical contributor to positive mental health, as well as an exogenous source of risk.

The Australian Government is also clear about the various benefits which accrue from participation in sport, noting that programs which increase physical activity are linked to broader positive health outcomes and corresponding potential savings in health care costs. In addition to health benefits, participation in sport and active recreation is also seen as another way to improve personal wellbeing, and as a forum for creating social capital through social connectivity and resilience.²

Research further indicates that physical activity decreases the risk of type 2 diabetes; depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses; coronary artery disease; dementia/cognitive decline in older adults; and some cancers.

At the same time, participation - particularly in team-based sport – assists to deliver outcomes such as: improved resilience and mental health outcomes; social connectedness; positive role models; and continuing to participate in physical activity longer term.

¹ <https://www.sportaus.gov.au/nationalsportplan/home>

² https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/knowledge_base/sport_participation/community_participation/sport_participation_in_australia

The Government also notes that “regular community-based sport participation in Australia generates an estimated AUD\$18.7B value p.a. in social capital”. This is generated from: direct economic benefits; avoided health costs; educational benefits; and the value of the volunteer and not-for-profit networks.³

Sport 2030 recognises all these benefits: personal; social; and economic.

Government further identifies several factors that influence participation in physical activity and community sport, including cost and geographic factors. Community size and local infrastructure affect participation in sport, whereas social and cultural characteristics of communities influencing which sports prove popular. Research suggests that 'mid-size' communities create a better environment for sport participation than either very small or large communities. Results indicate that participation rates are generally higher, for both children and adults, in major cities, falling progressively as communities are classified respectively as: inner regional; outer regional; remote; or very remote.⁴

Internal research by the organisation revealed that in 2019-2020, OTLR engaged with 90 sporting clubs and nine schools and provided 24/7 welfare support to the members of the sporting clubs and schools that were actively engaged in the program via the *Outside the Locker Room* app.

Outside the Locker Room internal research further indicated, engagement with 90 sporting clubs and nine schools across 112 different communities and provided 24/7 welfare support to the members of the sporting clubs and schools that were actively engaged in the program via the *Outside the Locker Room* app.

Highlights from 2019 - 2020 included:

- In 2019-2020 the app was downloaded 836 times by participants from 112 different community groups across Australia;
- The OTLR onboarding survey was completed by 778 participants. The average participant was male, 19-35 years of age. 67% of respondents were from Victorian community groups;
- 35% of respondents (n=279) had experienced self-harm or suicidal ideation at some point in their lives. Of this number, 40% (n=111) experienced these thoughts in the month prior to completing the survey, deeming them high risk;
- A total of 240 respondents shared that they had tried illegal drugs in their lives, and of these individuals, 29% (n=69) had used these substances in the past month, deeming them high risk; and
- A total of 180 participants (21%) had engaged in on or more high-risk behaviours in the past month and were contacted with an offer for support by the OTLR Welfare Team;
- When asked about gambling, 35% of participants volunteered that they'd gambled on sports;

³https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/knowledge_base/sport_participation/community_participation/sport_participation_in_australia

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- 18% (n=143) of respondents shared that they had been a victim of domestic violence before;
- 35% (n=271) of respondents indicated that they had been diagnosed with a mental health challenge; and
- 102 respondents (13%) went on to receive support from the OTLR Welfare Team.

Outside the Locker Room has also commissioned economics consultancy Evaluate, and the Latrobe University Centre for Sport and Social Impact, to undertake a cost benefit analysis of the Program. The Centre for Sport and Social Impact (CSSI) strives to change the future of sport practices and policy and their impact on society through real world research and engagement with industry and government.

The CSSI draws from the disciplines of organisational behaviour, management, marketing, economics, law, sociology and public policy to investigate issues that impact on the efficacy of sport organisations operating in the corporate, public and nonprofit sectors of the economy and their impact on society.

The design of this study is complete, and data will be available at end-2021. Findings will be disseminated to the Government, to provide an evaluation metric for public funds.

How the Federal Government can address the issue(s)

There are key government messages around mental health and sport that align with and are supported by *Outside the Locker Room*. These include:

- Physical activity stimulates a biochemical response in the brain, that influences individuals' mental states. Appropriate amounts of regular physical activity contribute to personal wellbeing;
- Sport, recreation and physical activity encourage and promote social interaction, which supports good mental health;
- Athletes are subjected to sport-specific stressors as well as stress from everyday life. Good mental health is characterised by emotional wellbeing and resilience to all sources of stress;
- An athlete's state of mind has a significant impact on their athletic performance and vice versa; and,
- Diagnosis and care of an athlete's mental health concerns must be considered within the context of sport and life.⁵

Mental health is also noted in *Sport 2030* with five target outcomes under these priority areas.

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https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/knowledge_base/high_performance_sport/performance_preparation/athlete_mental_health

- i) improving the physical health of Australia;
- ii) improving the mental health of Australians, including through the improved management of mental illness and greater social connectivity;
- iii) growing personal development;
- iv) strengthening communities, particularly by improved cohesion and reduced isolation; and
- v) growing Australia's economy.

These outcomes are designed to create a healthier, more prosperous Australia at an individual, local, regional and national level and mental health and its support are clearly central to this with the key outcomes and goals of OTLR's programs at the forefront of these target outcomes.

The issue of isolation has been powerfully highlighted throughout 2020, and *Outside The Locker Room* adapted its program to ensure this was issue was specifically addressed.

In accordance with the comment in *Sport 2030* it is important to note that - for sport to play a role in promoting good health and preventing chronic conditions - greater collaboration across relevant government departments is required, and sports organisations need greater support to make productive contributions.

Since its inception in 2018, OTLR has completed 116 training sessions in the first year, 174 in the second, and 14 in 2020.

Given the COVID situation, particularly in OTLR's home of Victoria – where 77% of previous courses have taken place - 2020 is not an effective measurement of OTLR's activity. However, while new training sessions were limited by the COVID environment, both individual interactions from our mental health professionals, and participation in our program via the OTLR app, facilitated in filling the gap. As with most service providers, OTLR has learnt, evolved and translated delivery of care from the COVID experience.

Across all years, mental health, wellbeing, resilience and lifestyle training sessions have accounted for 98% of the first sessions, with the remaining 2% focused on coaches and support staff (again with reference to resilience).

This is then built upon in more specialized instruction, with the second sessions comprised of:

- 47% on drugs and alcohol;
- 23% on leadership and culture;
- 15% on social media and cyber-bullying; and,
- 9% on inclusion and respect.

Added to these direct interventions, OTLR's training of some 46 facilitators over the past three years will make a contribution to extended training outside its own programs.

Specific Request of the Federal Government

Outside the Locker Room is seeking to partner with the Australian Government to expand its Program and target communities across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, and Western Australia.

To expand the mission of OTRL the Program is seeking funding of \$5.2 million over a 3-year period.

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