

Inclusive Sport Uniform Guidelines



Government of South Australia
Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing



Introduction

Sport has a powerful impact on South Australian communities - it is crucial that everyone has the opportunity to participate and thrive.

The Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (ORSR) is dedicated to fostering a sporting environment where everyone feels safe, welcome, and free to participate in a way that suits them best.

This means building an inclusive and respectful sporting landscape that embraces diversity. Every individual regardless of their age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, location, or any other characteristic, should enjoy the same access to participate in and benefit from sport and recreation as a player, official, coach, administrator or any other role.

Recent studies have found that a lack of appropriate uniform options is a key barrier to participation in sport for women and girls. However, there is evidence to suggest it may be a

larger barrier for engaging and retaining other underrepresented groups, from people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to transgender and gender diverse people. One way to assist in breaking down this barrier is by implementing an inclusive uniform policy.

These Inclusive Sport Uniform Guidelines have been developed to provide guidance for South Australian Sporting Organisations (SSOs) and clubs when implementing an inclusive uniform policy.

The aim is to acknowledge that the sport environment in Australia has evolved and to ensure that sport is welcoming of all people. These guidelines will support SSOs and clubs to listen, adapt and celebrate their members. Let's take another step towards growing strong and connected sporting communities in South Australia and ensure women and girls do not see uniform as a barrier.

Why have these guidelines been developed?

The State Government is serious about backing women and girls in sport and is working to ensure they can equally and actively participate in the sport they love.

Research suggests that the style, colour, fit, modesty, cost, and lack of flexible options of sporting uniforms can be a barrier to women and girls choosing to participate in sport. With less than 15% of South Australian youth aged 15-17 years meeting the physical activity guidelines, feeling self-conscious in sport uniforms may also contribute to the dropout rate of adolescent girls from participating in sport.

A recent national study from Victoria University found that:

- 58% of young girls do not want to wear skirts when playing sport.
- 61% of young girls prefer to wear dark-coloured bottoms during sport.
- 65% of young girls want the freedom to choose from a range of uniform options.

Considering the immense social, physical and societal benefits of sport and sporting communities, it is not acceptable that women and girls turn away from sport because they are unable to participate in an appropriate uniform.

These guidelines will encourage SSOs and clubs to develop and support inclusive uniform options and help facilitate long-term cultural change throughout the South Australian sport and recreation sector.

Every girl and woman experiences different barriers to participation. SSOs and clubs should use these guidelines to implement a flexible framework.

The aim is to create a shared understanding so that sports, clubs, and communities can work together to address the challenges their participants face, and work towards providing appropriate options.



Barriers

1. Uniform barriers

Here are some of the uniform factors that can make girls and women feel uncomfortable and unsafe.

- Uniforms that make a person conscious of their body while they participate. In particular:
 - Uniforms that are designed to be tight fitting.
 - Uniforms that are too baggy.
 - Uniforms that are “unnecessarily sexualised.”
 - Skirts, where skirts do not provide any direct performance advantage.
 - Male cut uniforms.
 - Uniforms that are revealing when wet.
 - Being watched, recorded, photographed or “feeling looked at” while participating in a sport that requires a participant to wear a uniform that reveals or shows their body.

- Uniforms (predominantly white or light coloured) that can make participants feel uncomfortable while on their period.
- Uniforms that restrict a participant from expressing crucial elements of their religious or cultural identity.
- Uniforms that restrict a participant from expressing crucial elements of their gender identity.
- Uniform options that allow a participant to reflect crucial elements of their identity but make it visually clear that they are different from their teammates.
- Uniforms that do not allow people with a diverse range of abilities or medical conditions to express themselves with dignity.

It's important to keep these considerations in mind when working towards providing appropriate uniform options for participants.





2. System barriers

There are competing forces preventing positive change. We, collectively, need to work towards finding mechanisms that acknowledge, understand, challenge and overcome those barriers. These are the key themes relating to systemic barriers.

Traditionalism/the 'identity of the sport'

There are people within each sport who view uniforms as a vital part of their sport's identity. Being asked to either give up that heritage or that identity can evoke an emotional response. To them, change feels like they are losing something that matters dearly to them.

Example: Cricket whites are not period-conscious but are viewed by many in the cricket community to be intrinsic to the tradition of the game. Changing that element may feel to some to be changing the very nature of the sport itself.

Cost

For clubs - particularly smaller ones - offering flexible uniform options can place additional financial strain on already limited budgets.

Example: A club wants to purchase inclusive uniform options (i.e., shorts instead of skirts) but cannot justify the minimum order number if only one or two players will purchase them.

In some contexts, suppliers do not provide the necessary items an individual or a club need because the market is still viewed as unprofitable.

Example: A local club is looking for female-cut options but cannot find a supplier who provides that product.

Example: A player is required by her league to wear a hijab that is the same colour as her jersey but cannot find anyone who makes one for her jersey colour.

Safety

The concern that some uniform options, especially those relating to religious or cultural expression, may provide a safety risk in "collision" sports.

Example: Cultural bracelets that are not skintight create a risk for opponents in sports that involve tackling.

Performance

There are sports, especially timed or acrobatic sports, where a slim fitting uniform provides a competitive advantage. At specific levels of performance, international or Olympic/Paralympic standards of uniforms are enforced.

Role modelling

Players want to wear what their heroes wear. Sporting idols and heroes set a standard for what young athletes want to replicate and set a norm for grassroots participants. Girls and women feel conscious about wearing clothes that do not fall within the norms set by their sporting heroes.

Power imbalance

People who feel uncomfortable with their uniform options may not feel empowered to raise the issue with decision makers. Those who are not impacted by a lack of change can be the ones who hold the power to enforce change and can be the ones preventing change.

Example: Swimming, athletics, gymnastics.

Example: A young girl who plays tennis wears a skirt, even though she knows she would feel more comfortable in shorts, because there are no prominent female tennis players wearing shorts.

Example: A club traditionally wears light coloured shorts. That club establishes a women's program. The club do not involve girls and women from within their sporting environment in the decision-making process relating to the uniforms they will be required to wear. The girls and women are forced to play in light-coloured shorts that make some of the players feel uncomfortable.



The Inclusive Sport Uniform Guidelines checklist

Policy and regulations

- We have explored whether our sport has any relevant uniform frameworks/policies/guidelines.
- We have reviewed and adapted our own policies/regulations/rules relating to uniform requirements to ensure that, at participation level, uniform options are as broad as possible.

Female voice

- A diverse range of girls and women from within our sporting environment are authentically engaged when it comes to designing sporting uniforms and sporting uniform options that are provided to them.

Flexible uniforms

- Girls and women in our sporting environment have an opportunity to select uniform sizes and female/male cut options when it comes to their own uniform.
- Girls and women in our sporting environment can select uniform options for tops (long sleeve, short sleeve, singlet, jumper, etc.) and for bottoms (skirts, pants, shorts, compression-wear, etc.).
- Girls and women in our sporting environment can select uniform options that ensure their body is not exposed when playing.
- Girls and women in our sporting environment can select uniform options that are not skintight, or tight in a way that makes them conscious about the shape of their body.
- Girls and women of all cultural backgrounds can wear uniforms that allow them to express their cultural identity.
- Where flexible uniform options may provide a safety risk to the individual or to other participants, we are actively seeking to find appropriate risk mitigation practices.
- Girls and women in our sporting environment are not made to wear light-coloured bottoms.
- Girls and women in our sporting environment are not made to wear uniforms that are revealing when wet.
- Girls and women in our sporting environment are not made to wear uniforms that are made from a material that can be seen through.

Medical needs

- Girls and women of all health and ability requirements have uniform options that allow them to safely participate in their sport with dignity.

Affordability

- Girls and women in our sporting environment can afford the uniforms and uniform options that they are required to wear in order to participate.

Role Modelling

- We actively promote imagery within our sporting environment that shows girls and women participating in sport wearing a range of sporting uniform options.

Additional recommendations and actions

The opportunities of impact can be summarised by the following five points.

- 1 Leagues/associations adapt the rules.
- 2 Clubs provide options.
- 3 Communities support those who feel vulnerable.
- 4 Sporting idols set examples.
- 5 We all listen authentically.

The following key stakeholders create different opportunities for impact...



League administrators (SSOs, local grassroots competitions, school competitions etc.)

League administrators adapt competition guidelines to ensure that the uniform policies of each competition reflect the purpose of that competition.

If your competition is focused on participation, then a flexible and adaptive uniform policy with an allowance for a wide variety of options is the key priority.

If your competition is focused at elite level or Olympic/Paralympic level performance then it is understandable if there are more restrictions placed on uniform options, but ensuring the voice of the girls and women involved in the decision-making process is vital.

League administrators work genuinely and authentically with multicultural communities to identify acceptable risk aversion standards for cultural requirements that establish a perceived risk within the sporting context.

A person should not be forced to sacrifice their cultural identity to play sport. In sports where some cultural requirements may create a perceived safety risk for other participants, ensure that time and effort is spent on understanding what reasonable and acceptable steps can be taken to avert that risk.

State Sporting Organisations

SSOs prioritise uniform suppliers that can provide female-cut options when procuring an exclusive supplier contract.

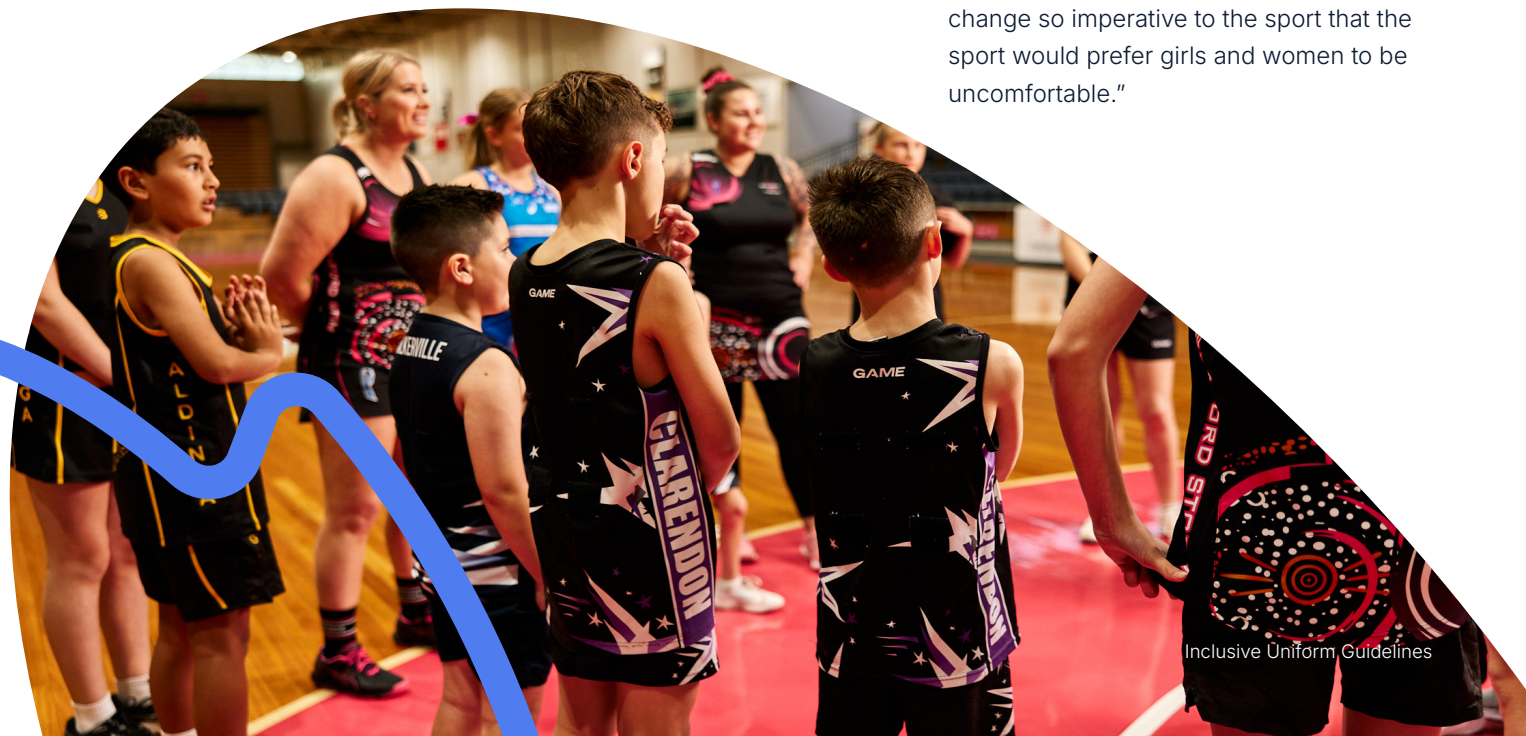
Depending on the size of the organisation and sport, SSOs have the potential to put pressure on suppliers to resource female-cut options.

By creating partnerships with suppliers who provide female-cut options, SSOs will be giving clubs an option they can utilise to provide options for girls and women.

SSOs establish lines of communication to ensure that girls and women are given an authentic say in the uniforms they are asked to wear.

Build a formal process within SSOs that connects a diverse and intersectional range of female voices to decision makers within the sport to authentically assess and understand what uniform options for girls and women are required.

Where requests for inclusive uniform options are denied, the sport should critically assess the reasoning behind the decision, asking "why is a refusal to change so imperative to the sport that the sport would prefer girls and women to be uncomfortable."





Clubs

Clubs ensure that girls and women from within your sporting environment are given an authentic say in the uniforms they are asked to wear.

Build a formal process within the club that allows girls and women to assess what uniform options the club can allow, how the club can ensure sizing is done appropriately, and how the traditional uniform can be adapted for all girls and women noting the previously mentioned uniform barriers.

Within the formal process, there should be an understanding that the need for inclusive uniform options may only apply to a small section of the girls and women from within your sporting group – and that even if that is the case, their voices and needs still matter.

Be open to the idea that adapting some elements of the uniform do not impact

the club in a negative way, but instead highlights to the broader community that women have a meaningful say within their sporting environment. Where traditions give way to the needs of girls and women, there is cause for celebration and pride.

Where requests for uniform options are denied, the club should critically assess the reasoning behind the decision by asking “why is refusing this element so fundamental to our club that we would prefer women to be uncomfortable.”

Note that there is a slight difference between cosmetic feedback (design, patterns, colours etc.) and inclusionary feedback (dark shorts, sleeved options, a choice between skirts and shorts etc.).

Wherever possible, clubs should ensure that any kit supplier partnerships are with suppliers that provide female-cut options.

Major sporting franchises, teams and athletes

Sporting idols seek opportunities to lead from the front and showcase themselves wearing flexible uniform options.

Young girls look up to their sporting heroes. Those sporting heroes set norms in terms of what the sport looks like.

By working with those idols and finding appropriate opportunities for them to be seen to be performing in inclusive uniform options, we can give social permission for young girls to wear what makes them feel comfortable.





Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing

To activate these guidelines effectively,
ORSR commits to:

- Collaborating with the sector to deliver advice and support to leagues, SSOs and clubs to impact positive and meaningful change.
- Providing resources for leagues, SSOs and clubs in relation to developing authentic lines of communication between girls and women and decision makers.
- Supporting leagues, SSOs and clubs in developing inclusive uniform policies.
- Consistently listening to the sector about their needs, challenges and support they require.

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