Summary: ‘Economic and Health Benefits Project- Community Aquatic and Recreation Centres’


Introduction

This landmark industry research project investigated a range of health, economic and community benefits delivered by local aquatic and recreation centres across Victoria and interstate.

The project was supported by Sport and Recreation Victoria as the major funding partner and led by Aquatics and Recreation Victoria, with significant and productive collaboration between Victoria University, the University of South Australia, the YMCA Victoria and the City of Greater Geelong.

The research has particular implications for all levels of government decision making, as the results provide insights that can positively affect centre operations, programs, marketing, and design.

Making the right decisions will impact on the quality of the visitor experience, participant retention rates and ultimately provide better health, social and economic outcomes for Australian communities.

Key Findings

- Health and fitness is the key benefit that prompts all age groups to use their local aquatic and recreation centre, but for 15-29 year olds lack of confidence can hold them back, for those between 30-49 years of age, free time is their major constraint and the risk of injury or being ill makes those over 50 more cautious about participating.
- Aquatic and recreation centres are providing programs, facilities and services that are contributing to better community health as users tend to visit centres 3 or more times a week (exceeding the pattern of most Australians), spend 60-90 minutes per visit and feel that their centre helps them remain healthy, have fewer sick days and be more productive in work/life.
- All users of aquatic and recreation centres were more likely to increase their participation if they enjoyed the activity and could see the value and personal benefit of their exercise, with most having a positive attitude about the cost involved.
- Users value the personal benefits they receive at $48.00 each time they use their centre, producing an average of $38 million in personal benefits per medium sized centre.
- For every dollar spent by a centre delivering services, $8.00 in personal benefits is returned.
- Over 80% of centre income comes from 3 program areas- learn to swim, group fitness classes/health club memberships and recreational swimming; with 80% of centre memberships taken out by local residents.
- Delivery costs for these main program areas accounted for only 25% of total expenditure, producing operational profit levels that support other major centre administration, management and operational costs.
- Aquatic and recreation centres have a positive economic impact with 70% of all income provided by local community participation, while significant local expenditure is generated through the use of local companies and employment of those who live locally.
- There are however some sobering findings that indicate that aquatic and recreation centres do not attract an even cross-section of their local community, with limited participation from lower socio-economic groups and those with lower levels of education or qualifications.
- With only 2% of expenditure allocated to programs and services for community development or specific population groups, centre goals and vision statements do not always line up clearly with allocated spending to address the social needs of the local community.

With 279 centres across 79 councils in Victoria alone, these findings serve to highlight the influence of the aquatic and recreation industry on the state’s economic output and the health and well-being of local communities and how they can be used even more effectively.