

# **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON AUSTRALIAN ATHLETES**

**SURVEY REPORT MAY 2021**



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## NOTE ON IMAGERY

Images of athletes used throughout this report are for illustrative purposes only, and are not reflective of the athletes who responded to the Australian Sports Foundation's Impact on COVID-19 on Australian Athletes' survey.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey follows on from our survey into the impact of COVID-19 on [Community Sports Clubs](#) released in July 2020. It was commissioned to understand the impact of COVID-19 on Australian athletes. While the survey was open to athletes from all sports, 96% of responses were from athletes outside the major professional codes (eg AFL, Soccer, Cricket) and so these athletes are the focus of this report (see page 15 for more information).

The results of our survey show that while **COVID-19 has worsened the financial situation of Australian athletes**, it also lays bare a **profound impact on physical and mental health**, and in many cases **on our athletes' overall career aspirations**. It has implications for our ability to be competitive internationally, which is of particular concern given the likelihood of Australia hosting the 2032 Olympics. At the Australian Sports Foundation, our aim is to help raise additional funds to support our athletes - please visit [our website](#) for more details and to find out how you can help athletes in need of support.

Key findings of the survey can be broken down into two main areas:

## 1. The overall financial picture for Australian athletes

- Despite efforts to improve direct funding and support available to athletes in recent years (See Table 3) athlete incomes are well below minimum levels mandated in other sectors, and this was the case even before the impact of the pandemic is considered. Over 75% of respondents specified that they compete at National or International level (See Table 2) – yet **around 50% of these national/international athletes reported earning less than \$23,000 from all sources (well below the \$39,000 national minimum wage (Fair Work Act))** – including their sport and external paid work (See Figure 4).
- Our survey shows that most Australian representative athletes receive minimal income from sport, but also relatively little from other employment (the need for which necessarily reduces their focus on their sport). **They are therefore often forced to rely on their families** (if financially able to do so) to support their athletic careers. This means that **athletes whose families are unable to provide that financial support are disadvantaged and may well be lost to their sport for good**.
- Responses showed that **regrettably the gender pay gap is as prevalent in sport as in other sectors** – with a higher proportion of female athletes in the lowest (sub \$23,000) income band and a lower proportion in the higher (\$75,000 and above) income bands than their male colleagues (See Figure 5).
- Our **athletes have little of the financial security that is the norm for most Australians**. For example, there is no superannuation on much of their income, (as they are not employed by their sports), and they miss out on many benefits that are the norm in other sectors (e.g. paid sick leave and paid annual leave etc). Athletes also often struggle to obtain mortgages or the other sources of credit available to most Australians.







## 2. The impact of Covid-19 on our athletes

- COVID-19 simply added to this bleak financial picture – nearly **61% reported financial losses** (See Figure 7), with many athletes reporting termination of sponsorship deals as businesses faced their own COVID-19 related challenges. Other athletes cited **lost earning opportunities and/or losses due to ongoing and sunk costs** over the past 12 months. While these losses are not huge in pure dollar terms – an average of \$13,500 from sporting sources, and \$10,100 from work (See Figure 26 and Figure 27) – this represents a significant proportion of athletes’ already low income. And, our **Australian athletes were largely missed by COVID-19 related support schemes, such as Jobkeeper and Jobseeker** (see figures 12 and 13).
- However, the personal and social impacts of COVID-19 on our athletes is perhaps even more significant. **Negative impacts were reported on careers and families** and, concerningly, on athletes’ own physical and mental health. **73% of respondents reported that the pandemic had a negative impact on their physical health** (see Figure 20), and Paralympic athletes or those with a disability fared even worse, with over 80% reporting a decline in physical health (figure 22). Impact on mental health was even more pronounced, with **86% of all respondents reporting worse mental health** (See Figure 23).
- This, along with the disruption to careers and earnings caused by COVID-19 (in particular the postponement of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games) , and the financial sacrifices made by athletes and their families, has caused a significant proportion of elite athletes to contemplate retirement: **nearly 17% of international competitors reported considering ending their athletic careers** (See Figure 16) should disruption continue through 2021, as seems highly likely.
- The loss of some of our best and most experienced athletes would lead to the athletic equivalent of a **‘brain-drain’, creating a future lack of mentors, coaches and advocates, and those who inspire others to take up sport in Australia**. This has the potential to **negatively impact both community engagement and participation and the future success of our national, Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games teams** in the longer term, a particular concern given the likelihood of Australia hosting the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

## So what needs to happen now?

In carrying out this survey, our objective was first to highlight the challenges - financial and otherwise - facing our representative athletes. Having shone a light on the situation through this report, our aim is now to work with the philanthropic community and Corporate Australia to help generate additional financial support for our athletes. Please contact us or visit [our website](#) for more details and to find out how you can help athletes in need of support.

 We aim to work with Australia's sporting, philanthropic, corporate and political leaders - and everyone who believes our athletes deserve the opportunity to fulfil their potential and represent our nation with pride - to generate the support they need during these challenging times. 



**Patrick Walker**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



**Mark Stockwell**

CHAIR OF THE BOARD





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NISSAN  
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Woolworths Woolwo



# PREAMBLE

## ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN SPORTS FOUNDATION

The Australian Sports Foundation is Australia's leading non-profit sports fundraising organisation and charity, and the only organisation to which donations for sport are tax-deductible.

Sport has the remarkable ability to entertain, whilst providing both physical health and social benefits for those participating and watching. Sport brings people and communities together and provides opportunities for inclusion. Sport helps the mental health of individuals, it inspires and motivates while forging community and national pride.

Our mission is that everyone in Australia, regardless of background, ability or culture, has access to the health and social benefits of sport, and that our athletes have the resources needed to fulfil their potential. In the last 30 years the Australian Sports Foundation has distributed close to half a billion dollars to Australian sport to help develop an inclusive and active sporting nation, to strengthen local communities, and to support our aspiring athletes.

**We are committed to an Australia where everyone can play.**



# ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN SPORTS FOUNDATION'S RESEARCH INTO COVID-19 AND SPORT

COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on all levels of sport in Australia and throughout the world. The shutdown of activity and restrictions on spectators created a huge financial impact on professional clubs and competitions, while the postponement of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, along with countless other international events, has caused a profound impact on our national sporting organisations, causing widespread reductions in staff and placing them under sustained financial stress.

The impact on community sport received less attention in the media so, in 2020, the Australian Sports Foundation conducted a survey of Community Sporting clubs across Australia to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the grassroots sector that is so vital to both community health, and to the creation of future elite athletes.

The report was released in July 2020, and uncovered a worrying story for the future of the sector in Australia, and those who participate in community and club sport. Among the key findings were that **70% of community clubs forecast a decline in participants and 43% projected a reduction in volunteers** - who are so vital for the sustainability of community sport. The report showed that the financial losses arising from the pandemic were such that **one in four community sports clubs feared for their solvency**.

[To obtain a copy of this report visit <https://covid.sportsfoundation.org.au/clubsportincrisis>].

With the impact of COVID-19 on both professional and community sport now known, the missing piece of the puzzle is the impact of COVID-19 on the athletes themselves.

**Australian athletes do not just represent our nation on the world stage, they play a vital role in inspiring young Australians to get active and explore their potential.**

We wanted to understand how the challenges posed by the pandemic - the travel restrictions, lockdowns, postponed and cancelled competitions, financial uncertainty and health implications - had impacted our athletes.

So, in November 2020, the Australian Sports Foundation launched a national campaign and study to understand the impact of the pandemic on our athletes, to shine a light on the continuing crisis and ultimately to help athletes gain access to the support and funds needed to recover.



# SURVEY RESPONSES

During the 8 weeks in which the survey was open (2nd November - 28th December 2020), we collected 521 responses.

The survey was distributed via a wide range of channels, including National and State Sporting Organisations, and Sports Academies. The data collected covers **72 different sport types**, ranging from Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games sports like gymnastics, swimming, snowsports and athletics, to a wide cross-section of sports with lower participation rates, such as orienteering and dragon boating.

## By Sport

**Table 1- Data collected from 72 different sport types - Top 25 represented sports**

Sport Name	# Athletes	Sport Name	# Athletes
Swimming	69	Table Tennis	9
Equestrian	51	Wheelchair Sports	9
Volleyball	33	Australian Football	8
Rowing	27	Football (Soccer)	8
Softball	23	Golf	8
Gymnastics	22	Karate	8
Hockey	22	Multi-Sport	8
Cycling	18	Orienteering	7
Athletics	14	Triathlon	7
Netball	12	Canoeing	6
Snowsports	12	Kendo	6
Sailing	11	Surfing	6
Shooting	11		

The full list of sports represented in the survey responses is available in Table 12 in the appendix.





## By Athlete classification

While responses were received from athletes across all levels of sport, from emerging to international competitors **over 75% of survey participants identified as competing at a national or international levels.** This survey therefore paints a vivid picture of how our elite athletes have been affected by the pandemic.

**Table 2 - Athlete classification**

Level Of Competition	Responses	% of Responses
Emerging	21	4.03%
State Competition	78	14.97%
National Competition	161	30.90%
International Competition	234	44.91%
Other	27	5.18%

## By Location

We heard from athletes in all states and territories, and from both metro and regional Australia (darker areas represent a higher number of athletes responding from that area), providing a sound representation of our national athlete population.

# 521 ATHLETES RESPONDED

Map Of Respondents

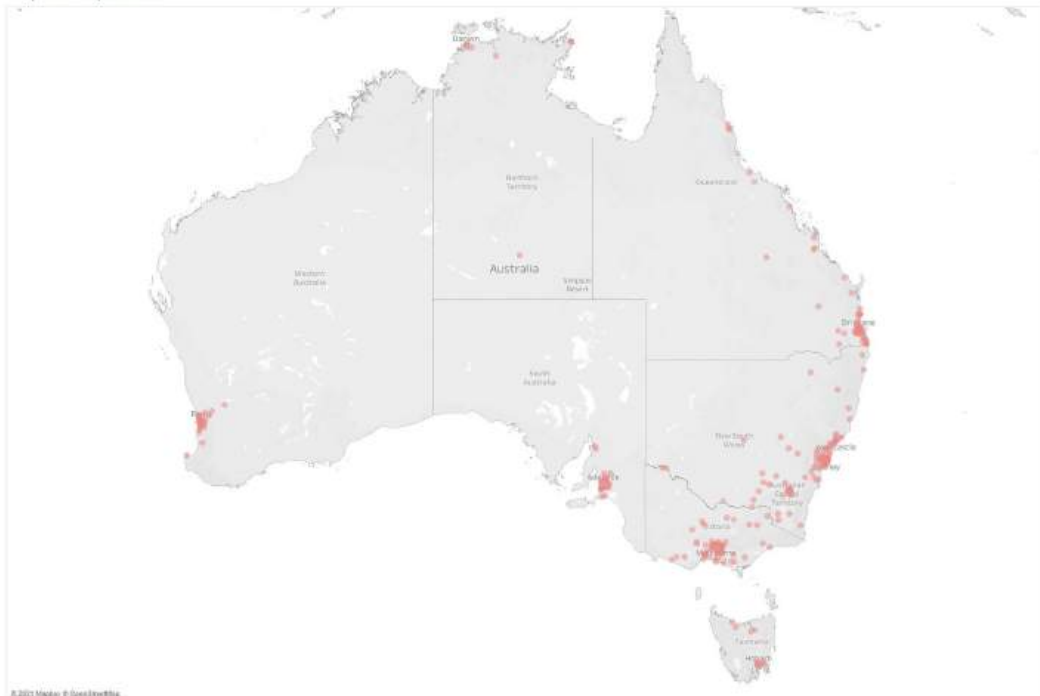


Figure 1 - Map showing respondents by location

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON AUSTRALIAN ATHLETES





55  
BASS  
SUNCORP  
Woolworths  
NISSAN WA  
SCHERIAN  
Woolworths

origin

## WHAT IS MEANT BY 'AUSTRALIAN ATHLETE' IN THIS REPORT?

The definition of 'athlete' is a broad one, and colloquially can mean anyone involved in sport or competitive physical activity. Before we highlight the impact of COVID-19 on Australian athletes, we must first define what we mean by 'athlete' in the context of this report.

For the sake of clarity, athletes as presented in this report are defined as individual Australian citizens who identify as representative at an emerging, state, national or international level in their sport.

While the survey was open to athletes from all sports to respond, 96% of responses were from athletes representing sports outside the major professional codes (such as AFL, Soccer, Cricket), and so these athletes are the focus of the report.

This distinction is important when exploring the impact of COVID-19 on Australian athletes, as while a contracted player in the AFL or cricket may (or may reasonably aspire to) have the financial security and all-round support to weather the COVID-19 storm; other representative athletes such as swimmers, volleyball players, and shooters - even those competing at the very highest levels, such as the Olympic, Paralympic, and Commonwealth Games - often do not have adequate or stable incomes to support themselves, nor the same levels of care or support available to athletes in the professional codes.







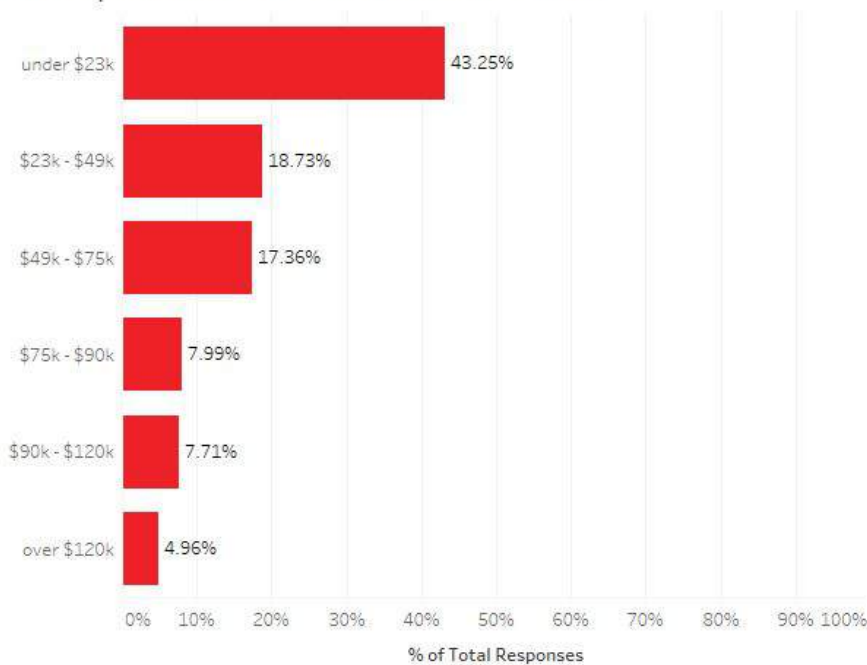
# AUSTRALIAN ATHLETE INCOMES

Excluding the major professional codes, and with the exception of a few big names, sport is rarely financially lucrative for athletes. Over 60% of survey respondents said that other paid employment was their primary form of income, with over 60% of respondents' incomes coming in under the Australian median income of ~\$59,000, ([Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)).

Furthermore, nearly **44% of respondents reported annual income from all sources (both sport and work) of less than \$23,000 in 2020** – on par with the benefits payable to a single unemployed person, and substantially below the national minimum wage of \$39,000.

**Figure 2 - Athletes personal income from all sources in 20FY - excl. U18**

Athletes personal income from all sources in 20FY - excl. U18



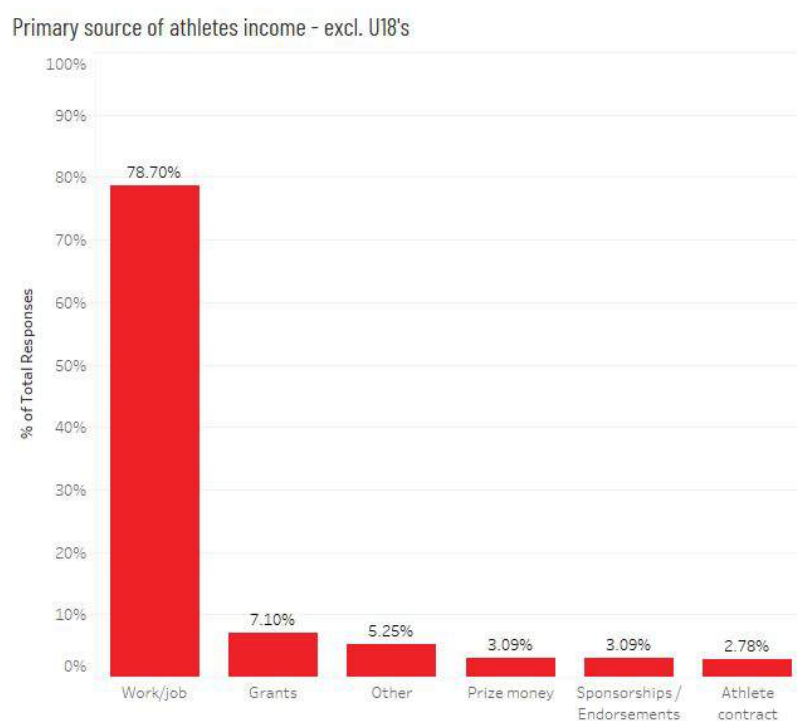
[NB The above chart and following financial charts excludes athletes under 18, who would likely be in full time education or otherwise supported]

Among athletes over 18, income from other sources far outweighs that from sport – with over 78% citing paid employment as their primary income source, and a far lower proportion of respondent athletes listing grants (7%), sponsorship or prize money (3%) as primary sources of income.





**Figure 3 - Primary source of athletes income - excl. U18's**



[Where 'other' is listed as the main income source, this was mainly support from families.]

While there may be a perception that our athletes are well supported, only 7% of respondents listed 'grants' (e.g. from National and State Sporting Organisations or other sector bodies) as their primary source of income, despite efforts to improve funding support in recent years.

For example, the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) which is one of the major sources of grant funding to Australian athletes, distributes \$14m a year in grant funding direct to athletes. These grants, known as dAIS, are allocated based on certain performance levels, are tax-free, means-tested and are gender and para-athlete neutral.

dAIS grants have increased by 38% in the last 10 years and the tables below outline current arrangements. An athlete who placed first in the world in their event – the best of the best at Olympic and Paralympic sports – can receive only a maximum of \$35,000 a year in funding, while an athlete deemed a future medal prospect (but currently outside the top eight in the world) can receive only a maximum of \$4,000 - \$12,000 a year in grant support - substantially below the level of unemployment benefit.

**Table 3 - AIS dAIS grant table for Olympic & Paralympic sports only**

Tier	Results at a world championship (or equivalent event) in the last 12 months	Notional grant (6 month period)
OP1	1st	\$17,500
OP2	2nd	\$16,500
OP3	3rd	\$15,500
OP4	4th	\$14,000
OP5	5th - 6th	\$11,500
OP6	7th - 8th	\$7,500
OP7	Other priority athletes with potential to medal at future Olympic or Paralympic Games	\$2,000 - \$6,000

**Table 4 - dAIS grant table for Commonwealth Games Sports**

Tier	Results at a world championship (or equivalent event) in the last 12 months	Notional grant (6 month period)
CG1	1st	\$17,500
CG2	2nd	\$10,000
CG3	3rd	\$7,500
CG4	Other priority athletes with potential to medal at 2022 Commonwealth Games	\$2,000 - \$6,000

Of course, funding distributed directly to athletes represents only a part of the overall funding picture. In 2020, the Federal Government, through the Australian Institute of Sport, allocated \$144m in direct grants to national sporting organisations, much of which is used to provide athlete support in the form of training, coaching, nutrition and sports science etc.

Athletes can also receive support through a number of additional AIS measures, and from other bodies - including the Australian Olympic Committee, Paralympics Australia, National and State Sporting Organisations, State Sports Academies/Institutes, and universities. **Nevertheless, our survey shows that the income of athletes in non-professional codes remains well below minimum levels mandated in other sectors.**

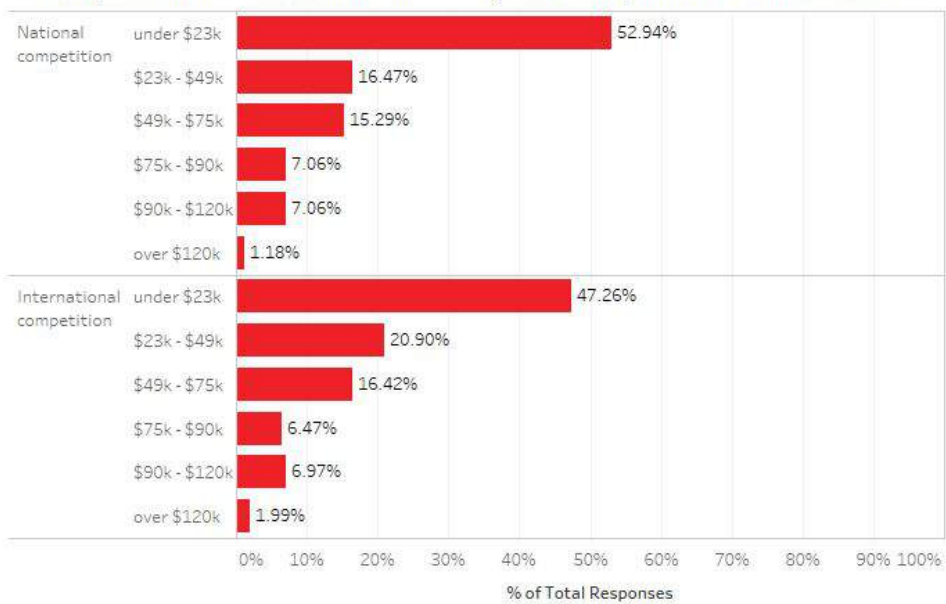




With this in mind, it is not surprising that approximately **50% of athletes who compete at a National & International level reported earning less than \$23,000 a year** from all income (sporting and non-sporting) sources.

**Figure 4 - Athletes personal 20FY Income from all sources - by level of competition (% of level)**

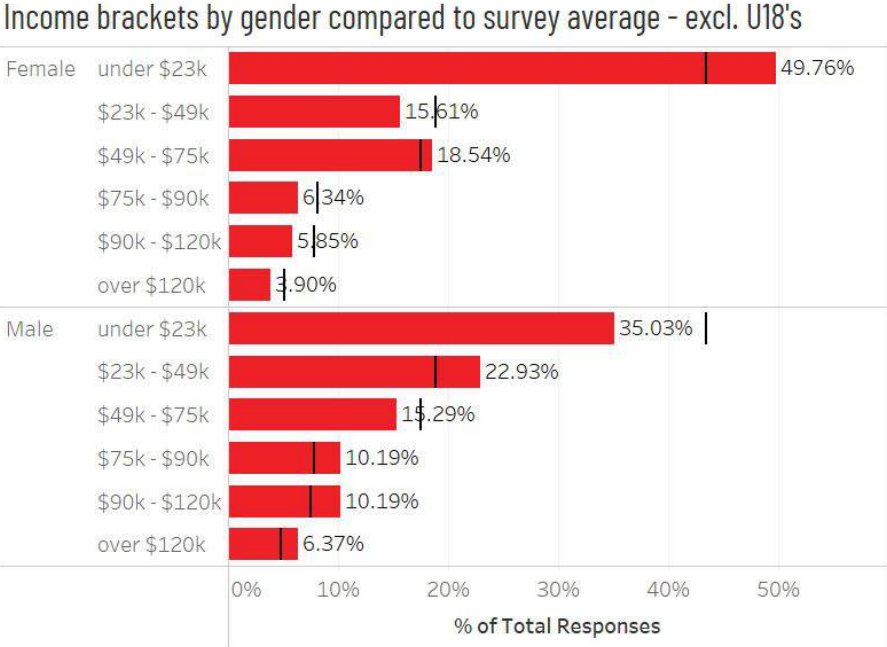
Athletes personal 20FY income from all sources - by level of competition (% of level) - excl U18





While these broad trends remain similar when looking at different demographics, it appears that **unfortunately the gender pay gap is as much of an issue among our athletes as in other walks of life.** Female athletes represented nearly 60% of all survey respondents, and results showed that they are far more likely than their male colleagues to earn in the lowest income bracket (<\$23,000), with over 49% of females in this income category compared with around 35% of males. Conversely, only 16% of female athletes earned incomes in the higher brackets (\$75,000 and above), compared with nearly 27% of male colleagues.

**Figure 5 - Income brackets by gender compared to the survey average (black bar)**



Black line indicates the total survey average for the income band - excl. U18's.

# SACRIFICES REQUIRED TO BE AN ATHLETE

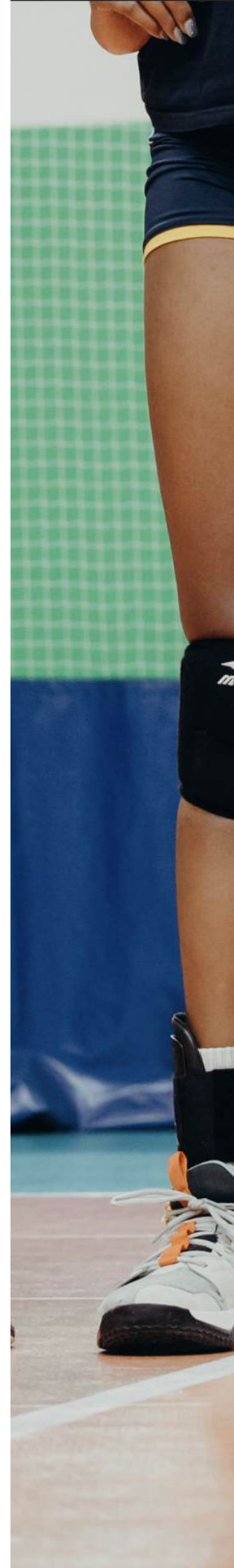
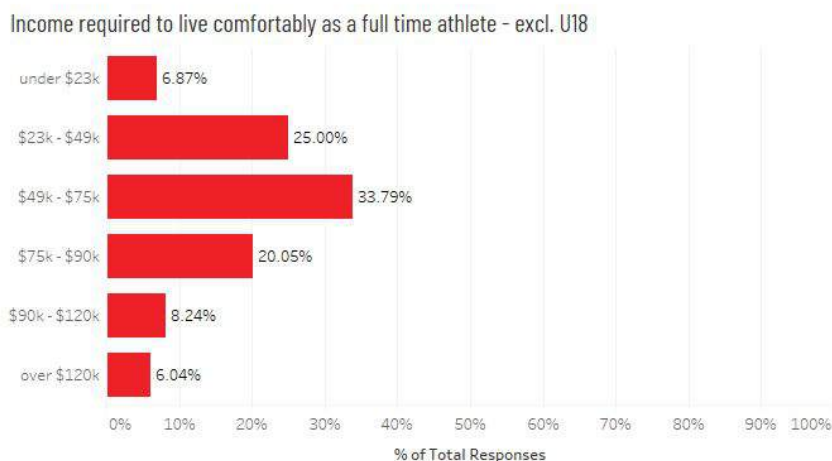
In addition to coping with low incomes, our athletes have to make other significant financial and non-financial sacrifices to pursue their sporting careers. Australian athletes are required to fund considerable out of pocket expenses (See Figure 15), including equipment and training costs as well as travel and accommodation costs when competing – a particular burden given Australia’s size and geographical remoteness. Add to this the costs of physiotherapy, sports psychology and specialized nutrition, on top of normal day to day food and accommodation costs, and this puts a great deal of financial stress on the majority of Australian athletes.

And our athletes have little of the financial security that is the norm for most Australians: there is no superannuation on much of their income, as they are not deemed to be ‘employed’ by their sport. This means they miss out on many of the benefits of being employed (e.g. paid sick leave and paid annual leave etc), and often struggle to obtain mortgages or the other sources of credit available to most Australians.

As a consequence, there is a need for many to juggle full or part time work with the demands of training and competing. And because athletic careers are short, longer-term careers are often deferred until the time when they retire from sport – another ‘hidden’ sacrifice. Taken together, all of this places a huge demand on the athletes (and families) of those we expect to make our nation proud when the major events come round.

But far from embarking on an athletic career driven by thoughts of financial riches, the vast majority of athletes simply desire a ‘normal wage’ to enable them to pursue their sport.

**Figure 6 - Reported income required to live comfortably as a full time athlete, that athletes aspire to achieve**







Zeus

Zeus

MIZUNO

MIKASA

MIKASA



## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON AUSTRALIAN ATHLETES

2020 was a year of unparalleled disruption that affected us all, and athletes were no exception. Travel restrictions meant Australian athletes were unable to travel domestically and internationally to competitions, and of course countless competitions were postponed or cancelled - most notably the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, which were deferred and which we all hope will be able to go ahead in 2021.

In 2020 many athletes were training to make trials for this event and the deferral and cancellation of these trials had a significant impact on future prospects and even short-term earning potential.

Our survey responses clearly highlighted the impact of COVID-19, which broadly fall into two categories – **financial and non-financial**.





▬ Making previous investments for the Olympic original calendar become lost expenses. Also losing considerable amount of working hours at my regular job

- Male International Karate



▬ Businesses who supported me previously have had to cut down in their budgets which I completely understand as for them sponsorship is not a necessity. No comps or results mean no advertisement for sponsors

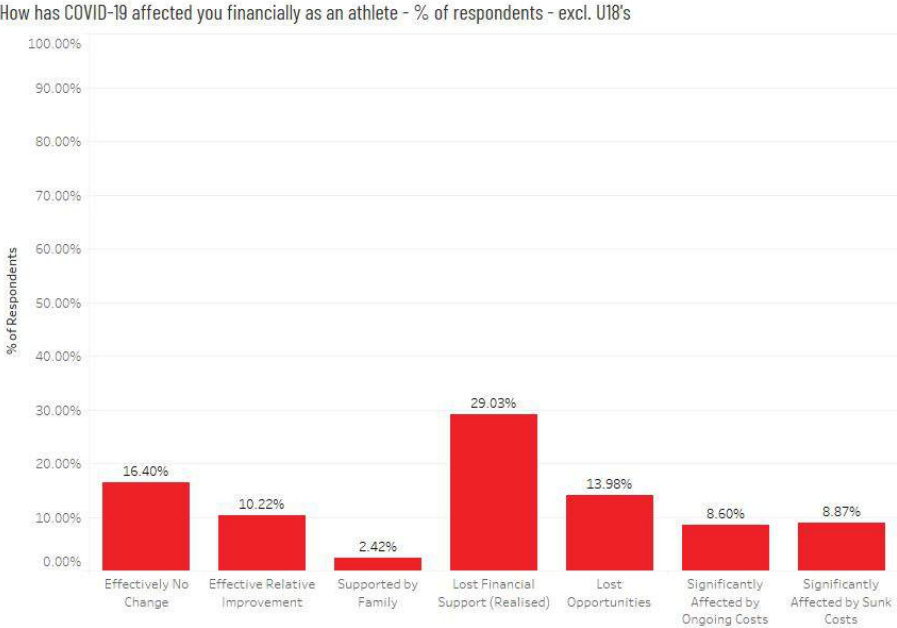
- Female International Shooting



# FINANCIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON AUSTRALIAN ATHLETES

Even though the majority of athletes earn well below the Median income – and often below the national minimum wage or level of unemployment benefit – **over 60% suffered some form of financial loss as a result of COVID-19**, whether from reduced income, sunk cost or lost opportunity.

**Figure 7 - How has COVID-19 affected you financially as an athlete - % of respondents**



The loss of a direct athlete grant has been devastating & unfair as there were no opportunities to get to the next level as there were no competitions

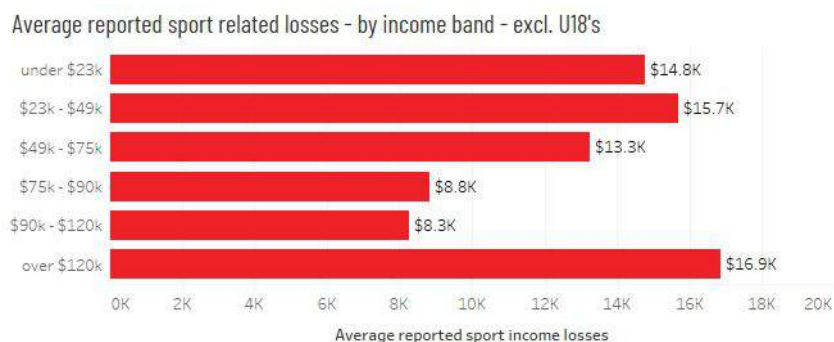


- Male International Swimming

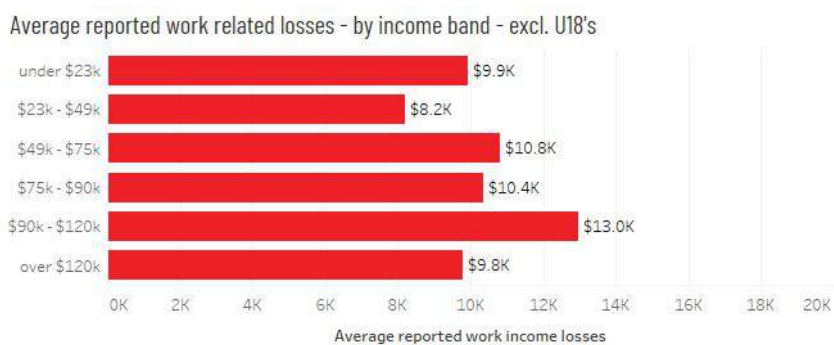
Interestingly, around 10% of respondents noted an 'effective improvement' in their financial situation in the short term, due to the reduction in travel and competition expenses being paid out of pocket. This in itself lays bare the financial pressures of being a representative athlete.

While the dollar amounts lost are small in absolute terms, they form a relatively large proportion of athletes' income: for example, respondents in the lowest (sub \$23,000) income bracket, reported losses averaging \$14,800 from sport and \$9,900 from other paid employment. Overall, across all income bands, the average amount lost from sport income is \$13,500 whereas the average amount lost from other employment is \$10,100 (refer to Figures 26 and 27 in Appendix).

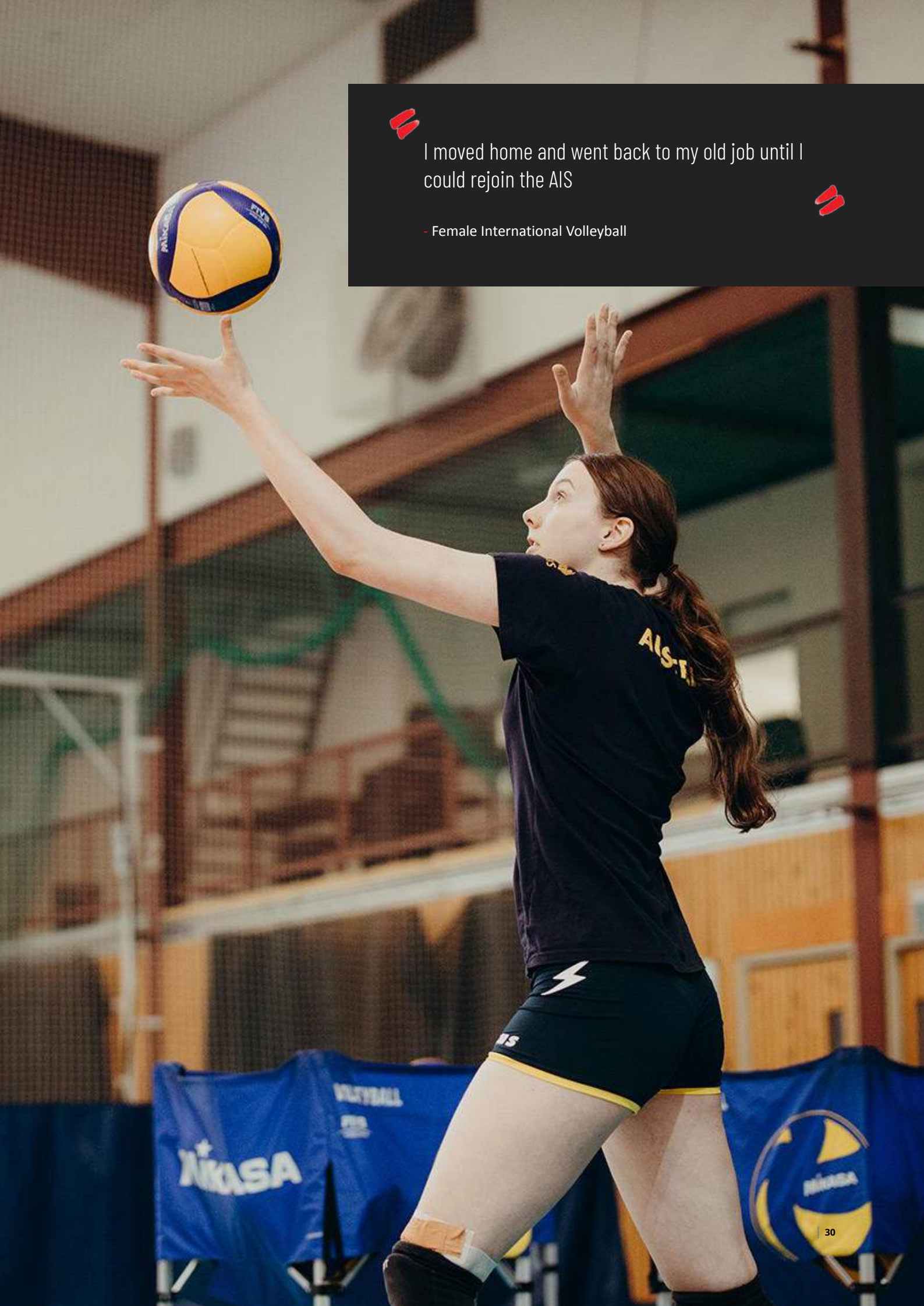
**Figure 8 - Average reported sport related losses by income band**



**Figure 9 - Average reported work related losses by income band**



Again, it is interesting to note that 19% of athletes over the age of 18 reported no change in their finances, which may point to the lack of support and funding to begin with.



I moved home and went back to my old job until I could rejoin the AIS



- Female International Volleyball



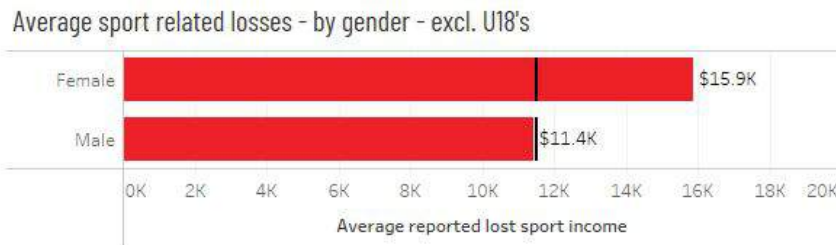
Survey responses also showed that female athletes suffered a greater financial loss from both work and sporting incomes due to COVID-19 than male colleagues, despite having lower average incomes to begin with.

**Figure 10 - Average work losses - by gender - excl. U18's**



Black line indicates the total survey average for work losses - excl. U18's.

**Figure 11 - Average sport related losses - by gender - excl. U18's**



Black line indicates the total survey average for sport losses - excl. U18's.



Financially I was unable to receive job keeper like other athletes so I'm already significantly behind in financial security like those others. The biggest thing is losing the potential prize money that could have been won and even sponsorship money that could have come through



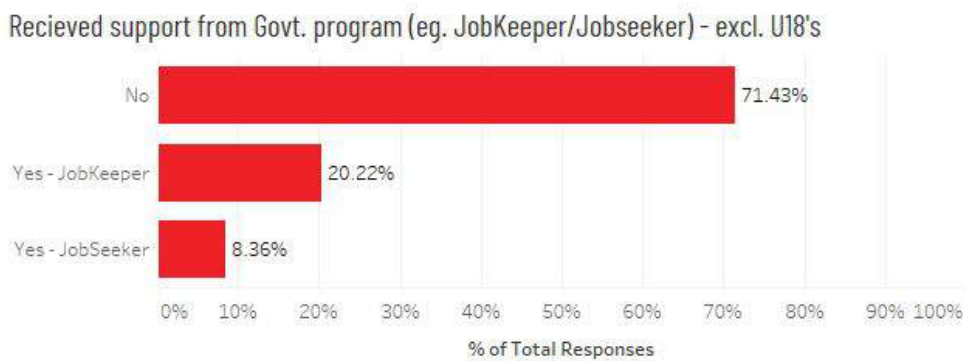
- Male International Volleyball



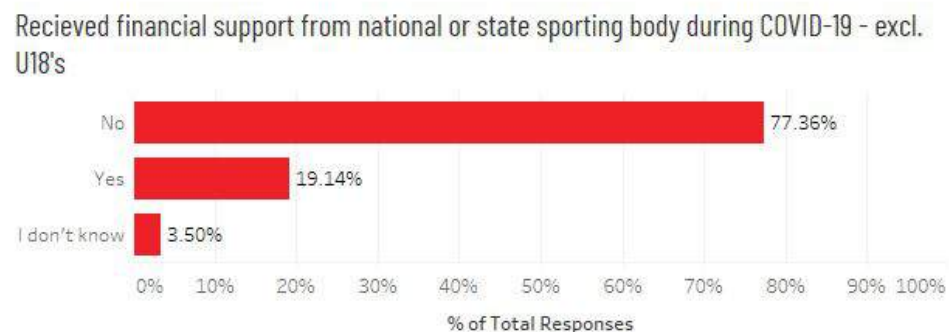


While Governments stepped in to provide significant financial support to many segments of the community to help weather the worst financial impacts of the pandemic, COVID-19 specific support appears to have largely missed the athlete demographic, with **over 70% not receiving any direct support**.

**Figure 12 - Respondents who were supported by government programs**



**Figure 13 - Respondents who were supported by their national or state sporting bodies**

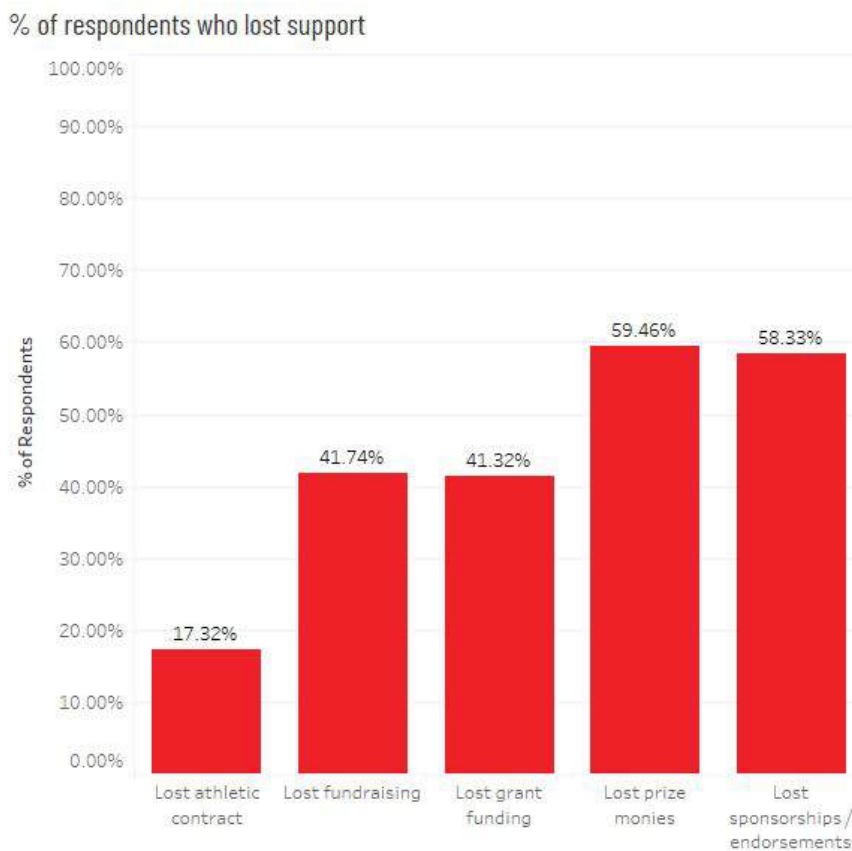






## WHERE THIS MONEY WAS LOST FROM

The financial hit typically arose from lost sponsorships, prize money, grants and fundraising.



**Figure 14 - % of respondents who lost support**



One of the principal ways that athletes bridge the gap between their personal incomes and the costs of competing is through sponsorships and endorsements. Around 58% of respondents indicated that these forms of support were lost due to COVID-19.

 The major financial loss was my major athlete ambassadorship / sponsorships pulled out after 10 years working together as they were closed for 7 months. 

- Female International Snowsports

 Fewer tournaments, so less potential prize money. Sponsors unable/unwilling to deliver annual sponsorship items within contract 

- Female National Lawn Bowls

 My [sponsorship] contract was cut by 60% 

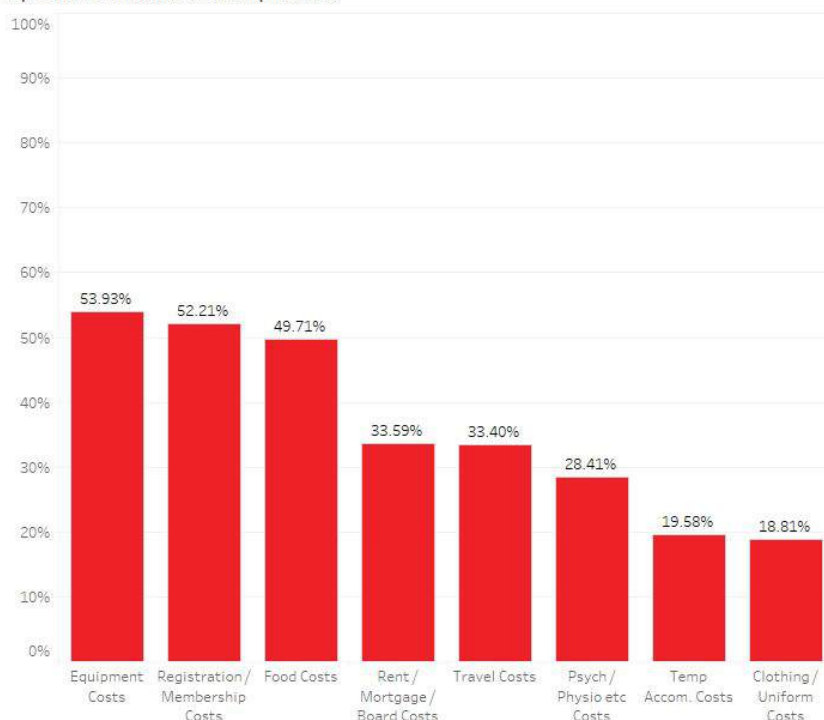
- Male International Surfing

# TOP COSTS TO ATHLETES DURING COVID-19

Most athletes were faced with ongoing costs on top of the decline in incomes. Membership costs (of their local sports club or facility, for example) continued for the majority of respondents, despite not being able to compete for much of the year, and it appears that these and equipment costs exceed even food and rent costs for our Australian athletes.

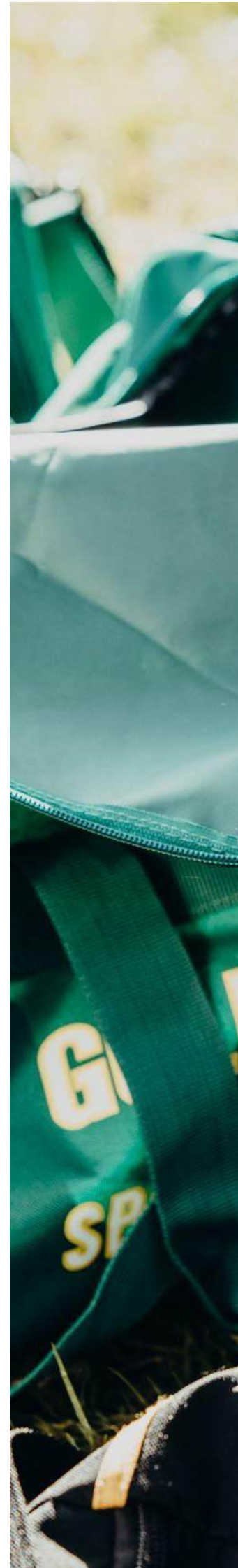
Figure 15 - Top costs for athletes during COVID-19

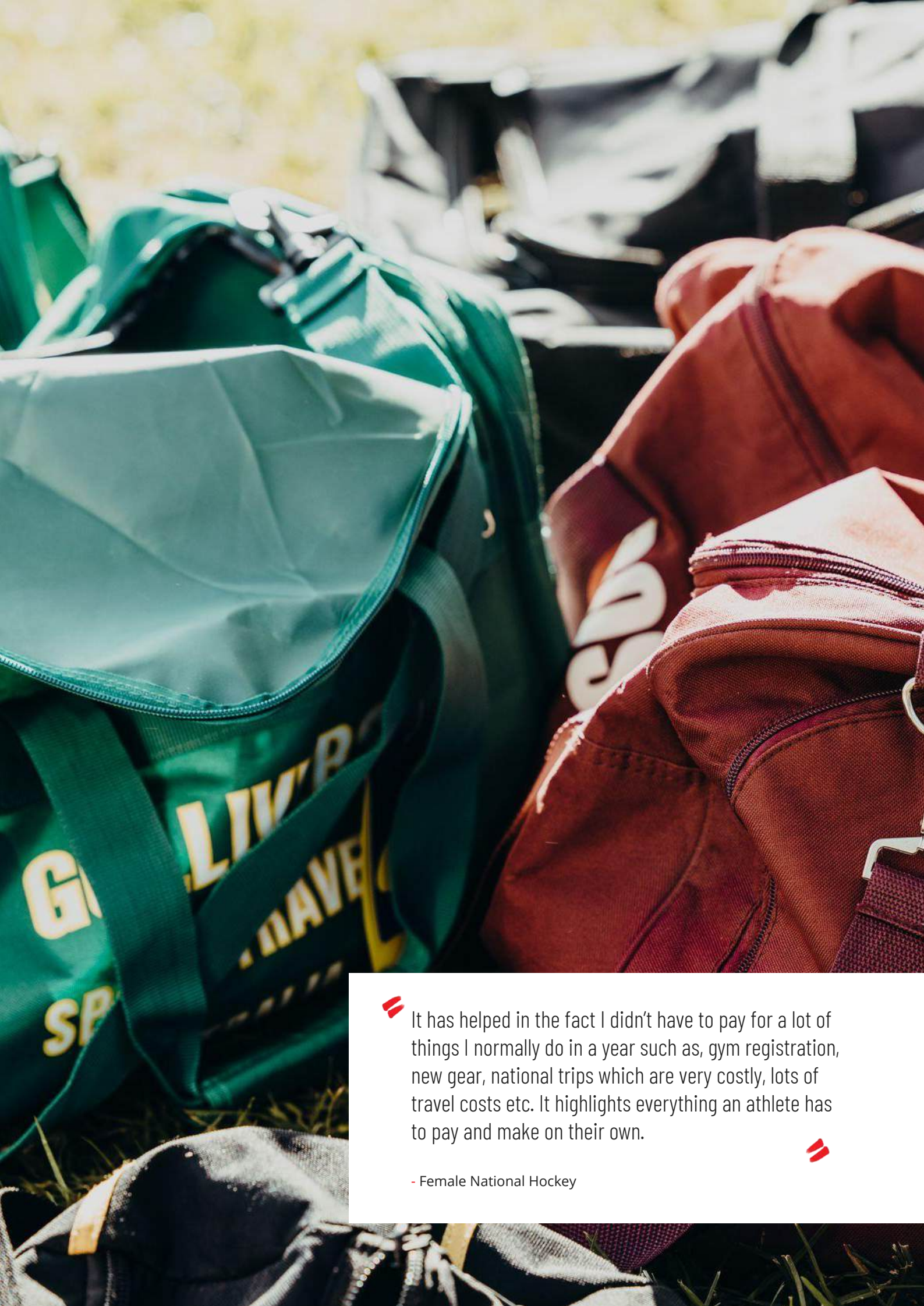
Top costs for athletes (% of respondents)



Swimming training has been more difficult, and fees have gone up due to COVID-19. This has impacted my training as my parents have struggled to pay the fees.

- Female Emerging Triathlon





It has helped in the fact I didn't have to pay for a lot of things I normally do in a year such as, gym registration, new gear, national trips which are very costly, lots of travel costs etc. It highlights everything an athlete has to pay and make on their own.



- Female National Hockey

# SOCIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON AUSTRALIAN ATHLETES

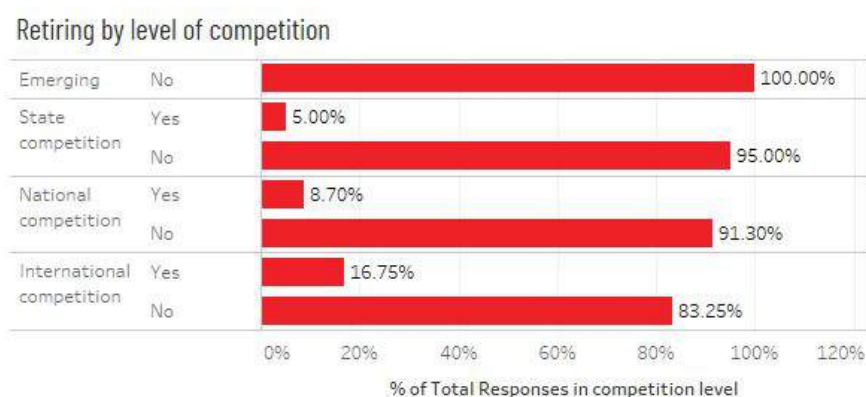
As outlined earlier in the report, while our Athletes have suffered financially, the major impact seems to be on broader social aspects. Responses indicated these social impacts fall into four broad categories.

## 1. Impact on athletes' careers

Athletes have a relatively narrow career span, and an even narrower window – often only a handful of years - when they are at their peak and can fulfil their potential. COVID-19 caused a deferment of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, and led to the cancellation of countless major national and international events.

This disruption, coupled with the increasing uncertainty of ever 'making it' to the pinnacle of their sport and the ongoing burden on their families and support networks has led to **nearly 17% of our international athletes contemplating retirement** should COVID-19 related disruption continue through 2021 (as seems likely).

**Figure 16 - Athletes who will consider retiring from sport if COVID-19 continues through 2021**





Something as simple as a lack of competitions (and in turn results) can represent a major career setback, with long-term implications:

It has made it hard to compete, which may have long term financial impact (as I will have very few results from this year)

- Female International Mountain Biking

Competitions that have an age limit have been missed out on and those preparing for the international comps are having a hard time

- Female International Water Polo

I will significantly reduce my participation to repay my debt

- Male International Karate





NEARLY

**17%**



of international competitors considering calling time on their athletic careers

The provision (or otherwise) of financial support for athletes had an obvious bearing on the experiences of survey respondents:

 The financial aid that I currently receive through dAIS has made the world of difference during this time. Without it I would almost definitely have to retire from my sport. 

- Male International Baseball

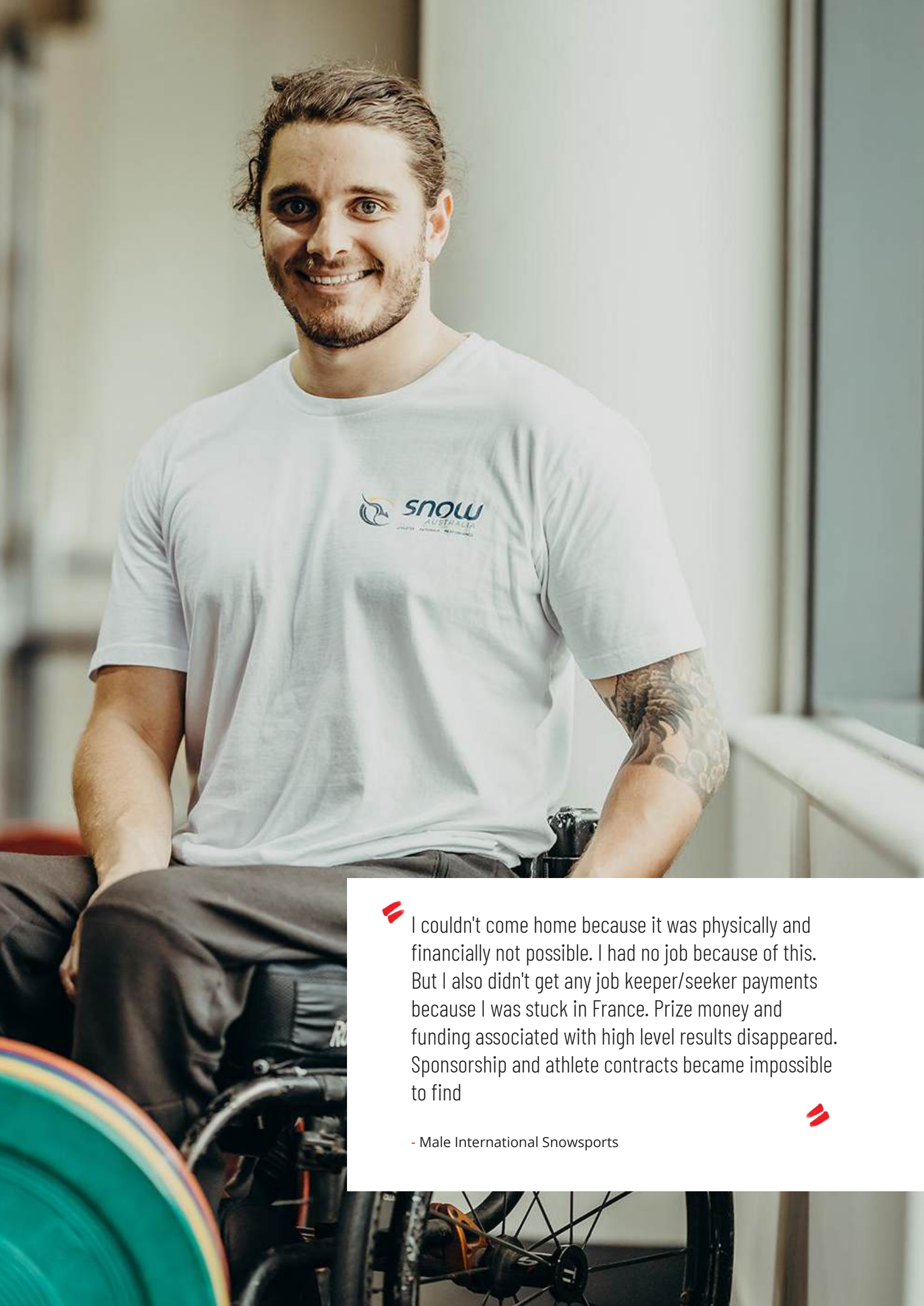
One aspect that often flies under the radar, is that for many sports our athletes are required to spend considerable amounts of time overseas – for example because of climate (e.g. snow for winter sports) or to gain access to necessary events and competitions. A number of respondents highlighted the impact of being stranded overseas, and unable to return home to Australia:

 I think it's been really scary being overseas, wondering if your finances are dwindling so far you might not even make it home and trying to keep fit and positive and doing everything 

- Male International Equestrian







 **SNOW**  
AUSTRALIA  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



I couldn't come home because it was physically and financially not possible. I had no job because of this. But I also didn't get any job keeper/seeker payments because I was stuck in France. Prize money and funding associated with high level results disappeared. Sponsorship and athlete contracts became impossible to find



- Male International Snowsports

## 2. Impact on athletes' families

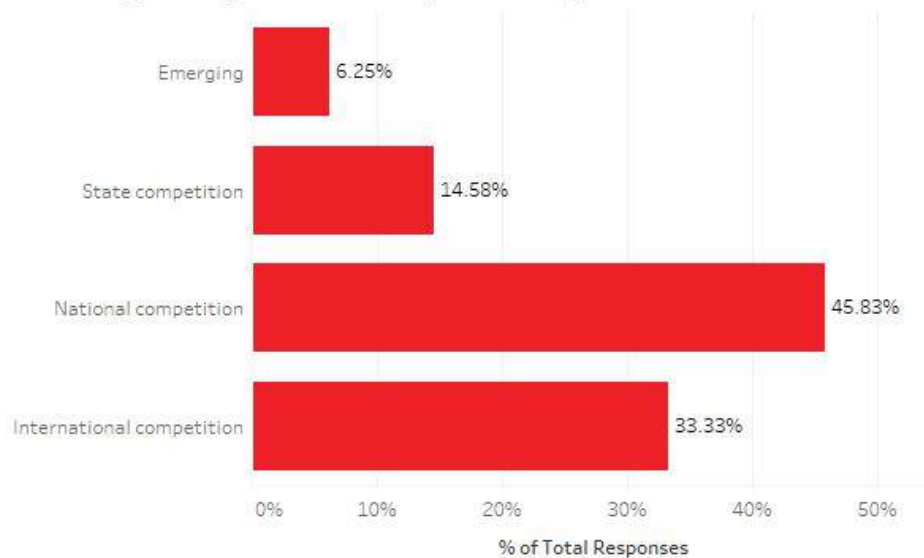
There are two dimensions to this – the impact of the Pandemic on families who support our athletes so that they can pursue their athletic careers, and the impact on those families where the athlete is the primary income provider.

### a) Impact on athletes supported by their families


A staggering 79% of respondents are athletes who compete at either national or international level and are supported by their families (See Figure 17 below) – giving a new insight into just how far the 'bank of mum and dad' supports our elite competitors. This raises the question of **what happens to talented athletes whose families cannot afford to fund their sport?** It is likely that many or most are deprived of the opportunity to fulfil their potential, which is unfair on the individuals concerned, and means as a nation **we are potentially selecting from a smaller talent pool than we might otherwise be able to do.**

**Figure 17 - Athletes supported by their families - by level of competition**

Athletes supported by their families - by level of competition





In many cases the availability of family support was negatively affected by COVID-19.

 My family was greatly financially affected due to the pandemic; our family had a significant decrease in income, (loss in job and cut income). Due to this, I was not able to afford a sufficient and frequent amount of training sessions. Throughout 2020, I have only been able to train 90 minutes per week on the court with a coach, all the other days in the week all I could do is self-train with the minimal range of equipment at home.



- Female International Badminton 

 Had to get a job to support my family on top of sport and studying 

- Female International Volleyball

 My parents have been put out of work temporarily, putting more stress on me as an athlete as I have had to find more work to provide for myself. 

- Female International Volleyball

 COVID-19 has impacted me and my family a great deal, my father lost his job and I lost my casual job during lockdown. 

- Female International Gymnastics

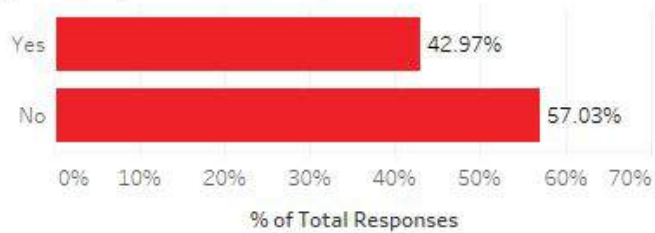


## b) Impact on athletes who have families to support

Despite their below-average income levels, **nearly 43% of athletes who responded to the survey are the primary income providers for their families** and more than a third of those also provide for dependents.

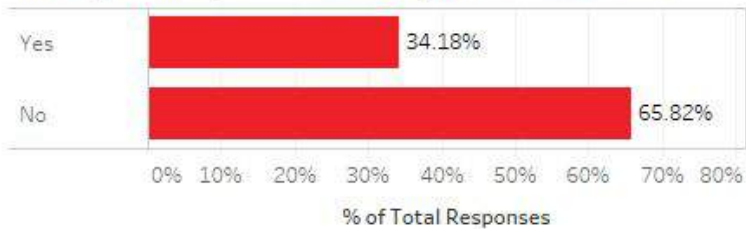
**Figure 18 - Athletes as primary income providers**

Primary income provider - excl. U18's



**Figure 19 - Athletes as primary income providers - with dependents**

Primary income provider - With dependents - excl. U18's





Having 2 kids is tough at the best of times let alone only making \$400 a month when COVID-19 hit from my NSO

- Male International Hockey

Based on an analysis of responses, those who support their families and dependents appear to have higher income levels (from all sources) than the average athlete, potentially implying that only our most successful athletes can afford to combine their athletic careers with starting a family.

### 3. Impact on athletes' physical health

It is obvious that Australian athletes need to be in peak physical health to compete and perform to their potential; it is equally obvious that our athletes' mental health is critical to performance levels and, ultimately, success on a national and world stage.

Disturbingly, **survey responses pointed to a sharp decline in both physical and mental health**, casting doubt on the levels of performance that can be achieved as and when competitions such as World Championships and Olympic and Paralympic Games resume.



🔴 Physically I deteriorated without having access to sport. I began to substantially decrease my intake resulting in a concerning amount of weight loss. This made it even more difficult 🔴 when it was time to return to the gym.

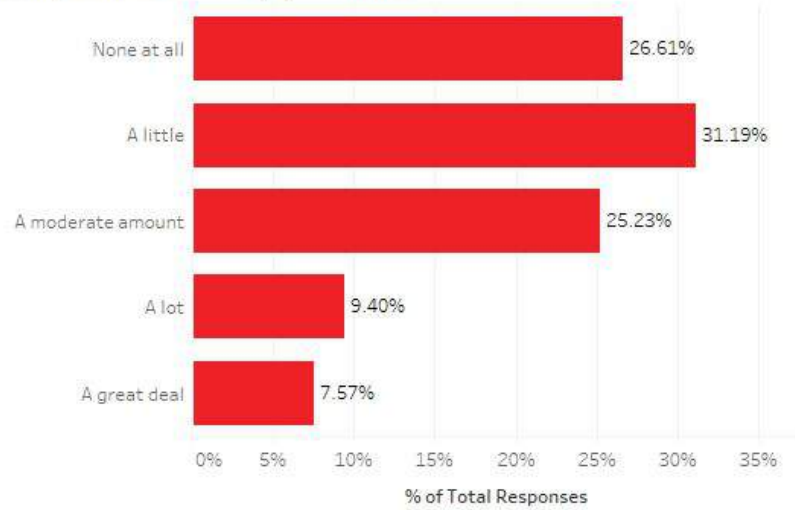
- Female International Gymnastics



For example, over **73% of all survey respondents said their physical health had been negatively affected** by COVID-19.

**Figure 20 - Physical health impact of COVID-19**

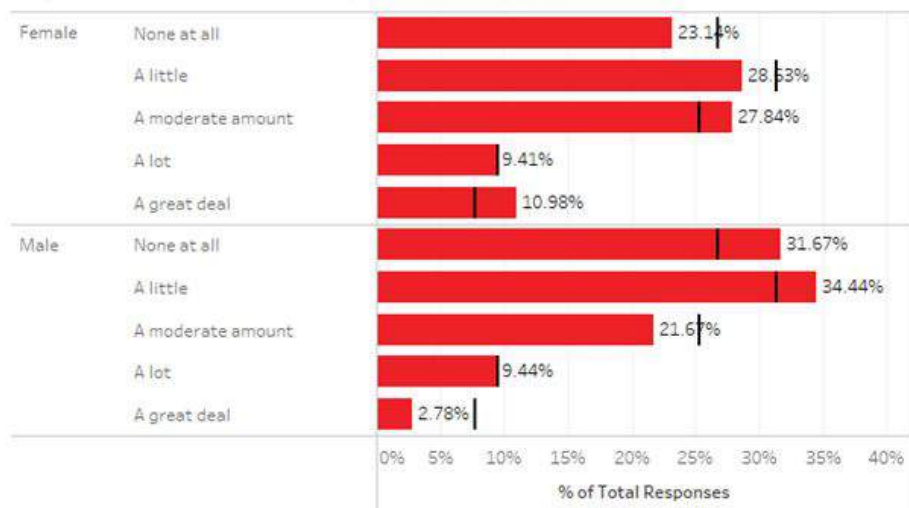
Negative impact of COVID-19 on physical health



**Female athletes reported a greater negative impact on physical health than males** (around 77% compared with 68%), perhaps reflecting lack of support and/or more limited access to training facilities and equipment.

**Figure 21 - Physical health impact of COVID-19 - by gender**

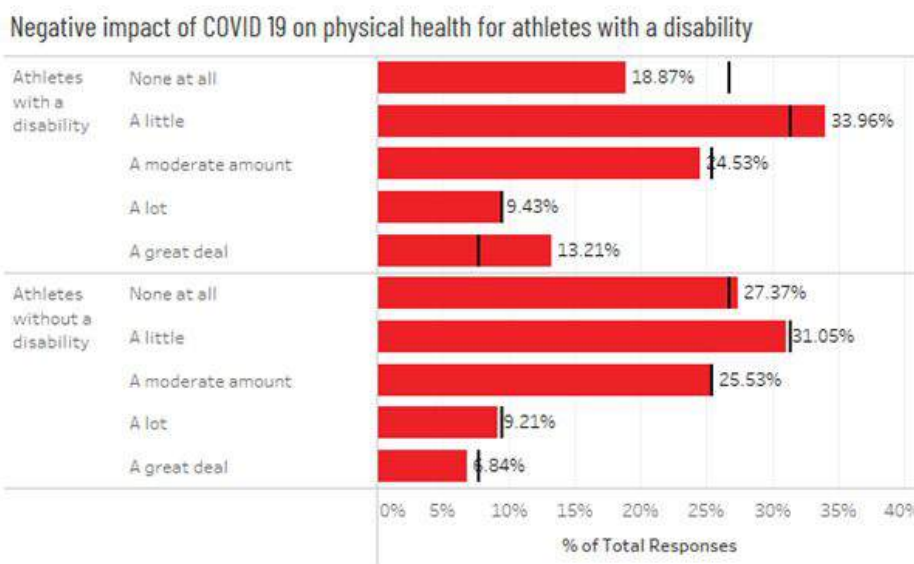
Negative impact of COVID 19 on physical health - by gender



It is perhaps obvious that physical health would be negatively affected for many athletes, due to restrictions in training and the absence of competition. It was notable, however, that our **Paralympic athletes, and other athletes with a disability faced even greater challenges to physical health.**

While around 27% of all athletes reported no impact on physical health, less than 19% of para-athletes did so; conversely para-athletes were more likely to report “a lot/a great deal” of negative impact than the average (over 22% compared with around 16%).

**Figure 22 - Physical health impact of COVID-19 on athletes with a disability**



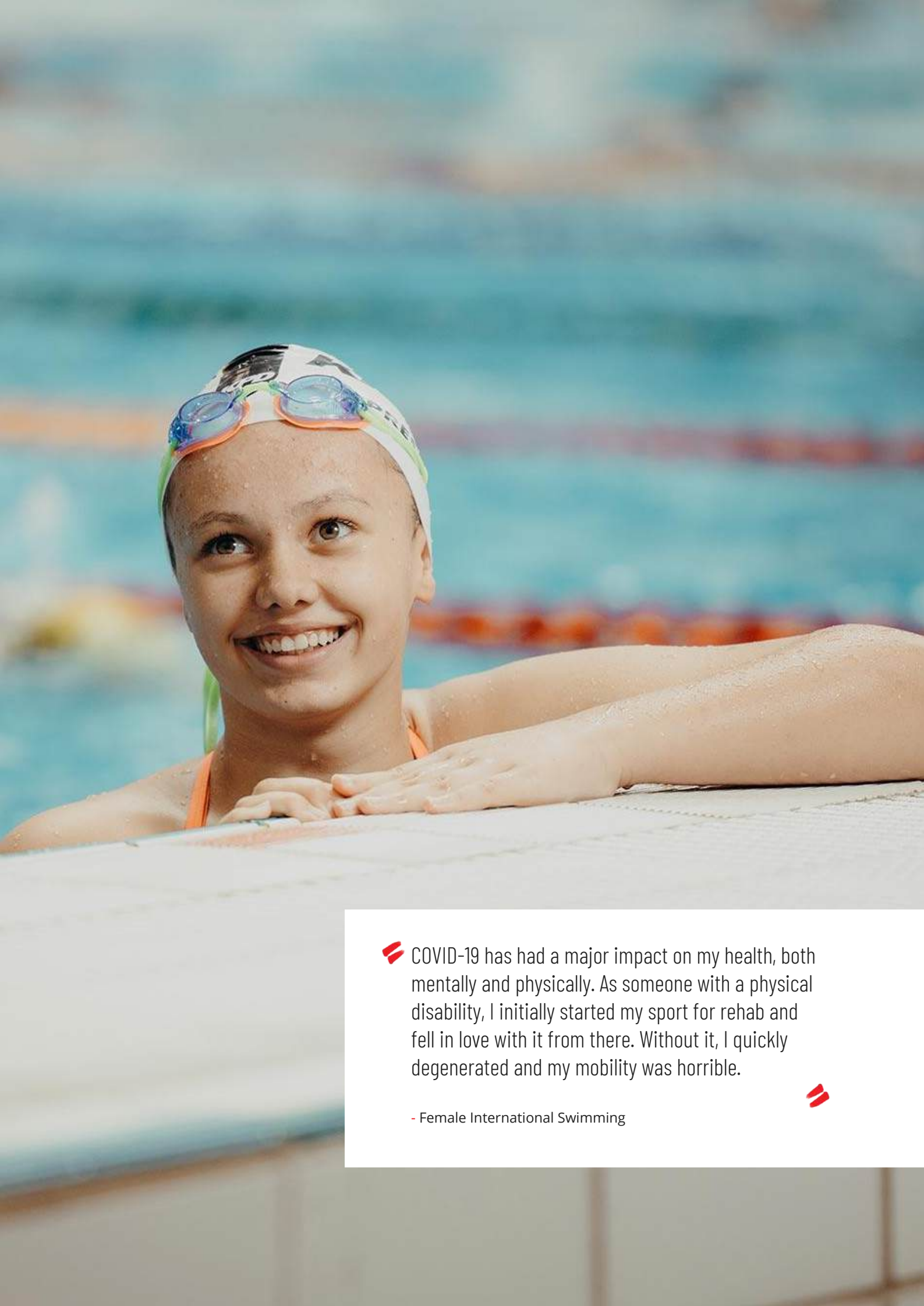
Physically, being a Paralympian, it affected me a lot as I couldn't rely on my medical support as much.

- Female International Multi-Sport

I've gained weight due to reduced training. I've lost muscle mass...

- Male Emerging Wheelchair Sports





COVID-19 has had a major impact on my health, both mentally and physically. As someone with a physical disability, I initially started my sport for rehab and fell in love with it from there. Without it, I quickly degenerated and my mobility was horrible.

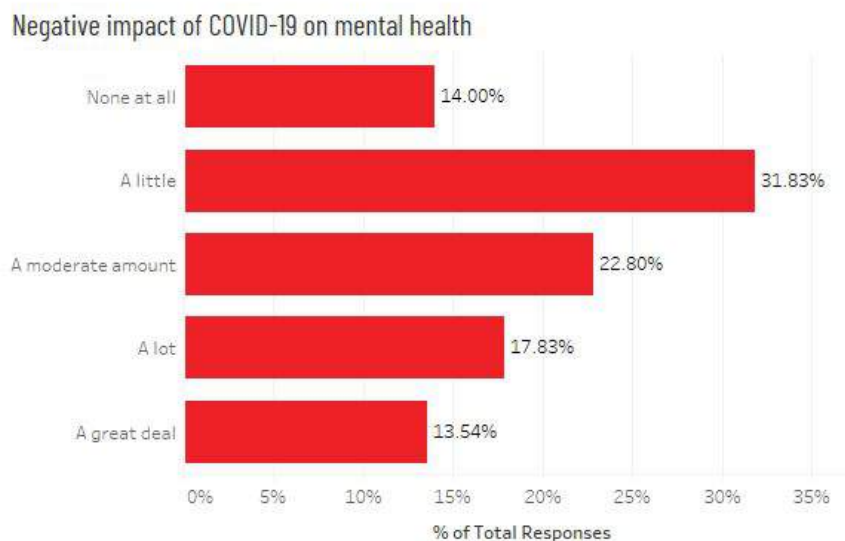
- Female International Swimming



## 4. Impact on athletes' mental health

The positive impact that sports participation has on mental health is well established, and it is not surprising therefore that the impact on our athletes mental health has been profound. **86% of all survey respondents said their mental health has been negatively impacted by COVID-19**, with more than half (54%) reporting their mental health being affected by a moderate amount or more.

**Figure 23 - Mental health impact of COVID-19**



I have lost almost all motivation and drive to train as I still believe Tokyo 2021 will be cancelled so what is the point in training?

- Male International Swimming

Mentally has thrown me from pillar to post having a 1 year old to provide for and no idea when competition will return

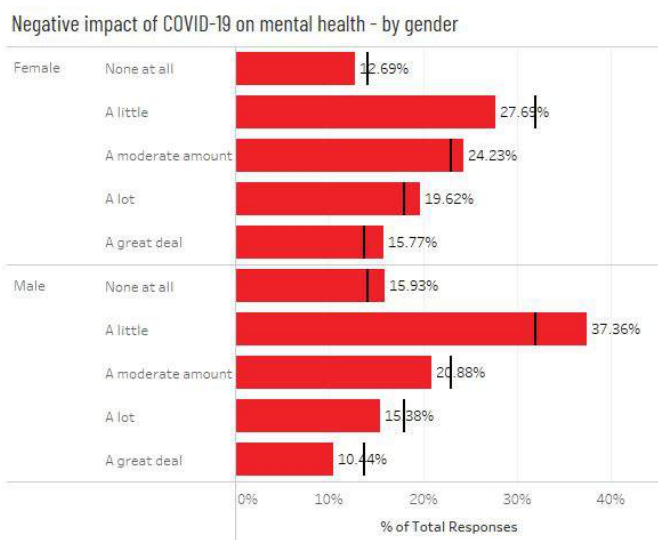
- Male International Volleyball





Once again, however, it appears that **our female athletes have fared worse than their male colleagues, with 59% of female athletes reporting a moderate or greater impact on mental health, compared with only 46% of male athletes.**

**Figure 24 - Mental health effects of COVID-19 - by gender**



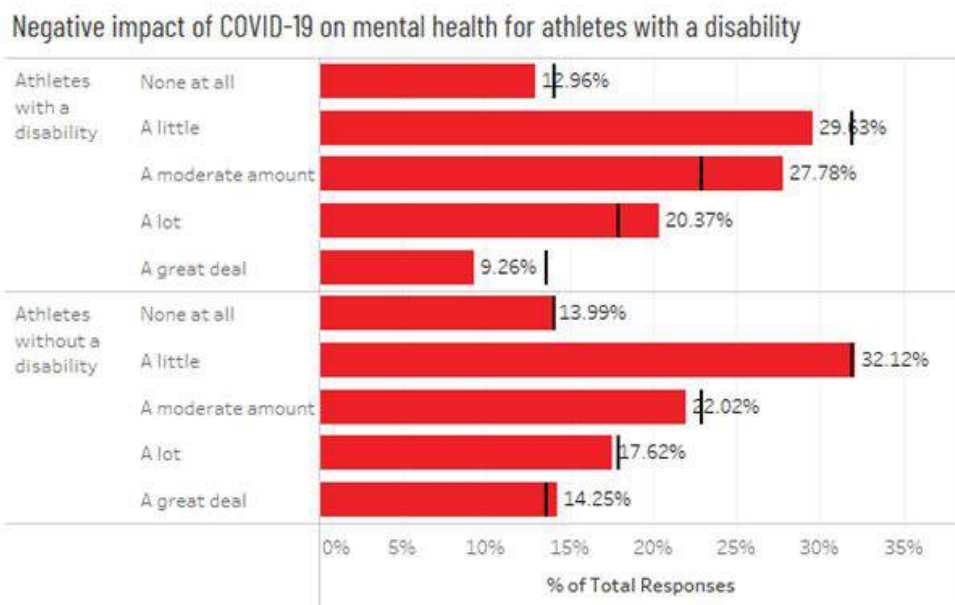
I have never been this stressed in my life - no organisation was advising or helping us plan for the Winter season so all of the management processes and logistics was on me also knowing I had to take care of my team and not put them in danger but also qualify for the olympics. I have never experienced this kind of stress in my life and was on the verge of breaking every day.



- Female International Bobsleigh

We have already highlighted that Paralympic and other athletes with a disability faced greater challenges to their physical health than the other athletes who responded. However, the picture for mental health is more nuanced. While there was still a significant impact, a higher proportion of para-athletes reported little or no negative impact on mental health, while only 9% reported a great deal of negative impact, compared with nearly 15% of all athletes.


This may be linked to the resilience such athletes have developed to overcome the challenges they face both in everyday life and in pursuing their sporting careers.

**Figure 25 - Mental health impact on athletes with a disability**




 Mentally unsure if games are going ahead, sometimes wondering if my dream is going to be taken away or if I should keep training and continue to put other life type decisions on hold to prepare for Tokyo 


- Female International Para Swimming




Not going to wheelchair sports events has made me feel isolated.




- Male Emerging Wheelchair Sports




Higher level of stress and worry for negative impact on my kids. Worry about health of my parents... Bring on the vaccine!... Tokyo is my last games.



- Female International Wheelchair Sports



I developed an eating disorder due to the challenges and stresses and lack of escape through sport... The drop into oblivion was fast and scary. The road out will be long and hard. As a para-athlete - we were already under the radar and overlooked.



- Female State Para Sport Climbing



## IMPACT ON OUR SPORTING FUTURE

Our survey shows that COVID-19 has led to a significant number of athletes questioning their ability to continue to commit to their sport, with **close to 17% of our international athletes considering retirement** if the disruption continues, for example. This could create the sporting equivalent of a 'brain drain' with a potentially damaging flow-on effect to the entire sporting community in Australia. Not only do these current elite athletes represent the pool from which future mentors, coaches and teachers will be drawn, but their performance inspires other Australians (particularly young Australians) to become more active through sport – with a beneficial impact on community health (both physical and mental) and engagement.

If athletes are forced to retire early or before the peak of their career, they will leave a gap which will affect our sporting future at all levels: At the elite level, it would potentially affect Australia's performance on the world stage - a particular concern given the likelihood of Australia hosting the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games - while at the community level, it could remove some of those performers who play such an important role in inspiring and motivating our kids to take up a sport.

## CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has had a significant financial impact on our Australian athletes, but the bigger impact is on their physical and mental health and that of their families. These in turn have negatively impacted athletes' career prospects. **The combination of financial pressure and these personal burdens means that a significant proportion of our elite athletes are considering calling time on their careers**, which in turn may impact our future performance at high profile international events. This is a particular concern given the likelihood of Australia hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2032.

At the Australian Sports Foundation, we believe our athletes inspire the nation, and play an important role in motivating our kids – currently among the least active in the world - to participate in sport. We believe they are worthy of better financial support. Currently, over 1500 representative or aspiring Australian athletes are seeking philanthropic financial support via our fundraising platform. If you would like to make a tax deductible donation to help an athlete from a particular sport or particular community please visit <https://asf.org.au/our-athletes/>.

While we cannot solve the problems highlighted in this report alone, we call on the philanthropic community and Corporate Australia - and all who believe our athletes deserve better support - to join with us.

To find out more and explore opportunities to help us provide better financial support to our athletes, please [contact us](#).

I'm not sure if I can afford to continue participating in sport to the same level as I did pre COVID-19

- Female State Swimming

I can't work in a job due to the travel commitments that my sport brings and my [sport] doesn't support me domestically so I can't afford to train when I am home without working. But the jobs that you can do short time (like cafes etc) are too taxing on my body with the training load I must uphold during the day. It's very challenging.

- Female International Snowsports



# APPENDIX





# APPENDIX INCLUSIONS

## Survey Details

The survey was widely promoted and distributed by the Australian Sports Foundation. It was distributed to all Athletes already on its database and athletes also received the survey through the following means:

- Distribution by National and State Sporting Organisations to their athletes
- Distribution by national and state based sporting academies and Institutes of Sport

Based on this broad distribution, and due to the fact that response samples (in terms of age, gender, geography etc.) closely mirror expected profiles for the overall athlete population, it is reasonable to assume that this sample is broadly indicative of the wider state of athletes of this kind in Australia.

## Potential Limitations

It is assumed that the information provided by the respondents is reasonably accurate, and that each response in the data set represents a unique and true individual.

There is a potential for bias – e.g. athletes could be expected to favour greater financial and non-financial support, and those who received less support may have been more likely to respond to the survey.

The size of the overall survey sample limits the ability to draw meaningful indicators for specific demographics, e.g. indigenous athletes, and should be borne in mind when considering themes emerging from other demographics e.g. athletes with a disability.

## Survey respondent demographic summary (those who responded to the survey)

### AGE

Table 5 - Age of respondents (bracketed)

	Under 18	18 - 24	25 - 35	36 - 45	46+
<b>Responses</b>	149.0	160.0	107.0	46.0	59.0
<b>% of Total Responses</b>	28.60%	30.71%	20.54%	8.83%	11.32%

### GENDER

Table 6 - Gender of respondents

	Female	Male	Prefer not to say
<b>Responses</b>	307	212	2
<b>% of Total Responses</b>	58.93%	40.69%	0.38%

### STATE

Table 7 - State of respondents

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	ACT	TAS	Bad response
<b>Responses</b>	142	125	78	61	50	37	17	11
<b>% of Total Responses</b>	27.26%	23.99%	14.97%	11.71%	9.60%	7.10%	3.26%	2.11%

### INDIGENOUS

Table 8 - Indigenous respondents

	Yes	No
<b>Responses</b>	14	505
<b>% of Total Responses</b>	2.70%	97.30%

## DISABILITY

Table 9 - Respondents with a disability

	Yes	No
Responses	56	462
% of Total Responses	10.81%	89.19%

## NON SPORT REPORTED OCCUPATION (NOT ADDITIVE)

Table 10 - Respondent occupation

Category	Time / Detail	Responses
<b>Employed</b>	Casual	128
	Part time	83
	Full time	120
	TOTAL	331
<b>Studying</b>	Full time	216
	Part time	71
	TOTAL	287
<b>Other</b>	Lost Job due to COVID	29
	Not Working or Studying	37

Figure 26 - Average sport related related losses

Average sport related losses - excl. U18's



Figure 27 - Average work related losses

Average work related losses - excl. U18's



**Table 11 - Aggregated occupation combination responses**

<b>Q12) Are you working or studying? (Aggregate Combinations)</b>	<b>Count of Responses</b>
Full time study,	123
Full time employment,	95
Casual employment, Full time study,	60
Part time employment,	43
Not working or studying,	35
Casual employment,	33
Full time employment, Part time study,	20
Part time employment, Full time study,	19
Part time study,	19
Casual employment, Part time study,	18
Part time employment, Part time study,	10
Lost my job due to COVID-19,	9
Casual employment, Part time employment,	5
Full time study, Lost my job due to COVID-19,	5
Casual employment, Lost my job due to COVID-19,	4
Casual employment, Full time study, Lost my job due to COVID-19,	3
Full time employment, Full time study,	3
Part time employment, Full time study, Lost my job due to COVID-19,	2
Part time employment, Lost my job due to COVID-19,	2
Casual employment, Full time employment,	1
Casual employment, Full time employment, Lost my job due to COVID-19,	1
Casual employment, Part time employment, Full time study,	1
Casual employment, Part time employment, Part time study,	1
Casual employment, Part time study, Lost my job due to COVID-19,	1
Not working or studying, Lost my job due to COVID-19,	1
Not working or studying, Part time study,	1
Part time study, Lost my job due to COVID-19,	1

## SURVEY RESPONSES BY SPORT TYPE

Table 12 - Sport type (incl. Games sports denotation)

Main Sport	Responses	Sport Category
Swimming	69	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport
Equestrian	51	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport
Volleyball	33	Olympic Sport
Rowing	27	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport
Softball	23	
Gymnastics	22	Olympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Hockey	22	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Cycling	18	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Athletics	14	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Netball	12	Commonwealth Games Sport
Snowsports	12	Olympic Sport
Sailing	11	Olympic Sport
Shooting	11	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport
Table Tennis	9	Olympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Wheelchair Sports	9	Paralympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Australian Football	8	
Football (Soccer)	8	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport
Golf	8	Olympic Sport
Karate	8	Olympic Sport
Multi-Sport	8	
Orienteering	7	
Cricket	5	Commonwealth Games Sport

**Table 12 - Sport type (incl. Games sports denotation) continued.**

Main Sport	Responses	Sport Category
Diving	5	Olympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Judo	5	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Bowls	4	
Sport Climbing	4	Olympic Sport
Squash	4	Commonwealth Games Sport
Surf Life Saving	4	
Tennis	4	Olympic Sport
Water Polo	4	Olympic Sport
Archery	3	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport
Baseball	3	Olympic Sport
Bobsleigh	3	Olympic Sport
Lawn Bowls	3	Commonwealth Games Sport
Modern Pentathlon	3	Olympic Sport
Motor Sports	3	
Rugby Union	3	
Taekwondo	3	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport
Tenpin Bowling	3	
Touch Football	3	
Basketball	2	Olympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Body building	2	
Disability Sports	2	Paralympic Sport
Dragon Boating	2	
Ice skating	2	Olympic Sport
Motorcycling	2	

**Table 12 - Sport type (incl. Games sports denotation) continued.**

Main Sport	Responses	Sport Category
Mountain Biking	2	
Skipping	2	
Underwater Sports	2	
Badminton	1	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport, Commonwealth Games Sport
Biathlon	1	Paralympic Sport, Olympic Sport
Bicycle Motocross (BMX)	1	
Cheerleading	1	
Disabled Equestrian	1	Paralympic Sport
Dodgeball	1	
Drill Dance (Marching)	1	
Fencing	1	Olympic Sport
Floorball	1	
Functional Fitness	1	
Gaelic Football	1	
Goalball	1	
Luge	1	Olympic Sport
Outrigger Canoeing	1	
Roller Sports	1	
Skateboarding	1	
Skydiving	1	
Stocksport	1	
Ultimate Frisbee	1	

## **How you can help**

For more information, or to find out how you can help, please visit

<https://covid.sportsfoundation.org.au/help>

## **How you can fundraise**

For more information on how representative athletes can fundraise with the Australian Sports Foundation, or to create your own athlete fundraising campaign,

please visit <https://asf.org.au/our-athletes/>

## **Information for Media**

For media enquiries, please contact Jodie Artis at Progressive PR ([jodie@progressivepr.com.au](mailto:jodie@progressivepr.com.au))