



Report into

Community Impact of Rugby League in NSW

September 2026





Acknowledgement of Country

NSWRL respects and honours the Traditional Custodians of the land and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the lands we meet, gather and play on.



David Trodden - NSWRL Chief Executive

Rugby League people have always known what the game means to their communities.

They've known it in the relationships forged across decades of Saturday mornings, in the volunteers who give up countless hours year after year, in the coaches who notice when a kid is struggling and the clubs that show up when families need support. They've known it because they've lived it.

What this study does, for the first time, is put the evidence behind what we've always believed.

I am incredibly proud to present this Community Impact Study, the most comprehensive assessment of Rugby League's contribution to New South Wales ever undertaken. The findings confirm what our Rugby League community has long understood: that this game delivers far more than what happens on the field. It is a driver of economic activity, a contributor to public health, and one of the most powerful vehicles for social connection and community wellbeing that this state has.

The numbers are significant. But what moves me most about this report is not the economic figures or the health savings but the stories. The young person who found their confidence. The family that found their community. The volunteer who found their purpose. Those stories are the true measure of what Rugby League means to NSW, and they are told throughout these pages in the words of the people who lived them.

None of this happens without our Rugby League community, and I want to take this opportunity to say thank you. Thank you to the thousands of participants who took the time to complete the survey that underpins this study. Your willingness to share your experiences has given this report its heart. Thank you also to the clubs and district associations who opened their books and shared their financial data. Your transparency and cooperation made it possible to tell this story with the rigour and credibility it deserves.

Rugby League has been part of the fabric of New South Wales for more than a century. This study is a testament to everyone who has contributed to that legacy. It is also a tool, one we intend to use. The evidence presented here will inform how we advocate for investment in our facilities and programs, how we engage with government and partners, and how we continue to grow a game that delivers for every community it touches.

The case has always been there. Now we can prove it.



Solucio has been engaged by NSW Rugby League to undertake the first comprehensive study articulating the economic, health and social value that Rugby League delivers to the NSW community.

Rugby League is one of the most deeply embedded sporting codes in NSW. Played in communities across the state and ACT, the game has been woven into the social fabric of the state for more than a century. Yet despite its scale and reach, the full breadth of Rugby League's contribution to NSW has never been comprehensively measured.

This study addresses that gap. It examines the game not only as a sport, but as a driver of economic activity, a contributor to public health and a platform for social connection, inclusion and community development. These benefits arise through many forms of engagement, from organised competition and representative programs, to social and casual participation, as well as through the operation of clubs, associations and governing bodies whose reach extends far beyond the football field.

Quantifying and communicating these benefits matters. Investment in sport is too often evaluated on narrow terms, assessed primarily through participation numbers or economic outputs, while the broader and often more enduring contributions to community life go unmeasured and undervalued. This study seeks to change that by providing a more complete picture of what Rugby League delivers to the people and communities of NSW.

The findings presented here are intended to inform stakeholders, policymakers and decision-makers as they consider investment in Rugby League facilities, programs and pathways, supporting decisions that reflect the full value the game delivers to NSW.

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Executive Summary



Executive Summary



Rugby League is more than a sport. In New South Wales, it is a community institution and one that has been shaping lives, connecting families and anchoring local identity for generations. This study, the first of its kind commissioned by NSW Rugby League, provides a comprehensive and evidence based assessment of the full value the game delivers to the people and communities of NSW.

The findings are significant. Across three domains: economic contribution, health impact, and social value, Rugby League generates measurable, recurring and broadly distributed benefits that extend well beyond the sideline.

The economic contribution of the Rugby League ecosystem to the NSW economy is substantial, driven by the combined expenditure of community clubs, pathway competitions, governing bodies, district associations and more than 165,000 registered participants. This activity flows through every region of the state, supporting jobs, local businesses and community infrastructure yearround.

The health contribution of Rugby League is grounded in the preventative value of regular physical activity. By keeping participants active, the sport reduces the burden of chronic disease and mental illhealth across the NSW community, generating meaningful savings to the health system on both an annual and lifetime basis.

The social contribution of Rugby League is perhaps its most distinctive and enduring strength. Rugby League clubs function as genuine community institutions, creating belonging, developing local leaders, supporting vulnerable people through hardship, and providing young people with the structure, mentorship and purpose that shapes positive life outcomes. The research confirms that Rugby League participants demonstrate stronger social connections, higher rates of volunteering, and greater community trust than both other sport participants and the general population.

Together, these findings make a clear and compelling case: investment in Rugby League is investment in the health, cohesion and prosperity of NSW communities.

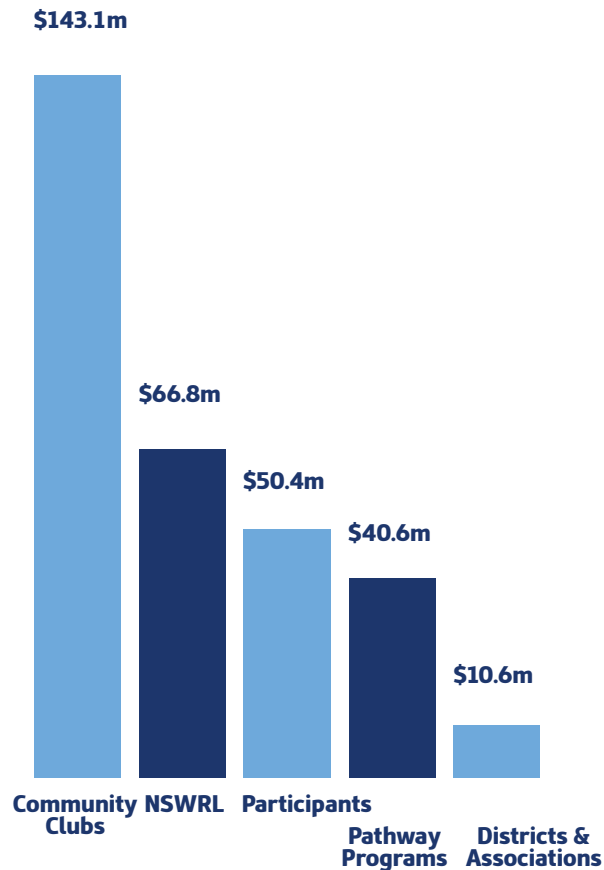
The headline findings across each domain are presented on the following pages.



Annual Community Impact of Rugby League in NSW

\$311,558,749

Annual Economic Contribution of the Rugby League Ecosystem to the NSW Economy



\$313,259,852
per annum

Unique Social Strengths of Rugby League

A Place to Belong

A second family built through shared seasons, Saturday mornings and a lifetime of showing up.

More Than a Sporting Club

The volunteer, the committee member, the coach. Rugby League builds the people who hold communities together.

A Community Safety Net

When life gets hard the club shows up with practical help and no questions asked.

Positive Pathways for Young People

A trusted adult who knows their name. A peer group with purpose. A reason to stay on track.

Inclusion Made Visible

More than just being accommodated. Included by being needed, recognised and part of something that matters.

Better People, Not Just Better Players

Rugby League doesn't just build better players. It builds more capable, resilient and confident people.

\$1,701,103

Annual Saving on Health Care Expenditure through Rugby League Participation

Physical Health Benefit



\$1,133,714

Mental Health Benefit



\$567,389

**Lifetime
Community Health Benefit**



\$29,486,336

Headline Economic Contribution

Rugby League is one of NSW's most deeply embedded sporting codes, operating through a network of hundreds of community clubs, district associations, pathway competitions and development programs that collectively span every region of the state.

This scale of activity generates a substantial and measurable contribution to the NSW economy through multiple channels.

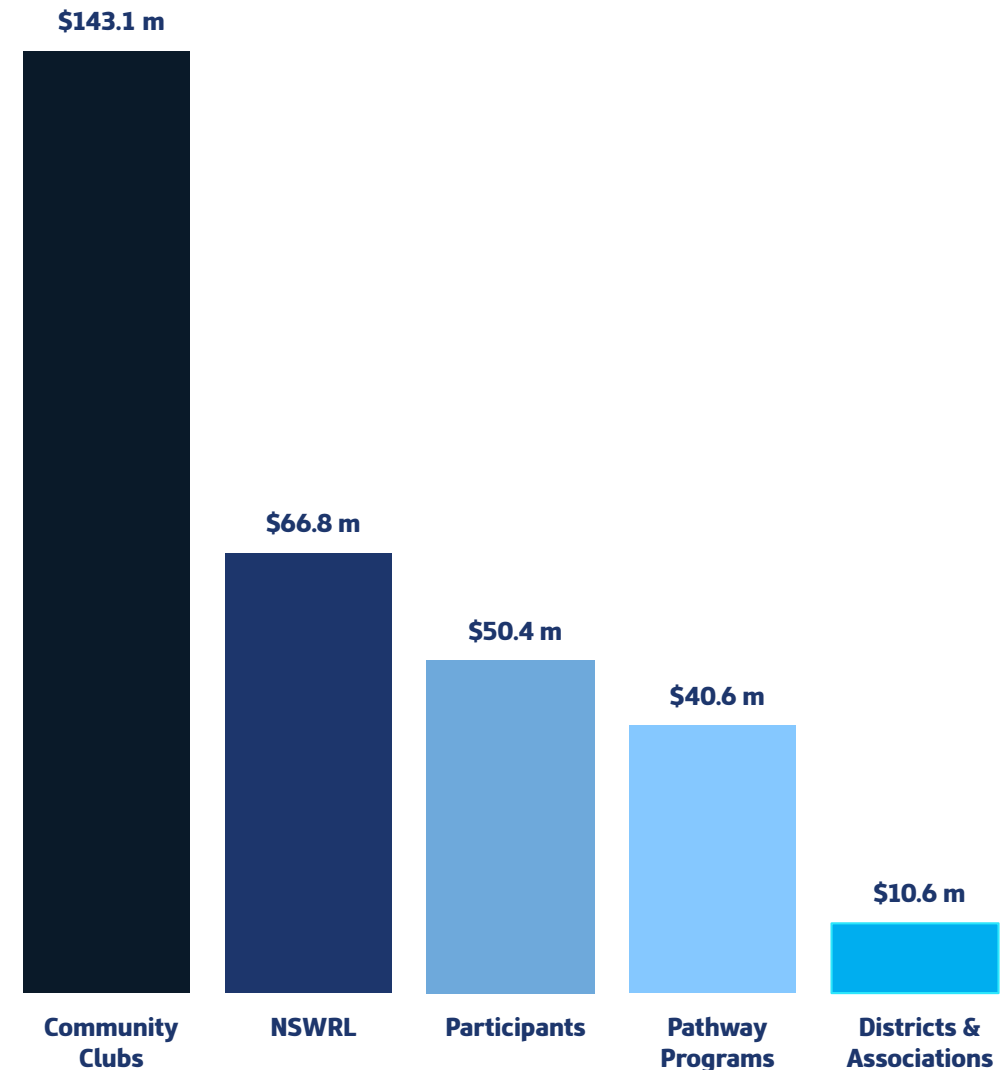
Rugby League creates employment and stimulates local economic activity through the day-to-day operations of clubs, associations, competitions and facilities. It supports local businesses, from sports retailers and allied health providers to caterers, groundskeepers and equipment suppliers. The game also sustains a significant volunteer workforce whose contribution extends well beyond the football field.

Rugby League's economic contribution to the NSW economy is estimated at \$311.6 million per annum. This is delivered through:

- Direct expenditure by 643 affiliated community Rugby League clubs on player payments, facility operations, administration and community programs.
- Operational expenditure by the NSWRL as the state governing body, including the administration of competitions, development programs and marquee events.
- Expenditure by pathway competition programs operated by NRL clubs and standalone clubs across the NSW Cup, Women's Premiership and agegroup development competitions.
- Expenditure by district and referee associations supporting local competition administration and match officiating across NSW.
- Direct spending by more than 165,000 registered Rugby League participants on club fees, uniforms, equipment, allied health services and travel.

This contribution reflects recurring annual economic activity rather than a one-off injection, underscoring Rugby League's role as a stable, embedded and year-round driver of economic activity across NSW.

Economic Contribution of the Rugby League Ecosystem to the NSW Economy



Headline Health Impact



\$1.7 million

Annual Health Contribution



\$29.5 million

Lifetime Health Contribution

Physical inactivity is one of the top ten risks of disease behind tobacco, obesity and alcohol use. Regular participation in physical activity provides significant health benefits to individuals from both a physical and mental health perspective.

The physical health benefits analysed in this study are derived from reducing the prevalence of chronic diseases as identified by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The mental health benefits are derived from reducing the prevalence of anxiety and depression.

This study estimates that Rugby League participation in NSW generates an annual health contribution of approximately \$1.7 million, reflecting avoided health system costs associated with improved physical and mental health outcomes. When the benefits of sustained participation are considered across the expected lifetime of current participants, this contribution increases to an estimated \$29.5 million in lifetime health value.

All estimates have been developed using conservative, government-aligned valuation parameters and are grounded in established public health and economic evaluation practice. As such, the findings represent a robust baseline measure of Rugby League's preventative health contribution in NSW, reinforcing the sport's role as a community asset that supports public health objectives and delivers longterm value beyond participation alone.

Annual Health Contribution

Participant Segment		Physical Health Benefit	Mental Health Benefit	Total Health Benefit
Registered Players	Males	\$491,100	\$215,318	\$706,417
	Females	\$50,958	\$113,675	\$164,633
Social Players	Males	\$46,298	\$104,397	\$150,695
	Females	\$42,617	\$7,898	\$50,515
Referees and Trainers	Males	\$435,482	\$64,999	\$500,481
	Females	\$67,260	\$61,101	\$128,362
Total Annual Health Contribution		\$1,133,714	\$567,389	\$1,701,103

Lifetime Health Contribution

Participant Segment		Physical Health Benefit	Mental Health Benefit	Total Health Benefit
Registered Players	Males	\$9,552,420	\$2,192,379	\$11,744,799
	Females	\$358,337	\$602,911	\$961,248
Social Players	Males	\$932,328	\$714,131	\$1,127,812
	Females	\$413,681	\$118,787	\$1,051,115
Referees and Trainers	Males	\$12,011,577	\$1,271,423	\$13,283,000
	Females	\$802,488	\$515,873	\$1,318,361
Total Lifetime Health Contribution		\$24,070,832	\$5,415,504	\$29,486,336

Rugby League occupies a place in New South Wales communities that no other sport quite replicates. It is not simply played by the communities, it is an integral part of how those communities understand themselves.

The game carries a cultural weight, a working-class authenticity and a depth of local loyalty that has been built up over more than a century, and that continues to express itself every weekend across hundreds of clubs, grounds and neighbourhoods across NSW.

What the evidence reveals is that this attachment is not sentimental, it is structural. Rugby League clubs do things that matter: they hold people together during hardship, give young people direction when they need it most, provide volunteers with a sense of purpose that extends well beyond sport, and create forms of belonging that prove remarkably durable across decades and generations.

The social value of Rugby League is not generated on the field. It is generated in the relationships, routines and community structures that form around the game; in the conversations after training, the fundraisers after a family tragedy, the coach who notices a kid is struggling, the volunteer who has given thirty years of weekend mornings because the club gave them something they could not find elsewhere.

This is a form of social infrastructure that is difficult to quantify and easy to underestimate. But for the people who described their experiences through this study it is entirely real, and in many cases, lifechanging.

Unique Social Strengths of Rugby League in NSW

A Place to Belong

Rugby League clubs generate belonging across friendships, families, generations and school boundaries, creating connections that are structural rather than incidental and that persist well beyond playing years.

More Than a Sporting Club

Rugby League clubs function as working community institutions, developing local leaders, sustaining volunteers, mobilising communities in times of need.

A Community Safety Net

Rugby League clubs provide emotional, practical and social support during some of the most difficult moments in people's lives, filling gaps that formal services often cannot reach.

Positive Pathways for Young People

Rugby League provides young people with something increasingly rare in modern community life: reliable structure, a trusted adult who knows their name, and a peer group with shared purpose.

Inclusion Made Visible

Rugby League gives people who might otherwise feel excluded a visible and valued place in the community, not through programs or policy, but through the experience of being needed and part of a team.

Personal Growth Through the Demands of the Game

Rugby League builds confidence, resilience, discipline and wellbeing by placing people in an environment that demands growth and surrounding them with the relationships that make it possible.



Economic Contribution of Rugby League in NSW



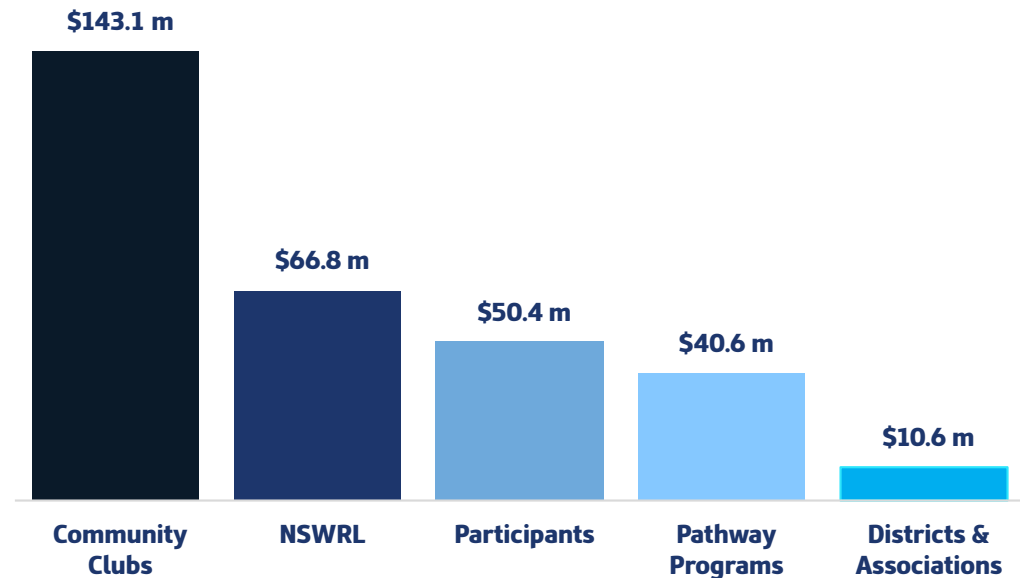
Economic Contribution – Overview

Rugby League in NSW contributes an estimated \$311.6 million per annum to the NSW economy through direct organisational expenditure and participant spending across the Rugby League ecosystem.

This contribution comprises:

- \$143.1 million from expenditure by community Rugby League clubs.
- \$66.8 million from NSWRL operations.
- \$50.4 million by Rugby League participants.
- \$40.6 million from pathway competitions and programs.
- \$10.6 million from District and Referee Associations.

Importantly, this contribution reflects recurring annual economic activity rather than one-off injections, highlighting Rugby League's role as a stable and embedded component of the NSW economy.



	Administrative & professional services	Food, beverage and events	Goods procurement	Labour and personnel	Travel and transport	Venue and facilities	All Other Expense	Total
NSWRL	\$3,807,424	\$597,106	\$266,505	\$58,462,721	\$0	\$1,816,208	\$1,874,329	\$66,824,293
Pathway Competitions and Programs	\$470,893	\$58,193	\$702,164	\$35,926,592	\$916,103	\$2,474,389	\$62,741	\$40,611,076
Districts and Referee Associations	\$1,632,488	\$1,404,234	\$338,235	\$6,104,867	\$152,763	\$674,275	\$265,432	\$10,572,294
Community Clubs	\$16,549,092	\$33,450,147	\$9,604,629	\$72,151,364	\$337,826	\$9,115,404	\$1,945,490	\$143,153,951
Participants*	\$30,482,778	-	\$6,372,758	-	\$13,541,600	-	-	\$50,397,135
Subtotal	\$52,942,675	\$35,509,680	\$17,284,290	\$172,645,544	\$14,948,292	\$14,080,276	\$4,147,992	\$311,558,749

* Participant contribution figures have been allocated to organisational expenditure categories for presentation purposes. Full participant expenditure methodology is set out on page 20.

This assessment estimates the economic contribution of Rugby League in NSW for the 2025 calendar year. The analysis covers community and pathway Rugby League activity, from registered participants at community clubs through to pathway competitions and development programs and is bounded to impacts arising within NSW.

The economic contribution estimates are informed by a range of primary and secondary data sources, including:

- Annual reports and financial statements from the NSW Rugby League (NSWRL).
- Financial statements from affiliated community Rugby League clubs, district associations and referee associations.
- Pathway competition and development program expenditure data from NSW-based NRL clubs.
- An online survey of Rugby League participants conducted across NSW.
- Registration and participation data from the NSWRL registration platform, MySideline.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing data.
- Industry and tourism research, including Tourism Research Australia regional profiles and IBISWorld industry reports.

What is Included

The assessment encompasses economic activity generated by:

- Community Rugby League clubs and district associations affiliated with the NSWRL.
- NSWRL administered competitions and development programs.
- Pathway competitions, including The Knock-On-Effect NSW Cup, Women's Premiership, Jersey Flegg Cup, Harold Matthews Cup, Lisa Fiaola Cup and Tarsha Gale Cup.
- Regional academies and associated development programs.
- Associated participant, spectator and volunteer activity across NSW.

NSW-based NRL clubs are included to the extent of their participation in pathway competitions and delivery of development programs and regional academies. The broader operations associated with the top level NRL competition are excluded.

The State of Origin series is included to the extent of NSWRL's direct operational expenditure and related program activity. The broader economic contribution of NSW-hosted State of Origin matches, including visitor expenditure and venue activity is specifically excluded from this analysis, as that impact is more appropriately analysed as part of a separate event level assessment.

What is Excluded

The following are explicitly outside the scope of this assessment:

- The direct operations and expenditure of the NRL.
- NRL club operations and expenditure associated with the top grade NRL competition.
- Spectator and visitor expenditure at NRL and State of Origin events not directly attributable to NSWRL operations.
- Non football related expenditure of licensed clubs.

Assessment Framework

Economic Contribution vs Economic Impact

Economic contribution and economic impact are related but distinct concepts, and the distinction matters for interpreting this analysis.

- An economic contribution assessment measures the scale and distribution of economic activity associated with an existing sector. The central question is not what would change if the activity disappeared, but what role it currently plays within the economy.
- An economic impact assessment estimates the net change in economic activity attributable to a specific intervention, typically measured against a counterfactual scenario in which that activity does not occur.
- This study primarily presents an economic contribution assessment of the size and scale of Rugby League's contribution to the NSW economy through an Expenditure Flow Analysis.



Expenditure Flow Analysis

To assess economic contribution, the total expenditure of organisations and participants across the NSW Rugby League ecosystem is analysed. Expenditure data drawn from a sample of financial statements is categorised consistently across entity types, and an extrapolation model is applied to estimate total ecosystemwide expenditure where complete data is unavailable. Participant expenditure is estimated from inputs gathered through an online survey of Rugby League participants across NSW.

It is important to note that total expenditure does not equal total economic contribution. Not all spending remains within NSW, and some flows represent transfers between entities within the Rugby League system rather than new economic activity. To account for this, three key adjustments are applied:

- **Leakage:** expenditure flowing outside the NSW economy is identified and excluded from the NSW contribution estimate.
- **Internal transfers:** payments between entities within the Rugby League ecosystem, such as registration and affiliation fees, are netted out at the consolidation stage to avoid double-counting.
- **Retention rates:** remaining expenditure categories are assigned a 'NSW retention rate' reflecting the proportion of spend remaining within and circulating through the NSW economy.

Assessment Framework

Multipliers

When money is spent within an economy it does not stop circulating after the first transaction. A club that pays a groundskeeper creates income for that worker, who in turn spends on local goods and services, generating further rounds of economic activity. An expenditure multiplier captures this flow on effect, translating direct retained expenditure into a broader estimate of total economic contribution including indirect and induced effects.

- **Direct contribution** represents the retained expenditure figure, the first round economic activity that is directly attributable to Rugby League spending in NSW.
- **Indirect contribution** reflects the subsequent supply chain activity generated as local businesses procure their own inputs to service Rugby League demand.
- **Induced contribution** reflects the household consumption spending of workers employed across the direct and indirect supply chain.

Together, these three effects are captured in the total economic contribution figure produced by applying the multiplier to retained expenditure.

As with retention rates, a conservative approach has been applied to the multipliers used in this analysis. Rather than applying a flat rate multiplier, category-specific multipliers have been used to ensure that goods-heavy expenditure categories are not overstated by applying a labour sector multiplier that does not reflect their economic characteristics. The category multipliers used draw from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Input-Output tables as the primary reference, with sector classifications matched to the nature of each expenditure category.

The result is an estimate of total economic contribution that is intentionally conservative and designed to be robust enough to withstand scrutiny.

Type	Expense category	NSW Retention Rate	Multiplier
Administrative and professional services	Administration and compliance	50%	1.5
	Insurance costs	10%	1.3
	Sponsorship and marketing expenses	55%	1.5
	Technology, website and communications	30%	1.3
Labour and personnel	Medical and sports science	80%	1.7
	Player and coach payments	70%	1.7
	Referees and match officials	90%	1.7
	Wages and salaries	85%	1.7
Venue and facilities	Capital expenditure	65%	1.6
	Oval expenses and maintenance	70%	1.7
Food, beverage and events	Canteen, bar and trading costs	65%	1.7
	Functions, trophies and presentations	55%	1.5
Goods procurement	Equipment and playing supplies	20%	1.3
	Playing uniforms and apparel	15%	1.3
Travel and transport	Travel and transport	50%	1.5
Residual	All other expenses	40%	1.5
Excluded categories	Depreciation and amortisation		
	Donations and community contributions		
	Registration and affiliation fees		

Expenditure Profile: Community Rugby League

NSW is home to 643 affiliated community Rugby League clubs, ranging from small junior clubs operating on volunteer labour to large metropolitan and regional clubs with paid staff, owned facilities and significant community infrastructure.

Collectively, these clubs incurred total expenditure of \$172.8 million in 2025. Expenditure estimates are based on financial statements from 193 clubs, with remaining clubs modelled using a perparticipant extrapolation approach stratified by region and club type. Where clubs operate as part of a licensed club or broader group of businesses, only football related expenditure is included.

The expenditure profile reflects the core business of community Rugby League: fielding teams, running competitions, maintaining facilities and supporting participants.

Player and coach payments are the single largest expense category, reflecting the direct cost of putting teams on the field across hundreds of clubs and competitions.

The relatively high share of uniforms and apparel reflects a recurring, nondiscretionary cost for every team fielded, with procurement predominantly through national and international supply chains. Wages and salaries and medical and sports science services are modest in aggregate, consistent with the predominantly volunteer operated nature of community clubs.

Expense Category	Raw Expenditure
Player and coach payments	\$46,498,719
Playing uniforms and apparel	\$23,965,775
Canteen, bar and trading costs	\$18,825,344
Administration and compliance	\$16,818,309
Equipment and playing supplies	\$15,239,387
Functions, trophies and presentations	\$10,909,997
Insurance costs	\$6,208,550
Oval expenses and maintenance	\$5,183,122
Registration and affiliation fees	\$5,013,871
Wages and salaries	\$3,075,612
Referees and match officials	\$2,443,197
Capital expenditure	\$2,209,120
Sponsorship and marketing expenses	\$1,268,558
Medical and sports science services	\$765,189
Donations and community contributions	\$646,527
Technology, website and communications	\$595,558
Depreciation and amortisation	\$513,147
Travel and transport	\$422,282
All other expenses	\$12,159,310
Total Expenditure	\$172,761,575

Expenditure Profile: Districts and Referee Associations

NSW Rugby League is supported by a network of district associations and referee associations that coordinate local competition administration, match officiating and club development across the state. Collectively, these bodies incurred total expenditure of \$12.2 million in 2025.

The expenditure profile reflects the core administrative and officiating functions of these organisations. Referees and match officials is the largest single expense category, consistent with the primary role of referee associations in recruiting, training, developing and paying match officials across all levels of the competition.

Administration and compliance and wages and salaries together reflect the operational overhead of running incorporated associations with governance, regulatory and staffing obligations. Functions, trophies and presentations reflect the important role these bodies play in recognising and rewarding participation and officiating achievement across the NSW competition structure.

Unlike community clubs, these organisations have limited expenditure on playing equipment and uniforms at the club level, and negligible canteen or trading activity, consistent with their role as administrative rather than operational sporting entities.

Expense Category	Total
Referees and match officials	\$1,796,892
Administration and compliance	\$1,490,684
Wages and salaries	\$1,371,287
Functions, trophies and presentations	\$1,356,607
Insurance costs	\$1,205,917
Playing uniforms and apparel	\$781,869
Player and coach payments	\$594,955
Equipment and playing supplies	\$580,141
Oval expenses and maintenance	\$430,847
Travel and transport	\$190,954
Technology, website and communications	\$187,169
Registration and affiliation fees	\$173,823
Sponsorship and marketing expenses	\$127,673
Capital expenditure	\$112,314
Canteen, bar and trading costs	\$109,965
Depreciation and amortisation	\$26,089
Medical and sports science services	\$17,278
Donations and community contributions	\$16,181
All other expenses	\$1,658,950
Total Expenditure	\$12,229,595

Expenditure Profile: Pathway Competitions and Programs

Pathway competitions represent the pinnacle of NSW-based Rugby League club competition. The NSWRL administers three interwoven competition structures: a graded premiership, running from the premier grade The Knock-On-Effect NSW Cup and NSW Women's Premiership down through the Leagues Clubs Australia Ron Massey Cup, Sydney Shield, Westpac Tarsha Gale Cup and Westpac Lisa Fiaola Cup; a men's age-group development pathway spanning the Jersey Flegg Cup (Under 21), UNE SG Ball Cup (Under 19) and UNE Harold Matthews Cup (Under 16); and regional pathway competitions including Andrew Johns Cup, Laurie Daley Cup and regional Country Championships.

NRL clubs are the dominant participants across both structures, complemented by standalone clubs that compete primarily in the graded premiership and women's competitions.

The expenditure profile of these pathway programs is markedly different from that of community clubs. Player and coach payments represent nearly 60% of total expenditure, reflecting the semi-professional nature of pathway competition programs.

Medical and sports science services and wages and salaries are also proportionally higher than at community level, reflecting the more professionalised support structures maintained by NRL clubs and larger standalone clubs for their pathway programs.

Conversely, categories such as canteen and trading costs, functions and presentations, and sponsorship and marketing, which feature prominently in the community club profile, are largely absent at pathway level, consistent with these entities operating as program delivery vehicles rather than community social clubs.

Expense Category	Total
Player and coach payments	\$20,840,314
Medical and sports science services	\$3,128,812
Playing uniforms and apparel	\$2,728,643
Wages and salaries	\$2,138,192
Oval expenses and maintenance	\$1,963,801
Insurance costs	\$1,365,278
Travel and transport	\$1,145,129
Equipment and playing supplies	\$430,498
Administration and compliance	\$313,499
Registration and affiliation fees	\$211,500
Functions, trophies and presentations	\$62,238
Technology, website and communications	\$29,512
All other expenses	\$392,130
Total Expenditure	\$34,749,546

Expenditure Profile: NSWRL

As the governing body for Rugby League in NSW, the NSWRL is responsible for competition administration, game development, officiating, community programs and the management of marquee events including the State of Origin series. Total NSWRL expenditure in 2025 was \$55.7 million.

The expenditure profile reflects the scale and breadth of these responsibilities. Referees and match officials is the largest single expense category at \$22 million, reflecting NSWRL's centralised responsibility for recruiting, training, paying and developing match officials across all competitions it administers, a function that at community level is distributed across individual clubs and associations.

Wages and salaries reflect the professional staffing required to administer a state-wide governing body. Playing uniforms and apparel reflects NSWRL's responsibility for outfitting representative teams and officiating personnel across its competition and event portfolio.

The all other expenses category captures a range of operational and program delivery costs that could not be consistently disaggregated from available financial data, and is treated conservatively in the flow analysis.



Expense Category	Total
Referees and match officials	\$22,049,142
Wages and salaries	\$12,853,677
Administration and compliance	\$2,164,121
Sponsorship and marketing expenses	\$1,828,811
Oval expenses and maintenance	\$1,441,435
Depreciation and amortisation	\$1,164,412
Technology, website and communications	\$796,816
Functions, trophies and presentations	\$638,616
Playing uniforms and apparel	\$570,000
Equipment and playing supplies	\$489,349
All other expenses	\$11,714,557
Total Expenditure	\$55,710,936

Participant Expenditure

Beyond the expenditure of clubs, competitions and governing bodies, Rugby League participation generates significant direct spending by players, coaches, referees, and trainers across five key categories: club fees, uniforms and apparel, playing equipment, personal accessories, and allied health services.

Participant expenditure was estimated using data collected through an online survey of Rugby League participants conducted across NSW. Average annual spend was calculated for four participant types and applied to the registered participant population drawn from NSWRL's MySideline registration platform. Where individuals were registered to more than one participant type, the participant was treated as the higher spending type to avoid double counting. Participant travel expenditure is estimated from reported kilometres travelled rather than direct expenditure.

Because all participants are NSW/ACT residents, a substitution discount of 50% has been applied to gross expenditure before retention rates and multipliers are calculated. This reflects the conservative assumption that approximately half of participant spending would be redirected to alternative recreational activities if Rugby League did not exist and therefore cannot be treated as genuinely additional to the NSW/ACT economies. Category specific retention rates and multipliers were then applied consistent with the methodology used for club expenditure, as set out in the table on this page.

Expense Category	Substitution Discount	NSW Retention Rate	Multiplier
Club Fees	Transfer with Rugby League Ecosystem		
Uniform and Apparel	50%	20%	1.4
Playing Equipment	50%	20%	1.4
Personal Accessories	50%	25%	1.4
Allied Health Services	50%	85%	1.9
Travel and Transport	50%	50%	1.5

	Club Fees	Uniform and Apparel	Playing Equipment	Personal Accessories	Allied Health Services	Travel and Transport
Junior Player	\$25,425,336	\$9,691,836	\$11,412,032	\$3,230,612	\$16,530,664	\$14,296,339.18
Senior Player	\$7,087,696	\$2,301,200	\$3,486,318	\$989,516	\$8,238,296	\$11,655,361.69
Social Player	\$2,438,119	\$859,926	\$1,147,233	\$325,216	\$2,214,658	\$3,411,442.08
Coach, Referee or Trainer	\$5,552,640	\$4,457,536	\$4,457,536	\$1,619,520	\$10,765,952	\$6,747,790.23
	\$40,503,791	\$17,310,498	\$20,503,119	\$6,164,864	\$37,749,570	\$36,110,933.18
Raw Participant Expenditure	\$126,127,817					



Health Contribution of Rugby League in NSW



Health Contribution – Overview

Physical inactivity is one of the most significant and preventable contributors to poor health outcomes in Australia. National evidence consistently identifies insufficient physical activity as a leading risk factor for chronic disease, contributing to conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, bowel cancer and stroke.

These conditions impose a sustained burden on individuals, communities and the health system through reduced quality of life and ongoing healthcare expenditure.

Within this context, regular participation in organised sport plays a critical preventative role. Sport provides structured, repeatable and socially reinforced opportunities for physical activity that are difficult to replicate through informal or individual exercise alone. Rugby League, in particular, supports sustained engagement across the life course, offering participation opportunities from junior and school-based programs through to adult and social formats.

The health benefits generated through Rugby League participation extend beyond individual wellbeing. Reduced incidence of chronic disease and mental ill-health translates into tangible system-level value through avoided treatment costs and reduced longterm demand on health services. This reframes Rugby League from a recreational activity to a contributor to preventative health infrastructure within NSW.



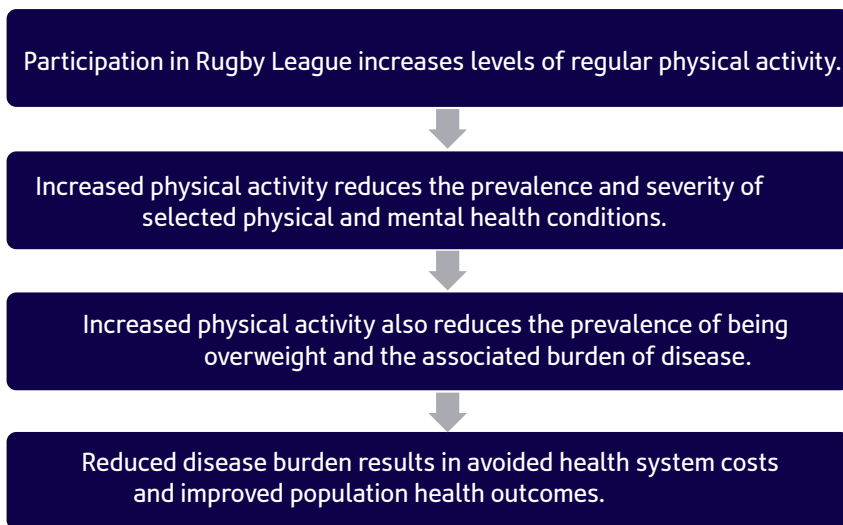
Health Contribution – Methodology

This assessment quantifies the health contribution of Rugby League in NSW by estimating the extent to which participation reduces the burden of disease associated with physical inactivity and poor mental health. The analysis focuses on the preventative health value generated through regular participation in Rugby League, expressed as savings to the health system rather than individual health outcomes.

The approach is grounded in established public health and economic evaluation practice and is consistent with methodologies applied across comparable wholeofsport impact studies in Australia. Conservative assumptions have been applied throughout to ensure the resulting estimates are robust, transparent and appropriate for policy and funding contexts.

Conceptual Framework

The methodology follows a clear causal pathway:



This framework allows the contribution of Rugby League to be isolated from broader lifestyle and environmental factors, while recognising that Rugby League is one of several contributors to overall physical activity levels.

Participation Data and Scope

The health benefit modelling draws on NSWRL registration data from MySideline and responses from the participant survey as evidence to estimate the number of individuals receiving health benefits through Rugby League participation. Participants are segmented by age, gender and participation type, including registered club and representative players, social participants (including tag and touch) and non-playing active participants such as trainers and referees.

Only active participants meeting minimum thresholds for regular physical activity are included in the valuation. In the case of Rugby League, coaches, volunteers and non-participating members have been excluded from the health contribution analysis. This ensures that health benefits are attributed only where there is a clear and evidence based link between participation and improved health outcomes.

Conservative Assumptions and Transparency

Throughout the analysis, conservative assumptions have been applied to avoid overstating the health contribution of Rugby League. These include:

- Attributing health benefits only to the period of active participation.
- Applying cautious estimates of preventative health effects.
- Aligning valuation parameters with current government guidance.

To ensure full transparency, data sources, detailed assumptions and calculation steps are provided in the Appendix.

Health Contribution - Methodology

Valuing Health Outcomes

Physical and mental health outcomes are measured using Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs), a standard public health metric that captures both years of life lost due to premature mortality and years lived with illness or disability. Reductions in DALYs attributable to Rugby League participation are converted into economic value using a government endorsed Value of a Statistical Life Year (VSLY).

Physical health valuation focuses on chronic diseases for which physical inactivity is a recognised and material risk factor. Mental health valuation captures the preventative impact of physical activity on anxiety and depression, applying conservative estimates to ensure that benefits are attributed only where there is a clear evidence base.

Using a consistent valuation framework across both health domains enables comparable and transparent estimation of Rugby League’s contribution to health outcomes.

Disability Adjusted Life Years Model



$$\begin{array}{lcl}
 \text{DALY} & = & \text{YLD} + \text{YLL} \\
 \text{Disability Adjusted Life Years} & & \text{Years Lived with Disability} + \text{Years of Lost Life} \\
 \text{is a measure of overall disease burden, expressed as the cumulative number of years lost due to illhealth, disability or early death.} & &
 \end{array}$$



Valuation Approach – Physical Health Benefits

Rugby League participation contributes to physical health by increasing overall activity levels and reducing sedentary behaviour among participants. Training sessions, matches and associated preparation combine to deliver moderate to vigorous physical activity at frequencies that align with national physical activity guidelines for health benefit.

By supporting regular movement, cardiovascular fitness, strength and coordination, Rugby League contributes to reducing the prevalence and severity of chronic disease within the NSW community. These benefits extend beyond the individual participant, translating into reduced demand on the health system over time.

Physical Health Contribution

The value of physical health benefits generated by Rugby League participation is calculated through a systematic approach that connects the burden of disease attributed to physical inactivity to the preventative benefits of sport participation.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s Burden of Disease Study (2024) attributes 3.5% of Australia’s total disease burden to physical inactivity across several specific conditions, including coronary heart disease, stroke, colorectal cancer, uterine and breast cancers, diabetes and dementia.

Physical activity also reduces the likelihood of being overweight, which is itself the leading risk factor for disease burden in Australia at 13.7%. Because physical inactivity is a recognised causal pathway to overweight, sport participation can claim a proportional share, but not all, of the overweight burden. AIHW (2023) establishes that physical inactivity and overweight jointly account for 8.7% of total burden, compared to 2.5% for physical inactivity alone, a ratio of 3.48. This joint effect scalar is applied to the physical inactivity DALY figures to derive the combined estimate used in this analysis. This approach is consistent with AIHW’s own modelling and avoids double-counting by capturing only the overweight burden that sits on the causal pathway through physical inactivity.

For each condition, the total DALYs attributed to physical inactivity and overweight (joint effect) is divided by the Australian population to calculate the average disease burden per person, segmented by age and gender. This perperson DALY burden is multiplied by the number of Rugby League participants in NSW, then adjusted to reflect the health benefit attributable to a single year of participation, calculated as one divided by the average years of life remaining for each age and gender cohort (ABS Life Tables, 2024). The VSLY of \$253,000 (2025 dollars, Office of Impact Analysis, 2026) is applied to convert DALYs prevented into economic value.

These components combine in the following formula:

$$\text{Physical Health Benefit} = \text{DALYs Prevented per Person} \times \text{Rugby League Participants} \times \text{VSLY} \times (1 / \text{Average Years of Life Remaining})$$

Disease Attributed to Physical Inactivity			
Disease Group	Disease Name	% of all Diseases	% Attributable to Physical Inactivity
Cardiovascular diseases	Coronary heart disease	24.5%	5.2%
	Stroke	6.1%	4.5%
Cancer and other neoplasms	Bowel cancer	2.7%	10.9%
	Uterine cancer	0.3%	22.5%
	Breast cancer	0.8%	7.3%
Endocrine disorders	Type 2 diabetes	9.0%	7.7%
Neurological conditions	Dementia	3.9%	21.7%
All Disease			4.2%

Source: AIHW, 2026

Valuation Approach – Mental Health Benefits

In addition to physical health, mental health represents a growing public policy challenge, with anxiety and depression among the leading contributors to disease burden in Australia. Physical activity is widely recognised as a protective factor against the onset and severity of these conditions, with consistent evidence demonstrating that regular exercise reduces the risk of anxiety and depressive disorders.

Mental Health Valuation

The mental health benefits of Rugby League participation are calculated using a similar approach to the physical health methodology, with adjustments to reflect the specific preventative effects of physical activity on anxiety and depression.

The methodology draws on peer reviewed evidence linking physical activity to the prevention of mental health disorders. A systematic review of reviews (Mammen & Faulkner, 2013; Schuch et al., 2019) established a probable causal relationship between physical activity and reduced incidence of both conditions, with Australian specific modelling (Wanjau et al., 2022) quantifying the following conservative protective effects:

- Depression: 26% reduction in incidence among individuals meeting physical activity guidelines
- Anxiety: 17% reduction in incidence among individuals meeting physical activity guidelines

These estimates reflect the direct physiological protective effect of meeting physical activity guidelines. Sport participation generates additional mental health benefits through social connection, belonging, improved self-esteem and stress reduction, however, given insufficient evidence to precisely quantify these effects, they are excluded from this analysis. The estimates presented therefore represent a conservative lower bound of Rugby League's true mental health contribution.

The perperson burden for each condition is adjusted by the relevant preventative effect (26% for depression, 17% for anxiety), multiplied by the number of Rugby League participants in NSW, and valued using the same VSLY, life remaining, and population parameters applied in the physical health calculation above. These components combine in the following formula:

Mental Health Benefit = Rugby League Participants × (DALYs per Person from Anxiety & Depression × Preventative Effect) × VSLY × (1 / Average Years of Life Remaining)

Burden of Mental Health Disorders in Australia

Cause	% of all Diseases
Cardiovascular diseases	34.4%
Cancer and other neoplasms	15.1%
Endocrine disorders	9.7%
Mental and substance use disorders	9.4%
Anxiety disorders	2.3%
Depressive disorders	1.9%
Respiratory diseases	6.8%
Other	5.7%
Neurological conditions	4.1%
Kidney and urinary diseases	3.9%

Key Health Findings

Annual Health Contribution

On an annual basis, Rugby League generates an estimated \$1.13 million in physical health benefits and \$567,000 in mental health benefits, resulting in a total annual health contribution of over \$1.7 million.

Registered club players account for the largest share of annual benefit, reflecting higher participation frequency and greater exposure to health-enhancing physical activity. Social players and active non-playing participants such as referees and trainers also contribute meaningfully to the annual total, highlighting the value of participation formats that broaden access to the sport.

Male participants represent the majority of annual health value, driven primarily by higher participation numbers. Female participants, while contributing a smaller share of total value, generate strong health outcomes relative to participation levels, reinforcing the importance of continued growth in female participation.

Lifetime Health Contribution

The lifetime health contribution of Rugby League participation in NSW is estimated at \$29.5 million. This reflects the cumulative impact of regular participation on reducing the long-term burden of chronic disease and mental ill-health across the participant cohort.

Physical health benefits account for approximately \$24.1 million of this total, with mental health benefits contributing a further \$5.4 million. These findings underscore the long-term value of sustained engagement in Rugby League, particularly for participants who remain active across multiple life stages.

While registered club players generate a significant component of the lifetime health value, it is actually active non-players who generate the highest lifetime benefit, driven by longer participation tenure and older age.

Annual Health Contribution

Participant Segment		Physical Health Benefit	Mental Health Benefit	Total Health Benefit
Registered Players	Males	\$491,100	\$215,318	\$706,417
	Females	\$50,958	\$113,675	\$164,633
Social Players	Males	\$46,298	\$104,397	\$150,695
	Females	\$42,617	\$7,898	\$50,515
Referees and Trainers	Males	\$435,482	\$64,999	\$500,481
	Females	\$67,260	\$61,101	\$128,362
Total Annual Health Contribution		\$1,133,714	\$567,389	\$1,701,103

Lifetime Health Contribution

Participant Segment		Physical Health Benefit	Mental Health Benefit	Total Health Benefit
Registered Players	Males	\$9,552,420	\$2,192,379	\$11,744,799
	Females	\$358,337	\$602,911	\$961,248
Social Players	Males	\$932,328	\$714,131	\$1,127,812
	Females	\$413,681	\$118,787	\$1,051,115
Referees and Trainers	Males	\$12,011,577	\$1,271,423	\$13,283,000
	Females	\$802,488	\$515,873	\$1,318,361
Total Lifetime Health Contribution		\$24,070,832	\$5,415,504	\$29,486,336



Social Contribution of Rugby League in NSW



Social Contribution – Overview

Rugby League's contribution to the NSW community extends well beyond participation and physical activity. The game plays a meaningful role in shaping social outcomes by fostering connection, trust, inclusion, and opportunity across diverse population groups.

This section examines Rugby League's social contribution through both quantitative analysis and qualitative research. It assesses how Rugby League strengthens community wellbeing, builds social capital, promotes inclusion, and creates pathways for social mobility. The analysis draws on established national and international frameworks, survey data from NSW Rugby League participants, and insights from stakeholders across the Rugby League ecosystem.

Defining Social Contribution

For the purposes of this study, social contribution is defined as Rugby League's capacity to strengthen social cohesion and improve individual and community wellbeing through structured participation, shared identity, and sustained community engagement.

Throughout this section, the term social impact refers specifically to the measurable differences in social outcomes for Rugby League participants compared with other sport participants and the general population. These impacts are assessed using validated indicators from national research.

The Role of Sport in Building Social Cohesion

National and international research consistently identifies sport as a powerful vehicle for building social cohesion. Studies highlight sport's role in:

- Building community integration and connection across diverse groups
- Reinforcing social networks and reciprocal relationships
- Supporting broader wellbeing outcomes including education, safety, lifelong learning, and civic pride
- Creating shared identity and belonging within communities

While sport participation generally correlates with positive social outcomes, this study examines whether Rugby League delivers these benefits to a greater extent than other sports, and whether Rugby League participants demonstrate measurably stronger social outcomes than the broader community.

Conceptual Framework

This study uses the OECD framework for social cohesion as its organising structure. The OECD defines a cohesive society as one that works towards the wellbeing of all its members, actively reduces exclusion and marginalisation, fosters trust and belonging, and enables opportunities for upward social mobility.

The OECD framework comprises three interrelated dimensions:

- **Social Capital** – the strength and quality of social networks, levels of trust in people and institutions, and active engagement in community life. This dimension captures how individuals connect with each other and participate in collective activities.
- **Social Mobility** – both actual and perceived opportunities for individuals to improve their position within society across their lifetime or compared to previous generations. This dimension encompasses wellbeing outcomes such as health, education, and economic status.
- **Social Inclusion** – the extent to which individuals feel accepted, valued, and protected from exclusion arising from poverty, inequality, discrimination, or social polarisation. This dimension focuses on belonging and equal access to opportunities.

Why Focus on Social Capital?

While Rugby League contributes across all three dimensions, this study places particular emphasis on social capital. This focus reflects three key considerations:

- **Strength of evidence base** – Australian research, particularly through the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) General Social Survey, has established robust correlations between sport participation and social capital indicators. This provides validated measures for comparison.

- **Data availability** – social capital indicators are observable at the individual level and can be measured through structured surveys, enabling direct comparison between Rugby League participants, other sport participants, and the general population.
- **Policy relevance** – social capital indicators align directly with government objectives relating to community wellbeing, resilience, and participation. They are also sensitive to change through sustained investment in community sport, making them a meaningful basis for assessing social returns.

Social inclusion and social mobility are primarily explored through qualitative research in this study, where lived experience and contextual insight provide a richer understanding of these outcomes. However, where quantitative indicators are available and reliable, they are included in the analysis.



Social Impact Metrics

To provide a quantitative assessment of the strength and intensity of Rugby League's social contribution in NSW, this study compares key findings from the online survey of NSW Rugby League participants with established national benchmarks.

Comparisons with key data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' General Social Survey (GSS) enable a direct and comparable assessment of NSW Rugby League participants relative to sport participants and the general population, identifying clear correlations between Rugby League participation and a range of social impact indicators. This approach provides a consistent and defensible basis for assessing the relative social value associated with Rugby League participation within NSW.

Across the key indicators examined, NSW Rugby League participants demonstrate stronger social and wellbeing outcomes than both other sport participants and the general population in most areas:

- **Stronger work-life balance**, with 99% of NSW Rugby League participants reporting they can meet work, family, and community responsibilities, which is higher than the proportion of both sport participants (92%) and the general population (87%) that can meet their responsibilities.
- **Higher levels of civic participation**, with 77% of NSW Rugby League participants reporting that they volunteer for a civic organisation (e.g. sporting club, education, community group, emergency services, religious organisation), compared with 42% of sport participants and just 19% of the general population.
- **Slightly higher exposure to personal stressors**, with 66% of NSW Rugby League participants reporting a recent personal stressor, compared with 63% of sport participants and 56% of the general population.

Further comparisons across social capital, social inclusion, and social mobility are presented on the following pages.

Work Life Balance

	NSW RL Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
Can always meet responsibilities	46%	92%	87%
Can sometimes meet responsibilities	53%		
Cannot meet responsibilities	1%	8%	13%

*Excludes respondents who selected 'Don't have family or community commitments' (n=14) and 'Not applicable (Unemployed or not in the force)' (n= 257)

Volunteering

	NSW RL Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
Volunteered for a civic organisation in past 12 months	77%	42%	19%

Personal Stressor

	NSW RL Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
Experienced a personal stressor	66%	63%	56%
Did not experience a personal stressor	34%	37%	44%

Social capital represents a foundational component of community wellbeing. It encompasses the networks, trust, and reciprocal relationships that enable individuals to access support, participate in collective life, and maintain meaningful connections within their communities.

Across the social capital indicators examined, NSW Rugby League participants consistently report stronger outcomes than both other sport participants and the general population. These include:

- NSW Rugby League participants demonstrate **stronger close personal networks**, with 59% reporting three or more confidants, compared with 58% of sport participants and 37% of the general population. This indicates more robust and dependable social connections within the Rugby League community.
- **Social isolation is substantially lower** among NSW Rugby League participants, with only 4% reporting no confidants, compared with 10% of sport participants and 23% of the general population. This reflects a markedly reduced risk of social disconnection.
- **Everyday social interaction is also more frequent.** 44% of NSW Rugby League participants report daily contact with family or friends, more than double the rate reported by sport participants and the general population. Regular interaction of this kind reinforces ongoing connection and social wellbeing.
- **Access to practical and emotional support is exceptionally strong.** 94% of NSW Rugby League participants report being able to ask for small favours, while 95% indicate they could seek support in a personal crisis. Both outcomes match or exceed those of sport participants and the general population, reflecting high levels of reciprocity and trust.
- NSW Rugby League participants report **stronger feelings of safety within the home** compared with the general population.

- **Trust in people and institutions is consistently high.** 55% of NSW Rugby League participants report general trust in others, while trust in key institutions remains strong, including hospitals (79%), doctors (84%), and local police (80%). These levels of trust support service engagement and broader social cohesion.
- **High residential stability** further reinforces these outcomes, with 67% of NSW Rugby League participants having lived in their current dwelling for five years or more. This supports longterm relationships, placebased identity, and sustained community ties.



Number of Confidants

	NSW RL Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
None	4%	10%	23%
12 friends	37%	32%	40%
34 friends	34%	32%	23%
5 friends or more	25%	26%	14%

Percentage of people that 'strongly agree' or 'somewhat agree'

Access to Support

	NSW RL Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
Someone (who does not live with you) you could ask for small favours	94%	94%	88%
Someone (who does not live with you) would support you in a crisis	95%	95%	90%

Excludes respondents who selected 'prefer not to say' (n=48)

Social Network Diversity

	NSW RL Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
Friends with the same ethnic background	6%	23%	33%
Friends of a similar age	9%	9%	17%
Friends with the same level of education	10%	12%	16%

Percentage of ALL friends being in the same category

Contact with Social Networks

	NSW RL Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
Every day	44%	21%	19%
At least once a week	43%	60%	54%
At least once a month	9%	14%	17%
At least once in 3 months	2%	4%	7%
No recent contact	2%	1%	3%

Percentages of 'face-to-face' contact

Safety

	NSW RL Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
Feel safe at home during the day	94%	96%	90%
Feel safe at home after dark	87%	88%	79%
Feel safe walking home in your area after dark	65%	53%	33%

Percentage of people that feel 'very safe' or 'safe'
Excludes respondents who selected 'prefer not to say':

- At home during the day (n=72)
- At home after dark (n=91)
- Walking home after dark (n=114)

Time in Current Dwelling

	NSW RL Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
Less than one year	7%	33%	43%
12 years	10%		
34 years	15%		
59 years	25%	67%	57%
1019 years	32%		
20 years or more	10%		

Excludes respondents who selected 'prefer not to say' (n=35)

Trust

	Participants	Sport Participants	General Population
Trust in most people	55%	56%	48%
Trust in hospitals	79%	74%	70%
Trust in doctors	84%	38%	37%
Trust in local police	80%	77%	69%

Percentage of people that 'strongly agree' or 'somewhat agree'

Social mobility refers to changes in an individual's socio-economic position, either across generations or over the course of their lifetime.

It is closely linked to equality of opportunity, reflecting the extent to which people have the same chances to achieve positive life outcomes regardless of background or personal circumstances beyond their control.

While social mobility is often measured through income, occupation, or class, it is also influenced by broader wellbeing factors, including health and education. These dimensions shape an individual's capacity to participate in work, learning, and community life, and therefore play an important role in supporting longterm opportunity.

Across the social mobility related indicators examined, NSW Rugby League participants report outcomes that suggest stronger wellbeing foundations and broader participation across educational pathways.

- NSW Rugby League participants report substantially better overall health, with 62% rating their health as excellent or very good, compared with 57% of sport participants and 40% of the general population. This indicates stronger day-to-day wellbeing, which supports sustained participation in work, education, and community life.
- Lower levels of poor health reinforce this advantage. Only 10% of NSW Rugby League participants report fair or poor health, compared with 14% of sport participants and 27% of the general population, suggesting reduced health-related barriers to opportunity.

- Educational attainment patterns point to Rugby League's reach across a broad socioeconomic spectrum. NSW Rugby League participants are more strongly represented in postschool vocational pathways, with 14% holding an Advanced Diploma or Diploma, compared with 7% of the national population. At the same time, university qualification rates among Rugby League participants are slightly lower than the broader NSW average, with 15% holding a bachelor degree or above compared with 16% across the national population.
- Together, these patterns indicate that Rugby League participation in NSW engages individuals from a wide crosssection of educational backgrounds, supporting inclusion across diverse life pathways.



Annual Household Income

	NSW RL Participants	Australian Population
Less than \$52,000	11%	32%
\$52,000 - \$64,999	5%	8%
\$65,000 - \$77,999	5%	7%
\$78,000 - \$90,999	5%	6%
\$91,000 - \$103,999	6%	6%
\$104,000 - \$129,999	11%	17%
\$130,000 - \$155,999	11%	
\$156,000 - \$207,999	18%	15%
\$208,000 - \$259,999	13%	
\$260,000 or more	14%	

Excludes respondents who selected 'prefer not to say' (n=273)

Highest Education Level

	NSW RL Participants	Australian Population
Bachelor Degree and above	15%	16%
Advanced Diploma or Diploma	14%	7%
Trade Certificate	11%	3%

Excludes respondents who selected 'prefer not to say' (n=174)

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion relates to the extent to which individuals and groups are able to participate fully in social, economic, and community life, and is defined as the process of improving participation, particularly for people from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds, by enhancing their opportunity, ability, and dignity.

Sport can play an important role in improving social inclusion by reducing barriers, fostering shared experiences, and creating spaces where connection can transcend cultural, linguistic, and social differences.

Across the social inclusion indicators examined, Rugby League demonstrates a strong capacity to support inclusive participation, while also highlighting areas where targeted improvement is required.

- Friendship networks among NSW Rugby League participants are more agediverse, with only 9% reporting that their friends are of a similar age. This reinforces Rugby League's ability to connect people across life stages and support inclusive social interaction beyond narrow peer groups.

- Rugby League clubs are widely perceived as inclusive environments for female participants, with 90% of respondents agreeing that their club is socially inclusive of women, 75% expressing strong agreement. This indicates a positive and supportive club culture that enables women's participation and belonging.
- Perceptions of inclusion of participants from First Nations and multicultural backgrounds are also strong, with 90% agreeing that their club is socially inclusive of people from First Nations communities, and 90% also agreeing that their club is socially inclusive of people from multicultural backgrounds.
- In contrast, perceptions of inclusion are notably lower among people with a disability or participants from LGBTIQ+ communities. Only 77% and 70% of respondents respectively agree that their club is inclusive. These are two priority areas for targeted action, including improvements to accessibility, programming, and club culture.

Social Inclusion Perceptions

	Female Participants	First Nations Heritage	Multicultural Backgrounds	People With a Disability	LGBTIQ+ Communities
Strongly Agree	75%	78%	74%	54%	52%
Somewhat Agree	15%	12%	16%	23%	18%
Neither Agree or Disagree	6%	7%	8%	18%	26%
Somewhat Disagree	2%	1%	1%	3%	2%
Strongly Disagree	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Excludes respondents who selected 'prefer not to say'	n=44	n=46	n=48	n=103	n=181

Qualitative Assessment of Social Benefits

Strength and Importance of Rugby League to Communities

This assessment of the unique social benefits of Rugby League draws on the lived experiences of participants, families, volunteers, coaches and community members to understand the ways the game contributes to community life across NSW.

While Rugby League delivers many of the general benefits associated with team sport, including physical activity, friendship and enjoyment, insights from participants point to a deeper and more distinctive form of social value. Local Rugby League clubs operate as trusted community institutions that create belonging, mobilise support, develop young people and strengthen local identity.

As part of the online survey distributed to NSW Rugby League participants, respondents were asked to share their stories of how Rugby League has made a positive impact on the lives of either themselves, a friend, or another member of the community.

Across the responses, the game was rarely described as just an activity played on weekends. Instead, respondents spoke about Rugby League as a source of family connection, personal identity, emotional support, community pride and civic contribution.

Clubs were described as places where lifelong friendships are formed, families spend meaningful time together, volunteers find purpose, young people gain direction, and communities rally around people during times of hardship.

Unique Strengths of Rugby League

The following six themes summarise the unique strengths of Rugby League in delivering social benefits to communities across NSW. Together, they show that Rugby League's social impact is created not through participation in the game, but through the relationships, routines and community structures that form around it.

A Place to Belong: Rugby League clubs generate belonging across friendships, families, generations and school boundaries, creating connections that are structural rather than incidental and that persist well beyond playing years.

More Than a Sporting Club: Rugby League clubs function as working community institutions, developing local leaders, sustaining volunteers, mobilising communities in times of need.

A Community Safety Net: Rugby League clubs provide emotional, practical and social support during some of the most difficult moments in people's lives, filling gaps that formal services often cannot reach.

Positive Pathways for Young People: Rugby League provides young people with something increasingly rare in modern community life: reliable structure, a trusted adult who knows their name, and a peer group with shared purpose.

Inclusion Made Visible: Rugby League gives people who might otherwise feel excluded a visible and valued place in the community, not through a program or policy, but through the experience of being needed and part of a team.

Personal Growth Through the Demands of the Game: Rugby League builds confidence, resilience, discipline and wellbeing by placing people in an environment that demands growth and surrounding them with the relationships that make it possible.

A Place to Belong: Rugby League Clubs as Extended Families

Rugby League creates a sense of belonging that few community organisations can match. Joining a Rugby League club can simultaneously create new connections and sustain existing ones across families, school boundaries, peer groups and down through generations.

Critically, this belonging does not end when playing does. Adult players and volunteers consistently described Rugby League clubs as the vehicle through which they maintain friendships that would otherwise fade. The club is not just a place people join, it is a place they return to across the course of their lives.

Across all roles and demographics, respondents reached instinctively for the same language: family, home, mates, community. That convergence suggests the social bonds Rugby League produces are structural rather than incidental. The strength of this theme is the recognition that this belonging works at several levels:

- **Friendship:** Rugby League creates lifelong peer friendships and trusted social networks that persist well beyond playing years.
- **Family bonding:** Parents, children and extended family members connect through shared participation, making the club a genuinely intergenerational family experience rather than a children's activity.
- **Cross-school connection:** Children build friendships outside their immediate school environment, broadening their social world in ways that few other community activities provide.
- **Intergenerational ties:** Families participate across generations — as players, coaches, volunteers and spectators — giving clubs a social depth and continuity that accumulates over decades.
- **Reconnection:** For adults, Rugby League serves as the mechanism through which friendships that might otherwise fade are maintained — making the club not just a place people join, but a place they return to.

"Rugby League has given me a strong sense of belonging, connecting me with like minded people and creating lasting friendships. It's become a family passion, with my husband and daughter also playing, strengthening our bond and enriching our social life both on and off the field."

"As a family not from the area where our local club is located, we reached out to the club to register our three children to play what came with that was endless friendships, community spirit and a place we feel we can call home."

"Before I played Rugby League I struggled with social interaction. Rugby League is my happy place where I feel comfortable and confident around my peers. It has allowed me to find my voice and become a leader in my team. The game has created some of my closest friendship groups and I'll always be grateful."

"The club feels like another family"

"As a single working mum, coaching has given me more of a chance to bond with my daughter - it has brought us closer together."

More Than a Sporting Club: Rugby League as Local Community Infrastructure

Rugby League clubs are not simply venues for sport. They are community institutions where people gather, organise, volunteer, mentor and support one another week after week, year after year. They are visible expressions of local pride and a practical mechanism for civic contribution.

The game's social value is not generated on the field, it is generated by the people who make the game happen: coaches, managers, trainers, committee members, canteen volunteers, ground staff, parents and longterm club people whose contribution extends far beyond the scoreboard.

This is community infrastructure in the most practical sense, and it operates across several interconnected layers:

- **Volunteer purpose and identity:** Coaching, managing, volunteering and serving the club gives people structure, meaning and a sense of contribution that becomes central to how they see themselves.
- **Local leadership development:** Clubs quietly produce organisers, decision-makers and community advocates; committee members, coaches and long-term volunteers who develop skills and confidence that extend well beyond sport.
- **Local pride and shared focal point:** In both rural towns and suburban neighbourhoods, the Rugby League club is often one of the last remaining institutions that regularly and physically draws people of different ages and backgrounds together.
- **Intergenerational contribution:** Former players return as coaches, encourage their children to join, parents who came for their kids stay for the community. This depth of trust and social knowledge accumulated through multiple generations is something newer organisations cannot replicate.

Rugby League clubs are not just gathering places, they are organising structures that develop people, sustain local leadership and hold communities together across generations.

"A few years ago, a new family moved to town. The three teenage boys all signed up for footy and reported that the relationships made through footy was the key factor in settling into their new life. All three are still living in town, either as apprentices or fully qualified trades people. Footy is key to keeping rural communities alive."

"Bush footy has always been my happy place. Being around the team and group lifts my mental health. The small town community feeling makes it even better. It's a happy place where people show up for each other and you never feel like you're doing life on your own."

"Rugby League brought our community together through a local junior club, giving kids a safe place to belong. It also fostered social gatherings and friends and family to connect over shared BBQs encouraging people to get out, be social, and feel part of the community."

"I have been involved in Rugby League since 1989, it's my home away from home and would be lost without it in my life it has always been there for me and given me so much so I'll be giving back as much I can."

"I absolutely love the game and feel very grateful for being able to participate in it. Now I have retired, I enjoy giving back to the game via coaching and being on the committee of my junior Rugby League club."

A Community Safety Net: Clubs as a Source of Support Through Hardship

Rugby League clubs provide emotional and practical support and a source of stability during some of the most difficult moments in people's lives.

While clubs don't deliver social services directly, they often fill the gaps where formal services and support cannot help. This is one of the clearest expressions of Rugby League's distinctive social value, and it operates across several layers:

- **Emotional safety:** When life becomes unstable or overwhelming, the club offers something deceptively simple but genuinely rare: a familiar place, a reliable routine and a sense of normality where simply showing up to training or a game provided continuity when everything else felt uncertain.
- **Practical support:** Rugby League communities respond in tangible and material ways to support those in need. From small acts of support such as donating an old pair of boots or giving someone a lift to a game, through to significant financial support to remove the financial barriers, Rugby League clubs step up so that vulnerable families aren't pushed out of the game and away from its support networks.
- **Mental health support:** The club provides purpose, structure and a social environment that helps insulate vulnerable individuals from social isolation through the sustained presence of people who notice, check in and stay connected.
- **Community response to crisis:** When families experience grief, serious injury or hardship, clubs rally. This is community solidarity organised not by institutions but by the relationships the club has built over time.
- **Continuity for children:** Rugby League provides children with a stable weekly structure even when their home environment is not. For children in out-of-home care, single parent households under stress, or families navigating instability, the club represents a consistent, trusted, external anchor in their week.

"During a really unstable period in temporary accommodation, Rugby League became my boys' safe place. Getting free boots from the Parramatta Eels meant they didn't miss out. It's given them structure, confidence, and something to hold onto when everything else felt uncertain."

"As someone who has struggled with mental health her entire life, including hospitalisations, Rugby League has changed my life for the better. The sense of community, the exercise and purpose have given me something I didn't know was missing. It's not always just a game, it can be life changing. In our small town, it means community and acceptance for all."

"The Rugby League community always bands together to help those who face hard times not just the big stars but also the people on club level. For a lot of people this is their only safe place or the only place some kids get love and make friends."

"Rugby League provided a happy place for me while going through my marriage breakdown and losing my Mum. It also provides a shared love and enjoyment for me and my boys."

Positive Pathways for Young People

Rugby League gives young people something that is increasingly difficult to find in modern community life: a reliable weekly structure, a trusted adult who knows their name, a peer group with shared purpose, and a reason to show up.

Rugby League organises young people's time around something that demands commitment, rewards effort and connects them to people who are paying attention. It is not the structured nature of Rugby League alone that produces these outcomes, it is the presence of adults who are known, trusted and present over time. That combination is rarer than it should be, and Rugby League provides it reliably.

- **Structure and routine:** Training nights and game days impose a rhythm that many young people lack elsewhere. A rhythm that creates accountability and gives the week a shape that supports focus and selfregulation.
- **Positive role models:** Coaches, trainers, senior players and volunteers provide consistent, reliable adult presence. For some young people, particularly those without stable male or female role models at home, these relationships carry a significance that extends well beyond sport.
- **Mentorship:** The relationship between older players, coaches and younger participants is one of Rugby League's most under recognised assets. Values, behaviour, how to handle winning and losing, how to be part of a team, are all transmitted through proximity and trust, not instruction.
- **Aspirations and goals:** Rugby League gives young people something to work towards; personal improvement, selection in representative teams, leadership roles within the club. The existence of a pathway, however modest, changes how a young person relates to effort and progress.
- **Social development:** Across seasons and age groups, young people develop communication, emotional maturity and the capacity to function as part of a team. These are not incidental by-products, they are built into the daily demands of training, competing and being accountable to others.

"Day to day support given to young adults to stay on the right path in the community and school."

"As a trainer and social worker, I can see the positive impacts that the Rugby League structure, routine and discipline has on these young boys that may not have the privilege of having a consistent male role model in their young lives. Rugby League and community have enabled these young boys to develop social skills and emotional regulation maturity."

"It gives a safe place for my son to be himself. It also allows my son to have positive male role models in his life that he continues to be supported by."

"Playing Rugby League keeps me off the street and getting into trouble and gives me something to look forward to each week."

"Rugby League has been transformative for my children's confidence, helping them come out of their shell and find their place. It gives them a positive outlet and something to look forward to each week and goals to strive towards."

Inclusion Made Visible: A Place Where Everyone Has a Role

Rugby League gives people who might otherwise feel excluded a visible and valued place in the community. Inclusion is not a program or an initiative, it is something that happens through participation itself.

People are not included by being accommodated, they are included by being needed, by having a role and by being recognised as part of something that matters to everyone around them. What distinguishes this from inclusion as a policy aspiration is that respondents did not describe it in abstract terms, they described specific realworld moments where someone felt accepted, recognised and treated as a genuine part of the team.

The survey captured this across a wide range of people and circumstances, and the consistency of the experience across such different groups is what gives this theme its weight:

- **Girls and women:** Rugby League provides tangible and visible pathways for women and girls. For many female participants, the club offers not just opportunity but a place where their contribution is recognised and valued.
- **Disability and neurodiversity:** Participants with disability or neurodiverse profiles are recognised as players and teammates first. Respondents described club environments where people are defined by what they bring to the team, not by what distinguishes them from it.
- **Cultural inclusion:** First Nations children and families described feeling genuinely welcomed through club environments, not as participants in an inclusion program, but as members of the community the club serves.
- **Family inclusion:** Single parents, carers, siblings and extended family members find a place in the club community, not just the children who play. The club absorbs the whole family, not just the participant.

"Rugby League has been life-changing for my son. Despite his disability and epilepsy, it gives him a sense of belonging, confidence, and pure joy. Cheering for the Bulldogs makes him feel included and empowered, reminding him he is just like every other child, and that means everything to our family."

"This is my 4 year old has only just started this season so it is our first and the coach puts so much time into the little ones. My 4 year old is in out of home care and Indigenous and has been welcomed."

"Coaching disabilities Rugby League has made a huge impact on me as a person, realising how fortunate I am and allowing the participants to just be footy players for the 80 minutes not a disabilities person, it's awesome."

"Giving me the same chance to play footy like boys do. Lots of girls I know do dancing but I love that I can play footy even though I'm a girl."

"I didn't want to play tackle, and my club allowed us to make a league tag team, the first ever girls team to the club, we made history, and now I'm in my third season. I love my team, my club for this opportunity."

Personal Growth Through the Demands of the Game

Rugby League builds confidence, resilience, discipline and wellbeing, but these outcomes are not simply the product of participation.

What lifts this above the standard vocabulary of sport for development is that Rugby League does not build these qualities simply by keeping young people active. It builds them by placing people in a demanding environment that requires growth, and then surrounding them with the relationships and structure that make growth possible.

The game is physically and emotionally demanding. It requires players to manage pressure, accept setbacks, control their responses and contribute to something larger than themselves, week after week, in front of their community. That environment, when well-coached, becomes a reliable engine for personal development.

- **Confidence and selfesteem:** Rugby League enables people to come out of their shell and discover their abilities, not by being told but through the game's repeated opportunities to discover it. Being selected, contributing to a win, mastering a skill and being recognised by teammates builds a selfbelief that is earned rather than given.
- **Resilience:** Rugby League is an unusually direct teacher of resilience. Players lose games, make errors, face physical setbacks and experience disappointment in front of their community. Learning to absorb those experiences, return to training and try again, builds a capacity for handling adversity that carries well beyond sport.
- **Discipline and emotional regulation:** The game demands commitment, punctuality, respect for coaches and referees and critically, the ability to stay controlled under physical and emotional pressure.
- **Goal-setting:** Rugby League gives participants something concrete to work toward and a way to measure their own progress. Seasons, selections and representative pathways create a visible structure that motivates effort and builds the habit of setting and pursuing personal goals.

"A child was being bullied at school. The child gained confidence through weekly game play, team camaraderie and was able to deal with the situation much better."

"Joining Albury Thunder Juniors at the age of five gave me structure, confidence, and lifelong friendships. Now 14, Rugby League has shaped my discipline, teamwork, and resilience and has highly increased my social skills. The club provides a safe, supportive environment where he's grown into a respectful young man and a positive role model in my community."

"Rugby League has helped me feel part of a team. I'm not the best player, but my teammates always support me and cheer me on. I've made good friends and learned to never give up. It's given me confidence and something fun to look forward to every week."

"Playing Rugby League has helped me make new friends, given me a greater sense of confidence and sparked an interest in health and fitness."

"Rugby League has helped me stay strong, healthy and active"



Social Impact

Case Studies



Case Study – First Nations Communities – Rugby League in the Outback

Rugby League plays a vital role within the communities of regional and remote New South Wales, especially in the Far West regions where Barwon Darling Rugby League (BDRL), Balonne Barwon JRL and Netball and Outback Rugby League (ORL) are based.

According to ABS data First Nations Peoples makeup 4.2 per cent of the NSW Population and 1.9 per cent of the ACT population. Across the NSWRL participation base, 17 per cent identify themselves as First Nations peoples. In the Far West regions, more than 75 per cent of NSWRL registered participants identify as First Nations peoples.

Connecting Regional and Remote Communities Through Rugby League

Barwon Darling together with Balonne Barwon JRL competitions connect Far West NSW communities of Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett, Goodooga, Collarenebri, Lightning Ridge and Mungindi.

The competitions offer participation for all age groups from Under 6s to Open Ages for all genders. The season frequently features dynamic carnivals hosted by different townships rather than traditional weekly homeandaway fixtures, maximising community participation and managing the vast travel distances between Far West towns.

These innovative game day structures encourage sportsmanship and intertown socialisation - teams from various communities regularly share players to creating a more balanced game and higher quality experience.

Outback Rugby League competition was formed in 2007 after a ten-year absence of regular top grade Rugby League in the Broken Hill region. The competition features teams from Broken Hill, Menindee, Wilcannia, Bourke and composite teams from Wentworth/Dareton/Coomealla and Mildura/Robinvale.

Additionally, there is an Outback Challenge feature game in Far West NSW biennially aiming to recognise and reward leaders across the various Far West communities. To increase community access, localised social mixed League Tag competitions are offered in-town over four to six weeks, outside of the regular season.

All the interclub competition matches, training sessions, League Tag competitions and Gala Days are all dry events.

Helping Young People Thrive Off The Field

Organised Rugby League (matches and training) provides an alternative and a refuge from destructive behaviours such as alcohol abuse, physical/domestic violence and suicidal ideation.

Many women that are involved in events and clubs provide strong leadership, good governance and greater support for the youth involved.

Players involved in the events often have a calmness on the sidelines, while for other typically reserved youths, the sport has been a vehicle that helps them come out of their shells, creating greater purpose and positivity in remote communities.



Benefits of Rugby League in Outback New South Wales

- Growth of new competitions and increased participation has helped to lower the rates of harmful addictions and suicides in the areas where events are held.
- Improved volunteer engagement and community capacity to deliver programs. Community members and players have become role models by taking on leadership or officiating roles within clubs.

Case Study – Mental Fitness Program – Changing Rooms

The Changing Rooms program has been making a difference to the lives of youths aged 11-17. Facilitated by Blues legend Paul Langmack in conjunction with the Police Youth Command and supported by local clubs, the program has been changing the lives of at risk youth.

Since the inception of the Changing Rooms program in 2019, Paul Langmack has delivered the program to more than 11,000 participants. The initiative has been rolled out with clubs, high schools and at other events.

Program Details

The initiative aims to create a safe space to equip young players with actionable tools to handle life's challenges off the field. The program provides advice on how to improve mental fitness and provide education on life skills. Mental fitness professionals help to deliver the program which is free for participants in 30minute sessions across five weeks, often before or after league training sessions.

The program encourages youths to: stay active; maintain a good diet; reduce digital device usage two hours before going to sleep; get six to eight hours of good sleep daily; not hang around with negative people or troublemakers; be sociable and meet up with friends; stay away from drugs and alcohol; enjoy doing things at which they excel.

It focuses heavily on: Managing emotions - Helping youth identify the difference between physical fitness and mental resilience; tackling bullying - openly addressing peer pressure and negative behaviours within school and sporting clubs; social media pressure - providing strategies to deal with the constant anxiety stemming from mobile phones; reducing stigma: encouraging conversations around anxiety and depression so youth feel empowered to speak up and seek help early.

Langmack has delivered the program to diverse audiences including the Royal Australian Navy, First Nations groups, a NSW Parliamentary committee, and a variety of sporting codes as well as Rugby League participants.

“Being positive doesn’t mean you will be happy every day. It means on your bad days you believe tomorrow will be a good day.” - Paul Langmack



Impacts of Changing Rooms Program

- Following a Changing Rooms program that was completed in a high school in Granville, a remarkable student behaviour change was observed:
 - In one term in 2025, 9 of 25 youths enrolled were suspended with 178 negative incidents recorded. In the term following the program, there were no suspensions and a reduction in negative incidents of 70%.
- The Police Youth Command noted that the participants in Changing Rooms have been more receptive with a league legend facilitating the sessions, as compared with similar programs that they run on their own.

Case Study – Multicultural Programs – Heritage Rugby League and Harmony 9s

Heritage Rugby League (HRL) is an official affiliate of NSWRL designed to increase Rugby League participation within multicultural, Indigenous, and diverse ethnic communities. Rather than standard geographic clubs, players represent teams based on their ancestral heritage, offering a cultural bridge to mainstream grassroots football. While there have been Heritage matches played for 25 years, its first structured season was in 2023.

Harmony 9s

With its genesis at the Redfern Harmony 9s (in 2008, 2009) and Harmony Cup in 2011, 2012), the Harmony 9s is an annual marquee event co-hosted by NSWRL and Heritage Rugby League. It features a fast-paced, nine-a-side tournament hosting over 20 heritage groups and roughly 80 teams celebrating cultural exchange through sport. The Harmony 9s event has grown from a one-day event in 2022 with 44 teams to a two-day event in 2025 with over 80 teams and 1400 players.

The HRL competitions and Harmony 9s serve as important vehicles for the NSWRL to attract Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups, build community leaders, and improve social cohesion across NSW. Beyond local integration, HRL games frequently help support the development of emerging nations' test teams and international Rugby League programs abroad. Players have also transitioned from playing Harmony 9s to playing more regularly in HRL competitions.

The annual event also includes physical disability and 'Indigenous vs All Stars' showcase matches.

Nations and Ages

Participating heritage nations and groups include teams representing Pasifika, Malta, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand; Japan; Italy, Lebanon, Syria, Ukraine, Poland, South Sudan, Greece, Macedonia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, South Africa, NSW Maori and NSW First Nations groups.

In the next two years, expansion is on the horizon, with the addition of Indian and Chinese Heritage teams reflecting the growing cultural diversity of the sport.

The HRL runs junior and senior pathways, operating competitions across Under 16, Under 18, Open Men's, and Open Women's divisions.



Benefits of Heritage Rugby League and the Harmony 9s

- The events promote heritage, encourage inclusion and provide another representative pathway for those looking to play at a higher level.
- While most participants also play community Rugby League, at least 10% of players only participate in league through the Harmony 9s.
- The events bring families and communities together and include cultural performances, celebrations of heritage and cuisines from around the world.

Case Study – Volunteering Making a Difference – Dungowan JRL & Group 4 JRL

Dungowan Junior Rugby League has been a success story over recent years with the help of a number of key volunteers including Dean Bliss, who has been heavily involved with both Dungowan JRL and Group 4 JRL.

A Community Club's Impact

Dungowan JRL has grown its playing ranks from 152 in 2022 to 289 in 2025. This rapid growth in participation and community engagement has occurred as a result of an energetic committee which has expanded from four people to a number that fills two large tables over the past four years. The club established a culture where any assistance is appreciated, and everyone's opinion is respected.

There has been a surge in female participation at DJRL in League Tag and 13-a-side competitions. The playing numbers are strong in the Under 13 Girls, Under 15 Girls and Open Women's sides in particular. Around half of the new players are new to any form of sport and Rugby League has proved to be an excellent vehicle for increased fitness and socialisation.

There have been many local success stories including players progressing to elite levels, who provide inspiration and aspiration for younger participants within the community such as Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks fullback Jada Taylor.

Dean's Story

Dean Bliss played Rugby League through high school and stopped playing at 18 years of age. Dean had a long break from league and then became involved again when his youngest son began playing in the Under 6s. Dean's wife also became involved with arranging uniforms and merchandise for the DJRL and they have enjoyed their ten years of involvement. This involvement has continued even though their son is currently not playing.

While Dean notes that it is busy when league seasons roll around each year, Dean has said that "it makes you feel normal" getting into the rhythm of helping organise seasons where so many players find friendship, physical activity and enjoyment.

Dean is the first to admit that the success that DJRL and Group 4 JRL has resulted from the efforts of many volunteers who are happy to contribute, seeing the benefits for many in their community.



Benefits of Rugby League to the Community with Help of Volunteers

- With Dungowan having a population of less than 400 people, the Rugby League club, through the efforts of many volunteers, has increasingly become the hub of the community.
- Grassroots Rugby League supported by volunteers helps strengthen the local identity and provides ongoing social and wellbeing benefits for children and families. One key volunteer's commitment can encourage others to contribute, helping build a sustainable base of local volunteers and strengthening community capacity over time.

Case Study – Growth and Inclusion – League Tag on the South Coast

League Tag is one of the fastest growing sports in New South Wales. The non-contact format has revolutionised grassroots Rugby League by providing a safe, accessible pathway for players of all ages. There have been huge surges in female participation in Rugby League through the introduction of League Tag in areas such as the South Coast of NSW.

Kiama Junior Knights' Story

The Kiama Junior Knights have been on a remarkable journey of growth over the past decade. In 2017, the club's playing membership was 182 (115 boys and 67 girls). In 2026, the playing membership now stands at 490 (289 boys and 201 girls). This represents a 151% increase in boys' playing membership and a 200% increase in the girls' playing membership in nine years. The increase in girls League Tag participation has been tenfold.

At this stage, League Tag is only offered to girls and women in the Group 7 Region and all players registered in Under Six and Under 7 sides. However, it may be offered to boys' teams in future years.

League Tag has brought families together at the Kiama Junior Knights where brothers and sisters play alongside each other, and friends enjoy time at the club.

There is strong representation on the Club Committee with over half of the roles filled by women and half of the League Tag coaching positions are also filled by women or girls.

There have been some challenges with the rapid growth in playing membership including the capacity constraints at facilities including: lack of available fields (and/or lighting) to cater for increased age groupings or training sessions; and the scarcity of adequate female-friendly changing facilities. There have also been times where the volunteer workforce has been stretched but the Kiama Junior Knights have been welcoming of new volunteers and been able to ensure that all those looking for a game have been able to play.

For many girls around Kiama, the League Tag games/competitions have provided more opportunities to be physically active and make lasting friendships that may not have happened without League Tag being available.



Benefits of League Tag Offering

- A gateway sport/activity – League Tag has become the primary entry point for women and girls into Rugby League. It allows participants to learn league skills without the fear of tackling/heavy contact.
- Female participation levels are at record levels at many clubs largely driven by the introduction of League Tag.
- League Tag has helped players build self-esteem and raise confidence while providing leadership and coaching opportunities for women and girls.

Case Study – Disability & Inclusion – Physical Disability Rugby League

The NSW Physical Disability Rugby League (NSWPDRL) empowers participants through Rugby League in building an inclusive community for people with disability. NSWPDRL has been at the forefront of providing sporting activity for players with a disability, with countless volunteers working tirelessly behind the scenes to manage the NSW competition and help grow PDRL at the grassroots level.

One Player's Journey

Rylan Gaudron has played with both the Wests Tigers and the Australian PDRL teams. Rylan has cerebral palsy and has been playing Rugby League since he was 15 years old. Rylan had tried or played a number of other sports as a junior but he never felt included by the other sporting activities.

For Rylan, Rugby League has “changed his life”. Rugby League is far more than an activity – his Rugby League community has become a second family. Rylan loves playing for the West Tigers in the NSWPDRL and has been immensely proud of being given the opportunity to play for Australia in the PDRL World Cup in 2022 and is hoping to do so again in 2026. The sport has given him the opportunity to play in Queensland, New Zealand and England – places he didn't think he would travel to.

Rylan is keen to mentor other players, has completed his Cert. IV in personal training and is hoping to coach players one day.

Sport for All

NSWPDRL is coordinated by administrators and volunteers that endeavour to find ways that any person with an intellectual or physical impairment can participate. The games are modified in numerous ways to allow as many people (with an impairment) as possible to play. Participants will wear different coloured shorts to indicate whether they are able to be tackled or not. The competition has had a player with no upper limbs and his body has ‘become the ball’ when he runs down the field. Paul Tubridy (Chairman of the NSWPDRL), has used his years of development experience, to help administer a competition where everyone can play. Apart from keeping active and making friends through the PDRL, the younger players learn valuable life lessons through the games and clinics.



Benefits of NSW Physical Disability Rugby League

- Has created an inclusive sporting environment for people with physical and intellectual disabilities, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate through modified rules and adaptive approaches.
- It provides an inclusive community where people with disabilities can build friendships, improve their health and wellbeing, develop life skills and leadership qualities, pursue representative opportunities, and experience a genuine sense of belonging and achievement.

Case Study – Social Cohesion, Community Identity and Belonging

Rugby League can become an intrinsic part of a volunteer's identity, just as dedicated volunteers can become an intrinsic part of their communities through their involvement in the game.

Lifetime Dedicated To The Community

For more than four decades, Chris Hollis has been the heart of the Taree Red Rovers Junior Rugby League Club. His story is not simply about volunteering in sport; it is about creating a place where generations of families feel connected, children develop a sense of belonging, and the wider community comes together around a shared identity.

Chris's journey with the Red Rovers began at four years of age, playing until injuries ended his playing career at 17. Rather than walking away from the game, he immediately found new ways to contribute through coaching, refereeing and administration. The Red Rovers have become an extension of Chris's family. His father, Dennis, served on the committee before becoming club president for around 20 years, while both his parents continue to volunteer well into their late seventies, helping with the canteen, barbeques, line marking and ground maintenance. His sister also serves on the club committee, continuing the family's longstanding involvement. The family has fostered a strong volunteer network that sustains the club and the culture of family participation extends throughout the club.

Chris believes junior Rugby League gives children and parents a place where they belong, where friendships are formed, and where families remain connected over many years. Long after players finish their junior careers, many continue volunteering because the club has become part of their identity.

Chris has been passionate about ensuring Rugby League is accessible to every child. Under his leadership, the club has expanded from just two junior teams during earlier years to now fielding teams across multiple age groups, including girls' tackle and League Tag competitions.

His work with Indigenous youth has been particularly significant. Recognising barriers that can prevent participation, Chris has regularly helped Indigenous children get to training sessions and games. His goal is to ensure every young person feels welcomed, valued and connected.



Benefits of Rugby League to the Taree Community

- Rugby League has strengthened community identity and social cohesion. The Taree Red Rovers is a club where generations of families feel connected, volunteers work together, and the club provides a lasting sense of belonging and pride for the region.
- The club has provided inclusive opportunities and positive youth development - expanding participation for girls and Indigenous, while using Rugby League to teach resilience, teamwork, respect and other lifelong values, along with building a resilient and willing volunteer culture.

Case Study – Women and Girls – Increasingly Involved in Rugby League

For many players, Rugby League has always been more than a game. It has become a vehicle for inclusion, confidence, leadership and community change.

Building a Place for Women in Rugby League

Through her involvement with the Karuah Rugby League Club, Kelly Johnson has witnessed and helped to drive a remarkable transformation in female participation, demonstrating how grassroots clubs can create opportunities that were once unimaginable for women and girls.

Kelly grew up in a Rugby League family, tagging along with her father and brothers to local Rugby League matches and has always had a love for the game. Kelly began playing league through a social 9-a-side competition with friends in 2017, with the team expanding to a 13-a-side team two years later (in a six-team, one-grade competition). As a small regional town, Karuah faced continual challenges attracting enough players to field teams. Despite the obstacles, the club persisted, recognising that participation would only grow if opportunities existed. Today, that commitment is paying dividends. The club now fields multiple women's teams across A and B Grades along with three mixed junior teams alongside dedicated girls-only teams from Under 13 through to Under 17, ensuring girls have opportunities to continue playing with their peers as they grow older.

For Kelly, these pathways simply didn't exist when she was growing up. "As a girl, I never would have dreamed of having the opportunity to play State of Origin," she reflected. The rapid growth of the NRLW and increased visibility of women's Rugby League have fundamentally changed what young girls believe is possible.

One of Rugby League's greatest strengths is the friendships and sense of belonging it creates. Kelly describes the social connections as one of the most important parts of her experience, having formed lifelong friendships through the club. The family environment has also been key to her journey with her son playing since Under 6s.

The sport has improved Kelly's physical fitness, supported her mental wellbeing and given her confidence, purpose and a strong support network. "There is no therapy like laying a shoulder in and it's okay," she jokes, reflecting on the physical release, empowerment and enjoyment she has found. She credits Rugby League with improving her wellbeing physically and emotionally. "Footy has changed my life."



Increased Female Participation in Rugby League

- Where once there were few pathways and limited acceptance, today's young female players can progress from junior competitions through community clubs and aspire to play representative Rugby League.
- Karuah Rugby League Club's experience demonstrates that when clubs invest in female participation, they build stronger communities, develop future leaders and inspire the next generation to believe there is a place for them in the game.



Conclusion



Conclusion

This study, for the first time, demonstrates in a comprehensive and evidencebased way, the full breadth of value that Rugby League delivers to the people and communities of New South Wales.

The findings are substantial. Rugby League contributes to the NSW economy through the combined expenditure of hundreds of community clubs, pathway competitions, governing bodies and more than 165,000 registered participants, generating recurring economic activity that flows through every region of the state.

It contributes to public health by keeping participants active, reducing the burden of chronic disease and mental illhealth, and delivering preventative health value that compounds across a lifetime of participation.

The game also contributes to society in ways that are harder to quantify but no less real: through the belonging it creates, the leaders it develops, the young people it supports, and the communities it holds together through hardship and celebration alike.

Importantly, the figures presented in this report represent a conservative and deliberately measured account of Rugby League's contribution. Many of the game's most meaningful impacts, the inspiration of a role model, the identity forged through decades of club membership, the cohesion built across diverse communities, sit beyond the reach of current measurement frameworks. The true value of Rugby League to NSW is larger than any single study can capture.

What this study does establish, clearly and robustly, is that Rugby League is more than a sport, it is community infrastructure. Investment in Rugby League facilities, programs and pathways is investment in healthier people, stronger communities and a more resilient NSW economy, and the evidence presented here makes that case in full.





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