



# Gender Equity Report 2019



Research report undertaken and prepared by

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It is the nature of sport organisations to be an auspice for clubs, associations and participants. Thus, it is the hope of the researchers that the recommendations within this report will be pursued with joint responsibility by all triathlon stakeholders. Unless explicitly stated, the term triathlon is used throughout and will encompass all internal staff within Triathlon Victoria, the clubs, associations, coaches, officials, administrators, participants and volunteers engaged in the sport.

## Background (historical workforce participation):

The number of women in the Australian workforce more than doubled in the period 1954-1970 (ABS 1955, 1970). This increase is largely due to second-wave feminism, and women having more access to job opportunities (Honey, 2018; Department of Education, 2010). The below graph (figure one) shows the increase in the number of women in the workforce compared with men for the period 1954-2014.

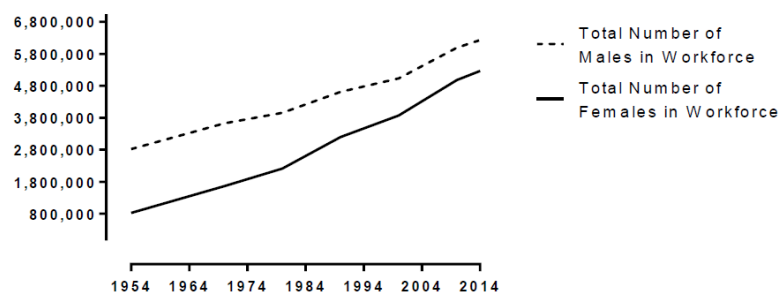


Figure 1: Trend of Female and Male participation in the Workforce<sup>3</sup>

Although 66% of Australian women aged 20-74 years engage in paid labour, men disproportionately hold most management and senior executive positions (Catalyst, 2018). Men also continue to hold two thirds of all management positions in Australia (Catalyst, 2018). There are three common cultural and behavioural factors which we will explore to assist in further understanding gender inequity in the workplace. These include unconscious bias, flexible work arrangements, and networking opportunities for career advancement.

### 1. Unconscious Bias

Unconscious biases are “prejudices we have but are unaware of” (McCormick, 2015, p.1). These biases may be based on race, gender, ability, weight, and socioeconomic status, amongst others. Unconscious bias may impact a person’s ability to progress in their career. Regarding gender, women are more likely than men to feel the negative effects of unconscious bias, and struggle to ‘climb the corporate ladder’ (APSC, 2019).

Different forms of unconscious bias include:

- Confirmation bias: the tendency to seek out and remember information that supports initial impressions

- Halo effect: the tendency to think everything about a person is good (or bad) because you like (or dislike) that person (McCormick, 2015)
- Stereotyping: the tendency to expect that because someone belongs to a group, they have certain characteristics
- Status-quo: the tendency to like things to stay the same without too much disruption
- Group attribution: the tendency to attribute one individual's characteristics as reflecting the characteristics of the group
- Group think: when people try to fit in by mimicking or holding back thoughts and opinions, causing organisations to lose out on creativity and innovation (Price, n.d. as reported in McCormick 2015)

Ways to combat unconscious bias include:

- Training – Identification of the various forms of bias, and how to overcome these through cultural and behavioural awareness training.
- Create formal structures around decision-making processes (such as interviews and promotion opportunities). This could include staff surveys to understand issues in the workplace and auditing current processes to ensure proper diversity practices are/can be undertaken (McCormack 2015).

## 2. Flexible working arrangements (FWA)

Shifting societal norms and family dynamics has seen more women enter, stay in, and return to the workforce in the past 40 years. This shift has meant that workplaces need to consider the work-life balance of their employees. Many companies and organisations now offer flexible working arrangements to support employees personal and professional responsibilities, along with their overall health and wellbeing.

Flexible work arrangements (FWA) are workplace strategies designed to support an employee's balance between their work and personal life (Timms, Brough, O'Driscoll, Kalliath, Siu, Sit & Lo, 2015), and may include: flexible start and finish times, compressed work days, work from home, and part-time employment (Timms et al., 2015). Of importance is to understand the individuality and diversity in an employee's desire for flexible work arrangements, with research suggesting that life-cycle, parenting phase, household model (number of adults, number of income earners, and proportion of full and part time workers), gender, age, and career orientation all impact the ways that people wish to engage in flexible work arrangements (Thorntwaite, 2004). Furthermore, public policy can affect a person's decision to take up (or how they take up) flexible arrangements and include: childcare provision, labour market participation (particularly of women), and broader socio-cultural characteristics such as gender equity (Thorntwaite, 2004).

### 3. Networking opportunities for career advancement

Networking is a strategic tool to assist in career advancement (Wang). Benefits of networking can include knowledge exchange, collaboration, alliance development, support and visibility (Wang). Networking can occur in various forms, including formal, informal, and community-based networking opportunities and events. Data suggests that women who network are more likely to advance in their careers compared to those who do not network (Wang, 2009). Further, Wang (2009, p. 36) notes that for women, **“networks dominated by strong ties with support from strategic sponsors result in the greatest probability of promotion, especially to higher-level positions”**. Women often benefit from different networking strategies to those of men. Research shows that men will network with other men in positions of power or influence whereas women will develop relationships with both women and men of varying work levels and outside of their traditional subunit to gain support and influence (Wang, 2009).

Thus, it is inherent on organisations to support and promote women’s networking and assist their capacity building if they are committed to achieving gender equity and the promotion of women in the workplace.

By addressing unconscious bias, flexible work arrangements and networking opportunities organisations can support women’s progression in the workforce. These three strategies were used to inform the method, data collection, and analysis of this research report and will underpin future planning and implementation of gender equitable practices in triathlon.

### Sporting Context<sup>1</sup>

Over 11 million Australian’s aged 15+ participated in sport or physical activity in 2014 (ABS, 2015). Of the 11 million participants, 5.56 million of these were women (ABS, 2015). With such a high proportion of people engaging in sport it is important to consider the role sport can play in achieving gender equity, not only on, but also off the sporting field. Sport is by no means a ‘level playing field’ but because of its reach, diversity and ability to breakdown socio-economic differences it has a real chance to create change within it’s structures and ripple these into the community and workplaces.

Gender equity is still a consistent problem in many Australian sporting organisations. Although more women are entering and staying in the workforce, the sport industry is still considered to be a male-domain. Whilst progress has been made over the past ten years, with several sport organisations appointing female CEO’s, Chairs to boards, and providing support for women in the workplace, representation at senior levels is still largely skewed towards men.

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<sup>1</sup> Triathlon participation is heavily weighted to people aged 15+ in Australia (ABS, 2019)

Sport organisations are unique in their structure when compared to other organisations. Large numbers of staff are employed casually or seasonally based on the needs of the sport, with many are in the field, working directly with athletes, participants, and volunteers. Women engage in various non-playing roles within the sport sector, as evidenced in table 1 below (ABS, 2013).

**Table 1:** Women's non-playing roles in sport and physical activity, 2010 (ABS, 2013)

Role	Number of women
Coach, Instructor, Teacher	273,000
Scorer or Timekeeper	264,300
Committee Member or Administrator	256,500
Referee or Umpire	115,100
Medical Support Staff	60,000

Sport Australia (formally the Australian Sports Commission) have recently set requirements on the number of women on National Sport Organisation boards and governing committees (Women on Boards, 2016). The introduction of these mandatory changes looked to improve conditions both on and off the sporting field for women (Women on Boards, 2016). As at 2016, NSOs average board composition was 34.4% female, 65.6% male however disappointingly of the 57 NSO boards, 24 had less than 30% female representation (Women on Boards, 2016).

With so many women in non-playing roles, and the current focus on women's representation at senior levels in the workplace (both generally, and within sporting organisations) (see VicHealth, and Sport and Recreation Victoria's requirements for gender equity), it is important to consider what support women need to begin, stay in, return to, and progress in their respective sporting roles.

## Research aims

The above insight into the current status of women in the Australian workforce, and the coaching and sport administrator landscape for women in Australia has brought rise to State Sporting Organisations (SSOs) prioritising the development of gender equitable practices that support retention and promotion of women. Triathlon Victoria, with the assistance of the State Government (Sport and Recreation Victoria), are exploring triathlon's gender equity both internally and externally (in the field where the majority of workforce is based).

Therefore, there are three aims of this project:

1. Examine triathlon's internal structures and processes to understand the current climate for women in the workplace (both internally, and out in the field)
2. Explore the experiences of triathlon's key stakeholders and analyse their insights for improving gender equity

3. Develop a Gender Equity Action Plan that will support women and enable triathlon to attract women into the triathlon workforce and retain/promote those already in the workforce.

In examining the internal structures there will be an analysis of the workforce, comprising: all internal and external staffing appointments, board structure, committee structures, and coaching appointments and a gap analysis on relevant policies and board documents.

By exploring the qualitative experiences of various key stakeholders, we will better understand the cultural and behavioural issues impacting women within triathlon and bring real life experiences to the Action Plan.

## Methodology

In line with Victoria University's Gender Equality Framework (Victoria University, 2019), the data collection and mining was undertaken to assist in contextualising triathlon's structure/strategy and it aligns with step (A) of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) change process (as outlined in the VU Gender Equality Framework, Victoria University, 2019). Step (A) refers to analysis and diagnosis of business objectives and includes finding information on where the organisation is currently situated in relation to gender and where they would like to be. Therefore, exploration of both internal and external staffing structures provides insight into gender representation at various levels.

Focus group interviews (four) brought together various women and men within triathlon to better understand their lived experiences (Ennis & Chen, 2012). A focus group is a beneficial data collection method as it gives individuals an opportunity to draw on their own and other peoples experiences; a chance to develop their understanding of key topics of interest; and a safe environment with others in a homogenous group (in this case, those involved in triathlon work or as a participant) (Ennis & Chen, 2012). In addition, semi-structured interviews (two) were conducted to gather further detailed individual insights.

## Results

A brief overview of triathlon's vision and mission contextualises the current state of this organisation and their commitment to gender equity.

### Current Triathlon context

Triathlon's vision is ***to enrich the sporting landscape by issuing a unique challenge that anyone can accept and a mission to connect and inspire the community to a lifestyle of multisport.*** Further to this, their core values include belonging, integrity and respect; which are key tenets on the path to gender equality. With regard to women's equality, a focus of the triathlon vision includes the implementation of activities and programs that have a strong focus on women and teenagers. While not specific to women's equity in the workplace,

triathlon also have several key drivers within the strategic plan that support improving conditions for women in the workforce, including: improving access, building the capacity of coaches and technical officials, development of infrastructure, inclusive membership and streamlining data collection and analysis.

Triathlon wishes to make a commitment to be a gender equitable workplace, one that is inclusive, empowering and supportive. Triathlon acknowledges that a proactive approach is required to address gender inequality in the workplace (both internally, and out in the field) and a baseline has been formed using the current state of the triathlon workforce.

### Internal Structure

Triathlon Victoria has approximately 4.3 FTE staff members. Whilst dominated by male staff members it is difficult to draw insights given the relatively small workforce number.

**Table 2:** Staffing Composition

Role	Female	Male	Under Recruitment	Total
Full Time	0	2		2
Part Time	0.6	1x 0.7; 1x0.2	0.4	1.9

\*2x Female project leads are on short term contracts to complete the Change our Game initiative at 0.2 each (June 2019)

### **Workforce - 'in the field'**

There are two key customer-facing roles at Triathlon Victoria: Technical Official (TO) and Coach.

#### **Technical Officials**

Technical officials are the major officiating presence on race/competition days and ensure the fairness of racing and safety of competitors. They are a 'barometer' for the sport and play a key role in providing a welcoming environment through being an educator and 'facilitator' of competition rather than 'policing' the Race Competition Rules (RCR). For technical officials, there are three levels of accreditation - Level 1 (Local TO), Level 2 (Regional TO), and Level 3 (Australian TO).

**Table 3:** Number and Gender Difference of Active Technical Officers (Triathlon Victoria, 2019)

Gender	LTO		RTO		ATO		TO #	
Male	27	51%	6	67%	2	100%	35	55%
Female	26	49%	3	33%	0	0%	29	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>64</b>	

The gender breakdown of technical officials in Victoria (Table 3) shows that as TO's progress to more senior positions (Level's 2 and 3), the number of women decreases. Upon further review what was more interesting was that the number of appointments for events (frequency) by gender was skewed heavily to men, and that senior roles (TD, RR, CRO) were dominated by males (Table 4) with only the CRO role, that of organising the equipment and race personnel) in some parity to the overall percentage of female officials.



**Table 4:** Number of event appointments (Triathlon Victoria, 2019)

Gender	Event Appts		STT*		TO	
Male	307	<b>64%</b>	120	<b>70%</b>	187	<b>61%</b>
Female	170	<b>36%</b>	52	<b>30%</b>	118	<b>39%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>477</b>		<b>172</b>		<b>305</b>	

*\*TD,RR,CRO combined*

Gender	Technical Delegate (TD)		Race Referee (RR)		Chief Race Official (CRO)	
Male	56	<b>76%</b>	27	<b>77%</b>	37	<b>59%</b>
Female	18	<b>24%</b>	8	<b>23%</b>	26	<b>41%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>		<b>35</b>		<b>63</b>	

Note:

Triathlon Victoria compares favourably against the national gender breakdown at LTO level (4% up) and overall (2% up) but lags at the RTO and ATO levels.

Triathlon Victoria fails across all areas of event appointments by approximately 10% and similar to the national profile is grossly under-represented in TD and RR roles, with the CRO role being the dominant role for females (both Victoria and nationally).

### Coaching

Tables 5+6 provide a breakdown of accredited coaches shows that women are under-represented when compared to the general event participation rate (~35%). The recent initiatives through a 'women only' Foundation coaching course have made immediate impact at the Club and Community level, however when analysing the higher accreditation levels this gender disparity is more pronounced.

**Table 5:** Gender of current triathlon coaches (Current 2018)

Gender	Victoria		National	
Male	123	<b>68%</b>	596	<b>67%</b>
Female	57	<b>32%</b>	294	<b>33%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>		<b>890</b>	

**Table 6:** 2019 Data of Accredited Coaches

Gender	Club & Community*		Development		Performance		High Performance	
Male	18	<b>51%</b>	79	<b>70%</b>	26	<b>81%</b>	1	<b>100%</b>
Female	17	<b>49%</b>	34	<b>30%</b>	6	<b>19%</b>	0	<b>0%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>		<b>113</b>		<b>32</b>		<b>1</b>	

*\* Combined number for TRIactive, Club and Community, TRYstars and Foundation*

### Clubs

There are two types of triathlon groups -clubs which follow a traditional not for profit (NFP) structure, and squads who are a registered sole trader or similar commercial enterprise. The

following provides breakdown of club and squad presidents<sup>2</sup> by gender reveals that women are under-represented when compared to the general event participation rate (~35%) and tend to take on the more traditional female roles of treasurer and secretary at much higher levels than that of President or Vice-President.

**Table 7:** Club and Squad presidents by gender (Triathlon Victoria, 2019)

Role	Female	Male	Total	% Females
Squad President	6	15	21	29%
Club President	6	18	24	25%

**Table 8:** Gender composition of triathlon club committees (Triathlon Victoria, 2019)

Role	Female	Male	Total	% Female
Vice President	5	15	20	25%
Treasurer	7	16	23	30%
Secretary	11	12	23	48%

### **Governance**

The gender composition of the Triathlon Victoria board and all sub-committees (Tables 9+10) show high levels of representation by women across the governance roles. Whilst Triathlon Victoria have adopted constitutional mechanisms to ensure gender diversity at board level the same has not been undertaken at sub-committee level and should be considered amongst a range of strategies to ensure gender equity across Triathlon Victoria governance.

**Table 9:** Board Gender Composition (Triathlon Victoria, 2019)

Role	Female	Male	Total	% Female
Board Members	4	5	9	44.4%

**Table 10:** Sub Committee Gender Composition (Triathlon Victoria, 2019)

Sub-committee	Female	Male	Total	% Female
Triathlon Victoria G&F	2	2	4	50%
Triathlon Victoria PDC	1	4	5	20%
Triathlon Victoria TC	2	4	6	33.3%
Triathlon Victoria CoG	4	1	5	80%

<sup>2</sup> President, when in reference to a squad, is the head coach or squad owner

### Current participation – gender profile:

In the 2017-2018 season there were approximately 3000 individual members of Triathlon Victoria affiliated clubs with the gender breakdown being 63% male and 37% female. This is broadly in line with the national breakdown (see below)

In addition to this more than 9000 individuals take out a 'one day race permit' known as a one-day membership annually, and whilst their gender make-up is not fully understood it is estimated not to vary significantly from the annual membership percentages.

Triathlon Victoria  
Annual member gender breakdown



Event participation is enjoyed by both cohorts – annual members and one-day members - with each group equally sharing the 27,137 race starts in Victoria (2017-18). Sampling of the race starts data shows that the gender breakdown is consistent with the broader membership sitting around the 65% male / 35% female. This breakdown shows only a minor differentiation across distances, with lower numbers of women in 'long distance' categories, and age groups, again lower numbers of women in the 'older' age groups.

Whilst there is much to do in addressing female participation rates, the purpose of this report is to focus on the triathlon workforce. The purpose for including the participation rates is to provide a reference/comparison point for the analysis of gender in the triathlon workforce and furthermore the nature of women's involvement in senior roles within the workforce.

### Focus Groups and Interviews

Analysis of the quantitative data shows males are over-represented in all sectors of triathlon's workforce, with this disparity growing as skill and qualification levels increase. Whilst this is a stark reminder of the inequity embedded in many sport clubs and organisations, the data serves as a baseline for tracking and measuring changes in female involvement moving forward.

Whilst the data shows the 'gap' in terms of male:female representation, the focus groups and interviews provide us with a deeper understanding of what barriers (perceived and real) may be present in triathlon and inhibit women's ability to progress or participate. Four focus groups and three interviews were conducted to engage various female cohorts of the triathlon community. Participants included staff members (past and present), athletes (both community and elite), club committee members, technical officials and coaches.

Participants held multiple roles within their club with many remaining active athletes, whilst also assisting voluntarily on Triathlon Victoria/club committees or as coaches/officials (paid and unpaid). Throughout the interviews, participants highlighted a number of barriers that

affect workforce participation and progression that can be grouped into three key areas: **accessibility, support and creating change** and are described in further detail. There are some references within the report about general participation (athlete) barriers and challenges and these are included as part of the general environmental context.

### **Accessibility**

Accessibility emerged throughout the conversations with threads exploring fitness prior to joining a club as a barrier (perceived) and confidence in swimming in open water. One participant noted,

*...The other thing too is, a lot of people, they've heard of Ironman, so when they think of triathlon, they think of Ironman. They think they've got to run a marathon at the end of it. For them, shopping at the supermarket with kids is a marathon, ... So I think there's like maybe a lack of understanding around triathlon, and a lot of people don't realise that they can go and do a smaller race that's completely achievable for anyone at any level (I1).*

Whilst there seem to be positive changes happening at club level to address these barriers, such as scaling down the intensity of training, and supporting people through the open water swim process, women expressed concern surrounding the general perception of triathlon as an elite sport.

In addition to these concerns, the women spoke of triathlon as a largely male dominated space, both on and off the field. Males were seen to be the key stakeholders – as participants, coaches, and committee/board members. One woman discussed the lack of female coaches:

*In our coaching panel, we've only got one female who does one of our spins (cycle session) a week. And, if you want to get a training program, we've only got male coaches that you can go to. Our coaches are great, but it would be great to have a female option there for us (FG3).*

Further, women noted that female coaches added value outside of formal training:

*I had one of the juniors; she's only 11 and she was meant to be going in the [2XU] race, and it was her first ever race. Her Dad rang me and said, she's just got her period for the first time, and she's devastated. She's beside herself. I thought, it's okay; we've got it. But it's things like that about swimming; they don't want to come to swimming because they've got their period and being able to talk to a female [might help] ...*

Some clubs are proactively attempting to change this dynamic by holding female only training sessions and introducing females into the coaching staff, however, this change was led by one or two women within the club who wanted to see change rather than a general approach across triathlon. Although many accessibility challenges emerged there were positive discussions around the types of support to help grow triathlon, including:

*Female mentoring for coaches/officials/board members - this would help women get into these areas, but it has to feel like the mentors WANT to be involved in this, otherwise (such as one experience I have had) you feel like you're a burden and it actually puts you off wanting to be involved (O1).*

And,

*More women-only events/get together for women new to the sport to have a chance to meet each other and to discuss the stuff they might not feel comfortable discussing with a male coach/club member.*

*Attempt to get sponsors down to events that support women specifically in ways that make their participation in the sport easier (i.e. a sports bra brand, a brand that has information or products related to training with your period, involvement from Liv bikes or another bike brand that can highlight the differences between women's and men's bikes). Basically, any brand that is saying we have products for you as a woman doing the sport you love, not just as a woman who can use a smaller version of the men's product! (O1)*

Triathlon has the potential to grow, and although the barriers outlined expose some systemic and possibly historical issues, the number of women looking to support the potential growth and be change agents is overwhelmingly positive.

Participants noted that triathlon seemed an expensive sport to become involved in, with many seeing both event entry fees and the cost of equipment (bikes, cleats, running and swimming gear) and coaching services as a barrier to participation. Whilst some of these costs are felt at greater impact after the initial sampling period, they influence early decisions of whether to participate knowing the longer-term costs. One participant expressed concern about the financial burden when she was becoming serious about events,

*And then I had to make a call as I was with a different running coach, but it was becoming really expensive if I wanted to go down this [path], I needed to consolidate (FG3).*

Participants also spoke about the commercialisation of services and triathlon clubs. Most clubs are affiliated with Triathlon Victoria and charge modest fees to cover the cost of their coaches and pool/space hire and insurance. However, there has been growth in the privatisation of coaching services in recent years, which has seen membership fees for those groups escalate and become a significant access barrier. Further research is needed to understand how these different groups function and what role the state association has in minimising the economic barriers to participation.

A barrier to progression (either as a coach or a committee member) was the feeling of not having the required skills to succeed in a role. From a coaching perspective, many believed that they didn't have the required skills which stopped them from taking the step-in coach

accreditation/development. A significant element of this was the male dominated nature of coaching at many clubs, as one participant discussed:

*I think when you start to try and get into that, even if it's just elite juniors, that's when I think they could get a bit of like I guess knock-back from males in the club or just don't think they're good enough or that females can do it (FG2)*

So, some participants, they doubted that they had the skills to coach at the same level as the men, or they believed that men may perceive their skills as inferior to their own. To address this issue many of the participants spoke of the need to have female coaching mentors with one participant proposing the idea of seeking female mentors outside of the sport:

*it's somebody who you said I like that and that could be anybody. And what is it that, that person offers you or that you aspire to be? And that could be anybody in any sport. It doesn't have to be in triathlon (I2)*

Participants also proposed the idea of having female specific coaching courses, to help overcome the possible lack of self-confidence of women when entering coaching:

*I like the idea of that female only coaching course because I can understand the benefits of that, being able to get females who may not be confident to value their own knowledge and worth ... (FG2)*

As for becoming a committee member, participants discussed the lack of knowledge that individuals may have about the skills required to become a committee member. Consequently, if women do become committee members, they may struggle to know what the job involves:

*The guys on the committee have been around that, and they know the ins and out and the lingo. To someone who hasn't done anything before, they're very, very lost (FG3)*

To overcome this, participants talked about the importance of having a reference sheet that details all of the skills that are required to be a successful committee member ...

*So, I was thinking of putting together sort of like a layout. If you are allocated this role, this is your reference sheet. It's easy to just go everything's on the website and whatever (FG3)*

Importantly, one of the participants acknowledged that similar information is available on ClubSpot but had only recently found it. By sharing information more broadly it may encourage more women to become involved as committee members.

### **Support**

One of the common barriers was a general lack of support for women to progress, specifically in the area of coaching. Comments re-enforced the idea that coaching was male dominated and often meant that female coaches did not get treated well.

*“We've got one other female coach ... who ... was like, how do you deal with this? I don't know if I want to be this anymore. So that was really disappointing for me. Having physios, sports scientists and other female staff members ended up reaching out to me 'cause I had said to them, I'm just happy for anyone to come to me and she just broke down in tears because of how she was being treated. From then on I've kind of taken a bit of the like I guess probably spokesperson role ... It is a boys' club unfortunately. But yeah it is getting better.” (FG2)*

To address this lack of support, participants suggested providing more opportunities for female coaches to engage in meaningful networking with other female coaches, beyond the basic opportunities offered by Triathlon Victoria such as the International Women's Day breakfast. Triathlon Victoria can play a key role in implementing mentoring programs and hosting female coaching networking events with a particular need to support a 'knowledge gap' about the 'ins and outs' of triathlon.

### **Lack of Knowledge**

*You don't have to be an elite athlete to do a triathlon. You don't have to finish your race with a marathon, like there are smaller, fun events that anyone can do (I1).*

The perception of triathlon as an elite sport, defined by ultra-distance events such as ironman, was a significant influencer in discussions around the support and knowledge of women's participation. Although the women interviewed were part of triathlon community, with the majority competing in events for social and health benefits, there seemed to be this notion that 'everyday' events tailored to beginners and first timers was not readily available.

Feelings of the frustration and lack of support was directed at the Triathlon Victoria. Participants felt that Triathlon Victoria could do more to support and provide resources to participants and clubs. It was suggested that using an app or digital messaging platform might help young girls become engaged – they could anonymously ask questions, see FAQs about upcoming events, and create a community within the broader triathlon community.

Although much of the frustration was levelled at Triathlon Victoria, some club administrators took a proactive approach to providing women with safe access to the sport. Initiatives such as a female 'buddy' system, where buddies rode alongside the women during the event to make them feel comfortable, resulted in a relatively positive impact.

Most, if not all interviewees gave feedback regarding the level of support and knowledge provided to women to enter triathlon and expressed a range of ideas that may benefit triathlon moving forward. One coach suggested that when coaching women,

*...They like to have that smaller group aspect or slow the pace down a little bit and have the opportunity to ask questions and feel a little bit more supported (FG1).*

Another interviewee noted the importance of diversifying the marketing to participants.

*I definitely think it needs to start at the top with a group like Triathlon Victoria as they obviously have the exposure to all the clubs. Like there's no larger organization ... that's obvious for people to go to and I guess the support should come from Tri Vic for that stuff. But the clubs certainly don't have the exposure, the money, all that sort of stuff to market properly because they're very all very small, usually just a one-man band a lot of them (I1).*

By taking a lead from the top and showing that gender equity is crucial to triathlon's future success and prosperity was key for many women.

### **Creating change**

One of the key themes that emerged was the need to create change, both at a structural level (Triathlon Victoria) and the club level. Many of the members highlighted some positive changes that clubs could make to improve culture, but they also commented on the reluctance of many of the clubs to make these efforts. They agreed that the only way to create change was to do it themselves. This was quite frustrating for many, knowing that change would only occur if they drove it, and the reality of time limitations and working with, and convincing, others of the need for change.

*It's more that I wanted to action change and I didn't see it was happening, but then I've got there, and I just don't have time to action it (FG3)*

*I know from my personal experience, there's four of us in the committee. One of them, the vice president; he is a lot of talk but no action, and so we're like, have you done this, done that? And he hasn't done it, so I we're sitting there going, I could just send that message right now and get an answer, but you have to sort of let them do it. That's what I really struggle with because I just want one phone call, and it's done you know. But you might have to wait a week for him to get around to eventually doing it (FG3)*

Triathlon Victoria should consider actions to help foster positive change at a structural level by providing support to these members. This may take the form of a liaison from Triathlon Victoria who works with clubs to listen to the perspectives of the 'game changers' and provides support to make change happen.

Participants spoke of the lack of coordination with regard to youth and junior participation. Although this was not gender specific, it is important to highlight the ad hoc nature of the junior triathlon.

*It's actually really challenging too because I have started coaching the triathlon team at [school] and it went really well. And I think across the six or seven weeks or something that I was there, I probably saw about 15 kids come through and do some form of training with me. And then in the end, we had eight competing at the event*



*that we were working towards, but there's five that would be keen to keep going but what do you do with them? (11).*

Although specific barriers to participation such as actually having events tailored to juniors was seen as a common issue, many were interested in developing their club to include juniors and provide more opportunities for them. This is certainly a growth area that can also facilitate more female participation moving forward.

## Discussion

Results indicate that women are under-represented in all areas of the workforce - officiating, coaching and administration. Although this is problematic, a more systemic issue includes the progression of females into senior positions and the overwhelming concerns that triathlon is a male-dominated space. Evidence of the 'male-dominated culture' includes club committees, where women make up only 27% of all Presidents, but hold 48% of secretary positions (a traditionally female role).

In addition, the workforce data highlights a significant drop in the number of women progressing to senior coaching roles, with women comprising less than 20% of all senior coach positions at clubs and 25% of senior (ATO) officiating appointments.

Focus group and interview respondents noted that women lacked the confidence and perceived competence to be leaders or hold senior positions. A common theme of **support** arose to combat this and included ideas such as providing opportunities to be mentored, engage in meaningful networking events, undertake training in 'women only' courses, and sharing resources and tools.

The research team believes that small actions like the establishment of a women in triathlon landing page on the Triathlon Victoria website, with information on events, female-only training, and guidance on how to get involved as participants or coaches/volunteers will assist in the growth and sustainability of women across triathlon.

**Cultural change** also emerged as a key theme through the research as women discussed a reluctance of some senior club members to engage in meaningful change to support women in triathlon. There was a general feeling of frustration from women interviewed. They felt alone and isolated in their quest for more gender equitable practices at their club. Whilst cultural change cannot occur overnight, and many women acknowledged the positive work that was happening at the top (Triathlon Victoria office), they felt that more education and support to clubs was required to change the culture.

There was strong interest from women in the community to support other women getting into triathlon. The women attending the focus groups engaged in meaningful conversations around how triathlon can improve and become more equitable; and largely avoided complaining about the structures, cultural issues or barriers they faced. This is a powerful tool moving forward, because there are some key stakeholders on the ground willing to support, advocate and drive change.

## Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following in addressing gender equity in triathlon

1. Develop an Action Plan including
  - the development and implementation of **support structures** including mentoring and networking opportunities, reviewing policy, etc.
  - addressing **culture** through a communications strategy which may include raising awareness of - current gender diversity, existing female leaders, pathways to senior roles, etc
  - access to **education, training and leadership development** opportunities that recognise the barriers faced by women to engage in the triathlon workforce.
2. Create a working group / sub-committee to work with the key Triathlon Victoria staff on driving and implementing gender equity.

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