



**AIS HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT  
SYSTEM: WELLBEING REVIEW  
EXECUTIVE REPORT**

June 2020



# WELCOME

In 2019 the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) commissioned independent consultancy, The Kinetica Group, to undertake a wellbeing review of Australia's high performance (HP) sport system. This document summarises the findings of that review, which was driven by the AIS's Athlete Wellbeing & Engagement (AW&E) team.

Established in the second half of 2018, AW&E partners with national sporting organisations (NSOs), state academies and state institutes of sport to enhance the HP sport system's offer to elite athletes in two key respects: investment in their whole-of-life wellbeing, and support to engage meaningfully with the community. Across both contexts, the review delivers an essential platform from which to gauge the state of play – the excellent foundations laid by the system over a sustained period, and the areas still to be explored.

We need comprehensive information to fully realise the wellbeing culture in HP sport. The work at hand helps the AIS to lead and support the whole HP system, and I extend my warmest thanks to the hundreds of athletes, coaches, staff, and industry experts who gave freely of their time and expertise to make it possible.



**MATTI CLEMENTS**

Director

Athlete Wellbeing & Engagement

AIS



## A NOTE ON DEFINITIONS

For the source document and this summary, 'wellbeing' refers to the physical, mental, and emotional factors that determine an individual's overall level and experience of health. 'Duty of care' (DOC) refers to wellbeing servicing and support as provided to stakeholders by the HP system; it is not intended in any legal sense.

Other areas commonly associated with DOC, such as OH&S or child safety, are not addressed in this review because they are typically governed by strict legal compliance requirements, do not fall within the purview of a wellbeing review, or may be addressed by Sport Australia or the AIS as part of alternative review processes.

**AIS High Performance Sport System: Duty of care & wellbeing review**

The Kinetica Group

2019

# CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Review process                                      | 3         |
| Key findings  | 4         |
| <b>SYSTEM OVERVIEW</b>                              | <b>6</b>  |
| Structural system challenges                        | 7         |
| Cultural system challenges                          | 7         |
| Strategic approaches for tackling system challenges | 8         |
| <b>WELLBEING FOCUS AREAS</b>                        | <b>9</b>  |
| Mental health                                       | 10        |
| Culture matters                                     | 12        |
| Transitions   | 14        |
| Injury management                                   | 16        |
| Selection   | 18        |
| Conduct & integrity                                 | 20        |
| Equality & inclusion                                | 22        |
| Bullying  | 24        |
| <b>SUMMARIES</b>                                    | <b>26</b> |
| AW&E initiatives mapped against review findings     | 26        |

# REVIEW PROCESS

As part of this wellbeing review of the HP sport system, 251 stakeholders across 23 NSOs and state academies and state institutes of sport were engaged, as well as experts from other industries that provide wellbeing services or programs.

|                         |                            |                      |                        |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| HP Athletes (able)      | HP Athletes (para)         | HP Alumni            | HP Coaches             |
| HP Directors & Managers | HP Medical & Support Staff | CEOs & Board Members | Other Industry Experts |

| STAGE                | OBJECTIVE   | PROCESS  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
|----------------------|---|--|---------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|----------|
| 1                    | <p><b>ASSESS STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS</b></p> <p>of the DOC/wellbeing provided to athletes† and support network (HP coaches, HP managers &amp; directors, and medical staff)</p> | <p>Workshops held in Melbourne and Canberra identified eight recurring themes around wellbeing:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>MENTAL HEALTH</td> <td>CULTURE MATTERS</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NON-SELECTION</td> <td>CONDUCT &amp; INTEGRITY</td> </tr> <tr> <td>INJURY MANAGEMENT</td> <td>TRANSITION IN/OUT OF HP</td> </tr> <tr> <td>EQUALITY &amp; INCLUSION</td> <td>BULLYING</td> </tr> </table> <p><b>8 LEADING WELLBEING FOCUS AREAS (WFAS) WERE IDENTIFIED DURING THE WORKSHOPS</b></p>  | MENTAL HEALTH | CULTURE MATTERS | NON-SELECTION | CONDUCT & INTEGRITY | INJURY MANAGEMENT | TRANSITION IN/OUT OF HP | EQUALITY & INCLUSION | BULLYING                |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| MENTAL HEALTH        | CULTURE MATTERS   |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| NON-SELECTION        | CONDUCT & INTEGRITY   |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| INJURY MANAGEMENT    | TRANSITION IN/OUT OF HP   |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| EQUALITY & INCLUSION | BULLYING  |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| 2                    | <p><b>IDENTIFY SYSTEM CHALLENGES</b></p> <p>that wellbeing initiatives face, and strategic approaches the sector can consider</p>   | <p>1hr+ interviews with a broad cross-section of stakeholders helped identify inherent system challenges working against fully realising a wellbeing culture in HP sport</p> <p><b>A NUMBER OF SYSTEM CHALLENGES AND THEIR COMMONLY REPORTED EFFECTS EMERGED FROM A FOCUSED INTERVIEW PROCESS</b></p>  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| 3                    | <p><b>QUANTIFY WELLBEING CULTURE</b></p> <p>as presently experienced by elite athletes and their support network across the HP sport system</p>                                 | <p>Online surveys tested the data gathered from stages one and two, allowing for its quantification in line with best practice.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>73%</td> <td>MENTAL HEALTH</td> </tr> <tr> <td>39%</td> <td>CULTURE MATTERS</td> </tr> <tr> <td>41%</td> <td>INJURY MANAGEMENT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>39%</td> <td>TRANSITION IN/OUT OF HP</td> </tr> <tr> <td>28%</td> <td>NON-SELECTION</td> </tr> <tr> <td>24%</td> <td>CONDUCT &amp; PROFESSIONALISM</td> </tr> <tr> <td>12%</td> <td>EQUALITY &amp; INCLUSION</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10%</td> <td>BULLYING</td> </tr> </table> <p><b>MENTAL HEALTH WAS NAMED A TOP WELLBEING PRIORITY BY 73% OF THE HP SPORT SYSTEM</b></p> | 73%           | MENTAL HEALTH   | 39%           | CULTURE MATTERS     | 41%               | INJURY MANAGEMENT       | 39%                  | TRANSITION IN/OUT OF HP | 28% | NON-SELECTION | 24% | CONDUCT & PROFESSIONALISM | 12% | EQUALITY & INCLUSION | 10% | BULLYING |
| 73%                  | MENTAL HEALTH   |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| 39%                  | CULTURE MATTERS   |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| 41%                  | INJURY MANAGEMENT   |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| 39%                  | TRANSITION IN/OUT OF HP   |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| 28%                  | NON-SELECTION   |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| 24%                  | CONDUCT & PROFESSIONALISM   |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| 12%                  | EQUALITY & INCLUSION  |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |
| 10%                  | BULLYING  |  |               |                 |               |                     |                   |                         |                      |                         |     |               |     |                           |     |                      |     |          |

†Tier 1-3 = Podium, Podium Ready, Podium Potential athletes. Tier 4-7 athletes were engaged in the review to a lesser extent.

# KEY FINDINGS

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 73% consider wellbeing support has improved during their time in HP sport | 67% assess the current provision of wellbeing services at '7 or above' (0-10) |
| Notably high system satisfaction with injury management                   | 63% consider a gap exists between acknowledging wellbeing and actioning it    |
| 69% consider HP sport favours 'performance above people'                  | 61% consider industry values physical health above mental wellbeing           |
| 70% of support network and 32% of athletes feel 'disposable' to HP sport  | Notably low satisfaction with aspects of non-selection and exiting HP sport   |

## SYSTEM SATISFACTION BY HIGH PERFORMANCE KNOWLEDGE AREAS

The perceived quality of information provided to stakeholders engaged in HP programs provides an indication of the system's overall sense of priority and policy focus:

- The review found high-to-exceptional levels of athlete satisfaction with aspects of HP information that mostly relate to areas traditionally associated with regulatory compliance and physical wellbeing (*left column*).
- Information relating to more nuanced or contemporary areas, or sensitive topics, was notably lower in athlete satisfaction, indicating opportunities for system development in wellbeing (*right column*).

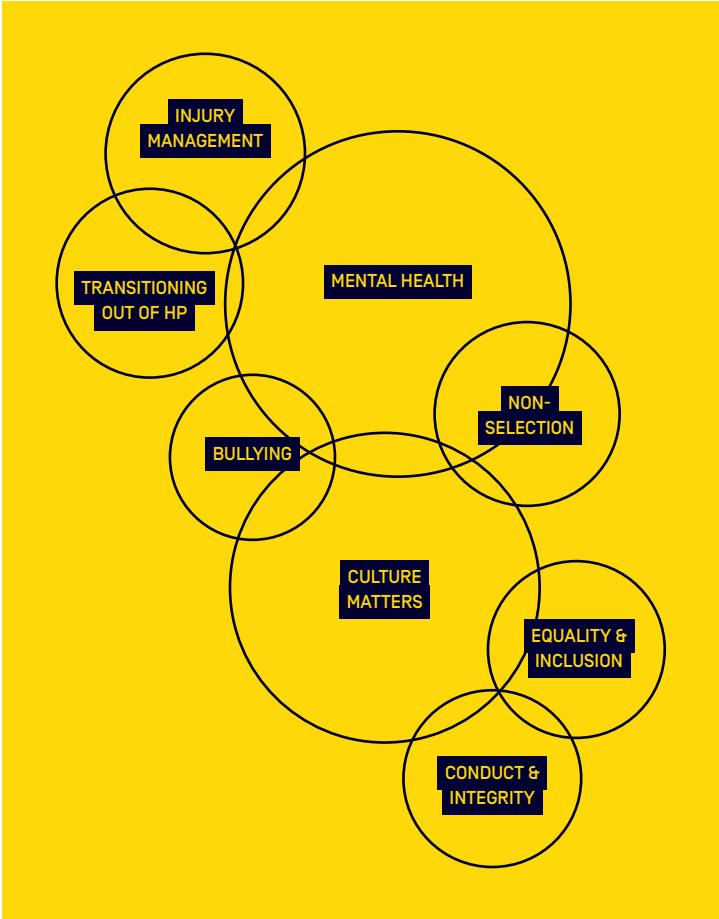
|     |                      |     |                   |
|-----|----------------------|-----|-------------------|
| 99% | Anti-doping          | 51% | Bullying          |
| 88% | Injury management    | 51% | Social media      |
| 88% | Match-fixing         | 50% | Mental health     |
| 86% | Physical health      | 42% | Body image        |
| 83% | Nutrition            | 35% | Career building   |
| 80% | Conduct & integrity  | 29% | Women's health    |
| 71% | Equality & inclusion | 16% | Managing finances |
| 65% | Cultural values      | 16% | Relocation        |

# SYSTEM SATISFACTION BY WELLBEING FOCUS AREA

Mental Health and Culture Matters were nominated by athletes as their first and second wellbeing priorities respectively. It can be observed that these are the two focus areas among those identified that have real potential to impact upon a HP career at any and/or every point.

Moreover, Mental Health and Culture Matters are preoccupations that commonly overlap, drive, or have an inter-relationship with the other focus areas.

|            |                         |
|------------|-------------------------|
| <b>83%</b> | Injury management       |
| <b>73%</b> | Conduct & integrity     |
| <b>70%</b> | Equality & inclusion    |
| <b>62%</b> | Culture matters         |
| <b>50%</b> | Bullying                |
| <b>46%</b> | Mental health           |
| <b>32%</b> | Non-selection           |
| <b>23%</b> | Transitioning out of HP |



<sup>1</sup>Data reflects combined athlete and support network assessments unless otherwise stated.

# SYSTEM CHALLENGES

Although stakeholders have observed significant progress within the system, two overarching system challenges emerged from the review: structural system challenges and cultural system challenges. Both have implications for fully realising a wellbeing culture across the HP sport system.





# STRUCTURAL SYSTEM CHALLENGE

## [Unstructured Approach to AW&E]

### AN ONGOING NEED FOR A CENTRAL STRATEGIC FORUM TO COORDINATE EFFORTS, ADVERTISE PROGRESS, AND ESTABLISH SYSTEM TRANSPARENCY

Stakeholders with longstanding experience of the wellbeing sector commonly described top-down coordination or facilitation of effort as desirable. In its absence, wellbeing in HP can feel less like a system and more like a collection of separate organisations pursuing different understandings of AW&E in a sometimes haphazard or inconsistent manner.

While the timing of the HP review meant that many AW&E programs were still in pilot or development phase, 71% of those surveyed regard the appointment of AW&E managers as a 'positive initiative' in providing a central strategic forum.

Asked why NSOs pursuing different understandings and strategies for AW&E was problematic, respondents identified resource efficiency and lack of knowledge-sharing. With individual NSOs often unable to resource comprehensive strategic plans for advancing wellbeing, current AW&E aspirations are not sufficiently underwritten by measures that help guarantee systemic change:

|                              |                                |                         |                            |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Priority-area identification | Priority-action implementation | Procedural transparency | Progress-tracking measures |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|

#### COMMONLY REPORTED EFFECTS OF TAKING AN UNSTRUCTURED APPROACH TO AW&E

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Always starting fresh | A 'clean slate' tendency to create new programs and processes instead of consolidating existing resources          |
| Shortfall in feedback | Absence of confidential reporting mechanisms to ensure process, build trust, and facilitate institutional learning |

# CULTURAL SYSTEM CHALLENGE

## [Pre-professional Mentality]

### EMBEDDED PERCEPTION THAT IT IS 'NOT A JOB TO BE AN ATHLETE, BUT A PRIVILEGE' RESULTING IN LOWER STANDARDS OF RIGOUR AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE SYSTEM

While a push for greater professionalism is being evidenced in the HP system, the absence of a fully professional mentality puts the sector out of step with examples of contemporary best practice governance cultures.

In addition, stakeholders highlighted a lack of independent and safe avenues for those within the system to report misconduct (including bullying, behavioural issues, mismanagement), both formally and informally. Safe avenues are essential given the current fear that raising concerns may result in non-selection or consequences to a career. Historically, inertia or reactivity to complaints has driven a fear that reporting issues will be fruitless, and no action will result. Manifestations of these 'cultural anchors' can include:

|   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| Policy and strategy not informed by expert or external engagement | Capacity to adopt/integrate new learnings limited | Contemporary management tools & perspectives not embraced | Innovative communication and education lacking |
|---|---|---|--|

#### COMMONLY REPORTED EFFECTS OF A PRE-PROFESSIONAL MENTALITY

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Wellbeing as a 'luxury'    | Wellbeing is still viewed as an addition to HP sport, not an inherent aspect of high performance that drives and lays a foundation for optimum results. |
| "When push comes to shove" | The automatic discontinuation of wellbeing culture and initiatives as soon as HP demands intensify and the option of a 'trade-off' presents itself.     |

# STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO TACKLING SYSTEM CHALLENGES

In identifying system challenges and the commonly reported effects associated with them, stakeholders articulated FIVE STRATEGIC APPROACHES that policy leaders can contemplate in pursuit of a fully realised wellbeing culture in high performance sport.

## ENGAGE WITH WHOLE OF HP

Pursue a structured engagement with wellbeing on a whole-of-system basis that respects NSO independence while counteracting the staggered progress that results from siloed policy environments.

## PRIORITISE NEW INFORMATION DELIVERY SYSTEMS

Educate for a modern system using innovative channels to stimulate engagement and facilitate effective knowledge transfer. Key opportunities include establishing alumni networks accessible to both athletes and HP staff, crafting interactive events to combat 'workshop fatigue', and employing digital technology to ensure accessibility.

## ESTABLISH COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Build strong partnerships with leading experts and organisations in other sectors to enhance capacity and capability across the HP sport system. In leveraging the respected place elite sport holds in Australian life, NSOs and state academies and state institutes of sport can tailor approaches modelled on demonstrated track records in other industries.

## ADOPT PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND MEASURES

Embrace a 'professional' mentality that recognises the adage, 'you cannot manage what you cannot measure'. In adopting best practice models from professional sectors, HP sport introduce wellbeing KPIs in the interests of benchmarking and tracking wellbeing outcomes. Role-responsibility and accountability is clear.

## MAKE AW&E SYNONYMOUS WITH HP SPORT

Consistently emphasise the many ways in which strong wellbeing offerings support excellent HP outcomes. Making AW&E initiatives both felt and core to HP sport has strong potential to combat 'have vs have not' perceptions natural in so diverse a sector, but not necessarily inevitable.

# WELLBEING FOCUS AREAS



# MENTAL HEALTH

Research indicates 1 in 5 Australians experience a mental illness in any given year (2007 ABS). By comparison, the AIS's 2018 Mental Health Audit indicated 1 in 3 athletes were experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression that would typically require professional care.

**Society's increased engagement with poor mental health is reflected in the HP sport system, with 73% rating it as a top priority.**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 32% of the support network believes their NSO is investing in their mental health   | 23% of athletes feel they do not have a support network they can rely on |
| 39% of athletes do not believe their NSO is investing enough in their mental health | 75% of the system agrees that a 'win at all costs' culture still exists  |

## ATTRIBUTED TRIGGERS OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

|                      |                      |                      |               |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Exiting HP           | Performance anxiety  | Feeling 'disposable' | Non-selection |
| Post-competition low | Injury and isolation | Financial stress     | Bullying      |

Stakeholders generally acknowledge progress in the sector's approach to mental health, with many regarding the Mental Health Referral Network and appointment of AW&E managers in a positive light. At the same time, a picture emerged of a HP sport system that exhibits six characteristics with direct implications for progressing mental health.

## RECURRING THEMES

### THE SYSTEM IS REACTIVE

53% of athletes and 59% of support network respondents consider the system to be reactive and driven by crisis. Preventive measures that are in place are used sporadically and often regarded as unfit for purpose when analysing mental health wellbeing, and actioning possible warning signs.

**We don't have tools to recognise problems before they manifest.**

### THE SYSTEM IS INCONSISTENT

Significant disparity was reported around NSO, as well as National Institute Network (NIN), approach and capacity to address mental health, with examples of sports that have no discernible process outside of documenting (but not actioning) key data points. Other sports are proactively developing athlete-focused policies and procedures, such as identifying high-stress 'inflection points' in the training and competition calendar, and providing targeted support (online psychology access, for example)

**[Every NSO is different,] so it's a patchy approach.**

### INSUFFICIENT RESOURCES

While 61% of athletes believe their sport invests in their mental health, only 32% of the support network agrees. Coaches in particular are a cohort facing pressures on multiple fronts: the emotional burden of looking after multiple athletes, often pastorally; the risk of burnout that comes with working long, unscheduled hours; lack of support servicing, especially relative to that received by the athletes in their care; concerns about procedural fairness (for instance, when accusations of bullying are made against them); and lack of recognition for the role they play in performance.

**The coach was undergoing significant mental health issues and the first time this was known was when he resigned [with] severe depression.**

## CONFIDENTIALITY CONCERNS

As a system, HP sport appears conflicted about the relative merits of transparency vs confidentiality when it comes to mental health. This confusion is reflected in athlete uncertainty about which conversations are confidential and which are not — a situation compounded by the involvement of multiple types of psychologist in the athlete's daily training environment [DTE] [clinical vs performance]. Given that some stakeholders reported a sense of disappointment with the way survey results have been managed in the past [confrontational instead of constructive], the imperative to articulate and safeguard confidentiality measures appears high. It also adds context to the need for (and benefits of) defining very clearly the AW&E manager's role from the outset.

**I told the team psych some of the difficulties I was having, then the coach used those in a training session to prove there was a problem. It was obvious they had been told.**

## STIGMA

Elite athletes remain reluctant to disclose issues that make them appear less than 'perfect'. This is particularly true in the case of (disclosing to) HP staff with selection duties. More broadly, many young HP athletes are very open about having a 'mental health conversation' in theory, but in practice struggle to frame 'an injury that can't be seen' in discussion with the coach — a figure they invest much time and effort to convince of their capabilities. To overcome this, coach buy-in around the importance of mental health support needs to be continuous and conspicuous to challenge the status quo.

**We have a wellbeing support person, but the athletes aren't going to utilise the service if there's a fear of being seen.**

## CAPABILITY GAPS

68% of the system agreed with the statement, 'I would feel confident in the steps to take in a crisis situation if someone in the system came to me for help.'

Although this is encouraging in its own right, respondents often became vague when asked to elucidate the steps in question, and NSOs have generally been inclined to highlight acute mental health as a gap in capability.

**This is not sports expertise! We need clearer guidelines as to what HP should do with acute mental health issues.**

# FORWARD CONSIDERATIONS

## INVEST IN MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

- Provide support network with education about the performance benefits of holistic approaches to wellbeing that accord equal importance to physical and psychological concerns.
- Expand acute mental health training currently offered around prevention, intervention, management, and assistance to build confidence across HP sport. In delivering the Mental Health in Sport Workshops (AIS) courses widely, complement and contrast with messaging around the (non-acute) terms of the MHRN.

## PROACTIVE MENTAL HEALTH MONITORING

- Assess the effectiveness of current monitoring platforms in capturing and reporting a fully comprehensive definition of wellbeing, one that encompasses both mental and emotional health. In respect of identified gaps, explore avenues to broaden the scope of monitoring and customise operations to deliver fit-for-purpose.
- Research mental health screening processes for elite athletes (such as those trialled by professional Australian sports partnering with Orygen) to be more proactive.

## CLARIFY CONFIDENTIALITY POLICES AND PROCESSES

- Foster trust by clarifying the relative roles and responsibilities of psychologists and AW&E managers in DOC/wellbeing matters, including clear guidelines about what information is embargoed and avenues for reporting inappropriate disclosures.
- When initiating stakeholder surveys, consider how to best administer processes and confidentially manage results in order to promote candour of response and counteract perceptions role-confusion or conflict of interest.
- Re MHRN, challenge lingering misapprehensions that athletes must be referred by coaches; emphasise the strict confidentiality ensured by its process.

## RENEW SUPPORT FOR HP COACHES

- Re MHRN, emphasise the broadening of access to HP coaches to acknowledge their importance and at-risk status.
- Consider challenges facing HP coaches. Support their wellbeing in the first instance while improving the 'buy-in' factor of this crucial HP cohort.

# CULTURE MATTERS

**A perception exists that 'culture' has become a buzz word in the system, a term over-used but often misunderstood.** At the same time, around half of respondents believe culture is a priority for their NSO (or NIN) and that clarity in cultural values is exhibited.

Implied in many responses was a conviction that an organisation's cultural fabric is not something to be constantly workshopped; rather, it is a long-term commitment to values that are known and upheld across appointments. Over half (57%) of athletes agreed that a change in culture occurs whenever there is a change of coach or leadership.

**Commonly cited as an impediment to wellbeing was a lack of professionalism in basic administrative matters in HP sport.**

## SIGNIFICANT EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS

|                      |                      |                       |                  |
|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| CEO & EXEC BUY-IN    | NSO INTERNAL SURVEYS | PUBLICLY UNITED FRONT | AW&E MANAGERS    |
| GENUINE CONSULTATION | EXPERT ENGAGEMENTS   | WORKSHOPPING VALUES   | COACHES WHO CARE |

## WORKSHOP FATIGUE

**Only 37% of athletes agree that workshops that involve developing cultural values have strong outcomes**

## RECURRING THEMES

### POWER IMBALANCE

The review detailed a 'coach is king' culture prevailing in some sports, with negative wellbeing consequences such as favouritism, unequal treatment, and/or communication breakdown. This perception may also apply if a powerful athlete figure or other HP staff are not managed well. One corollary of 'coach is king' is the absence of an embedded culture that survives after individuals leave and provides clear cultural standards for their successors.

### HAPHAZARD & INEFFICIENT

Athletes characterise administration in HP sport negatively, pointing to a lack of documented processes, useful resources, and established protocols. Stakeholders attribute this to under-resourcing, and highlight ad hoc 'case-by-case' reactions as an ongoing effect.

**I'm convinced everyone is working on lots of different things that overlap. We're not talking.**

### INERTIA

HP coaches typically bring decades' worth of experience and expertise on the technical side, but often with little exposure to 'soft skill' training that can modulate dated values or provide strong DOC/wellbeing care during times of heightened stress or vulnerability.

**Senior staff don't always understand why cultural values are relevant.**

## HONESTY

Some athletes discussed the experience of being confused by their NSO, NIN, coaches, or support network staff, especially around issues of relative standing, selection likelihood, and/or funding. The experience of being adversely 'managed' in such a way can have a serious long-term negative impact on wellbeing outcomes, while also hurting retention rates and poisoning legacy culture.

**No trust at all.**

**Lied to.**

## OVERSIGHT

While athletes have little interest in 'a new culture per Olympic cycle', the appetite for actual monitoring is robust.

**We always talk about culture — it's done to death! It's lost its purpose, just ticking a box. It's supposed to be about behaviour.**

# FORWARD CONSIDERATIONS

## BE MINDFUL OF CULTURE FATIGUE

- Recognise that while inductions, workshops, and overt conversations about culture are essential, NSOs and NIN to guard against exhausting the audience and relegating culture to a buzz word. The true currency of cultural progress lies in day-to-day conduct and behaviour.
- NSOs and NIN recognise that while their organisation's cultural fabric can be compromised in a moment, creating a vibrant, positive, self-regulating wellbeing culture takes place only in the longer term, over years and multiple cycles.

## FOCUS ON TANGIBILITY

- NSOs and NIN invest time in identifying organisational attributes that constitute a successful culture, recognising that culture, wellbeing, and optimum performance are inextricably related.
- Draw a clear line of sight between stated cultural values and the associated policies and procedures that reflect those values in real terms. Stakeholders can discern a basic continuity between the language in which NSOs and NIN frame cultural considerations and the tangible experience of belonging to a HP program.

## CONDUCT STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

- Promote transparency and accountability by attributing clear role responsibility for cultural performance. Implied in this process is a commitment to benchmarking and monitoring progress over time.
- NSOs and NIN deliver educational and/or communication pieces about cultural standards (including opportunities to upskill stakeholders' expertise) that are interactive and engaging, in line with best practice from professional sectors.

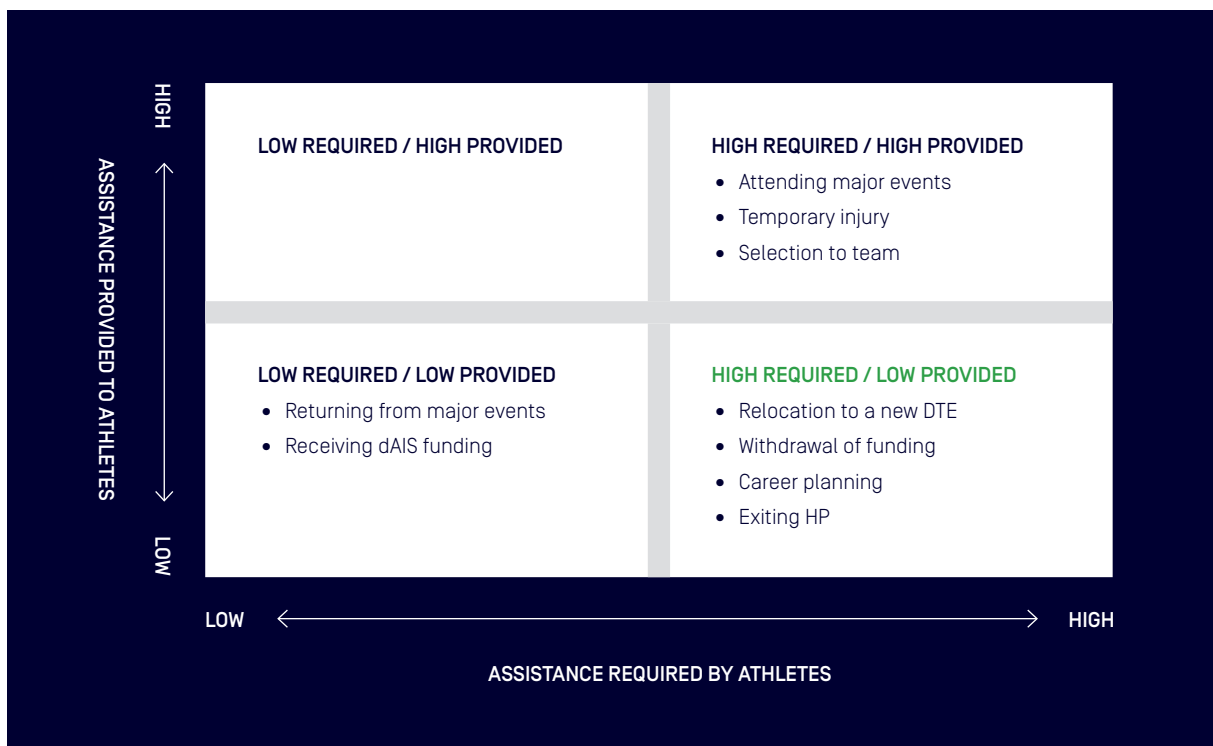
# TRANSITIONS

'Transitions' encompasses four distinct phases of a HP career: induction; movement between levels and/or institutional bodies; the ongoing process of post-HP planning, including career and education (C&E) development; and the experience of exiting HP (whether through injury, non-selection, or retirement).

Most stakeholders ventured that NSOs play a relatively limited role in HP induction, as opposed to the induction provided by the NIN. In addition, perceived gaps in key AW&E information areas persist. More positively, gaps in induction are generally not considered to be complicated by contradictory information across service providers.

|  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p><b>INDUCTION</b></p> <p>Only 38% of athletes believe they were provided adequate information by NSO</p> | <p><b>BETWEEN LEVELS</b></p> <p>87% of athletes report no clear conflict between NSO and NIN induction</p> | <p><b>C&amp;E DEVELOPMENT</b></p> <p>Only 35% of athletes have been given dedicated time to pursue C&amp;E activities</p> | <p><b>EXITING HP</b></p> <p>Lowest system satisfaction level of any wellbeing aspect of HP at 23%</p> |
|--|--|---|---|

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE FOR ATHLETES WAS GRAPHED ON A PAIR OF INDEXES, ASSISTANCE REQUIRED VS ASSISTANCE PROVIDED



FOUR CLEAR PRIORITIES WERE IDENTIFIED IN THE PROBLEMATIC ZONE OF HIGH ASSISTANCE REQUIRED BUT LOW ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

|                                |                              |                        |                                 |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <p>RELOCATION TO A NEW DTE</p> | <p>WITHDRAWAL OF FUNDING</p> | <p>CAREER PLANNING</p> | <p>EXITING HIGH PERFORMANCE</p> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|



## RECURRING THEMES

### RELOCATION SUPPORT

The incidence of young people moving interstate to pursue HP careers highlights the gap of relocation support, given the abrupt loss of family and friend networks they experience. The stress of these scenarios is felt by support network staff who witness the isolation of young athletes and feel conflicted about the extent and manner of pastoral care they should extend.

**There is almost no process at all, you just turn up and find your way ... there's a lack of understanding of the mental strain.**

### LACK OF (GENUINE) CAREER AND EDUCATION SUPPORT

69% of athletes report being encouraged to develop C&E interests alongside HP careers. This evidence of progress is undermined by a lack of practical follow-up in the HP daily training environment: only 35% of athletes report that their coaches or sport dedicates time to C&E development.

**I felt isolated for wanting more than just the sport.**

### CONFUSION: POST-EXIT CARE

For many, exiting HP sport involves a grieving process. As well as the preparation that comes from sustained C&E investment, adjusting well during this final transition is greatly aided by empathic exit protocols and a clear communication of the post-HP support that individuals can expect, including details of access and duration.

**If all your life you have only known that sport, you have nowhere to go — the downfall is huge.**

## FORWARD CONSIDERATIONS

### PREPARE HP INDUCTION AND RELOCATION SUPPORT

NSOs and NIN align HP induction covering all aspects of AW&E servicing. HP inductions integrate with and form an important aspect of a comprehensive Relocation Support policy.

### SCHEDULED TIME FOR C&E RESPECTED

Dedicate windows in training and competition timetables in order that athletes can effectively invest in planning for life after sport via C&E pathways. Coaches and HP staff support the development of DTE schedules that acknowledge training and recovery periods alongside the need for personal and professional development.

### CONDUCT FUNDING CONVERSATIONS

NSOs and NIN co-develop guidelines, in consultation with athletes, for communicating funding decisions. These guidelines educate for empathy.

### SUPPORT WHEN EXITING HP

NSOs and NIN align on guidelines, in consultation with athletes, for exiting an individual from HP sport. These guidelines educate for empathy, and must integrate with detailed NSO policy about post-HP services available to athletes, including clear timeframes.

# INJURY MANAGEMENT

The Australian HP sport sector lays claim to exceptional levels of medical care for the physical rehabilitation of elite athletes, for whom the issue ranks as a high priority.

While the HP sport system meets the most immediate and obvious wellbeing responsibilities to injured athletes to a very high standard, the AW&E aspects of what is an extremely stressful aspect of HP sport are less fully developed. A recurring motif was that while 'the steps for physical recovery couldn't be clearer — you are instantly connected to a range of medical services — I don't remember anything at all for wellbeing'.

|  |   |           |
|--|---|-----------|
| Satisfaction with physical IM extremely high across system           | <i>'I have been supported by my sport in times of physical injury'</i>            | 81% AGREE |
| Athlete wellbeing is not specifically tracked during recovery phases | <i>'When I have been injured, I have felt isolated and removed from my sport'</i> | 50% AGREE |

## RECURRING THEMES

### ISOLATION AND MONITORING

Although system encouragement for HP athletes to stay involved with the system while injured is commonplace (72%), the practicalities of achieving it are challenging. Loss of connection to coaches can be particularly acute for athletes, whose propensity to feel forgotten about or cast aside by this major figure in their life is high.

**There's no encouragement, it's fully down to the individual. That's a huge hurdle when you're already depressed.**

**Being injured is isolating. You only ever receive medical calls; no one called to see how I was doing or if I was OK.**

### PREMATURE RETURN

Undue (external) pressure to return from injury is considered less common than fear to disclose (25% vs 49%), but still significant enough to prompt concern. Both scenarios have a corrosive effect on trust and open communication.

**I knew it was too soon, but I just had to get back. Had I had the guarantee of a contract next year, I would have taken the recovery much slower.**

### SYSTEM MISALIGNMENT

Athletes can be subject to conflicting instructions during recovery, with medical staff at odds with coaches (knowingly or otherwise) about appropriate DOC responses. Confidentiality provisions around mental health can complicate this scenario still further, with different support network staff privy to different levels of detail.

### RELUCTANCE TO DISCLOSE

Half of those surveyed agree it is common for athletes to hide injury from coaches and/or medical staff to avoid non-selection. Obviously, this fear to disclose can also manifest as a lack of candour about actual vs reported recovery progress, placing the athlete in positions of unnecessary physical risk.

### TRANSPARENCY

Interview feedback occasionally notes failures around documentation and/or knowledge transfer relating to injury management. Lack of alignment might occur between care providers (NSO to NIN or medical practitioner) or can manifest as failure to comprehensively brief athletes about the full effects of medication/supplementation.

## **FORWARD CONSIDERATIONS**

### **OFFICIALISE WELLBEING IN IM PLANNING**

Ensure injury management plans incorporate a wellbeing component that elevates this aspect of rehabilitation to a level of official and systemic notice. Planning around maintaining wellbeing must involve opportunities to stay connected with the DTE, and scheduled support from the AW&E manager.

### **FOCUS ON THE MENTAL ASPECTS OF IM**

Educate athletes about the non-physical variables and dynamics that can influence recovery. For serious and/or long-term injury, empowering athletes to prioritise self-care to counteract the impulse to return prematurely is backed by psychological input to assess readiness to return.

### **PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE DOCUMENTATION TO THE ATHLETE AT EVERY STEP**

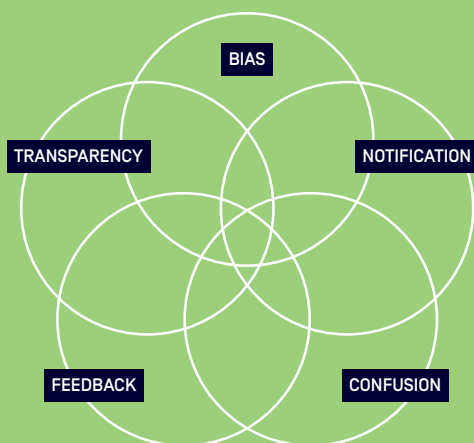
Encourage athletes to document their injury and rehabilitation themselves, in a way that complements the formal information transfer that occurs between medical practitioners and the HP sport system. Tasking injured athletes to remain fully briefed about all aspects of their injury and rehabilitation enhances their sense of active participation in the process, and helps to eliminate confusion and inefficiency in instances of system misalignment.

# SELECTION

Selection, in particular non-selection, is a major inflection point in the life of an elite athlete, and a prominent potential trigger for mental health stress. Feelings of shock, grief, worthlessness, and loss of identity are all commonly reported by athletes who experience non-selection, particularly those who feel their non-selection is exacerbated by a complex of both performance and other factors.

## NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES OF NON-SELECTION WERE REPORTED TO RESULT FROM A MIX OF FIVE OFTEN INTER-RELATED SCENARIOS OR CIRCUMSTANCES

Non-selection presents NSOs and NIN with communication measures to ameliorate athletes' experience of this difficult aspect of HP sport.



### PERCEPTION OF BIAS

Only **29%** of athletes view their sport's HP selection system as fair

### PERCEPTION OF NON-TRANSPARENCY

Only **17%** of athletes view the process as clear

**48%** are unclear about who is on their sport's selection committee

### NEGATIVE NOTIFICATION EXPERIENCE

Only **28%** of athletes say notification is delivered considerably

### ABSENCE OF FEEDBACK

Only **24%** of athletes receive adequate constructive feedback

### LACK OF UNDERSTANDING ABOUT PROCESS

**41%** of athletes feel unclear about the appeals process

- *It's hard — the same coach who has got you to this point won't even look you in the eye when you're trying out. There is so much riding on this moment, and yet in that moment all support is lost.*
- *Athletes are often blindsided by non-selection as they have received little feedback on performance up until [that] point.*
- *Non-selection can be delivered in such a brutal way.*
- *Feedback is very generic and not specific to the athlete.*
- *You're sitting there not knowing what's happening... Only at the end do you realise your name hasn't been called.*

## RECURRING THEMES

### COMPLEX OF COMMUNICATION MEASURES

While each sport's approach is rightly informed by dynamics specific to it, respondents consistently identified four organisational behaviours with significant scope to equip athletes with the knowledge, time, and strategies to prepare for all selection scenarios and secure the best possible wellbeing outcomes.

- Consult with athletes to create detailed notification guidelines and protocols
- Develop notification guidelines to specify timeframes to allow for advance planning (including support networks)
- Provide athletes with honest and regular feedback about performance and relative standing
- Educate athletes about AW&E support for non-selected athletes, including avenues of appeal and next steps

## FORWARD CONSIDERATIONS

### CONSULT ON NOTIFICATION

Consult with athletes to create detailed guidelines that set out preferred 'hows and whens' of notification.

### PROVIDE ADVANCE NOTICE

Communicate to athletes the likely timeframes and notification windows that will apply in the calendar.

### CLARIFY RELATIVE STANDING

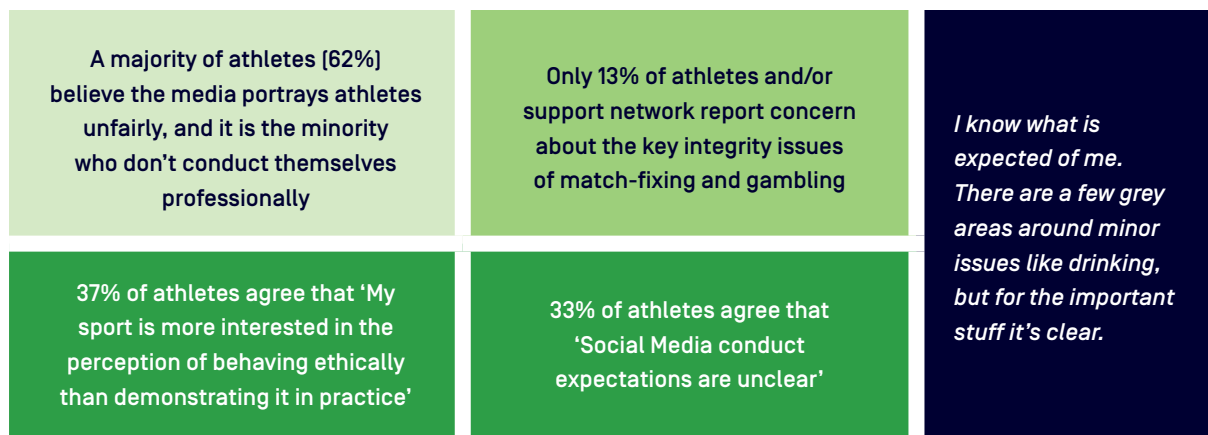
Provide athletes with honest, regular feedback about relative standing or position.

### EDUCATE ATHLETES ABOUT NEXT STEPS

Educate athletes about AW&E support for non-selected athletes, next steps, and any avenues and/or processes of appeal.

# CONDUCT & INTEGRITY

Interviewees and survey respondents expressed strong levels of satisfaction with most major aspects of conduct and integrity in HP sport. Written codes of conduct establish clear minimum standards, and these are underwritten by systemic rigour in matters of documentation, accreditation, and anti-doping education.



## COMMONLY REQUESTED TOPIC AREAS FOR SUPPORT



## RECURRING THEMES

### POLICY DOCUMENTS

Some NSO and NIN policy documents were criticised on the basis of excessive length and complexity. It was felt that shifting to a more accessible and target-relevant document framework may promote greater levels of understanding and policy abidance.

**I'm not a fan of the 50-page policy...**

### LOW COMPLIANCE FOR 'NON-ESSENTIALS'

Although adherence to NSO and NIN policy is exceptionally strong around major compliance issues, the same is thought to be less true regarding minor infractions or the taking of 'shortcuts' that have a tendency to go unchallenged and unaccounted. Over time this has a creeping potential to impart deleterious effects on culture.

**Bury your head in the sand, sweep it under the rug.**

### CONFIDENTIALITY STANDARDS

Disappointments exist around the (mis-)use of feedback given in expectation of confidentiality. To protect the good faith of athletes, the use of independent third parties to collect and de-identify data would be positively viewed.

**Has taken a lot of work to rebuild trust.**

### **FAILURE TO REPORT ISSUES**

Some athletes and support network staff were unsure about the appropriate reporting process for misconduct. A smaller number of often younger athletes were reluctant to report concerns, fearing repercussions — at selection time, for example. This cohort regularly share their concerns with parents or family members, urging them to say nothing for fear of being labelled 'troublemakers'.

### **LOW ENGAGEMENT**

Stakeholders argued that educational briefings on conduct and integrity can benefit from innovative delivery to combat workshop fatigue. Some suggested using apps or digital solutions to deliver interactive or experiential learning.

## **FORWARD CONSIDERATIONS**

### **REFRESH THE APPROACH TO C&I COMMUNICATION**

NSOs and NIN prioritise a fresh approach to their conduct and integrity service offer:

- Policy promulgation targets optimum moments for induction activities. Induction activities incorporate online or app-based testing that requires stakeholders to earn a pass mark or otherwise demonstrate knowledge.
- Review policies. Ensure communications are concise and clear. In addition to media training opportunities, stakeholders are guided about social media use, travel policy guidelines, and other requested topics.
- In addition to accessible printed and/or digital resources, time is allocated for group-based experiential learning sessions that test understanding and align values. Mentors from alumni ranks are invited to take part in scenario-based workshopping.

### **ENSURE APPROPRIATE COMPLIANCE WITH POLICY PRINCIPLES**

Without becoming a tick-a-box exercise, ensure that standards are maintained, and transparency exists in the instances of policy non-compliance. NSO and NIN leaders commit to recognising the value of adherence to professional standards in helping to create and maintain a positive, vibrant, and self-regulating wellbeing culture.

### **ENSURE ETHICS AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA COLLECTION**

NSOs and NIN commit to rigour and transparency about collecting feedback and data from stakeholders. Where confidentiality is a condition of collection, processes are observed that protect this condition strictly. Ethical collection of feedback to extend to confidential reporting mechanisms, about which all stakeholders are briefed during induction phases.

# EQUALITY & INCLUSION

Responses indicate a conviction across HP sport that the system is exhibiting genuine societal leadership with respect to equality and inclusion. Robust levels of satisfaction (71%) in this prominent and rapidly evolving area do not mutually exclude a simultaneous and commonly expressed belief that there is still a long way to go.

The conversation around equality and inclusion centred on gender issues, homophobia, racism, and advancing opportunities for stakeholders in Paralympian HP programs. Regarding the latter, instances of integration between Able and Para cohorts (in the DTE where possible, or in engagement or competition settings where possible) were reported to have inordinately positive and lasting benefits.

## HP PARA CONCERNS

*There are critical services provided to Able-bodied that Para-athletes in the same sport cannot access.  
[When the sport failed to include Para in a sponsorship deal] it's more than an oversight, it shows they are not thinking about Para.*

## OTHER E&I ISSUES

**60% of athletes agree that there is limited education around supporting LGBTIQ members of HP sport  
Only 41% of support network agrees that 'male and female support staff are treated equally'**

## RECURRING THEMES

### ABLE AND PARA

The kind of integration that occurs when Able and Para events are held in the same location in a concentrated period has reportedly resulted in cultural shifts to the effect that 'we are all one team'.

While emulating this effect in the DTE on a regular basis is not always possible, stakeholders feel that NSOs committed to heightened equality and inclusion outcomes can explore opportunities for their two HP cohorts to integrate as regularly as practicable.

### WOMEN'S HEALTH

Perhaps as a function of sport's historical roots, women's health is still being identified as a system-wide information and education gap.

### GENDER EQUALITY

A persistent discrepancy between treatment of male and female cohorts continues to be seen in some sports, with women in HP sport held to higher standards of behaviour. The under-representation of women in senior and/or leadership roles is noted, as is the relative likelihood of female athletes to be bullied (57% vs 30% for male athletes).

### LGBTIQ

While traditional prejudices are dissipating, the reflexive use of disparaging homophobic slurs continues in some DTEs. Few stakeholders claimed to be aware of inclusion policies or codes of conduct specific to LGBTIQ.



## FORWARD CONSIDERATIONS

### CONSIDER AW&E SERVICE EQUALITY

In addition to maximising integration opportunities to unite Able and Para cohorts behind a shared identity, explore an 'equality of AW&E service' commitment that tackles perceptions that Para is a lesser priority.

### PROVIDE WOMEN'S HEALTH EDUCATION

Provide system-wide education pieces that inform athletes and support network about the relationship between women's health and HP in identified contexts: body image, weight gain, menstruation, contraception, pregnancy, etc. Target induction phases to empower athletes to make informed choices at every stage of their HP journey.

### REQUIRE ZERO TOLERANCE IN IDENTIFIED RISK AREAS

Revise policy materials to expressly include major equality and inclusion 'risk areas'. The absence of these materials compromises organisational readiness to effect positive change and apply rigour in matters of accountability.

# BULLYING

As a term, bullying encompasses everything from abusive or threatening language, passive aggressive and/or psychological aggressions, and physical confrontation. Almost half (46%) of all HP respondents reported some experience of being bullied in HP sport at some point in time.

Senior NSO and HP stakeholders warned that even isolated instances of bullying can cause inordinate damage to the reputation, performance, and culture of any organisation, particularly in a 'social media age'. In this respect, bullying has much in common with the 'cultural' WFAs already discussed: Culture Matters, Conduct & Integrity, and Equality & Inclusion.

**66% of athletes reported a belief that negative consequences would 'likely' result from reporting a bully.**

## BREAKDOWN OF BULLYING BY FREQUENCY AND INTENTIONALITY

| HIGH FREQUENCY / INTENTIONAL   | LOW FREQUENCY / INTENTIONAL  | HIGH FREQUENCY / UNINTENTIONAL   |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal personal attacks</li> <li>• Exclusion, singling out</li> <li>• Altering times to obstruct study</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threats of violence</li> <li>• Punitive non-selection</li> <li>• Playing athletes against each other</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coarse language</li> <li>• Shouting</li> <li>• Comments about weight</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>I wouldn't speak up about bullying if it involved a senior athlete bullying someone else. It could damage my career.</i></p>                         | <p><i>If they can't handle criticism, are they mentally strong enough?</i></p>   | <p><i>[The coach] would say, 'How are you going to carry all that food?'</i></p>   |

## COMPLICATING FACTORS: 'BADGE OF PRIDE' AND ISSUE OF SUBJECTIVITY

Bullying occupies an equivocal place in the minds of stakeholders, who tend to accept a certain level of coach-led robustness as par for the course in HP sport, and one of its defining characteristics. This reflects the complex and subjective nature of the issue: one person's bullying is another's motivational tactic, and respondents acknowledge that the line can be a thin one.

The matter is further complicated if/when HP coaches from overseas bring a range of different cultural backgrounds and attitudes into the DTE, often with free rein 'to do things their way' in the pursuit of improved performance outcomes.

## RECURRING THEMES

### FEAR TO REPORT

Fear of repercussion for reporting bullying is widespread in HP sport. Perceived consequences can range from ostracism in the DTE to de-funding or de-selection; anxieties intensify where coaches double as selection panel members. A lack of confidential avenues for reporting perpetuates deep scepticism that anonymity in these matters will be respected.

### DISINCLINATION TO ACT

Fear to report dovetails with a pervasive doubt that NSOs and NIN are adequately equipped or inclined to pursue a rigorous investigations process. Education around what bullying entails and how it should be tackled is regarded as a gap.

## COACH WELFARE

Coach wellbeing during times of dispute is an under-appreciated aspect of wellbeing in HP sport. Coaches accused of bullying, or of failing to police against a toxic culture in the DTE, can quickly find themselves emotionally and professionally isolated. Many coaches and support staff pointed out the disjunction between being responsible for eliminating bullying, but not having the resources, protocols, or authority required to acquit the task properly.

**It is a risk to my wellbeing [and reputation] if there was a bullying issue. It's likely that parents go to the press and it would blow out of control.**

## FORWARD CONSIDERATIONS

### ENSURE POLICIES REFLECT AND REINFORCE CULTURE

- Establish clear 'red lines' and minimum standards using plain language and detailed scenarios to address the complex and subjective nature of bullying.
- As part of its policy offering, NSOs and NIN establish clear and confidential independent mechanisms to address matters early.

### TARGET HP INDUCTION AS CRITICAL

Brief incoming athletes and staff about NSO and NIN codes of conduct and anti-bullying requirements.

### SUPPORT COACHES DURING DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Acknowledge coaches are highly stress- and isolation-prone when bullying accusations arise, and respond with appropriate support. Perceptions of coaches as all-powerful figures mask their vulnerability during times of dispute, particularly when media attention intensifies.

# SUMMARIES

## ATHLETE WELLBEING & ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES MAPPED AGAINST REVIEW FINDINGS

The AIS is committed to leading and supporting the high performance sport system in pursuit of a fully realised wellbeing culture across HP. **While system challenges, both cultural and structural, require prolonged engagement, AW&E initiatives are already beginning to address the review's findings.**

The AIS is pursuing a broad-based strategy to effect change on multiple fronts: though the following tables summarise applied measures being taken by its Athlete Wellbeing & Engagement team, this by no means represents an exhaustive index of policy responses currently being undertaken or developed by the AIS with the wider NIN.



## SYSTEM OVERVIEW

### KEY FINDINGS

Unstructured approach: an ongoing need for central strategic forum to coordinate efforts, advertise progress, and establish system transparency.

Pre-professional mentality: persistent conceptions that HP athletes are not employees, meaning that lesser standards apply.

### AW&E OUTLOOK

Since the advent of AW&E in the second half of 2018 (as an evolution of the former Personal Excellence and Athlete Career & Education programs), key initiatives have been developed in close consultation with the HP system and other areas of the AIS:

- The recruitment of **AW&E managers** into 90%+ of HP-system NSOs establishes an unambiguous AW&E touchpoint within NSOs and DTEs. These roles report directly to the HPD or CEO in order to be able to impact the HP culture. The heightened presence of AW&E programs and personnel in the DTE is essential to embedding wellbeing culture as an 'inherent aspect of high performance', while also helping ensure that AW&E initiatives are not subject to reflexive de-prioritisation when HP demands intensify.
- This process is being complemented by the creation of the **AW&E National Network** to facilitate direct knowledge transfer, and coordinate regular forums to share best practice principles and methods. The simultaneous development of **AW&E Best Practice Guidelines for Sports** is addressing identified knowledge gaps and policy vacuums in a manner that will accommodate HP-wide conversations, allowing a centralised body of knowledge to evolve and grow. The delivery of tailored **AW&E NSO Frameworks** for each NSO HP program, developed via intensive focus group consultation, also establishes a knowledge base for ongoing reference and action. And the implementation of an **Annual Wellbeing Culture Check** will help provide benchmarking and system accountability.

In combination, these initiatives represent a unprecedentedly structured approach to AW&E that eliminates the sectoral tendency to start over with new initiatives rather than share/consolidate from within the system.

## MENTAL HEALTH

### KEY FINDING

Mental health support is the HP system's strongest demand/requirement.

### AW&E OUTLOOK

In 2019 the AIS launched the **Mental Health Referral Network (MHRN)**, providing stakeholders in HP with hotline access to an experienced mental health practitioner. This service is free-of-charge to the user, and access is completely confidential (including from the stakeholder's NSO). MHRN access was expanded in early 2020 to include HP coaches in recognition of the multifaceted pressures faced by this cohort.

In the second half of 2019 the AIS commenced with delivery of **AIS Mental Health Workshops**, customised in close consultation with NSOs to deliver key information and education to HP stakeholders around the early identification of mental health challenges and appropriate courses of action to be taken. In addition to redoubled focus on **Critical Incident Management Plan** education, these initiatives represent a system pivot towards 'proactivity instead of reactivity.'

The implicitly pastoral dimension AW&E roles is supported by **Best Practice Guidelines for AW&E Managers**, which impart procedural rigour around important issues of disclosure anonymity, confidentiality in data collection, and detailed role delineation for service providers in the DTE. In the interests of assuring NSO best-in-practice across the board, the capture and promulgation of key learnings around these and other mental health wellbeing issues constitute an ongoing **AW&E National Network** focus.

The AIS has worked with the NIN and NSOs to deliver a number of **AW&E Personal Development** offerings incorporating components of mental health wellness. These include: Athlete Wellbeing Toolkit, Personal Values Program, Developing a Growth Mindset, and Building Support Networks (Family & Friends).

## CULTURE MATTERS

### KEY FINDINGS

Culture is a buzzword, over-used but not always understood, and contributing to 'workshopping culture' fatigue

### AW&E OUTLOOK

AW&E has worked closely with NSOs to develop a tailored **AW&E NSO Framework** for every AW&E-supported HP sport. Developed out of confidential focus group data, Frameworks reflect stakeholder perceptions of wellbeing culture as it currently operates: what works well, and what can benefit from renewed focus. In addition to stipulating Priority Actions (including scheduled delivery), Frameworks foster an NSO-wide conversation that informs common understandings of what a positive HP wellbeing culture is and aspires to be. Updated **dAIS Funding Guidelines** and the upcoming **AIS Induction Project** will further assist NSOs in meeting administrative challenges in two high-priority contexts.

**AIS Annual Culture Checks** are a significant development in the evaluation of NSO cultures, allowing for systematic gaps analysis and benchmarking over time. Additionally, the **HP Wellbeing Deep Dive** service empowers NSOs to initiate, customise, and lead in their own cultural self-appraisal, strategising for sustained growth in this space. Typically proposed as a component of a revamped HP Induction process is **AW&E's Respectful Behaviours** education piece, concerned with the identification of risk areas and the establishment of minimum standards. All initiatives listed here have positive implications for 'culture matters' themes captured in the report: perceived power imbalances and communication shortfalls, revision of dated values systems, the need for 'culture continuity' and benchmarking.

## TRANSITIONS

### KEY FINDINGS

Transitions of high priority: relocation, loss of funding, career development, exiting HP.

### AW&E OUTLOOK

**AW&E managers** have a prominent role in AW&E service delivery around transitions into, through, and out of the high performance sport system, given their status as a key touchpoint for categorised athletes seeking information, clarification, or pastoral support. Specifically, their role may entail involvement in a transition-in process enhanced by the **AIS Induction Project** and **AIS Relocation Best Practice Guidelines**.

Supporting NSOs in HP Induction also involves briefings about: the **MHRN** and mental health literacy; the importance of supported career and education pathways, including integration with key **AW&E Career & Education** programs (including the Elite Athlete Education Network, the Career Practitioner Referral Network, and the EVOLVE program); the availability of Personal Development offerings including **AW&E Personal Development** programs, and targeted AW&E support during times of Non-selection or exit from HP.

Regarding Non-selection, **AIS Selection Communication Guidelines** inform the system's structured engagement with this crucial aspect of the HP experience, the AW&E significance of which has been consistently stressed in **AW&E NSO Frameworks**. Frameworks are also notable for the consistent Priority Actioning of **Individual Life Plans** for every HP athlete, ensuring that high performance objectives and schedules are incorporated alongside planning for whole-of-life considerations: career, work, study, family, and personal growth/wellness. All initiatives canvassed here, along with relevant others, align with the **AIS Transition Research Project** in demonstrating the AIS's commitment to supporting 'wellbeing-in-transition'.

## INJURY MANAGEMENT

### KEY FINDINGS

Although the steps for physical recovery are very clear, the explicit issue of 'wellbeing' is a continuing gap.

### AW&E OUTLOOK

**AW&E managers** are well placed to combat the system-wide prevalence of injured athletes experiencing 'loss of connection to the DTE' and, where appropriate, this added level of scheduled wellbeing monitoring is complemented by MHRN education. The AIS is currently undertaking a system-wide review of the **Athlete Monitoring System** to ensure it remains contemporary to the needs of HP athletes, and the incorporation of a 'dedicated wellbeing' tracking component is already being adopted by some NSOs while also being commonly recommended in **AW&E NSO Frameworks**. In addition, Frameworks typically Priority Action the adoption of evolved **HP Communication Guidelines** where communication issues are an identified gap. **Individual Life Plans** also shape as a prominent factor in the AW&E injury management conversation, in that they define and give structure to out-of-HP interests over a sustained period.

## SELECTION

### KEY FINDINGS

Non-selection amplified by unclear process, insensitive notification, perception of bias or non-transparency.

### AW&E OUTLOOK

**AW&E Selection Communication Guidelines** aid NSOs in the process of reviewing protocols for notifying HP athletes of Selection/Non-selection. Said guidelines stress the importance of protocols that are: the product of consultation with athletes; published; clear about timeframes in advance; clear about the specifics of notification; adhered to strictly; integrated with AW&E support (including MHRN); and forthcoming about next steps for Non-Selected athletes (including avenues of appeal if applicable). AW&E Selection Communication Guidelines integrate with **AW&E manager** participation and **MHRN** servicing to significantly enhance 'wellbeing awareness' in this undeniably fraught aspect of high performance. Crucially, their adoption promotes a program-wide understanding that Non-selection is 'not a moment, but a process' — one in which HP athletes themselves have a respected role in defining and evolving. **Individual Life Plans** impart structure, perspective, and whole-of-life context to conversations with Non-selected athletes.

## CONDUCT & INTEGRITY

### KEY FINDINGS

Although strong levels of satisfaction with the area was reported, areas for greater C&I support included: Media & Social Media, Leadership, Ethical decision-making, Help with becoming fully professional, Guidelines when travelling.

### AW&E OUTLOOK

In response to a range of identified needs — and in close alignment with five Strategic Responses that emerge from this review — the AIS is active in the development of detailed education pieces that articulate best practice principles for a growing number of high performance contexts: **Social Media Best Practice Principles**, for example. In addition to these, the AIS is supporting AW&E personnel at NSO level with **Best Practice Guidelines for AW&E managers** and will work closely with the new Sports Integrity Australia body to evolve wellbeing understandings in integrity matters.

## EQUALITY & INCLUSION

### KEY FINDINGS

Stakeholders recognise the role of high performance sport as a societal leader in championing equality and inclusion across key contexts such as race, gender, and LGBTIQ.

### AW&E OUTLOOK

**AW&E managers** enjoy strong opportunities for advancing cultures of inclusion in DTEs and across HP programs generally due to their ongoing 'pastoral touchpoint' role and capacity to share/transfer knowledge at all levels of NSO operations. Integration with **AW&E Personal Development** offerings or **AW&E Conduct & Professionalism** briefing resources shape as particularly strong avenues for fostering equality and inclusion in identified contexts/cohorts.

The Australian Sports Commission is promoting a range of programs to address the sectoral under-representation of women in positions of seniority and/or responsibility, and **AW&E NSO Frameworks** give Priority Action-status to **Women's Health** education pieces in instances of identified gaps. Identifying opportunities for greater integration between HP Able and HP Para cohorts in DTE and competition settings is also a recurring Framework consideration.

**Engagement** is a cornerstone of the new AW&E operating model, with the development of tailored engagement programs that align with individual athlete's values and interests, as well as the needs of the NSO and community.

## BULLYING

### KEY FINDINGS

Almost half of all HP respondents reported some experience of being bullied, and two-thirds of athletes feel that reporting an instance of bullying would come with adverse career consequences.

### AW&E OUTLOOK

An alignment of AIS/AW&E initiatives substantially amplify the sector's capability to detect for and strategise against the incidence of bullying in HP programs: **AIS Annual Culture Checks**, **AW&E HP Deep Dives**, **AW&E Respectful Behaviours**, and the presence of **AW&E managers** in the DTE. An essential complement to these is being developed in the form of **AW&E Behavioural Standards** to ensure NSOs are able to implement avenues for raising concerns that are safe, confidential, and promote constructive resolutions of matters before they deteriorate into a formal a Code of Conduct breach.





[AIS.gov.au](https://ais.gov.au)



[@theAIS](https://twitter.com/theAIS) [#theAIS](https://hashtag/theAIS)

Leverrier Street Bruce ACT 2617  
PO Box 176 Belconnen ACT 2616  
+61 2 6214 1111