



Game changer: a draft national sports injury data strategy

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Australia is a sporting nation and sport participation improves our health and wellbeing. But sports also brings with it a risk of injury which can lead to long periods of decreased participation and inactivity.

In 2019–20, about 52,000 Australians were admitted to hospital for sports injuries, but there is little or no national data on injuries that do not require hospital admission. Without good quality data, it is difficult to understand the positive effects of sports participation, the true risks of participation in community sport, or the effectiveness of injury prevention policies and programs.

The Australian Sports Commission commissioned the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to investigate the existing and potential data sources for sports injury. The aim is to develop a sports injury data collection – the National Sports Injury Data Asset (NSIDA) – that will:

- provide insight into the types and causes of sports injury in the community
- help sports bodies and their participants to understand where injury prevention programs are needed
- provide ongoing surveillance to monitor trends and evaluate injury prevention programs.

This paper is a summary of the *National sports injury data strategy* – a draft consultation report prepared by the AIHW that outlines how an NSIDA would be developed and operate. The improvements in data collection platforms, new government initiatives for injury prevention, and the forthcoming Brisbane 2032 Olympics make this an opportune time to invest in a national sports injury data collection.

As part of this project, the AIHW is talking with sports organisations, health-care providers, insurers and government agencies to understand what sports injury data is currently being collected. A new online sports injury data collection tool is being developed to fill a gap in community sports injury reporting.

Why do we need a national sport injury data asset?

The lack of national data on the extent and nature of sports injuries in Australia makes it difficult to formulate, prioritise and evaluate injury prevention initiatives.

Better sports injury data will help us to understand the impact and causes of sports injury, and improve injury prevention and management. This will benefit individuals, the sports sector, and the Australian health care system. Better evidence on the risks of sports injury and the benefits of injury prevention strategies will also help Australian's participate in sport with more confidence and for longer.

The collection of sports injury data from community sports organisations is a crucial part of the strategy. Players, parents, coaches and trainers will be able to quickly and easily record sports injuries using a new online reporting tool that will:

- provide data to the public, sports organisations and researchers so that the risks of participation are understood, and prevention programs can be prioritised
- help us to understand how prevention programs are working in community sports and whether changes are needed
- enable early detection of emerging issues and more rapid responses.

What have we discovered so far?

Over the past 20 years, there have been several efforts at national and state and territory levels to improve community sports injury data.

Previous government initiatives have identified a need for:

- more data on injuries, including less severe injuries and the causes of injury
- a lead agency to collaborate with health and sports sectors to collect data
- infrastructure support and training.

What data sources are available?

Sports injury information is currently collected by a variety of providers in different settings and for different purposes. These data sources are potential candidates for inclusion in the NSIDA.

Severe injury is usually treated in the hospital system, while less severe injuries are usually treated by physiotherapists, general practitioners, specialist outpatient clinics and other allied health professionals.

Data can also be sourced from sporting organisations that have data collections. Access to the data held by insurers may vary due to privacy and commercial-in-confidence concerns. Information on some injuries may also appear in more than one data source.

What are the limitations of current data sources?

Not all data sources include data on all types of injuries and several factors can influence data collection and its quality, including:

- the time available to record injury data
- sociocultural influences (for example, some cultures may see reporting injury as declaring a weakness)
- cost
- lack of knowledge or access to reporting systems
- poor formatting and coding.

Who have we spoken to?

The AIHW has met stakeholders from 45 organisations across health, government, industry, sporting and insurance sectors and conducted a stakeholder survey.

A number of themes emerged from these consultations, including:

- recognition of the benefits of existing mandatory sports injury reporting systems
- broad support for a national sports injury data asset
- limited data collection resources with many sporting organisations reluctant to place additional demands on the time of their mostly volunteer workforce
- a belief that a national data asset should:
 - be managed independently of the sport
 - be enduring
 - be tailored to the targeted population and sport (where possible)
 - incorporate easy to use tools for community reporting
 - be accessible on a mobile phone (to allow it to be used at sports facilities)
 - be of value to users themselves
 - be championed and promoted to encourage injury reporting.

How Surf Life Saving Australia used data to reduce injuries

Surf Life Saving (SLS) has a custom integrated database, SurfGuard that includes an incident report database with up to 17 years of data. SurfGuard captures data on drownings, deaths, resuscitations, major first aid incidents, and injuries sustained by SLS members.

This data helped SLS to research the causes of inflatable rescue boat (IRB) injuries:

“We had a situation where the number of IRB injuries during training was increasing and this was impacting on insurance claims. We used the database to identify that these were mainly knee and ankle injuries and, based on this, worked with Charles Sturt University, who redesigned where the IRB foot straps were placed. We sourced a safety grant which enabled us to change the strap location on the vessel and fund the replacement of all the straps within our fleet of IRBs. This significantly reduced injuries and ensured insurance premiums remained within budget guidelines.” (SLS Australia, personal communication, July 2021.)

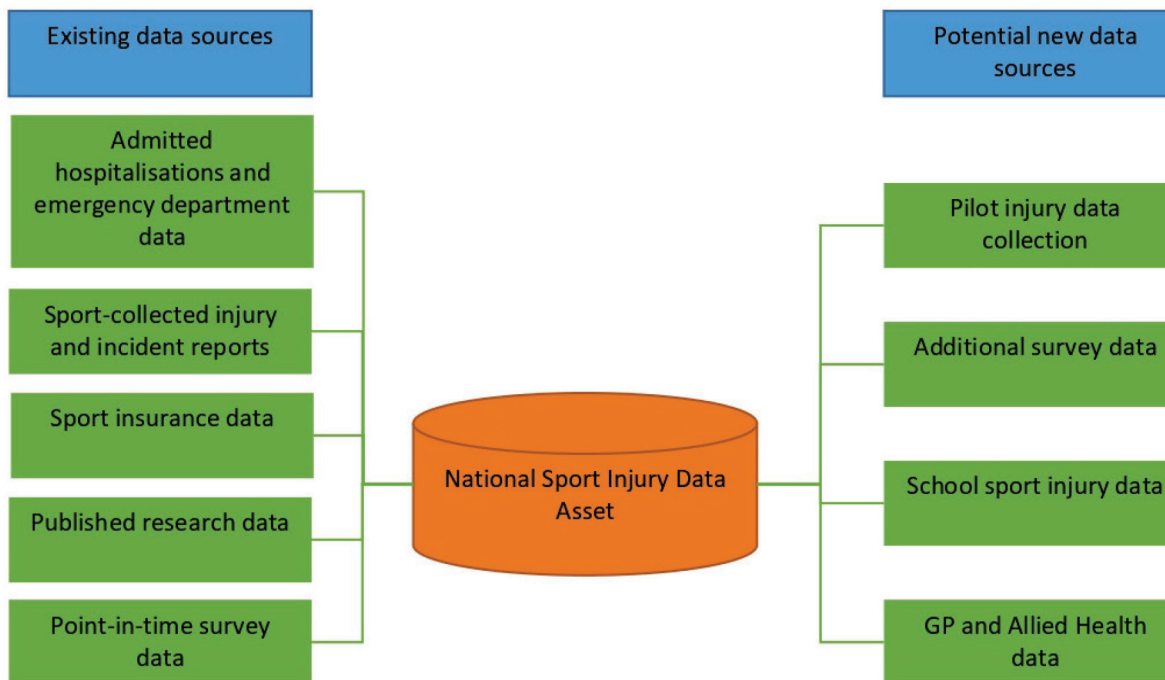
How will the data asset work?

The AIHW has identified the existing sports injury data sources available in Australia. The next steps are to:

- assess the suitability of each existing data source for inclusions in the NSIDA
- prioritise which data gaps should be filled first
- pilot a data collection tool and work with existing surveys to fill data gaps.

Data from existing and potential new sources will be collated by the AIHW (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Existing and proposed sources of data for the NSIDA



Where to from here?

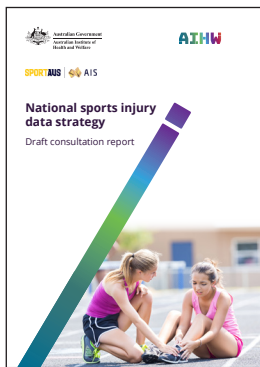
The draft strategy lays out a plan to monitor sports injury and sports injury prevention initiatives. It needs further feedback from a range of sport organisations, participants, health providers and researchers to ensure it meets our future needs, as well as government investment for a NSIDA. We want to know:

- if you agree with proposed approach to build a better data collection
- what data or activities are missing?
- other issues that should be addressed
- what are the key enablers and barriers to implementation?
- suggestions for improving the draft strategy.

Feedback can be provided to injury2@aihw.gov.au or by calling (02) 6249 5292.

Where do I go for more information?

For more details of the proposed data strategy, see the [National sports injury data strategy](#).



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