

Getting women to sign up for physical activity

A step-by-step guide

Translation of research conducted in partnership with
La Trobe University's Centre for Sport and Social Impact

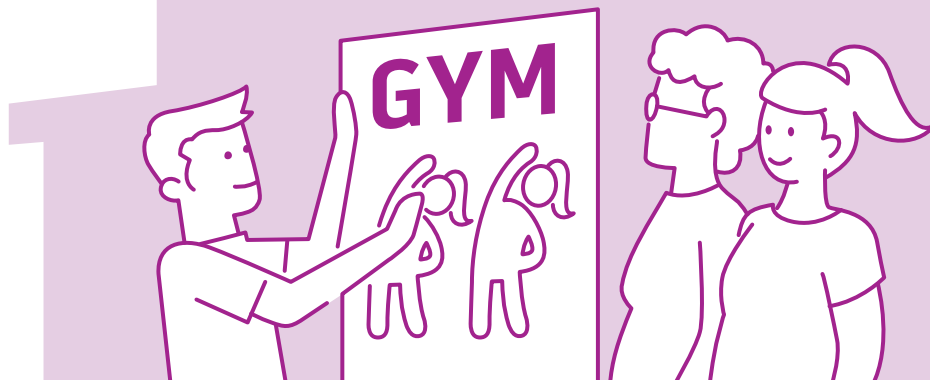
In this guide you'll find simple changes gyms, councils, sports clubs and community groups can make to help more women become active.

Reading time per step: 10 minutes.

STEP 1

Review your marketing

Checklist - page 3



STEP 2

Review your culture and customer service

Checklist - page 4

Script - page 5



STEP 3

Review your programs and activities

Checklist - page 6

Script - page 7

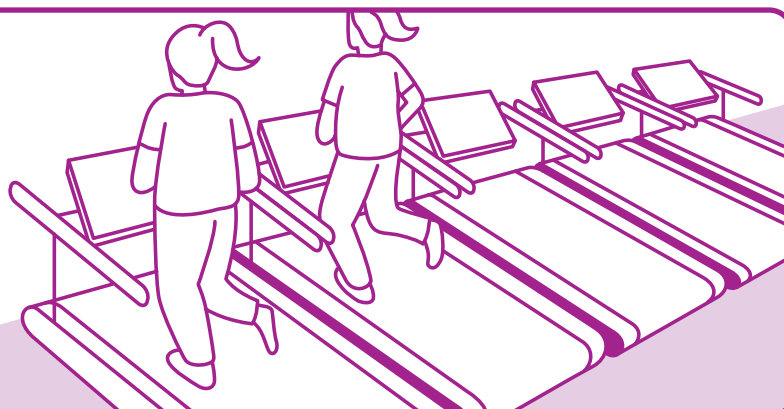


STEP 4

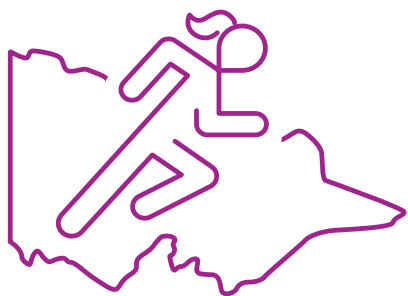
Review the physical environment

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STEP 1 Review your marketing



64%

of Victorian women who are inactive want to get more active in the next 12 months¹

Less active women are nervous about stepping into a recreation centre and scared about signing up for classes or joining a club. Making a few small changes to your marketing will encourage more women to get into (or return to) exercise.

Promote *feeling good* (de-stress, 'me time,' make friends, learn a new skill) - not *looking good*:

- Swap messages about looking good to messages about feeling good.
- Use images of all kinds of women (body shapes, sizes, age, cultural background and ability), not just models and super fit people. Think about your website, social media and posters around your physical location.
- Highlight beginner-only activities in your timetables/promotion materials (also see Step 3 Programs and activities)

TIP: Take your own photos (with permission), access images of our ambassadors, or download images from #ShowUs a more inclusive vision of beauty at: www.gettyimages.com.au/showus

Help women know what to expect before they're ready to sign up:

- Have lots of photos/videos on your website or Facebook page that show what everything looks like (location/people/facilities/activities).
- Could you film a virtual tour?
- Include videos that show how to use equipment or sport techniques (also see Step 3 Programs and activities).
- Have open days with tours and a 'meet and greet' with the team (do customer service training first).

Create a welcome pack (use this checklist):

- Introduce staff and volunteers (include photos so women can identify faces).

TIP: Choose photos that are friendly and approachable. If photos show how toned, fit and athletic the team are, only some people will like them, but a smiling head-shot looks nice to everyone!).

- Facilities (open times/contact info/map with women's toilets/change rooms).
- Social info - Facebook page? Social committee? How to sign up for updates.
- Rules/code/etiquette (clearly outline the rules of your sport/activity/gym etiquette).
- Include info on who to ask for more information (remember a photo!).

Remember to make sure women don't feel pressured to sign up

STEP 2 Review your culture and customer service



Around one in three women believe that sporting clubs are not welcoming to people like them²

Our words and actions can make or break a woman's experience. The best approach is to train your team to say and do things aimed at making women feel welcome.

- Check if all members of your team have indicated they're open to new ideas on how they can support women? If not, here are some conversation-starter tips:**
 - What do you think about the changes other clubs have made for women?
 - How do you think women see our gym/club/community?
 - Do you think we are female-friendly?
 - What changes do you think we could make to encourage more women?
 - How do our current women participants feel about our gym/club/community?
- Create, share and display etiquette guidelines with everyone so if people are unsure or need a reminder they can easily learn:**
 - Make sure every new member is told about the etiquette and expected behaviour/culture of the space or club.
 - Ensure members share their space and don't spread their belongings out to 'claim space,' making others feel like they can't intrude.
 - Ensure men allow women into shared club rooms/facilities.
 - Make sure your staff and volunteers do something when they see poor behaviour, for example:
 - 'Call out' the behaviour by saying something to calmly disagree or explain why it's important to stop it.
 - Defuse the situation by making a light-hearted comment.
 - Not everyone feels confident to do something in the moment, so it's important to also encourage alternative action, such as a simply giving a disapproving look, checking in with the victim/target later, or even reporting behaviour to someone senior.
- Train your team to provide the best possible experience (e.g. stand-up when someone arrives, smile and make eye contact, introduce yourself, learn people's names, but don't look people up and down).**
- Let women know it's ok to have breaks from exercise.**
- Don't assume women want to lose weight - you should never mention weight loss or appearance. If a woman mentions it herself, try and talk about the other benefits of physical activity too.**
- Foster a positive culture:**
 - Actively engage with women so they feel they are a valued member of the community.
 - Make sure the women in your community do lots of different roles - not just traditional roles like helping make tea and serve lunch.
 - Train everyone to be welcoming and inclusive.
 - Talk to everyone about the value of inclusivity.
 - Lead by example - go out of your way to chat to people who are quiet or on the outer.
- Create opportunities for people to interact:**
 - Schedule social catch-ups (e.g. provide coffee/tea after an activity/training).
 - Set social events or get the group to suggest and lead social events.
 - Create a social media group.
 - Set designated social spaces (e.g. tea room, local café).

Script ideas to help staff and volunteers make women feel welcome

To let women know you don't tolerate inappropriate behaviour:

USE:

- » If you see or hear something that makes you uncomfortable, let us know. We want everyone to feel welcome here.
- » All staff and volunteers must follow this etiquette. If someone doesn't, please let us know.

LOSE:

- » We try not to make a big deal about things around here.
- » Some people say things they don't mean, just ignore them/don't worry about them - they're just like that.

To specifically 'call out' poor behaviour:

USE:

- » Am I the only one who feels uncomfortable about this?
- » Wow, I thought sexism was a thing of the past!
- » I'm not sure I get the joke/know where you're coming from? (speaking to person demonstrating poor behaviour).
- » Excuse me, do you need help dealing with this behaviour? (speaking to the target of the poor behaviour).

LOSE:

- » Smiling and laughing along with poor behaviour without taking any action (refer to the tip on the previous page about etiquette guidelines).

To let women know they belong:

USE:

- » Hello/hi/welcome.
- » Let me know if you have any questions - I'll be here if you need me.
- » Hi, I'm not sure we've met, I'm [insert name]. I do [insert what you do there]. If you ever have questions I'm happy to help.
- » Have you met [insert name of another person who is a regular]?

LOSE:

- » Hello love/darling/miss/ma'm.
- » Are you after something?
- » Don't wait for new people to approach you - go and introduce yourself to them, even if you've seen them around a bit it's never too late to break the ice!
- » Do you know anybody?

To let women know it's ok to have breaks:

USE:

- » It's good to see you/great to have you back.
- » We know there will be times you won't come and that's ok.
- » Most people stop and start over time and that's ok.
- » Make sure you don't compare your Day 1 with someone else's Day 50.

LOSE:

- » We haven't seen you in a while/where have you been?
- » You owe it to yourself to keep it up.
- » Don't quit/don't give up.
- » You'll get back to where you were before in no time!

To let women know you don't assume they want to lose weight or change appearance:

USE:

- » You mentioned you want to lose weight, what about reducing stress or having fun? Do these sound good?
- » We want you to feel good and de-stress.
- » Leave your day behind and enjoy this time for yourself/forget about your to-do list.
- » Express yourself/enjoy being in the moment.

LOSE:

- » Earn that dessert!
- » Get the body you want.
- » We can help you lose weight.
- » Tone up for your big event!
- » Fit back into your clothing.

STEP 3 Review your programs & activities

52% of Victorian women worry about being judged while exercising³



Women are motivated by wanting to feel good, spending time being active with friends and feeling like they belong. If women 'find their tribe' they're more likely to keep coming back.

Make it easy for women to get there:

- Schedule times that suit different groups (e.g. during the day for mums, late at night for people who work until 5.30/6pm etc.).
- Provide family-friendly spaces where kids are welcome to accompany women, or where child-minding is available.
- Find out what motivates people and support them.

Provide clear stepping stones to introduce newbies into your programs and activities:

- Promote introductory or 'come and try' sessions for lots of different activities and communities (also see Step 1 Review Your Marketing).
- Start with an introductory program in a park, and then invite the group to try another program together in a gym/club.
- Create beginner versions of all your programs.
- Create a buddy system so staff or volunteers are assigned to look out for specific newbies to say hello and help them fit in (also see Step 2 Culture and customer service).

Continue to cater to all fitness levels by providing starter/shorter options:

- Schedule 15-minute micro classes or community sessions (maybe run a couple back-to-back so women can 'add-on' as their fitness improves).
- Breakdown workout plans into smaller, more achievable parts so women can decide how much to do in one go.
- Provide options that are easier or harder depending on skill level and confidence.
- Keep encouraging people to take a break, stop or sub-off if they need to (be sure to mention they have this permission to take breaks at the beginning and throughout a session/game).

Create different types of opportunities where people clearly see it's for them:

- Programs for women from different cultural backgrounds.
- Mums' classes, LGBTIQ+ classes, women's-only classes.
- Community walking groups (try running in a shopping centre if weather/safety a concern).
- Dog owner meet-ups.
- Match people with others of similar ability or aim for a diverse mix of abilities (i.e. avoid having 'odd people out').

Welcome and encourage women:

- Chat to people before and after a session/activity to provide encouragement (also see Step 2 Culture and customer service).
- Let people know you're available for questions directly before and after an activity (and plan time for this).
- Celebrate improvements in skill and focus on how people are feeling/if they're having fun (do not focus on weight loss/appearance).
- Try to pair newbies up with others so they can share and learn from each other.
- Make it easy for women to learn the rules and information about a sport/activity.

Script ideas to help your team make it easy for women to join your programs and activities

To let women know they're welcome:

USE:

- » Have you thought much about why you wanted to sign up? (you could try making suggestions too, for example some people want to de-stress, learn a new skill, make friends – how about you?).
- » We want everyone to enjoy themselves.
- » Take things at your own pace.
- » Everyone was new once.
- » Let's talk about what's right for you.
- » We're here to help [insert any customer service or community achievements].
- » Our community is thriving and there's always room for more!

LOSE:

- » What are your goals/what do you want to achieve?
- » We're only as strong as our weakest link.
- » Push yourself/go hard or go home/no pain no gain.
- » You'll only make the same mistake once!
- » Our trainers will push you hard!
- » We're the best [insert athletic achievements].
- » We're winners and we want to stay on our winning streak.

To encourage women to come back:

USE:

- » Take things at your own pace, if you need to stop, that's ok.
- » Everyone was new once.
- » I can see some new faces – welcome! (smile and make eye contact).
- » How did you go/feel today?
- » I could see you concentrating today, how did you feel? (answer questions and demonstrate as relevant).

LOSE:

- » Don't give up!
- » Try and keep up!
- » Who is new today – show of hands.
- » Did you get it?
- » You looked like you were struggling.
- » I didn't even notice you made a mistake/don't worry no one would have noticed.

To make it easy for women to learn the rules about a new sport or activity:

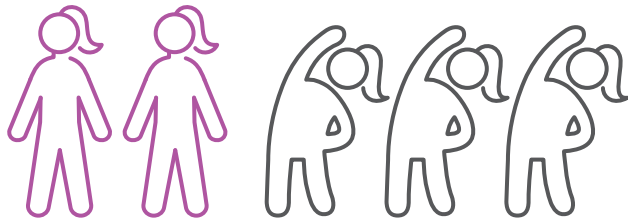
USE:

- » If you're new to [insert sport/activity] you can learn about it here (make sure you provide this info!)
- » We'll hang back at the end in case anyone has questions.
- » This is [insert name], they have been here before so if you're unsure of something and I'm not available, you can always ask them.

LOSE:

- » Do you need me to explain the rules?
- » Shout out if you have a question!
- » Pay attention and you'll get the hang of it.

STEP 4 Review your physical environment



Two in five women feel embarrassed exercising in public²

Our research shows that women's fear of judgement about their skill or appearance stops them feeling comfortable with physical activity. Creating welcoming, non-intimidating spaces can go a long way in encouraging women to get active.

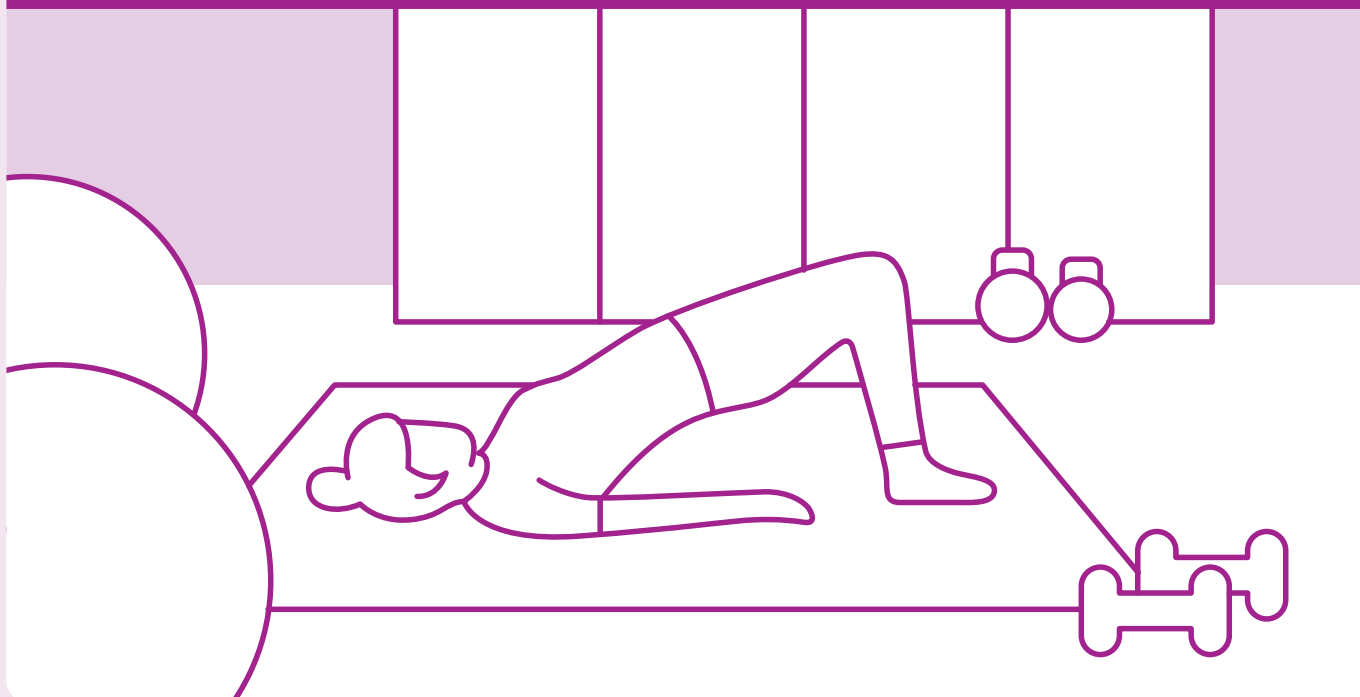
- Train staff and volunteers on words and actions to use and lose so that everyone makes a good impression (also see Step 1 Culture and customer service).**
- Modify layout so people can't easily watch women:**
 - Add privacy screens along the pathway from changerooms to swimming pool and/or add plenty of towel hooks next to water.
 - Arrange weights area so it's not easily viewed from other areas of the gym floor.
 - Women's only areas:
 - These will be more appropriate and preferred by some women or cultural groups.
 - It's important to maintain these areas to a high standard so they don't appear tokenistic or second fiddle to the main areas (e.g. are they cleaned/serviced as often as other areas? Do they have the same quality equipment and free weights available or only equipment typically considered 'women's' like fixed weight machines?).
- Make spaces safe and available to women:**
 - Install lighting between facilities and carparks and along quiet cycling/walking/running paths.
 - Open up public spaces to walking groups (shopping centres, parks, neighbourhoods).
 - Give women equal access to facilities and equipment (i.e. men shouldn't get all the prime training spots and the best equipment).

Examples of how your space can help make women feel safe and welcome

Cardio equipment facing outwards so people can't watch women while they're exercising makes them feel more comfortable



A separate area for stretching away from everyone helps women feel safer in your space



How to plan your actions

1. Follow the steps in this guide

- If you can only do a few of these actions you are already well on the way to breaking down the barriers holding women back, so give yourself a pat on the back!
- Need some support? Work with your local council, community network, regional sport assembly or state sporting association to get help creating your action plan.

2. Measure your success (and build a case study to help with funding applications)

- Track the number of women signing up (and not coming back – just as important)
- Survey women to find out what they think and how they feel
- Add relevant targets to staff performance measures.

References

1. La Trobe University 2020, This Girl Can Campaign Tracker, VicHealth, Melbourne.
2. TNS 2016, Physical Activity Behavioural Change Formative Research, A Marketing Research Report, VicHealth, Melbourne (unpublished).
3. LaTrobe University 2018, This Girl Can Campaign Tracker baseline survey, VicHealth, Melbourne.

Acknowledgements

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VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.

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