

# YOUR SPORT YOUR SAY

## RUNNING ON EMPTY

AUSTRALIAN ATHLETE RESEARCH FINDINGS  
AUGUST 2023

 AUSTRALIAN  
SPORTS FOUNDATION



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# ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

The Australian Sports Foundation (ASF) conducted the Your Sport Your Say research between 16th February and 22nd March 2023. **The study represents the views of 2,304\* Australian athletes from more than 60 sports** — from mass participation codes to small and emerging sports.

The ASF commissioned this research to understand the experiences and issues athletes had experienced over the past 12 months. The survey was open to Australian athletes from all sports.

Each respondent categorised their current competition level, from club level through to international. While responses were received from athletes across all levels, **28% of survey participants identified as competing at national or international levels. These athletes (605 respondents) are grouped as 'elite' when analysing the findings.**

**For the data analysis of this report, elite (national and international) athletes has been the focus.**

Level of Competition	%	Responses
Club Or Regional	61%	1,346
State	11%	244
National	15%	332
International	12%	273
<b>Elite (National + International)</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>605</b>

Athletes who told us they were aiming to compete at the 2026 Commonwealth Games, Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games or other major international competitions are grouped as 'green and gold hopefuls'. They make up 35%, or 763 survey respondents and are another key cohort for our analysis.

Are you currently training and preparing as a hopeful for any of the following?	%	Responses
2026 Commonwealth Games	7%	147
Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games	16%	348
Other major international event or championships	27%	594
<b>Green and gold hopeful</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>763</b>
No, I am not a Green and Gold hopeful	65%	1,410

The research represents the views of diverse groups of athletes across the nation including more than 100 athletes who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 135 athletes with a disability.

The survey was distributed via a wide range of channels, including national and state sporting organisations, sports academies and peak bodies including the Australian Sports Commission, Australian Olympic Committee, Paralympics Australia and Commonwealth Games Australia. It was also promoted through the ASF database, the Clearinghouse for Sport and some politicians promoted the survey through their channels.

This ASF research follows the *Impact of COVID-19 on Australian Athletes* report in May 2021, during the height of COVID-19. Results in these findings are compared to the 2021 data where relevant. The latest results are reported as 2022 in graphs and tables, which reflect the 12 months prior to the survey completion on 22nd March 2023.

The study represents the views of 2,304\* Australian athletes from more than 60 sports — from mass participation codes to small and emerging sports.



\* 1,188 completed the survey in full and 1,116 partial responses

# ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN SPORTS FOUNDATION

The ASF is Australia's national non-profit sports fundraising organisation, and the only organisation in Australia to which donations for sport are tax-deductible.

**ASF focuses on supporting a thriving Australian sporting sector**, where everyone has access to the health and social benefits of sport, regardless of their gender, background, location, ability or culture.

ASF has been helping athletes, clubs and organisations fundraise for 37 years. Since inception, **the ASF has distributed nearly \$700 million through its online fundraising platform and community sport grant rounds.**

Funds raised through the ASF have increased exponentially in recent years, culminating in a record of over \$79 million for FY23, raised from more than 50,000 donations to more than 3,000 fundraising projects. There were around 900 fundraising projects for individuals, raising over \$4.5 million.

The ASF has also established the Australian Sports Foundation Charitable Fund (ASF CF) to enable private and public ancillary funds to invest in a sporting future where everyone can play.

**ASF focuses on supporting a thriving Australian sporting sector, where everyone has access to the health and social benefits of sport, regardless of their gender, background, location, ability or culture.**

# THE ONLINE FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITY

The ASF offers an online fundraising platform, which exists to support the development of sport in Australia.

As an Item 1 Deductible Gift Recipient ('DGR1'), the ASF is the only Australian organisation that allows a donor to claim a tax deduction for philanthropic donations to sport.

This *Your Sport Your Say* research highlights the huge opportunity for more athletes to generate much needed financial support from fundraising, with 96% of all respondents currently not fundraising.

Elite athletes are more likely to adopt fundraising with 17% using fundraising as a source of income in the past 12 months.

- 70% of elite athlete fundraisers are using time-intensive activities such as raffles and sausage sizzles.
- 52% are using the ASF online fundraising platform.
- 31% rely on raising funds through private sponsorship.

## INDIVIDUALS FUNDRAISING THROUGH THE ASF ONLINE PLATFORM

Athletes, coaches, officials and other support staff selected to participate in representative, elite or high-performance sport can fundraise through the ASF 'Individuals' fundraising program to help them meet costs for such aspects as:

- travel and competition costs;
- equipment and uniform costs;
- training camps;
- injury recovery and rehabilitation costs;
- coaching and development costs.

Athletes and individuals competing at lower and community levels should speak with their club about launching a fundraising project through the 'organisations' program.

Athletes and individuals wishing to explore ASF fundraising are encouraged to check out current live fundraising projects at [asf.org.au/explore-projects](https://asf.org.au/explore-projects) and see how others are successfully generating support from their networks, local communities and clubs.

**GO TO [ASF.ORG.AU](https://asf.org.au) TO START FUNDRAISING OR DONATE.**



**52%**

of elite athletes who were fundraising used the ASF online platform

KEY FINDINGS

# ELITE ATHLETES ARE RUNNING ON EMPTY

THIS REPORT IS BASED ON ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES FROM  
ELITE (NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL) ATHLETES

# AUSTRALIA'S ELITE ATHLETES ARE RUNNING ON EMPTY AND RECONSIDERING THEIR SPORTING FUTURES

Australia's prowess as a sporting nation is deeply ingrained in our national psyche. Our brightest sporting stars are held up as heroes and their successes are widely celebrated as inspirations to the nation.

The survey responses show that for a great many of Australia's talented and dedicated elite athletes **daily life is a real struggle. This is restricting their ability to perform and causing many to reconsider their future in sport.**

An overwhelming number of Australia's elite athletes are under significant financial pressure, which is having flow-on impacts on athletes' mental health, their families' financial security and their ability to stay in the sport they have dedicated so much of their lives to. These financial pressures are now worse for many than during the pandemic.

**Almost half of elite athletes (46%) over the age of 18 are earning incomes from all sources of less than \$23,000 per annum.** An income of \$23k a year equates to \$442 a week, which places them below the poverty line of \$489 a week<sup>1</sup>.

A lot of the pressure is coming from a lack of income and rising costs. With athlete incomes failing to keep pace with cost increases, more than two in five (43%) elite athletes over 18 years old report **their financial position has deteriorated in the past 12 months.**

Most elite athletes rely on work and family support for their income, with **only one in four (26%) receiving financial support from a sporting body.**

This research showed Australian elite athletes are **spending more each year on competition travel and accommodation than they are on food.** An overwhelming majority of athletes also received no income in the past year from an athlete contract, sponsorships or grants.

Close to **three in four elite athletes (73%) reported the increasing cost of travel and accommodation as a key challenge** they are facing.

The increasing cost of participating in sport is impacting 71% of elite athletes and 67% reported this was placing financial strain on their parents and support networks. Sadly, two in five (42%) elite athletes aged 18-34 are **suffering poor mental health as a result of their financial predicament.**

The financial situation for 58% of elite athletes with a disability has worsened in the past 12 months, with many reporting corresponding impacts on their wellbeing and mental health.

**The mental health of elite athletes is a serious concern,** particularly for females, young adults and athletes with a disability. One in three (33%) of all female elite athletes surveyed reported they had suffered mental health challenges in the past 12 months compared to 17% of male elite athletes. Nearly two in five elite athletes (37%) aged 18-34 reported their main struggle in the past year has been mental health challenges.

**There is a gap between the mental health support needed by athletes and the support they are currently being offered.** Only one in four elite athletes (28%) told us that they were able to access mental health support programs through their clubs or sporting organisations. While half (51%) said they would access mental health services if they were offered.

More than half (52%) of elite athletes have considered leaving their sport in the past 12 months, with 15% giving the move a lot of consideration. This rises to two in three (65%) elite athletes aged 18-34 who have considered leaving their sport.

**Positive data from the research is unfortunately hard to find.** Only 9% of elite athletes reported an improved financial situation and just one in ten reported improved mental health.

As Australia looks ahead to the next nine years of hosting World Cups, World Championships and then the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, **we asked athletes what the funding priority areas should be through to 2032.**

This research shows there is a lot of support needed to meet financial and mental health gaps and address other challenges reported by our athletes. There are also significant cracks in the green and gold runway from the perspectives of athletes who are aiming to represent Australia in the future.

Government and sponsorship funding cannot fulfill all athlete funding needs — **philanthropists and everyday Australians must invest to provide comprehensive support across all sports and backgrounds.** This will enable athletes to focus on being the best they can be and the best in the world.

The ASF understands the importance of listening to athletes and using this data to provide as much support as possible. These findings will help shape ASF's support and inform our collaboration with other sports stakeholders and the philanthropic sector.

As a nation, a thriving sports sector driven by strong participation at the grassroots and community levels will support athlete development and help our Australian representative teams achieve podium success on the runway to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Athlete welfare needs to remain high on the agenda for discussion across all levels of sport.



<sup>1</sup> ACOSS: 'Poverty in Australia 2022: A Snapshot' defines the poverty line (based on 50% of median household after-tax income) as single Australians earning less than \$489 a week.

# KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

## ELITE ATHLETES



**2 IN 5**

reported their financial situation has worsened



**2 IN 3**

aged 18-34 years have considered leaving their sport



**\$23K-\$49K**

is the average annual income\* from all income sources



**36%**

of females said their mental health has worsened



**1 IN 2**

would utilise mental health services if offered



**56%**

of females have considered leaving their sport

## GREEN AND GOLD HOPEFULS



**1 IN 2**

2026 Commonwealth games hopefuls have considered leaving their sport



**43%**

of Brisbane 2032 hopefuls have considered leaving their sport



**3 IN 5**

2026 Commonwealth games hopefuls earn less than \$23k pa\*



# FOUR KEY THEMES IDENTIFIED BY ATHLETES

- 01 Elite athletes are in financial distress
- 02 Mental health is declining and greater support is in high demand
- 03 Australia risks an exodus of elite athletes
- 04 The green and gold runway needs investment in athletes

\* Athletes over 18 years of age.

# 01. ELITE ATHLETES ARE IN FINANCIAL DISTRESS

This research showed the financial situation of two in five (43%) elite athletes aged 18+ has declined over the past 12 months. **Many Australian athletes, even those competing internationally, have combined incomes from all sources which are below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup>**

Athletes are of course not immune to the broader cost-of-living increases, and being an elite athlete is expensive with the required travel and accommodation for competing, equipment, coaching and medical costs.

The overwhelming majority of Australian athletes are relying on full-time or part-time work or family support and are failing to generate any significant income from their athletic endeavours.

**Surprisingly, very few elite athletes surveyed are receiving financial support from a sporting body.** Of course, sporting bodies themselves are cash-strapped and dealing with rising costs and a squeeze on income.

These financial pressures are having a significant impact on elite athletes now and will limit their ability to reach their potential and stay in their sport. This bleak picture is likely to damage the strength of Australian teams for upcoming major events including the 2026 Commonwealth Games and the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games (see theme 04).

- Just under half of athletes\* (46%) reported their annual personal income from all sources, including paid work, sport and any support benefits, is less than \$23,000 — **effectively placing them below the national poverty line.<sup>1</sup>**

- Three in five\* (63%) have an income of less than \$49,000. The median individual income for Australians is about \$51,000,<sup>2</sup> which is considered the minimum for a decent standard of living by many.

- Athletes\* reported an average **loss of income from sport of \$12,124** in the past year. They also had an average **loss of income from employment of \$12,300.**

- The current earnings of many athletes is at odds with the incomes they perceived as necessary for a decent standard of living while competing as an athlete. Only half\* (51%) believed they could live comfortably on less than \$75k-\$90k.

- Athletes are **spending more in a year on travel and accommodation for competitions (\$7,974) than they are on food (\$5,019).**

<sup>1</sup> ACOSS: '2022 Poverty in Australia Snapshot'  
<sup>2</sup> ATO: 2021-22 individual median taxable income of \$50,980 a year  
\* Elite Australian athletes over the age of 18.



**2 IN 5**

elite athletes reported their financial situation has declined

**Funding is my constant concern. Being a female, and in an Olympic sport which does not have high commercial support, it can be very soul destroying knowing myself and my teammates are the best in our country for our gender in a well-known Olympic sport, and yet we earn a pittance.**

(ELITE ATHLETE, HOCKEY)



# 01. ELITE ATHLETES ARE IN FINANCIAL DISTRESS

(CONTINUED)

- More than two in five\* (43%) reported their financial situation has declined over the past 12 months. This was greater for female elite athletes, with 51% reporting their financial situation has worsened compared to 44% of elite male athletes.
- **The decline of an elite athlete's financial position is worse still among those with a disability (58%) and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes (59%).**
- Two in three elite athletes (66%) found a lack of funding as a major challenge and **only one in four (26%) received financial support from a sporting body** in the past 12 months. Elite athletes with a disability were more likely to receive financial support from a sporting body at 44%.

\* Elite Australian athletes over the age of 18



**1 IN 2**

female elite athletes reported their financial situation has worsened



**\$23-49K**

is the average income from all sources for elite athletes 18+



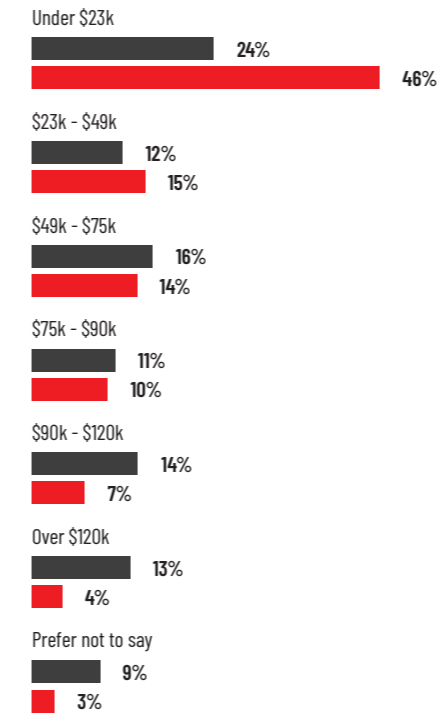
**66%**

of athletes reported lack of funding as their major challenge



# ELITE ATHLETES' ANNUAL INCOME

## ATHLETES' ANNUAL INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES - EXCL. U18S



Q65 - Please estimate your annual income from all sources in the past year?



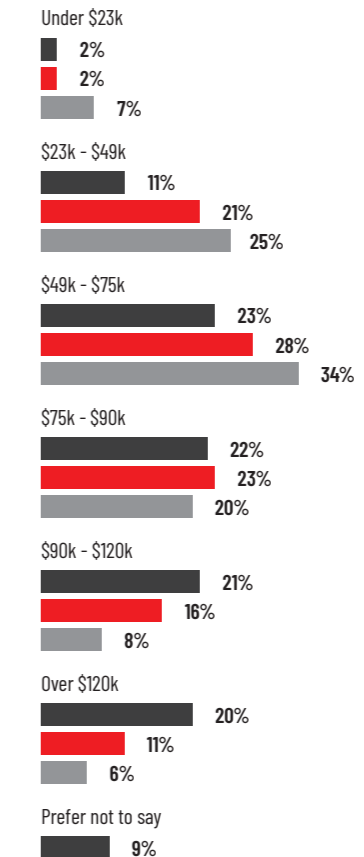
**\$23-49K**

is the average income from all sources for elite athletes 18+

■ All athletes over 18 (N=1,097)  
■ Elite athletes (N=299)

# FULL-TIME INCOME REQUIRED TO LIVE COMFORTABLY AS AN ATHLETE

## ATHLETES' INCOME REQUIRED - EXCL. U18S



Q73 - What income would you require to live comfortably as a full-time athlete?



**\$75-90K**

is the median required income to live comfortably as a full-time athlete

■ 2022 All athletes over 18 (N=973)  
■ 2022 Elite athletes over 18 (N=287)  
■ 2021 All athletes over 18

## COSTS AND FINANCES TOP MAIN CHALLENGES

Cost and availability of travel and accommodation



Increasing cost of participating in sport



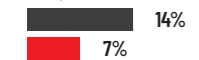
Financial strain on parents or support network



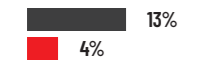
Lack of funding (fundraising, sponsorships, grants etc)



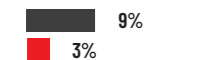
Competition readiness/fitness



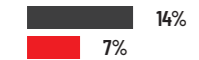
Costs of medical treatment, injury management and/or rehab



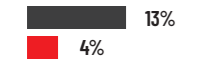
Access to facilities



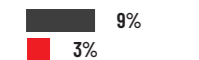
Mental health challenges



Competition instability/cancellations



Impact of extreme weather events (training, venues, competition)



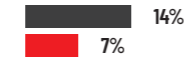
All athletes (N=1,191)  
Elite athletes (N=434)

## TOP COSTS FOR ATHLETES (18+)

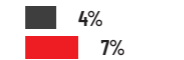
Rent/mortgage/board



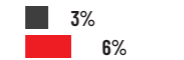
Travel for competition



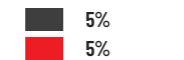
Accommodation for competition



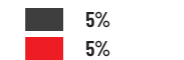
Travel for training



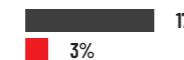
Food



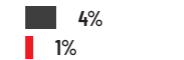
Equipment



Registration membership



Physio/Psych/Nutrition services etc.



Clothing/uniforms



All athletes over 18 (N=727)  
Elite athletes (N=249)

Q74 - What are the top costs for you as an athlete? Rank the following.

## THE FINANCIAL SITUATION HAS WORSENER FOR 2 IN 5 ELITE ATHLETES

Got better



Stayed about the same

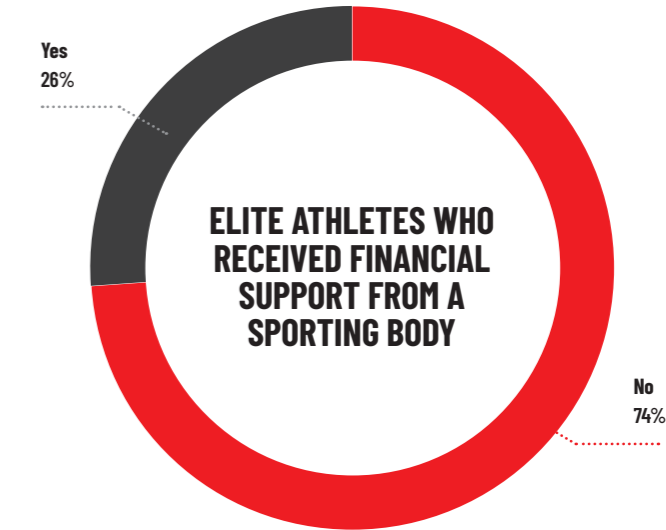


Got worse



All athletes over 18 (N=719)  
Elite athletes (N=249)

Q76 - In the past year, has your financial situation and financial security changed as an athlete?



Q71 - Did you receive financial support from a National or State sporting body (e.g. NSO, SSO, AIS, State Academy, AOC, PA, or CGA) in the past year?

Elite athletes N=551

% Receive financial support from a sporting body	Elite athletes		Athlete with a disability	Indigenous athlete
	Female	Male		
YES	26%	27%	44%	26%

## THE FINANCIAL SITUATION HAS WORSENERD FOR 2 IN 5 ELITE ATHLETES (CONTINUED)

Q76 - In the past year, has your financial situation and financial security changed as an athlete?

Financial situation and financial security change	Elite athletes			
	Female	Male	Athlete with a disability	Indigenous athlete
Got worse	51%	44%	58%	59%
Stayed about the same	44%	50%	36%	33%
Got better	5%	7%	6%	7%
<b>Total athletes (N=)</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>27</b>

Q77 - About how much (in whole dollars) has income/revenue decreased in each of the following areas in the last 12 months?

Average income loss in the past 12 months	Elite athletes		
	Elite athletes U18	Elite athletes 18+	Elite athletes total
Average loss income/revenue from SPORT	-\$6,230	-\$12,124	-\$9,888
Average loss income/revenue from WORK	-\$7,430	-\$12,300	-\$10,658
<b>Total athletes (N=)</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>129</b>

## WHAT ELITE ATHLETES TOLD US



**I'm 25 and don't have a career as I've been doing competitive sport since leaving school. I cannot live off my parents forever so I feel guilty that I don't have an income to help out with costs.**

(ELITE ATHLETE, BASKETBALL)

**I simply cannot make it work financially.**

(ELITE ATHLETE, CANOEING/KAYAKING)

**I rely on my parents and worry about the financial burden I place on them.**

(ELITE ATHLETE, SWIMMING)

**We are having to choose not to compete at interstate national events, due to the cost of travel.**

(ELITE ATHLETE, CYCLING)



**To put it simply, the costs of competing internationally as a tennis player far outweigh the ability to earn prize money. So this is a major concern for me and is a constant struggle to find further ways to fund my career.**

(ELITE ATHLETE, TENNIS)

## 02. MENTAL HEALTH IS DECLINING AND GREATER SUPPORT IS IN HIGH DEMAND

The research paints a worrying picture of declining mental health in athletes across all competitive levels, even worse for elite athletes. **Female athletes are more affected than males.**

Financial pressures and difficulty in juggling training with other commitments such as study or work were frequently cited by elite athletes as contributing to deteriorating mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still having a big impact on the mental health of many. Elite athletes in their open responses frequently referenced the anxiety when recovering from COVID-19, and the impact on training and competitions due to sport shutdowns, and now increased costs when traveling to competitions interstate and overseas.

**More than half of elite athletes across the country said they would use mental health services if they were available,** but many were unsure what was in place to support them.



**36%**

of female elite athletes said their mental health had worsened

- More than one in four elite athletes (28%) reported their mental health has worsened over the course of the past year. The national average for all athletes was 24%.
- One in three elite athletes aged 18-34 (35%) reported their mental health had worsened, which was higher than under 18s (22%).
- Athletes with a disability were significantly more likely than others to feel their mental health had worsened (40%).
- More than one in three female elite athletes (36%) reported their mental health had worsened, which was significantly higher than male elite athletes (17%).
- While 28% of elite athletes reported their sporting organisations or clubs were offering mental health support programs to their athletes, 46% reported their club did not offer these services and 26% were not sure.
- More than one in two elite athletes (51%) said they would use mental health support services if they were available.



**1 IN 4**

elite athletes reported their mental health had worsened



**2 IN 5**

elite athletes with a disability reported their mental health had declined



**1 IN 3**

elite athletes aged 18+ reported their mental health had declined



**1 IN 2**

elite athletes would use mental health services if offered

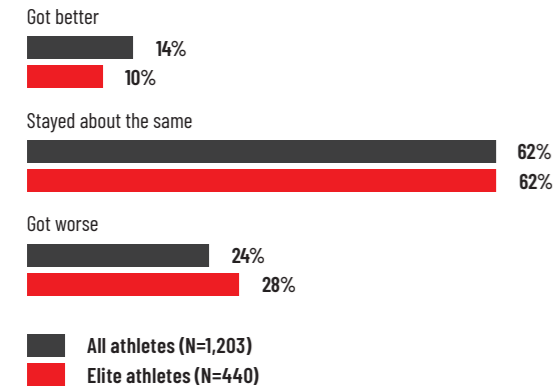
The pressure to earn enough income has impacted on my physical abilities to train, stopped my social life, had negative impacts on family relationships and increased my anxiety, issues with sleep and susceptibility to getting sick.

(ELITE ATHLETE, CYCLING)



# MENTAL HEALTH CHANGES FOR ATHLETES

## IN THE PAST YEAR, HAS YOUR MENTAL HEALTH CHANGED?



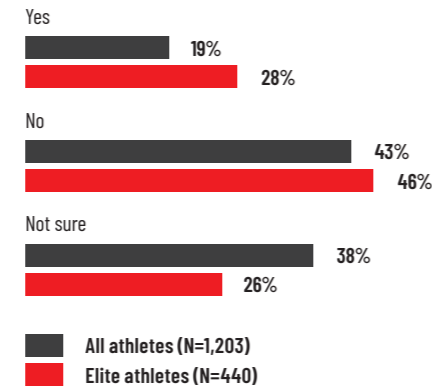
Q84 - In the past year, has your mental health changed?

Elite athletes	Elite athlete age			Gender	
	Under 18 years	18 - 34 years	35+ years	Female	Male
Got worse	22%	35%	29%	36%	17%
Stayed about the same	68%	54%	60%	53%	73%
Got better	10%	11%	11%	11%	10%
<b>Total athletes (N=)</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>191</b>

\*Shaded cells indicates a significantly higher result compared to the national average.

# MANY ATHLETES UNSURE IF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE

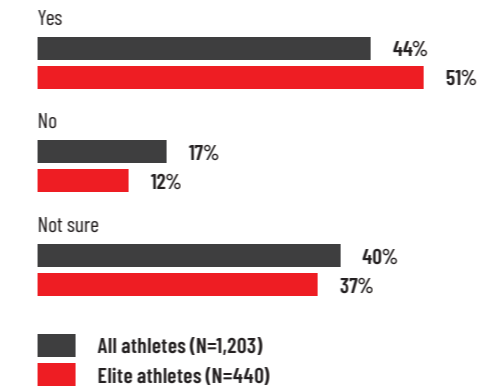
## DOES YOUR ORGANISATION OR CLUB OFFER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT PROGRAMS?



Q86 - Does your sporting organisation or club offer mental health support programs?

# 1 IN 2 ELITE ATHLETES WOULD UTILISE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IF OFFERED

## WOULD YOU UTILISE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IF OFFERED?



Q87 - If your club offered support services for mental health and wellbeing, would you utilise these services if they were offered?

## 03. AUSTRALIA RISKS AN EXODUS OF ELITE ATHLETES

In the past 12 months, **more than half (52%) of all elite athletes surveyed** have given some or a lot of consideration to leaving their sport. Female elite athletes are also more likely to leave than males.

These worrying findings were also worse for elites aged 18 to 34, where cost was the major factor.

Financial pressures made up half of the top six reasons why athletes were considering leaving their sport.

Elite athletes stopping sport would have a devastating impact on all tiers of sport, from Australia representative teams and national leagues through to grassroots. And this is at a time when we need to get more Australians active for their physical and mental health.

- **One in two elite athletes (52%) have considered leaving their sport** in the past 12 months — a five-fold increase from 2021. Over one in six (15%) have given a lot of consideration to leaving the sport for which they have dedicated so much to reach the elite level.
- **Female elite athletes are more likely to be considering leaving their sport**, with 56% of female athletes considering walking away compared to 47% of male elite athletes.
- **Two-thirds (65%) of elite athletes aged 18-34 are contemplating abandoning their sporting careers**, and 22% have given a lot of consideration to leaving.

### The main reasons elite athletes are considering leaving their sport:

- Costs involved in competing;
- Balancing commitments with school, training and work;
- Lack of competition funding;
- Financial pressures which cause stress; for athletes and families;
- Mental health reasons;
- Difficulty getting to training.

**Data specific to green and gold hopefuls for future major events are covered in theme 04.**



**2 IN 3**

elite athletes aged 18-34 years considered leaving their sport



**56%**

of female elite athletes considered leaving their sport



**1 IN 2**

elite athletes have considered leaving their sport



If I can't find some more sustainable funding and sponsorship my family will be too far in debt and I just won't be able to compete financially. I question if the financial strain is worth it and if I should just leave my sport now, will the cost be worth it in the end? My sport will likely cause financial debt, delay my career and ability to earn money, and delay having a family.

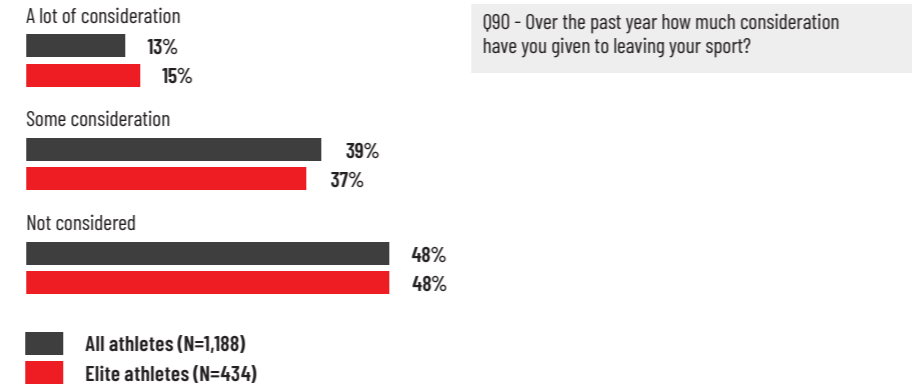
(ELITE ATHLETE, TRIATHLON)



## HOW A LACK OF FINANCES IMPACT ATHLETES



## ATHLETES CONSIDERING LEAVING SPORT



**52%** of elite athletes have given some or a lot of consideration to leaving their sport. This is consistent across all athletes

## WHAT ELITE ATHLETES TOLD US



**Difficulty of balancing work, study and sport. There is no financial support outside of family in a regional area.**  
(ELITE ATHLETE, CRICKET)

**I don't see myself leaving the sport now but eventually will if my financial conditions don't get better.**  
(ELITE ATHLETE, SOCCER/FOOTBALL)

**The balance between school, part-time work, and sport is having an impact on all of these areas, so therefore as sport is expensive and traveling for training time consuming sport would have to be the item I would consider leaving.**  
(ELITE ATHLETE, ROLLER DERBY)



**[It] is a constant struggle to find further ways to fund my career. Unless I can find further support through sponsors I will need to start winning more or face the decision to leave the sport.**  
(ELITE ATHLETE, TENNIS)

## 04. THE GREEN AND GOLD RUNWAY NEEDS INVESTMENT IN ATHLETES

Australia is in the enviable position of having secured the hosting rights to many major international events on the green and gold runway to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

This is an achievement that sports, their administrators and governments can be proud of, and will involve significant investment. **But it is not the venues, or even the crowds, that make these events inspiring and unforgettable — it is the athletes.**

This research shows that there are huge cracks in the runway when it comes to investing in and supporting our green and gold hopefuls.

At a time when athletes should be excited and driven by the opportunities to compete on the world stage at home, many are considering leaving their sport.

**More than half of the 2026 Commonwealth Games hopefuls have considered leaving their sport in the past 12 months, along with just under half of Brisbane 2032 hopefuls.**

About half of the 2026 Commonwealth Games and Brisbane 2032 hopefuls surveyed are going backwards financially and an alarming number are finding their mental health is getting worse.

\* Athletes over 18 year of age.

- **More than half (53%) of athletes training for the 2026 Commonwealth Games have considered leaving their sport,** with 17% giving it a lot of consideration in the past 12 months.
- Two in five (44%) 2026 Commonwealth Games hopefuls reported their financial situation has worsened in the past 12 months with **three in five (58%) of athletes\* earning less than \$23k. One in three Commonwealth Games hopefuls (31%) have deteriorating mental health.**
- For athletes aiming to represent Australia at the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, almost half (43%) have considered leaving their sport, with 9% giving it a lot of consideration.
- Close to **three in four (71%) Brisbane 2032 hopefuls\* earned less than \$23k in the past 12 months,** with almost half (46%) feeling their financial situation has deteriorated. Eight in ten (79%) said financial strain on parents or support network was a major challenge.



**1 IN 2**

2026 Commonwealth Games hopefuls have considered leaving their sport



**7 IN 10**

Brisbane 2032 hopefuls earn less than \$23k\*



**43%**

of Brisbane 2032 hopefuls considered leaving their sport



**I just started working as a part-time teacher this year and already had to take days off to compete. Last year I was unable to do casual work (coaching) due to competitions and travel to the Commonwealth Games.**

(ELITE ATHLETE, ATHLETICS)





## TOP CHALLENGES FOR GREEN AND GOLD HOPEFULS

Challenges	2026 Commonwealth Games	Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games	Other major international event or championships
Increasing cost of participating in sport	61%	68%	72%
Financial strain on parents or support network	73%	79%	67%
Cost and availability of travel and accommodation	66%	70%	71%
Lack of funding (fundraising, sponsorships, grants etc)	61%	59%	67%
Competition readiness/fitness	43%	38%	35%
Costs of medical treatment, injury management and/or rehab	36%	30%	31%
Access to facilities	30%	35%	33%
Mental health challenges	33%	22%	26%
<b>Total athletes (N=)</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>439</b>

If you are an athlete needing help fundraising, or a club or sporting organisation looking to help an athlete raise funds, **start raising valuable funds from your community today by starting a project on the ASF online fundraising platform at [asf.org.au](https://asf.org.au).**

\* Athletes over 18 year of age



### 8 IN 10

Brisbane 2032 hopefuls had cited financial strain on parents as a major challenge

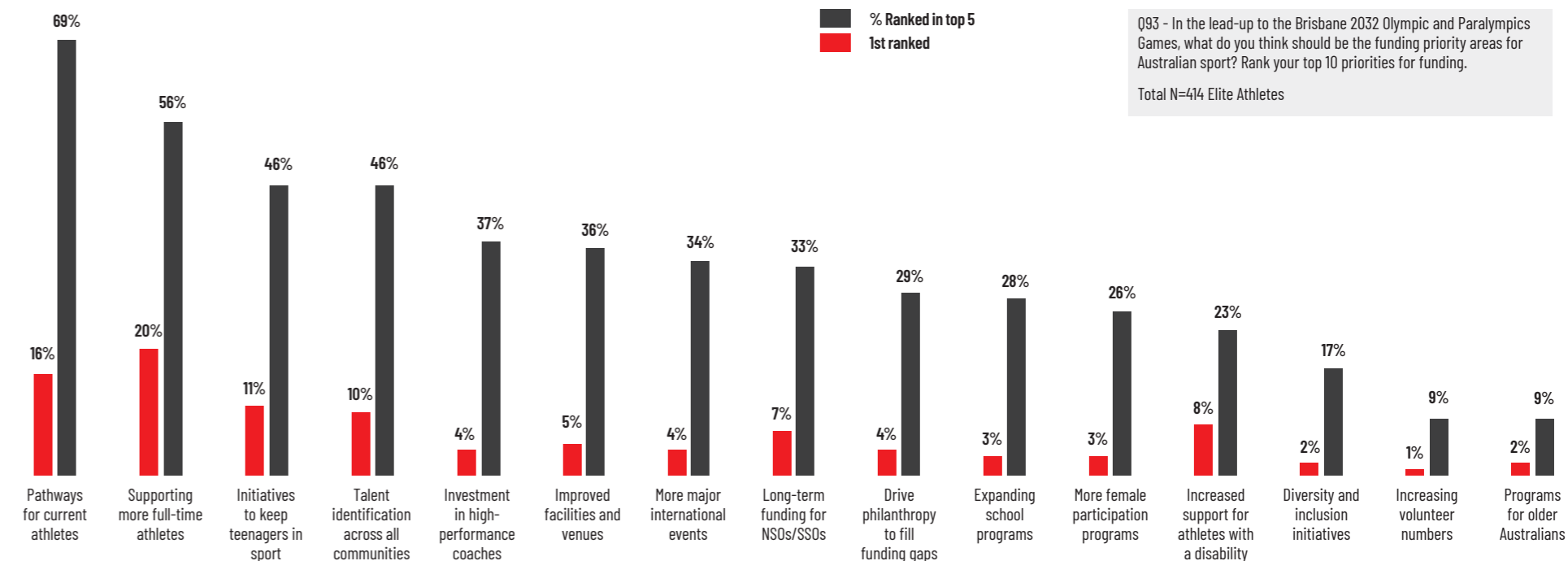


### 3 IN 5

2026 Commonwealth Games hopefuls earn less than \$23k\*

## ELITE ATHLETE FUNDING PRIORITIES THROUGH TO BRISBANE 2032

### TOP 6 FUTURE FUNDING PRIORITIES



# WHAT ELITE ATHLETES TOLD US



Money and support gives kids a lot younger than me time, as they will be the right age for the Brisbane Olympics, forgetting some of us have a goal to compete in the LA 2028 Games.

(ELITE ATHLETE, SAILING)

Trying to make the Olympics is costing me money instead of making me anything. The support through dAIs is good but doesn't come close to supporting the actual costs of real life.

(ELITE ATHLETE, TRIATHLON)



Having a fractured ankle last year added additional pressure to my recovery as I still had to work to make sure I had enough money to represent Australia at the World Games and World Championships.

(ELITE ATHLETE, GYMNASTICS)

# APPENDICES

- Interpreting this report
- Athlete sample profile
- Athlete responses by sport
- Income
- Costs
- Barriers to fundraising

FOR ADDITIONAL DATA ON ALL ATHLETES SURVEYED OR SPECIFIC DATA REQUESTS PLEASE CONTACT [INFO@ASF.ORG.AU](mailto:INFO@ASF.ORG.AU)

# INTERPRETING THIS REPORT

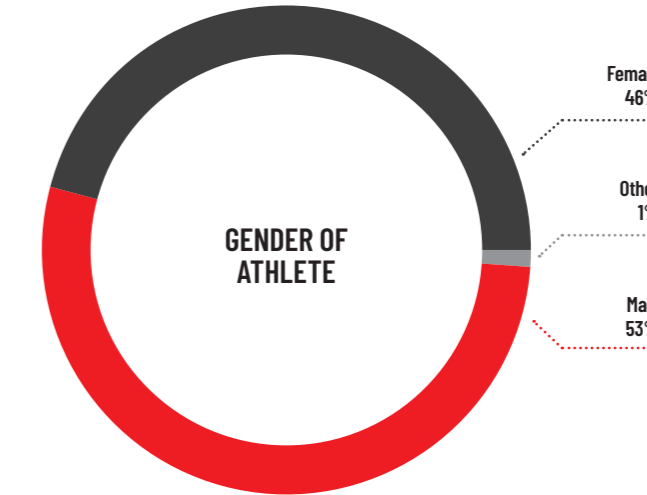
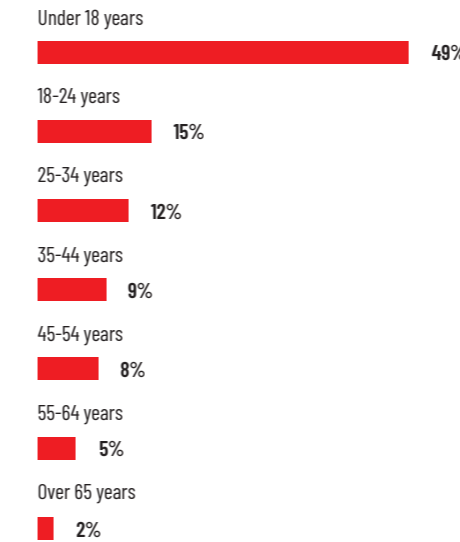
When interpreting findings in this report, please note:

- For all survey results, the base sample for each survey question is detailed on the graph or in the footnote (sample number and type of participants asked each question). Every question is reported and analysed based on the completed responses for that question.
- **All survey results have been examined for statistically significant differences between subgroups (within the same category) where meaningful in the context of the question.** For example, the subgroup of females has been tested against males. Where significant differences are noted, they are significant at the 95% confidence level. Where no differences are noted, it should be assumed that no differences existed or were meaningful.
- Survey results may not always total 100% due to rounding to reduce decimal points.
- To ensure data reliability, survey results with less than N=30 should be considered low base sizes, and where used should be interpreted with caution.
- **The report includes direct quotes provided by survey participants, which have been de-identified for confidentiality and privacy.**

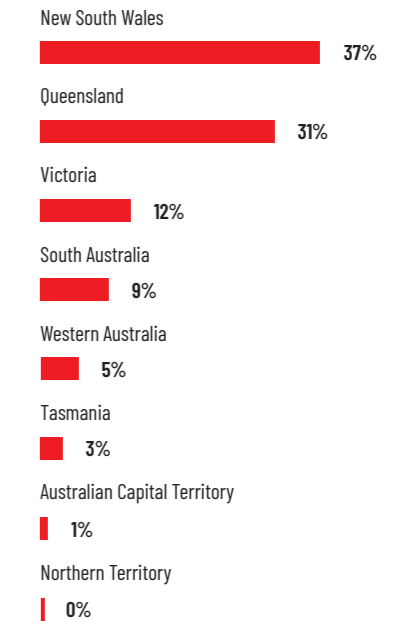


## ATHLETE DEMOGRAPHICS

### AGE OF ATHLETE



### LOCATION OF ATHLETE



What is your level of competition?	%	Responses
Club or regional	61%	1,346
State	11%	244
National	15%	332
International	13%	273
<b>Elite (Total National/International)</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>605</b>

Q53 - Which age group do you fall into?  
 Q54 - Which gender do you identify with?  
 Q3 - Which state do you live in?  
 Q56 - Are you an Australian citizen or permanent resident?  
 Q57 - Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?  
 Q58 - Are you an Athlete with a disability?  
 Total N=2,173



## ATHLETE RESPONSES BY SPORT

The data collected covers athletes from 72 different sport types with the top 63 sports shown below in these tables. Athlete responses were received from the major sporting codes; Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games sports and a wide cross-section of lesser-known sports such as orienteering and dragon boating.

Q6 - which sport are you mainly involved in?	Sample	
	%	N=
Football/Soccer	45%	1,026
Athletics/Running	12%	267
Swimming	10%	237
Australian Football	7%	167
Netball	7%	154
Basketball	6%	137
Cricket	4%	86
Hockey	3%	80
Tennis	3%	72
Cycling	3%	58
Rugby Union	2%	57
Gymnastics	2%	56
Water Polo	2%	53
Rugby League	2%	51
Touch Football	2%	47

Q6 - which sport are you mainly involved in?	Sample	
	%	N=
Softball	2%	45
Golf	2%	40
Surf Life Saving	2%	37
Martial Arts	2%	36
Volleyball	1%	34
Baseball	1%	33
Lacrosse	1%	28
Equestrian	1%	27
Sailing	1%	27
Rowing	1%	27
Weightlifting	1%	26
Triathlon	1%	24
Taekwondo	1%	23
Canoeing/Kayaking	1%	21
Mountain Biking	1%	20

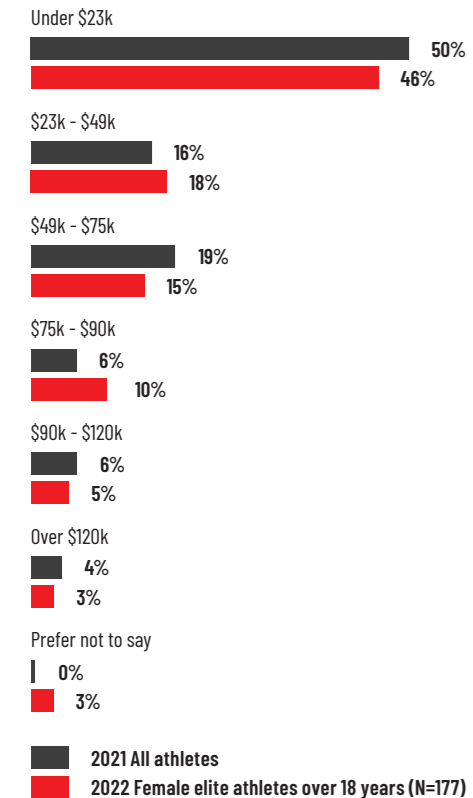
Q6 - which sport are you mainly involved in?	Sample	
	%	N=
Boxing	1%	18
Surfing	1%	18
Roller Derby	1%	16
Badminton	1%	16
Futsal	1%	14
Skateboarding	1%	12
Cheerleading	0%	10
Diving	0%	9
Archery	0%	8
Fencing	0%	8
Squash	0%	8
Orienteering	0%	8
Shooting	0%	7
Croquet	0%	7
Calisthenics	0%	7

Q6 - which sport are you mainly involved in?	Sample	
	%	N=
Underwater hockey	0%	7
Ice hockey	0%	7
Lawn Bowls	0%	6
Table Tennis	0%	6
Oz tag	0%	5
BMX	0%	5
Sport Climbing	0%	5
Dragon boating	0%	4
Pickleball	0%	4
Tenpin Bowling	0%	4
Figure Skating	0%	4
Motorsport	0%	3
Gliding	0%	1
Artistic Swimming	0%	1
Other	5%	126

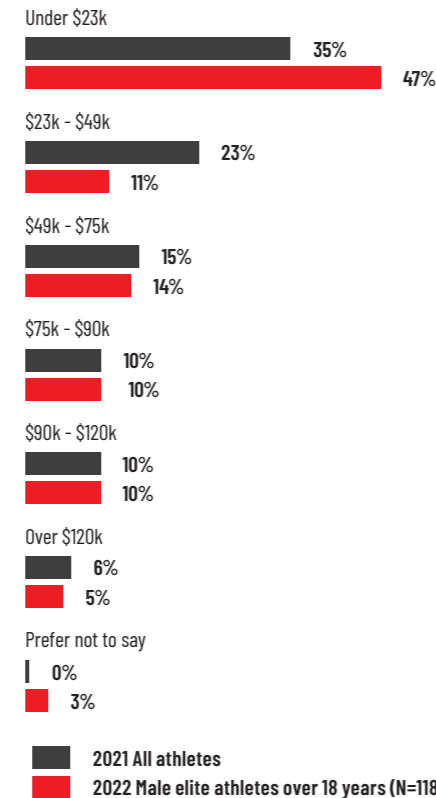
# ATHLETES' ANNUAL INCOME BY GENDER (18+)

## ATHLETES' ANNUAL INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES - EXCL. U18S

### FEMALE



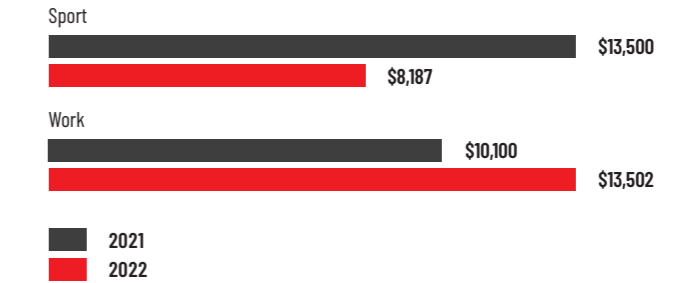
### MALE



Q65 - Please estimate your personal income from all sources in the past year?

# AMOUNT ATHLETES' INCOME HAS DECREASED

## AVERAGE LOSS IN INCOME/REVENUE - EXCL. U18S



Q77 - About how much (in whole dollars) has income/revenue decreased in each of the following areas in the past 12 months?  
Athletes over 18. N=719



**\$8,187**

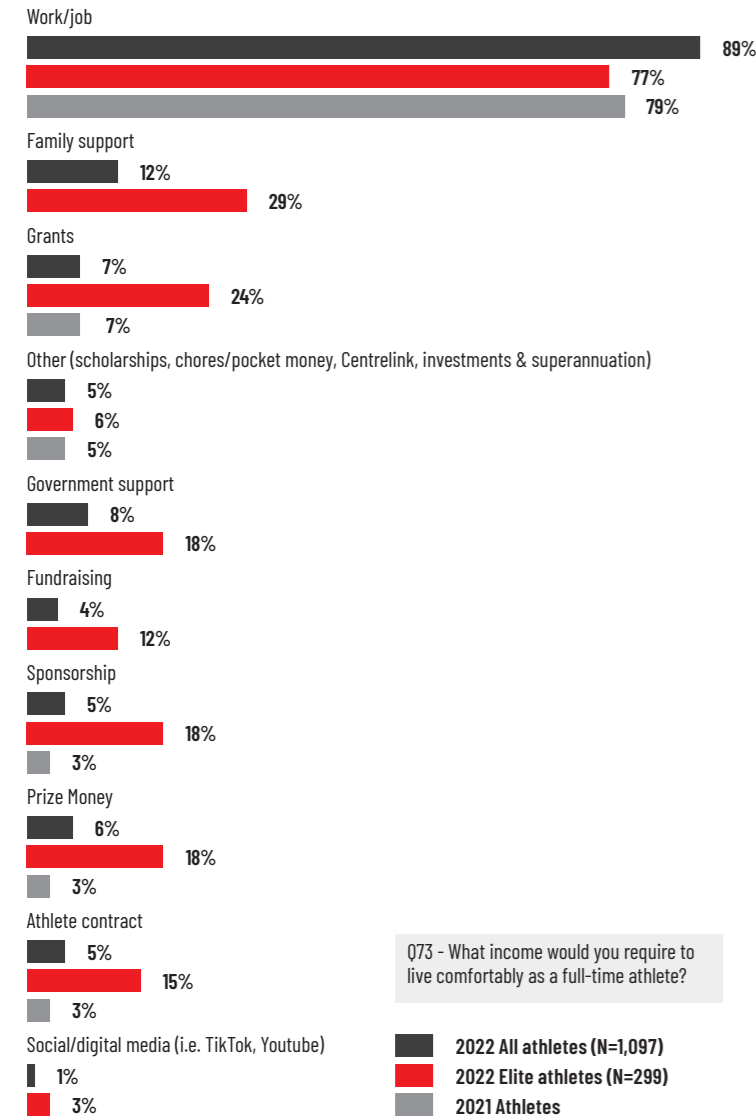
Average amount that income/revenue from **sport** has decreased for all athletes over 18 years



**\$13,502**

Average amount that income/revenue from **work** has decreased for all athletes over 18 years

## PRIMARY INCOME SOURCES FOR ATHLETES (18+)



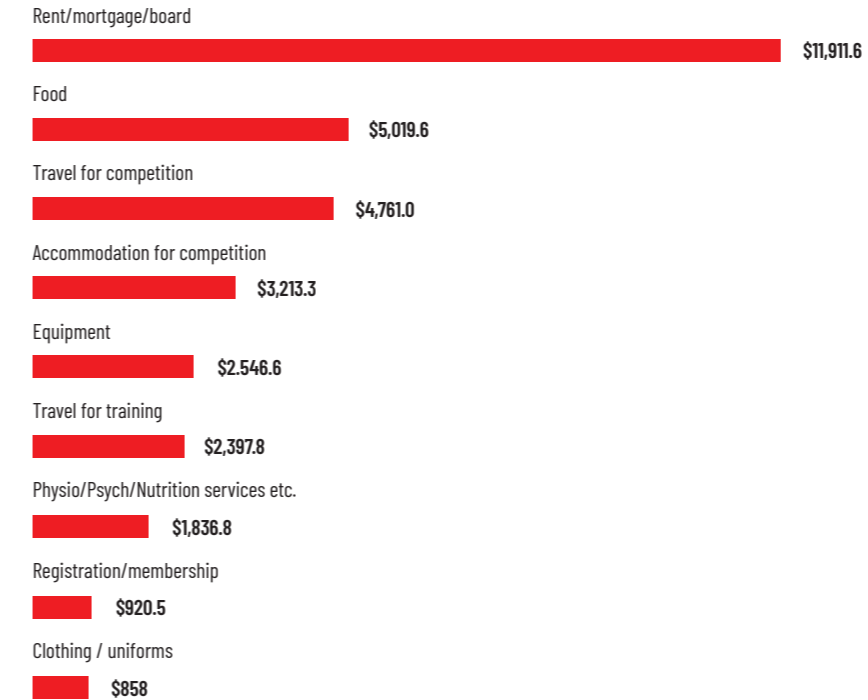
Income source	Athletes training and preparing for	
	2026 Commonwealth Games	Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games
Work/job	46%	42%
Fundraising	18%	20%
Sponsorship	22%	16%
Grants	43%	33%
Prize money	21%	12%
Government support	23%	11%
Athlete contract	18%	7%
Family support	50%	63%
Social/digital media (i.e. TikTok, YouTube)	4%	1%
Other (please specify)	9%	8%
<b>Total (N=)</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>219</b>

\*Shaded cells indicates a significantly higher result compared to the national average.

- Those training and preparing for Brisbane 2032 were most likely to be generating income through their family support (63%) and one in three (33%) through grants.

## AVERAGE AMOUNT SPENT ON COSTS OF SPORT BY ELITE ATHLETES (18+)

### AVERAGE EXPENDITURE OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS



Q75 - Please provide an estimate as to what you have spent on each of the following cost areas over the past 12 months?

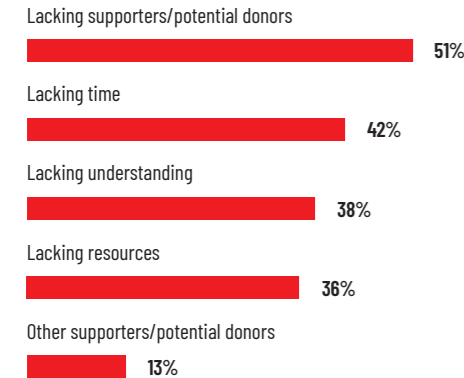
Elite Athletes over 18 N=303



- The largest expense on average for athletes was rent/mortgage/board, followed by food costs.
- Travel for competition and training were quite costly on average for athletes if they were paying for these directly.

# BARRIERS TO FUNDRAISING FOR ATHLETES

## CURRENT BARRIERS TO FUNDRAISING AND SEEKING SPONSORSHIP



Q70 - What are your current barriers to fundraising or seeking sponsorship?  
Base: Athletes that do not fundraise N=1,889

- Athletes competing at a state, national and international level were more likely to report the reason for not fundraising was a lack of supporters or potential donors.

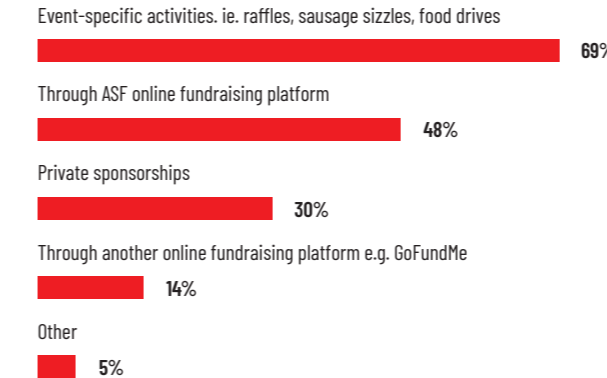


Elite Athletes	Level of Competition				Indigenous athlete		Athlete with disability	
	Club or regional	State	National	International	Yes	No	Yes	No
Lacking time	45%	37%	36%	40%	44%	42%	31%	43%
Lacking understanding	36%	45%	43%	37%	40%	38%	42%	38%
Lacking resources	34%	36%	43%	42%	47%	36%	44%	36%
Lacking supporters/potential donors	41%	60%	71%	76%	63%	51%	67%	50%
Other	15%	9%	9%	6%	4%	13%	12%	13%
<b>Total (N=)</b>	<b>1,207</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>1,811</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>1,778</b>

\*Shaded cells indicates a significantly higher result compared to the national average.

# HOW ATHLETES FUNDRAISE

## IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU FUNDRAISE?

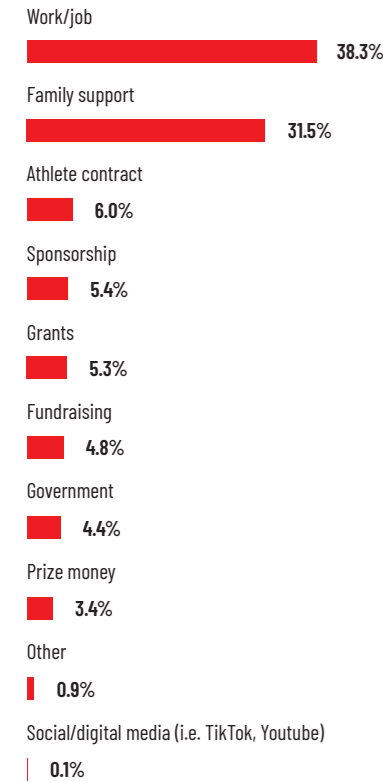


Q68 - In what ways do you fundraise? Select all that apply  
Total N=125

- Over two thirds (69%) of athletes who fundraise do so with event-specific activities including raffles, sausage sizzles and food drives.
- Just under half (48%) use the ASF online fundraising platform, which is higher for international athletes (63%).
- No differences noted by demographic or sporting code.

Fundraising method	Level of Competition			
	Club or regional	State	National	International
Through ASF online fundraising platform	18%	44%	31%	63%
Through another online fundraising platform e.g. GoFundMe	36%	13%	9%	13%
Event specific activities. ie. raffles, sausage sizzles, food drives	64%	63%	74%	68%
Private sponsorships	36%	19%	29%	32%
Other	0%	6%	9%	3%
<b>Total (N=)</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>63</b>

# INCOME SOURCES OF CURRENT INTERNATIONAL ATHLETES



Q67-Can you estimate what % of your income is generated from these sources?  
 Total N=260  
 (Filtered by International Level Athletes)





# YOUR SPORT YOUR SAY



FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO DONATE TO ATHLETE  
FUNDRAISING PROJECTS, VISIT [ASF.ORG.AU](https://www.asf.org.au)

 AUSTRALIAN  
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