



RISING COSTS THREATEN AFFORDABILITY OF COMMUNITY SPORT



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**NATIONAL
SPORT CLUB
SURVEY**



**AMATEUR
SPORT
ASSOCIATION**



New findings from the 2025 National Sport Club Survey (NSCS) reveal that the rising cost of sport is now one of the most significant challenges facing community clubs and families across New Zealand.

Compared to pre-COVID, the number of community sport clubs now reporting financial deficits has doubled, with rising costs for facilities, insurance, and general operations putting pressure on budgets, with fewer clubs breaking even.

With the Online Casino Gambling Bill now before Parliament, this year's survey found that grant funding remains a vital part of the financial picture, accounting for about one-fifth of a club's annual income on average, with more than half of clubs receiving grants relying on gaming machine trusts, far more than any other funding source.

For families, affordability is becoming a major barrier to participation. Clubs report that members are cutting discretionary spending, seeking payment plans, and in some cases, withdrawing from sport altogether.

Many clubs are exploring ways to contain costs: sharing facilities, leasing space to other codes, swapping uniforms, and relying heavily on volunteers to perform maintenance and administration tasks. Others are scaling back programmes or reducing service levels to avoid raising fees.

Financial pressure (both for clubs, and as reported by Kiwi households more generally) may also be contributing to growing concerns about participant behaviour, with around one-third (33%) of clubs reporting problems with "inappropriate" or "concerning" verbal behaviour during sport activities, while one-fifth (21%) cite issues with physical behaviour.

A significant number of clubs (15% overall) say that incidents or poor behaviour have increased in the past five years, with some sports, such as netball, reporting a particularly sharp rise.

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Other survey metrics report an increase in membership overall, despite around one in five clubs noting that their membership has declined in the past year, with larger clubs more likely to report growth, while smaller or more rural clubs continue to face membership challenges, or in some cases have chosen to amalgamate.

Club membership influences club volunteer numbers and although these have slightly improved in this year's survey, they continue to be well below pre-pandemic levels, with many clubs continuing to rely on a small group of highly committed individuals, while concerns about volunteer workload and burnout remain widespread.

Dr Mel Johnston, Project Co-Lead, said the survey findings provide an important reminder of both the strength and strain within New Zealand's community sport system.

"The data shows a sector that is deeply resilient but under pressure. Clubs continue to create opportunities for connection, wellbeing, and participation despite increasing financial and social pressures. Supporting the people who lead and sustain these organisations must remain a priority if we want community sport to continue thriving in the years ahead."

Now in its eighth year, the NSCS provides a comprehensive national snapshot of the management, governance, and operation of sport clubs in New Zealand.

Conducted in partnership with the New Zealand Amateur Sport Association (NZASA) and AUT Sport Performance Research Institute of NZ (SPRINZ), the 2025 survey engaged clubs from across all regions and over 80 sport codes, offering a longitudinal view of trends shaping the future of community sport.

For further comment on the 2025 NSCS, please contact Gordon Noble-Campbell,
Chairman, NZASA on 021 612 451.
