

Financial and mental health strain create daily struggle for elite athletes

EMBARGOED 12.01am Wednesday 30 August — Financial insecurity is placing crippling pressure on Australia's elite athletes, with the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games less than one year away and worrying signs for future Australian teams on the green and gold runway to Brisbane 2032.

New Australian Sports Foundation (ASF) research out today reveals **almost half of elite athletes (46%) over the age of 18 are earning incomes from all sources of less than \$23,000 per annum**, placing them below the poverty line.¹

The ASF commissioned this research to understand the experiences and issues athletes had experienced over the past 12 months, and to assist it in its efforts to raise additional community and philanthropic funds to provide better support to our emerging and representative athletes. The survey was open to Australian athletes from all sports with more than 2,300 athletes participating from more than 60 sports, **including 604 elite athletes (national or international level)**.

Against a backdrop of rising costs of living, the *Running On Empty* report, which focuses on elite athletes, showed **the financial situation of two in five (43%) elite athletes aged 18+ had worsened** over the past 12 months. **More than half (52%) of the elite athletes surveyed were considering leaving their sport.**

Costs and financial insecurity were the biggest challenges for athletes across all competitive levels. This research showed Australian elite athletes were **spending more each year on competition travel and accommodation than they did on food.**

The top four themes of the research findings for elite athletes are:

1. Elite athletes are in **financial distress**
2. **Mental health is declining** and greater support is in high demand
3. Australia risks an **exodus of elite athletes**
4. The green and gold runway needs **investment in athletes**

One of the thousands of direct quotes provided in the online survey was from an elite female hockey player.

"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." *

The *Your Sport Your Say* findings also paint a troubling picture of declining mental health in athletes across all competitive levels, with the situation even worse for elite athletes. Female athletes were faring worse than males.

More than one in four elite athletes (28%) reported their mental health had worsened over the course of the past year. And more than half said they would use mental health services if they were available, but many were unsure what was in place to support them.

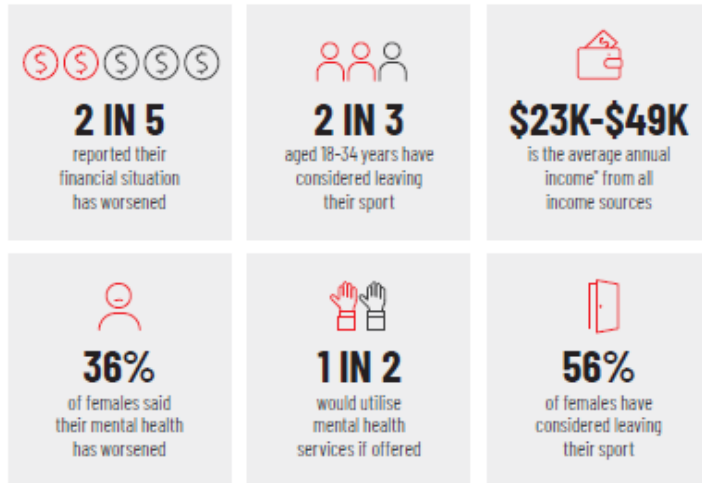
This bleak outlook is poised to damage the strength of Australian teams for upcoming major events and is impacting those with their sights on the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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

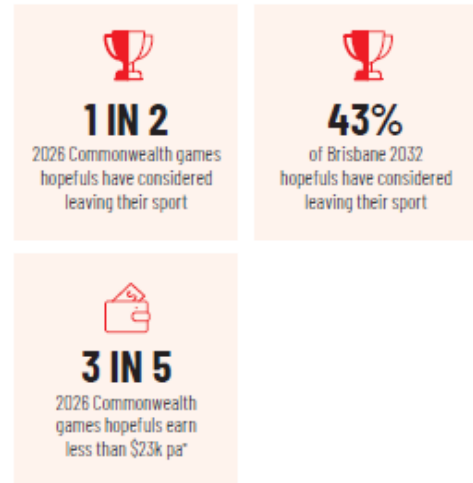
* All responses in the report are de-identified for the confidentiality and privacy of the athletes.

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

ELITE ATHLETES



GREEN AND GOLD HOPEFULS



* Athletes over 18 years of age

Australian Sports Foundation CEO Patrick Walker said the responses were worrying and outlined just how many elite athletes were struggling.

"Australia prides itself on the performance of its elite athletes but this report shows they're not getting the assistance they need to reach their full potential," Mr Walker said.

"This research confirms that financial stress is contributing to poor mental health, causing an alarming number of athletes to consider leaving their sport altogether.

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

"It's crucial for our athletes that the whole sports sector works together to provide as much support as possible. We know that what athletes need in terms of finances, equipment, medical and mental health support will outweigh what government, sporting organisations or sponsorship can provide."

Mr Walker said the FIFA Women's World Cup and the success of the Matildas had shown the power of sport to unite and enthral a nation.

"This is the green and gold decade, with so many such events for us to look forward to, but they are nothing without the athletes," Mr Walker said.

"If we lose athletes, or they can't perform at their best, we are not leveraging the opportunity, and we know philanthropy and community support can help."

"We have people below the breadline now who are poised to be hopefuls that have to choose between travel and food, and so we're asking Australians to consider sport in their giving profile as we know we can't rely on government funding alone."

The survey showed one in two elite athletes (52%) who were fundraising were benefitting from the ASF online fundraising platform.

"Australian athletes are crying out for more support, and that is why we are encouraging all athletes to look for new revenue streams, such as online fundraising. We encourage members of the community to support their local athletes and clubs whenever they can," Mr Walker said.

Since inception the ASF has distributed nearly \$700 million to athletes, clubs and sporting organisations, and funds raised through the ASF have increased exponentially in recent years.

The ASF welcomes the government's recent announcement of an additional \$20 million in funding for sports and athletes chasing qualification and preparing for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

"This money is vital to support our elite athletes who sacrifice so much to represent Australia on the world stage," Mr Walker said.

"The funding pressure we're seeing does confirm that the increasing costs for travel, training and cost of living are leaving big gaps for elite athletes that need to be filled."

Embargoed research report *Running On Empty* can be downloaded [here](#).

This research report is the second of a two-part release of the Your Sport Your Say 2023 research findings. More than 3000 sporting clubs completed a survey for the [Clubs Under Pressure](#) research released in May.

Further ASF Research can be found [here>>>](#)

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Video News Release with ASF CEO Patrick Walker available [here>>](#)

Radio Audio Grabs available [here>>](#), featuring:

Patrick Walker, ASF CEO

Natalie Cook, Beach volleyball - 5-time Olympian, Olympic gold and bronze medallist

Bronte Campbell, Swimming - Olympic, Commonwealth and World Championship gold medallist

Elite athletes available to speak with the media. The following athletes have been recently fundraising through the ASF online platform to help meet their financial challenges.

Biographies and images for these athletes are available [here>>>](#)

Sophie Hamilton Warners Bay/Valentine, NSW Swimming and surf lifesaving	Sophie's greatest achievement to date has been winning a bronze medal in the 50m butterfly in the International Children's Games.
Crystal Manning Adelaide, SA Ice Hockey	Crystal started playing inline hockey in 2012 after watching the movie 'The Mighty Ducks'. Crystal has represented both her state and country at various competitions. She is passionate about increasing opportunities and female participation in inline hockey in Australia.
Zane Keleher Rockhampton, QLD Motorcycling & Obstacle Course Racing	Zane is most proud of becoming a full-time professional athlete in the UK. He is competing at the World Championships for OCR (Obstacle Course Racing) for Australia in September.
Jessi Hooper Melbourne, VIC Para Boccia	Jessica has been playing Boccia since 2022, and she would love to be a representative in the Paralympics in the future.
Mischa Ginns Melbourne, VIC Para Badminton	Mischa is on the Australian Para Falcons team. Her goal is to qualify for the Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028 Paralympics.
Sarah Blizzard Ararat, VIC Bobsleigh	Sarah is heading into her fifth season of bobsleigh and is more motivated than ever to do everything she can to keep improving and growing towards the 2026 Winter Olympics.

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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.

For more information, visit asf.org.au/