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Adrian Bauman: Adrian Bauman. I'm a professor of public health at Sydney University in Australia. I've done lots of research into the health-enhancing physical activity area and worked across sectors with sport and also run a WHO collaborating centre on physical activity.

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Adrian Bauman: Firstly, the problem in both health and sport sectors is translating the evidence into practice. It's taking the evidence that's been researched on the benefits of physical activity for health, the benefits of sport for health and wellbeing in the community, and translating that and turning that into programmes across the community. We know a lot about what the evidence says. We know what to do, but we have to work out ways of funding and implementing programmes so that the whole population has access to physical activity, access to sport, and the opportunity to participate.

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Adrian Bauman: Thinking about good examples of grassroots sports, I can think of two examples: one in a high-income country and one in a middle-income country. The high-income country example is game.ngo, which is a community organisation in Denmark that runs street sports for 12-to-20-year-old kids in many different communities in Denmark, particularly focusing on adolescents and young people from disadvantaged and multicultural communities. It provides access to street sports of a variety of kind for boys as well as for girls, and provides different activities that girls might be interested in, in participating in as community sports. The other example is from Agita Sao Paulo in Brazil, where the Agita programme has built basketball courts in the poorest favelas, the poorest slums, to provide for young people in those communities the opportunity to play and access sport on really what is just a sand pit with a basketball net at one end. But these kids play and have the opportunity to participate that they would otherwise never get. And they've built these kinds of very low-cost facilities in many communities in Brazil and in other parts of Latin America. These two examples show the potential for community sports programmes to reach disadvantaged children and adolescents and young people, to reach many communities and to be affordable at low cost.

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Adrian Bauman: One of the biggest challenges in the sports sector is that over time, sport policy cycles from an interest in elite sport and high-end professional sport, back over a few years to community sport, interest and making the population and community participate more in sport and then cycles back to elite sport. This inconsistency of policy occurs in many countries and what we need is sustained policy on community sport in order to engage in programmes that foster community participation long term. Otherwise, a lot of the efforts and energy are lost as sport policy changes. It would be nice for sport policy to be sustained in both elite sport and in community sport continuously. Many countries show this cyclical behaviour.

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Adrian Bauman: The health benefits of physical activity are well-known for noncommunicable diseases, particularly for cardiovascular disease and diabetes and preventing obesity. New evidence is starting to suggest that physical activity is good for brain health. That's for improving academic performance in children. It's for preventing dementia and long-term frailty in older adults. It's also for reducing the risk of falls and maintaining functional capacity in middle and older aged adults. And, quite recently, physical activity is a missed opportunity for boosting the immune system to reduce the consequences of COVID, coronavirus infection. So really, there's a lot of new ways in which physical activity is going to benefit health.



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Adrian Bauman: But beyond that, physical activity is a way of engaging in communities, of promoting social cohesion, of increasing social connections, of increasing confidence and empowerment amongst children and young adults. And all of these can come from community sport. So we need to think about the non-health benefits of being active and moving and playing sport, not just the health benefits.

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Adrian Bauman: And finally, there's a broader social and economic development issue. Sport is not only good for social development, but also for economic development and prosperity and growth. And also sport for development is a vehicle for countries recovering from periods of conflict or economic fragmentation. Sport can bring people together at the community level, and that has a tremendous benefit in reintegrating communities that have had many problems and issues over a period of time.