



# Executive Summary

**The Irish Life GAA Healthy Club Programme (HCP) is the GAA's flagship programme to promote health and wellbeing in Ireland outside of its official games structures. Based on the settings approach, it aims to support GAA clubs and communities to achieve locally defined health and wellbeing goals that also reflect the national policy agenda for sport, physical activity, mental health, and preventative health. It has the potential to strengthen the GAA's inclusivity and role within communities by reaching a wider and more diverse audience. The HCP first began in 2013 with a pilot phase involving 16 clubs. By Phase 5 (2022-23) it had engaged 447 clubs.**

In 2021, the GAA commissioned Just Economics to carry out a Social Return on Investment Analysis (SROI) of the Healthy Club Programme. The evaluation followed a mixed-methods study design based on the Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework. SROI is a methodology that compares the social, economic, and environmental value of a programme with its cost to estimate the social return.

In 2022/23 the HCP engaged **447** clubs and involved **1,912** volunteers. These volunteers organised **2,389** activities accessed **184,598** times by **92,299** individuals. Activities are spread across six areas: physical activity (**44%**), mental fitness (**10%**), healthy eating (**7%**), substance use/gambling (**6%**), community development (**24%**) and diversity/inclusion (**9%**).

This SROI model includes benefits to three stakeholder groups: participants, volunteers, and wider society. For participant outcomes, the WELLBY approach was used to value improvements in life satisfaction. This draws on guidance for wellbeing appraisal developed at the London School of Economics and endorsed by the UK Treasury. This resulted in a value per participant of **€3,140**.

In line with SROI guidance, volunteers are treated as both an input and an outcome in the model. The number of hours invested by volunteers in the programme is approximately **102,292** annually, and we can value this using the 2022 minimum wage at **€1.1 million**. However, this compares with health and wellbeing benefits to volunteers of **€3.7 million**. For wider society outcomes, we have inferred benefits to health services from changes in the service use as a result of participation (**€620,000**). For the HSE/NOSP, which contributes **€140,000** of funding, the return from these savings is 4.4:1. The total value of the programme is almost **€50 million**. The headline return ratio is therefore 19:1, suggesting that €19 of value is generated for €1 of financial, volunteer, and in-kind investment.

**For participants, there are very high levels of satisfaction with the activities and clear health and wellbeing benefits. Participants report:**

- Increases in physical activity (**10-25%**)
- Adopting of healthier behaviours (**40%**)
- New hobbies (**17%**) and friendships (**51%**)
- Improvements in life satisfaction, connectedness to other people and the community (the latter seeing the largest change)



**For the GAA itself, we find the following benefits:**

- Greater involvement by participants in the GAA (joining, taking their children to training or attending games) (**77%**)
- Improved reputation (**78%**)
- More members/volunteers





Demographic data show that the programme engages an equal mix of men and women and is attracting participation from outside the GAA core base. If we were to generalise from our survey to all unique participants (**92,299**), we estimate that across the programme, it has engaged **10,152** individuals that had no previous involvement with the GAA and **38,227** individuals who were not closely connected to the GAA.

However, representation of BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities, people with additional needs and older people is low. These groups are underrepresented across all sports; hence they have been identified as a priority for the HCP which aims to bring to life the GAA's manifesto 'Where We All Belong'.

For volunteers, **89%** were satisfied with their volunteering experience. Life satisfaction increased from 7.6/10 at baseline to 8.5/10. They also report higher levels of community connectedness and connection to other people than at baseline. These improvements in wellbeing are higher than for participants. **25%** of volunteers had no previous involvement with the GAA and many started out as participants, suggesting that the programme is operating as a gateway for volunteering.

#### Participating clubs reported:

- Changes in policies and procedures such as smoke and vape free venue
- Healthy eating at training and after games
- Increases in the proportion of clubs that consider their club to be welcoming, representative of the community and well-utilised
- Some improvement in the ease at which volunteers are recruited/retained

The report contains a series of recommendations to improve the reach and effectiveness of the programme. These include the development of strategies to access hard to reach groups, addressing key health priorities for Ireland, improving branding and communications, better use of GAA facilities, developing the regional structure, and new research priorities.

The Irish Life GAA Healthy Club Programme is emblematic of the direction of travel for the GAA in 21st century Ireland. It aims to be an inclusive, progressive, and dynamic programme that builds social capital and changes health and wellbeing behaviours by starting where people are at. As a light touch, low-cost intervention it has made significant progress in its first ten years. The economic analysis shows that even on a conservative basis, the value of the prevention achieved thus far substantially outweighs the cost of investment.

As the HCP matures and reaches a more diverse audience and those with higher health and wellbeing needs, it has the potential to increase its social value even further. This programme has successfully demonstrated proof of concept and it should now be mainstreamed within the GAA. There is also a strong case for increased funding for the programme to enable it to grow and reach more people and communities more effectively.

