

# Dadfit

Final Program Evaluation

June 2025

# Acknowledgement of Country

CFRE respectfully acknowledges the Kulin Nation as Traditional Owners of the land where we deliver our services. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia. Sovereignty was never ceded, and they remain strong in their connection to land, and culture and in resisting colonisation.



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# Executive Summary

Dadfit is a Melbourne-based charity supporting dads to enable healthy, safe and gender-equal families. The five-week Dadfit program aims to support dads' mental and physical health, social connection, parenting and relationship skills, through weekly group workouts, facilitated discussions about fatherhood, and support to implement positive habits at home. The North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHN) commissioned Dadfit to deliver programs supporting diverse and disadvantaged families in the West and North of Melbourne, in partnership with Drummond Street Services.

This report presents the findings of a summative evaluation of Dadfit programs delivered from January 2024 to March 2025. The evaluation was completed by the Centre for Family Research and Evaluation, at Drummond Street Services.

The evaluation includes data from the following programs:

- **PHN Dadfit Programs:** 8 five-week programs delivered by Dadfit in partnership with Drummond Street and NWMPHN, reaching 129 participants (80 completed pre/post surveys).
- **All Dadfit Programs:** 26 five-week programs delivered by Dadfit reaching 390 participants, inclusive of the **PHN Dadfit Programs** (239 completed pre/post surveys).
- **Dads and Kids SportsFest Events:** 6 Dads and Kids SportsFest events reaching 100 dads and 129 children (70 dads completed post-event surveys).

## Results

The summative data analysis covered three evaluation questions, that Dadfit met with great satisfaction. Data from pre- and post-program surveys show evidence of positive impacts on self-reported physical and mental health, family relationships, and connection to community. For both **PHN Dadfit Programs** and **All Dadfit Programs**.

- Pre- and post-program surveys showed statistically significant improvements in validated, single item, self-report measures of mental health, physical health, parental self-confidence, and connection with other parents in the community;
- Over 90% of dads reported a positive effect on their physical health, mental health, community connections, relationship with their child(ren), and relationship with their partner (or co-parent) in the post-program survey. Results also suggested an improvement in social-connectedness, help-seeking behaviours and stigma reduction (through greater awareness and solidarity).

**PHN Dadfit Programs** successfully catered to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, with over 82% of participants born outside of Australia. Overall, participants rated the Dadfit program 4.93 out of 5 on average and over 98% said they would recommend the program to friends.

Dads and Kids SportsFest Events showed evidence of positive impacts: 100% of dads said SportsFest helped them to connect with their child(ren), 92% said it helped them to connect with other parents, and 96% said it had a positive effect on their child's wellbeing.

Recommendations include increased partnerships and training, program expansion, and increased, recurring funding.



# Introduction

## The Challenges of Early Fatherhood

The early years of fatherhood present a challenging time for fathers' mental and physical health. Studies have indicated that around 7 in 10 new dads report increased stress, whilst around half show an increase in negative health behaviours, and 1 in 4 feel socially isolated (Movember Foundation, 2019). Furthermore, 1 in 10 dads experience post-natal depression (Better Health Channel, 2025). Hence, the impact of becoming a father can greatly exacerbate what is unfortunately a difficult time for men between the ages of 25-44 – one where suicide is the leading cause of mortality for the cohort (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025).

These risks are exacerbated in lower income, and for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities that may face intersectional forms of disadvantage. CALD community members also face greater barriers when attempting to access mental health services for a range of reasons, including often working longer hours, cultural expectations and stigma, financial pressures, lower health literacy, and discrimination (Centre for Family Research and Evaluation [CFRE], 2023). Despite contemporary knowledge around the impacts of fatherhood on new dads; dads themselves may not identify the problem in this way (Better Health Channel, 2025). They may lose interest in things they once enjoyed and become socially withdrawn and/or feel disconnected from their partner, family and friends. Long work hours, financial pressures, and masculine norms such as 'toughness' and 'self-reliance' can prevent men from seeking help when they need it.

More generally, men are often entering fatherhood later in life. The current average age of becoming a father for the first time in Australia is 33.1 years of age, a jump from the 28.5 average in 1975 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Concomitantly, new dads (due to age and increased work pressures) are finding it more difficult to maintain their physical health and fitness.

When dads are struggling with poor mental health and social isolation, the impacts are felt for entire families and communities around them. Paternal mental health difficulties are associated with increased risks of maternal mental illness, increased familial conflict, harsh or hostile parent-child interactions, family violence, emotional and behavioural difficulties in children, and mental health issues in children.

When dads recognise these issues and impacts on the community around them, they may also be hesitant to engage with the service system. There are various factors impacting such a decision, including long work hours, traditional gender norms (such as the perception that the father has to return to work sooner), cultural stigma and patriarchal values that may hinder seeking support (e.g. that having a child should represent a happy time in one's life, or that seeking support is shameful or shows a lack of resilience), and the perception that some services (e.g. Maternal Child Health) are designed for mothers [Giallo et al., 2017].



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The National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030 highlights the challenges during new fatherhood for adult men, and the need to support men during this time. These challenges can have concomitant impacts on their children, partners, families, and broader communities. Hence, providing a service that can assist with new dad's needs at this time, could be of great benefit in supporting healthy, safe and gender-equal families. This isn't only true for new dads, but more generally for men – creating early intervention pathways and partnerships for capacity building and stigma reduction when addressing men's mental health concerns.

## Dadfit

In order to address this gap in services for new fathers, the Dadfit program was co-developed with fathers in Melbourne in early 2023. The creation of the program was supported with input from experts in mental health, family health, and cultural inclusion. It builds on best practices and research, showing that programs for fathers combining physical activity, social connection and parenting support can create lasting benefits including decreased symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety, as well as increased self-confidence as a parent (Giallo et al., 2020).

The Dadfit program involves five weekly, two-hour sessions, in which dads meet up in a local setting (e.g. a school, public park or community centre) with 10-20 dads from the local community. Each session starts with 45 minutes of team-building physical activity ("Dad Workout") followed by a 60-minute facilitated discussion ("Dad Chat") about parenting, relationships, mental health, and family wellbeing. The former component acknowledges the link between physical and mental health, along with allowing some fathers to reengage with fitness-based behaviours that they may have disengaged from, after becoming a father. The latter "Dad Chat" allow dads to listen to others; sharing personal challenges – about parenting, relationships, stress, anxiety, etc., and realise that their feelings related to becoming a parent are normal, and they are not alone. Dadfit creates a safe space for men to share experiences and learn from each other, guided by trained facilitators. At the conclusion of each session the dads receive a "Dad Challenge" – a fun, practical challenge to try out in their home lives, while also building community as the fathers share their experiences on WhatsApp between sessions.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Dadfit supports community development and cross-cultural engagement through Dads and Kids SportsFest afternoons. These are also intended to foster greater father-child connections. The Dadfit program partners with other organisations to enhance its reach, scope, efficiency, and ability to implement a more effective program.

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<sup>1</sup> An example of a Dad Challenge is: Do one thing to consciously connect with your child this week then share an update on the WhatsApp group to let us know how it went.

## Current Evaluation

The current evaluation will entail a detailed, summative analysis of the Dadfit program from January 2024 until March 2025. Specifically, the quality of implementation and the effectiveness of the program in terms of meeting program outcomes.

To assess the implementation and effectiveness of the Dadfit program, the following key evaluation questions were developed:

1. **How well has the Dadfit program been implemented and achieved its planned activities in an efficient manner?**
2. **To what extent does Dadfit meet its specific objectives and outcomes?**
3. **To what extent does Dadfit contribute to improved physical and mental health, social connectedness, and family relationships?**

From January 2024 to March 2025, Dadfit delivered 26 five-week Dadfit programs. Of these, 8 programs were delivered in partnership with Drummond Street Services and NWMPHN with a focus on diverse and disadvantaged communities in Melbourne's north and west. This evaluation reports on data from 8 of the 11 iterations of the program, including the **PHN Dadfit Programs** along with data from **All Dadfit Programs** across that period. It also provides data from 6 Dads and Kids SportsFest Events funded by NWMPHN. The table below outlines the 8 **PHN Dadfit Programs** and Dads and Kids SportsFest events.

Table 1. Program Iterations

Program Name & Date	Target Population	Funding Pool
Doherty's Creek (Truganina) February 2024		Pilot Program
Davis Creek (Tarneit) May 2024		
Broadmeadows August 2024		
Warreen (Truganina) November 2024	55 dads	Initial: \$12,000
Truganina South February 2025		
Cambridge (Hoppers Crossing) February 2025		
Riverwalk (Werribee) February 2025	90 dads (in total with 3 more iterations), with a particular focus on CALD community members	Extension: \$29,100
Point Cook March 2025		
3 more upcoming iterations		
Dads and Kids SportsFest (6 Iterations)	80 dads, and 120 children	\$14,100

## Program Logic

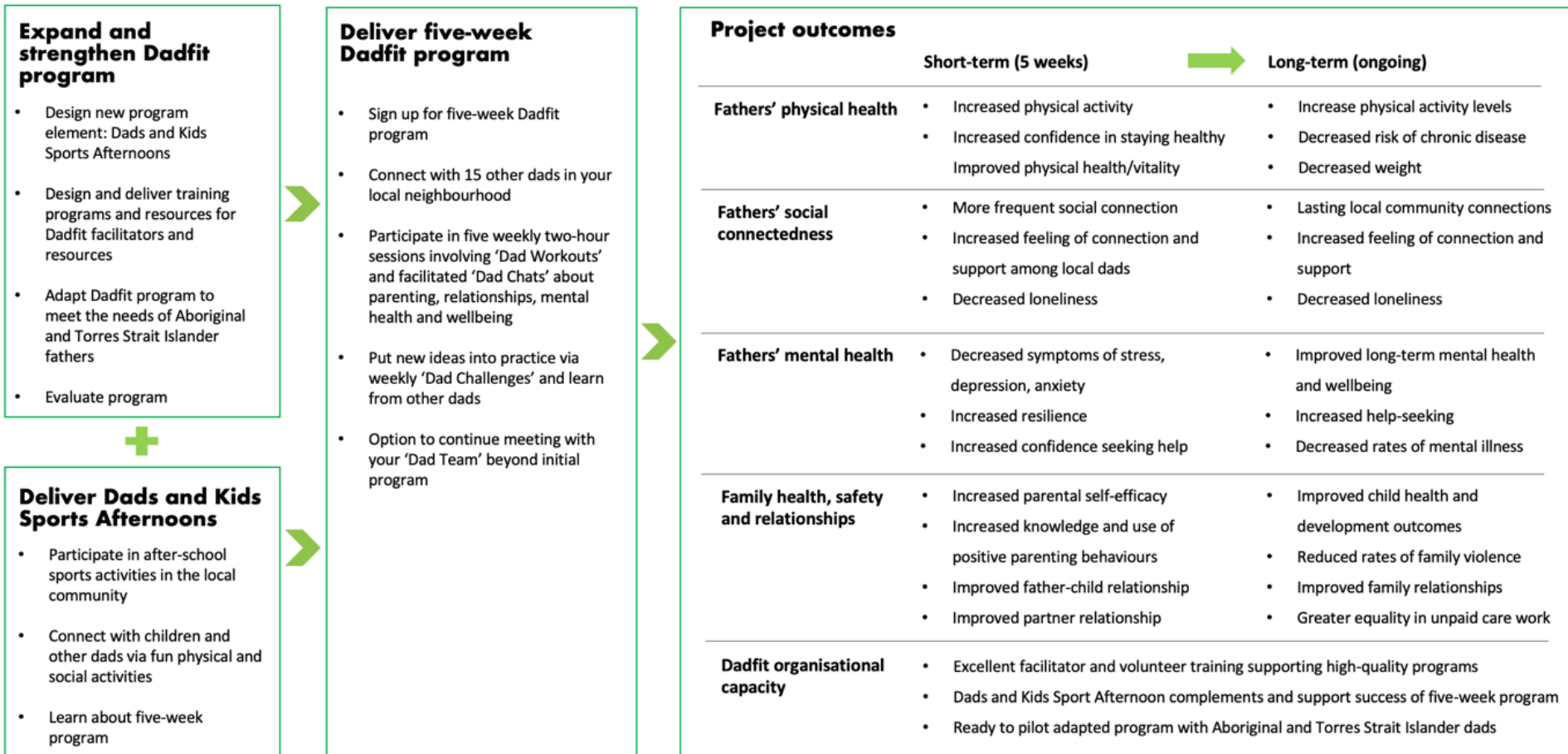
Due to the two sources of funding, the Dadfit program had two program logics for the following iterations, although they both contained very similar themes. The presented program logic expands on the initial funding pool. **All Dadfit Programs** aimed to recruit dads from the following populations:

- Dads from diverse cultures, newly arrived migrants and/or refugees
- Dads who work long hours and feel socially disconnected
- Dads who are struggling with their physical fitness and/or their mental health
- Dads who are concerned about their partner's health and happiness
- Dads who at times feel lost and unsure how-to parent in a positive way

The program logic can be seen below:

## Program logic: Dadfit Program Expansion (NWMPHN)

dadfit.au



dadfit

## Design and Methods

The evaluation design is convergent, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methods, with data collected in parallel. Quantitative data from pre- and post- (including a 6 week follow up) surveys provided basic demographic information (including age, country of birth, number of children etc.), along with information on mental health, physical health, parental connectedness, and parental confidence single-item outcome measures. The post-survey captures feedback data about the quality, effectiveness, relevance and usefulness of the Dadfit program. Hence, it contains further self-rated questions regarding 17 areas of interest – some of which overlap with the single-item outcome measures in regard to themes. Partners were also offered to complete a post-program survey.

Qualitative data from the surveys included open-ended questions to capture thoughts about the program. This survey leveraged a Most Significant Change (MSC) approach, as well as questions about dad's favourite things about the program, and areas for improvement. MSC was designed to report on diverse outcomes which can result from participants' perceived significance of changes (Better Evaluation, 2005).

Qualitative data was also captured during latter stages of the programs through planned activities focused on MSC. Activities inspired by the Most Significant Change technique were also incorporated into more recent **PHN Dadfit Programs**. These allowed for a more focused approach to qualitative reflection and feedback, at the end of each 5-week program. These activities usually took the form of open-ended chats. These responses were recorded and transcribed for the purpose of evaluation.

A focus group with the program coordinators provided further qualitative data covering all facets of the program, in particular; program enablers and benefits, program challenges, and any further information relevant to the evaluation.

## Limitations

Drummond Street's Centre for Family Research and Evaluation did not conduct focus groups or interviews directly with Dadfit participants due to ethical constraints. Instead, evaluators used participant data collected by Dadfit staff, including written surveys and transcribed recordings of conversations.<sup>2</sup>

## Data Collection Matrix

The table on the following page provides an outline of the methodology in relation to the key evaluation questions.

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<sup>2</sup> Consent was obtained by program staff, taking into consideration NHMRC guidelines.

Table 2. Data Collection Matrix

Evaluation Question	Indicators	Primary Method(s)
1. How well has the Dadfit program been implemented and achieved its planned activities in an efficient manner?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demographic data regarding % of dads from CALD backgrounds</li> <li>Pre/Post single-item outcome measures</li> <li>MSC and Favourite Thing data</li> <li>Suggested improvements data from pre/post survey</li> <li>Qualitative during-service data</li> <li>Focus group qualitative data</li> <li>Dads and Kids SportsFest Data – reaching over 80 dads and 120 children in 6 afternoons</li> <li>Partners' perceptions of the program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre/Post survey data</li> <li>Focus group</li> <li>Partner Survey data</li> </ul>
2. To what extent does Dadfit meet its specific objectives and outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demographic data</li> <li>Pre/Post single-item outcome measures</li> <li>Post-program questionnaire</li> <li>MSC and Favourite Thing data</li> <li>Qualitative during-service data</li> <li>Focus Group qualitative data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre/post survey Data</li> <li>Qualitative during-service responses (MSC activity)</li> <li>Focus group</li> </ul>
3. To what extent does Dadfit contribute to improved physical and mental health, social connectedness, and family relationships?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre/post single-item outcome measures</li> <li>Post-program questionnaire – aiming for 80% of cohort to agree with positive sentiments (4 or 5) on self-rated Likert scale questions</li> <li>Same results for Dads and Kids SportsFest</li> <li>Qualitative during-service data</li> <li>Focus group qualitative data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre/Post survey data</li> <li>Qualitative during-service responses (MSC activity)</li> </ul>

## Findings

*“A person, a family or a father coming from India, it’s hard to understand what’s his place in this society. I was amazed that there were so many dads so close and some were speaking the mother-tongue I speak. It was unreal that I’ve already spent close to two years here and I don’t know these guys. And the way we talk now, we feel like we’ve already known each other for years.” – Dadfit*

**participant at Dohertys Creek**

The evaluation findings primarily focus on the 8 **PHN Dadfit Programs** run from February 2024 to March 2025, also providing comparison with all 26 Dadfit programs run from January 2024 until March 2025. Data presented in the findings was collected through:

- pre- and post- program surveys (including post-program sentiments and 6-week follow-up surveys),
- Partner survey (completed by the partners of the dads),
- Dadfit activities (collecting qualitative data through Most Significant Change),
- focus groups with Dadfit staff, and
- Dads and Kids SportsFest surveys.

## Implementation of the Dadfit programs

Overall, there were a total of 390 dads that had participated across **All Dadfit Programs** until March 2025. Of these, 239 (61.3%) completed the pre/post survey. 129 dads participated across the first eight iterations of the **PHN Dadfit Programs** assisted by the Ready Steady Family team at Drummond Street Services – 80 (62%) of them completed the pre/post survey. The participation and survey completion of each program was:

- Dohertys Creek (Truganina) February 2024: 15 participants, 8 surveys (53.3%).
- Davis Creek (Tarneit) May 2024: 26 participants, 17 surveys (65.4%).
- Broadmeadows August 2024: 9 participants, 3 surveys (33.3%).
- Warreen (Truganina) November 2024: 19 participants, 9 surveys (47.4%).
- Cambridge (Hoppers Crossing) February 2025: 13 participants, 8 surveys (61.5%).
- Truganina South February 2025: 8 participants, 4 surveys (50%).
- Riverwalk (Werribee) February 2025: 22 participants, 16 surveys (72.7%).



- Point Cook March 2025: 17 participants, 15 surveys (88.2%).

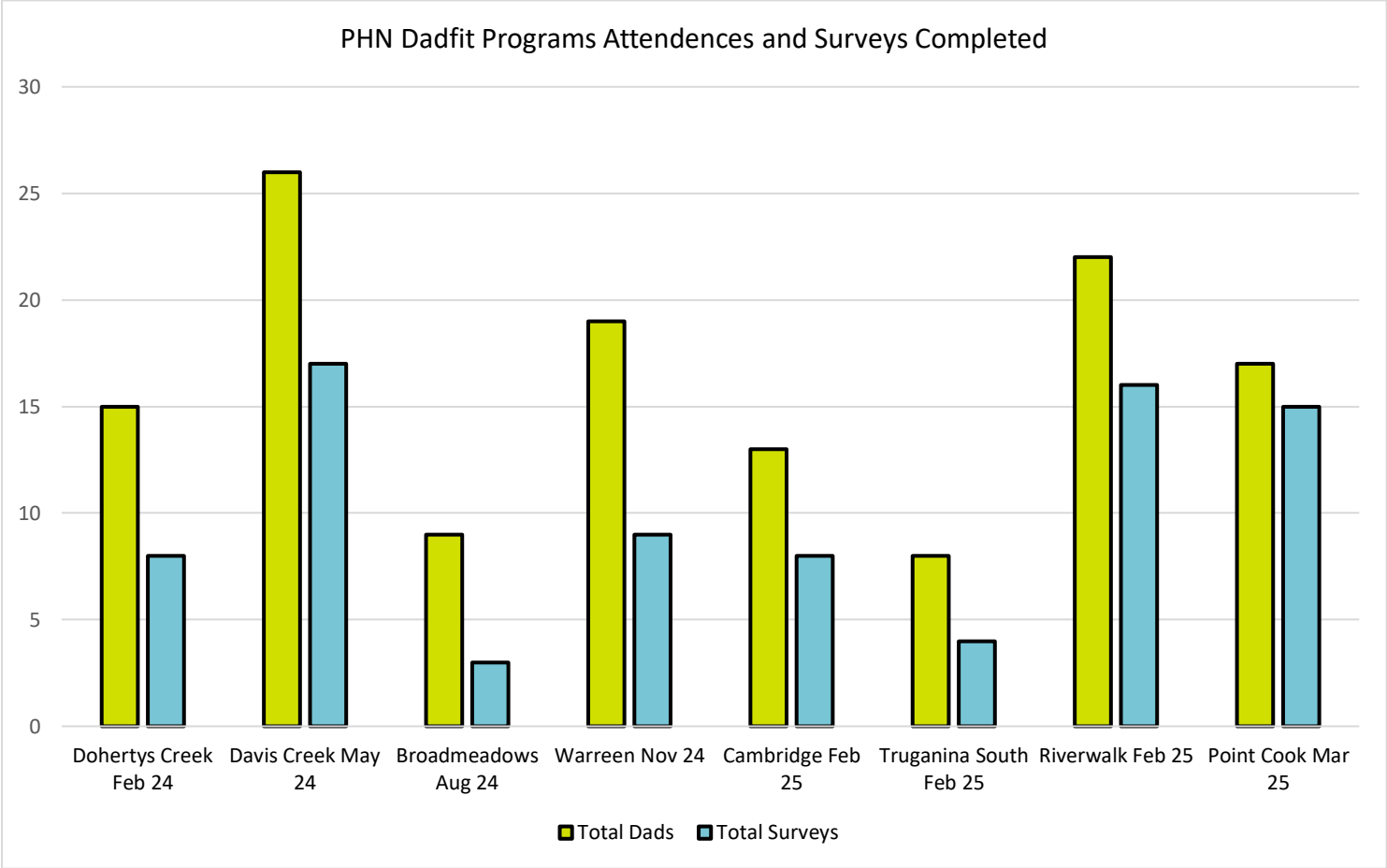


Figure 1. PHN Dadfit Programs & Survey Completion Rates

Please note that the gender and sexuality of dads was not recorded.

## Age

The average age of the participants for **All Dadfit Programs** was 39.3 years of age. The youngest dad was 28 years of age, whilst the oldest was 62 years of age. For the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, the average age was 40.2 years of age. The youngest dad was 32, whilst the oldest dad was 52. The remaining spread of ages for PHN can be seen below:

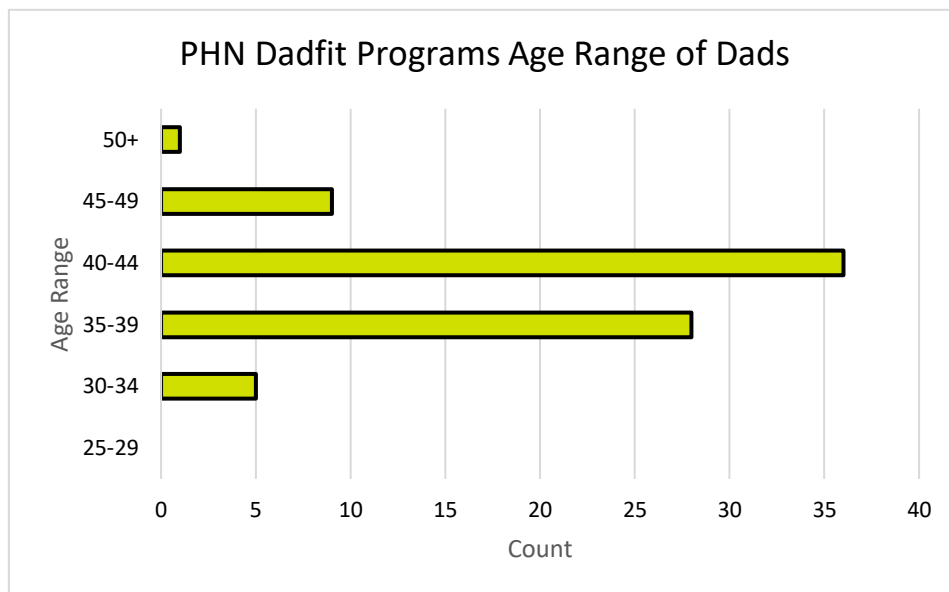


Figure 2. Age Range of Dads for PHN Dadfit Programs

## Diversity and Cultural Information

Across **All Dadfit Programs**, around 44.9% of dads were born in Australia. In contrast, the **PHN Dadfit Programs** saw only 17.7% of dads born in Australia (14 dads). This shows the greater focus on CALD communities for the latter programs.

For PHN programs, a vast majority of dads were born in India (62%, 49 dads). The remaining spread can be seen in the table below. One dad did not record their country of birth.

Table 3. Country of Birth for **PHN Dadfit Programs**

Country of Birth	Number of Dads	%
India	49	62%
Australia	14	17.7%
Germany	2	3.8%
Nepal	2	2.5%
Pakistan	2	2.5%
South Africa	2	2.5%
Fiji	1	1.3%
Malaysia	1	1.3%
New Zealand	1	1.3%
Philippines	1	1.3%
Saudi Arabia	1	1.3%
Syria	1	1.3%
Venezuela	1	1.3%
Total	79	100%

English was the most common language at home across **All Dadfit Programs**; representing 146 participants (61.6%). Hindi was the second-most spoken language (19 dads, 8%) of the 27 languages represented. For the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, English and Hindi both had 17 (21.5%) fluent speakers. All dads reported that they had some level of English proficiency. A total of 19 languages were represented in the cohort and can be seen in the table below. Once again, one dad did not record an answer for this section.

Table 4. Preferred Language Spoken at Home for **PHN Dadfit Programs**

Language	Number of Dads	%
English	17	21.5%
Hindi	17	21.5%
Telugu	12	15.2%
Tamil	9	11.4%
Marathi	3	3.8%
Afrikaans	2	2.5%
Arabic	2	2.5%
Bengali	2	2.5%
Gujarati	2	2.5%
Nepali	2	2.5%
Punjabi	2	2.5%
Urdu	2	2.5%
Cook Island	1	1.3%
Filipino/Tagalog	1	1.3%
Kannada	1	1.3%
Mandarin	1	1.3%
Scots	1	1.3%
Vietnamese	1	1.3%
Total	79	100%

### Children of Dads

For **All Dadfit Programs**; 138 dads (58.2%) reported being the parent of 1 child, 83 dads (35%) had 2 children, 15 dads (6.3%) had 3 children, and 1 (0.4%) dad had 4 children. For the **PHN Dadfit Programs**; 26 dads (32.9%) reported being the parent of 1 child, 45 dads (57%) had 2 children, 7 dads (8.9%) had 3 children, and 1 (1.3%) dad had 4 children.

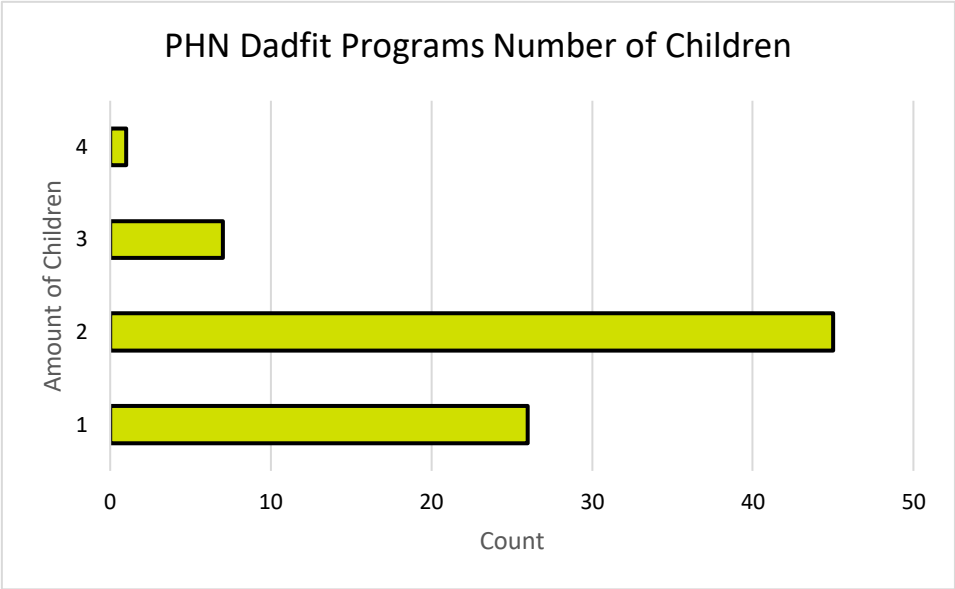


Figure 3. Number of Children per Dad for PHN Dadfit Programs

The median age of the youngest child for dads in the **PHN Dadfit Programs** was 4 years old, with 54.3% of participants having their child under 5 years old.

## Number of Sessions Attended

Across **All Dadfit Programs**, the average sessions attended was 3.96. The average for the **PHN Dadfit Programs** was 3.97. 2 (2.6%) dads attended 1 session, 4 (5.2%) dads attended 2 sessions, 15 (19.5%) dads attended 3 sessions, and 29 (37.7%) dads attended 4 sessions. 27 (35.1%) dads attended all 5 sessions, whilst 3 dads attendance was not recorded.

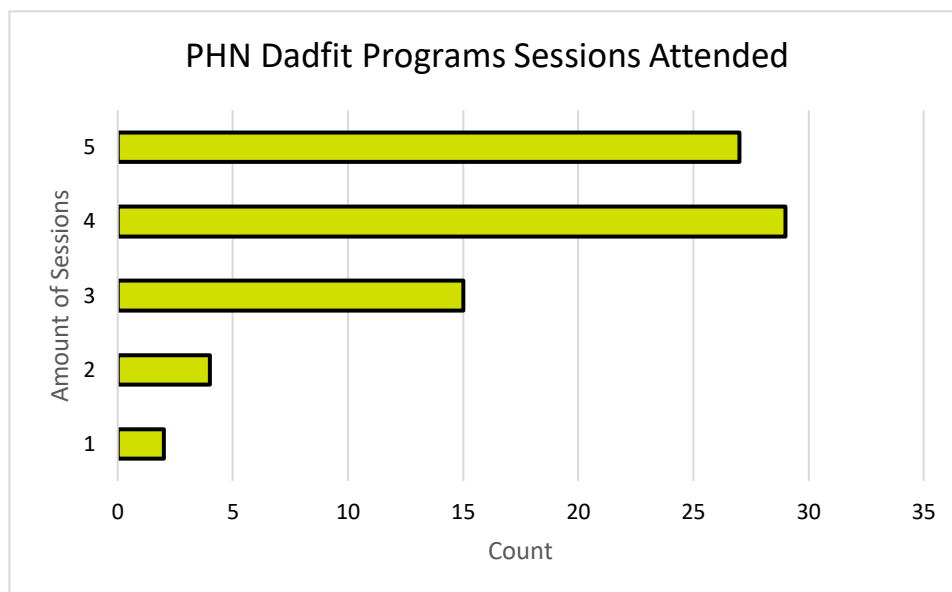


Figure 4. Session-based Attendance for PHN Dadfit Programs

## Impact of the Program

This section will primarily focus on data that elicits the effects of the Dadfit program for participants, families of participants, and the communities around them. These results will assist with answering the latter two evaluation questions that refer to outcomes, including changes in physical and mental health, social connectedness and family relationships.

### Pre/Post Outcome Measures

Both the pre- and post- program surveys contained the same four single-item outcome measures. They were all self-assessment measures. Of the 239 participants from **All Dadfit Programs**, 168 (70.3%) provided responses for both the pre- and post- outcome measures. From the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, 54 (67.5%) of the 80 participants provided responses. These response rates are commendable, particularly for a short-form intervention, where

participants may have limited time. Furthermore, 25 dads filled-in the same measures in the 6-week follow-up survey.<sup>3</sup> Outcomes were measured by Likert scales and included:

- Physical Health (1-5, with 5 indicating greater physical health)
- Mental Health (1-5, with 5 indicating greater mental health)
- Parental Confidence (1-5, with 5 indicating greater confidence)
- Parental Connection (1-7, with 7 indicating greater connection)

## Physical Health

Regarding physical health, the item asked; “In general, how would you rate your physical health?”

The average score for the item in the pre-program survey was 2.84 for **All Dadfit Programs** and 2.7 for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**. This rose to 3.26 in the post-program survey for **All Dadfit Programs**, and 3.32 for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, indicating increased physical health amongst both cohorts. Results were found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), using a two-tailed t-test.

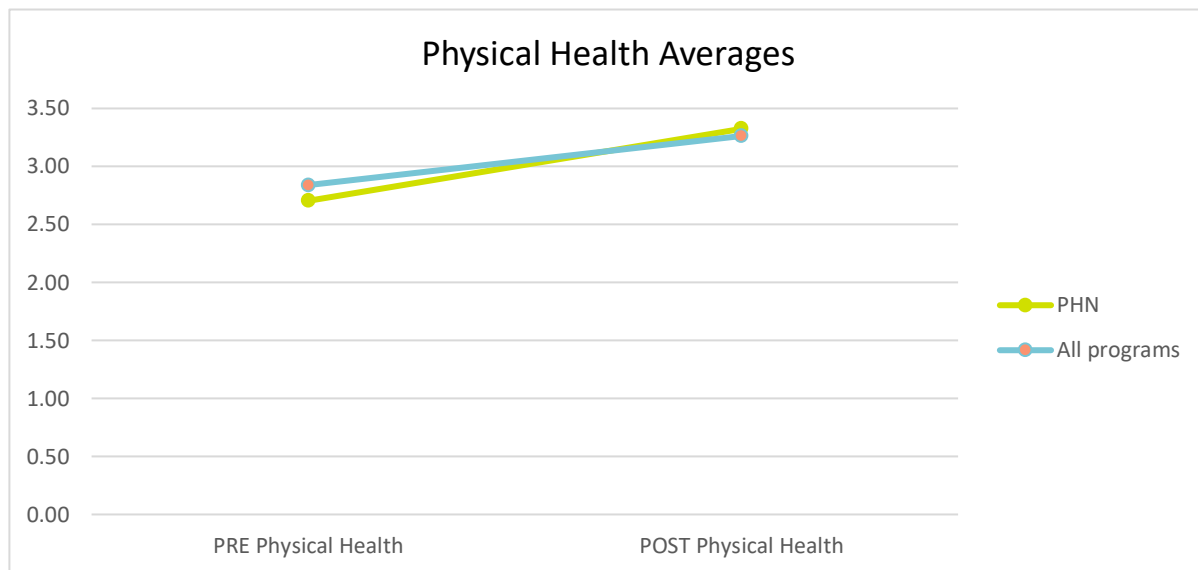


Figure 5. Pre/Post Physical Health Averages

Furthermore, of these results for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**; 24 participants (44.4%) showed an increased score, 25 (46.3%) remained the same, and 5 (9.3%) perceived a decrease.

<sup>3</sup> Please note that the 6-week follow up survey was only introduced in December 2024, and not offered to dads who completed earlier iterations of the program.

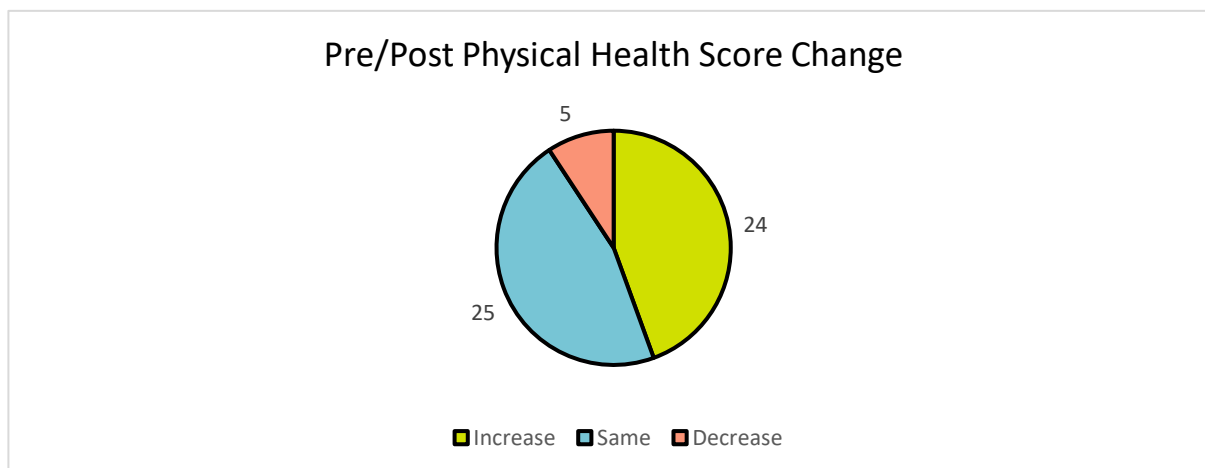


Figure 6. Physical Health Score Change

Of the 25 dads that completed the 6-week follow-up survey the average score was 3.52.

## Mental Health

Regarding mental health, the item asked; “How would you rate your overall mental health?” The average score for the item in the pre-program survey was 3.14 for **All Dadfit Programs** and 3.2 for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**. This rose to 3.51 in the post-program survey for **All Dadfit Programs**, and 3.8 for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, indicating improved health amongst both cohorts. Results were found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) using a two-tailed t-test.

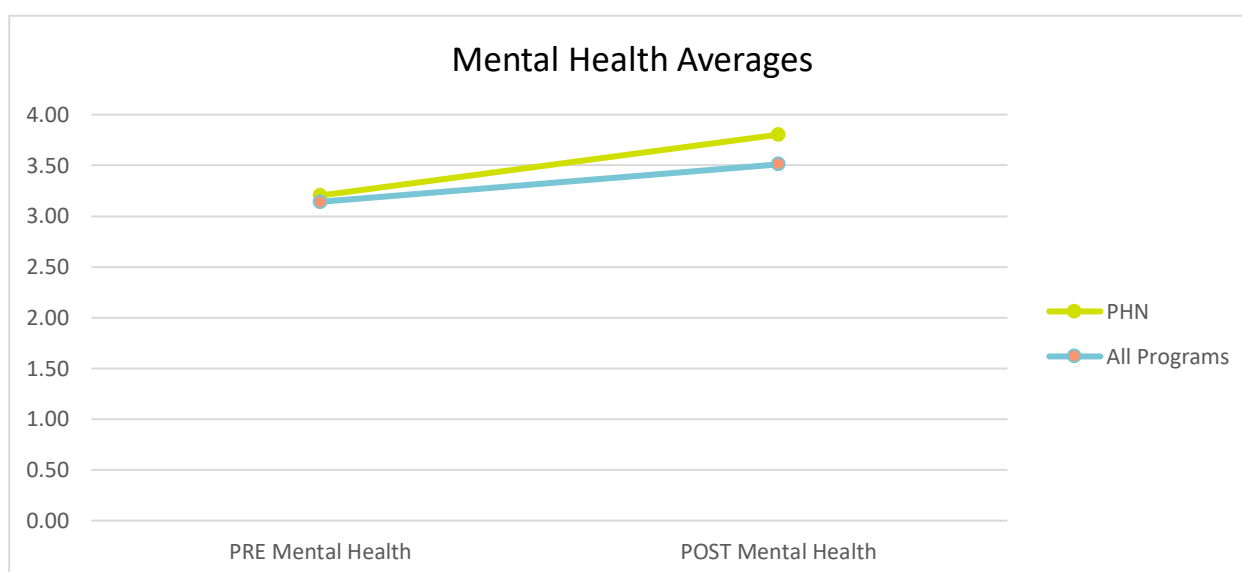


Figure 7. Pre/Post Mental Health Averages



Furthermore, of the results for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**; 28 participants (51.9%) showed an increased score, 23 (42.6%) remained the same, and 3 (5.6%) perceived a decrease.

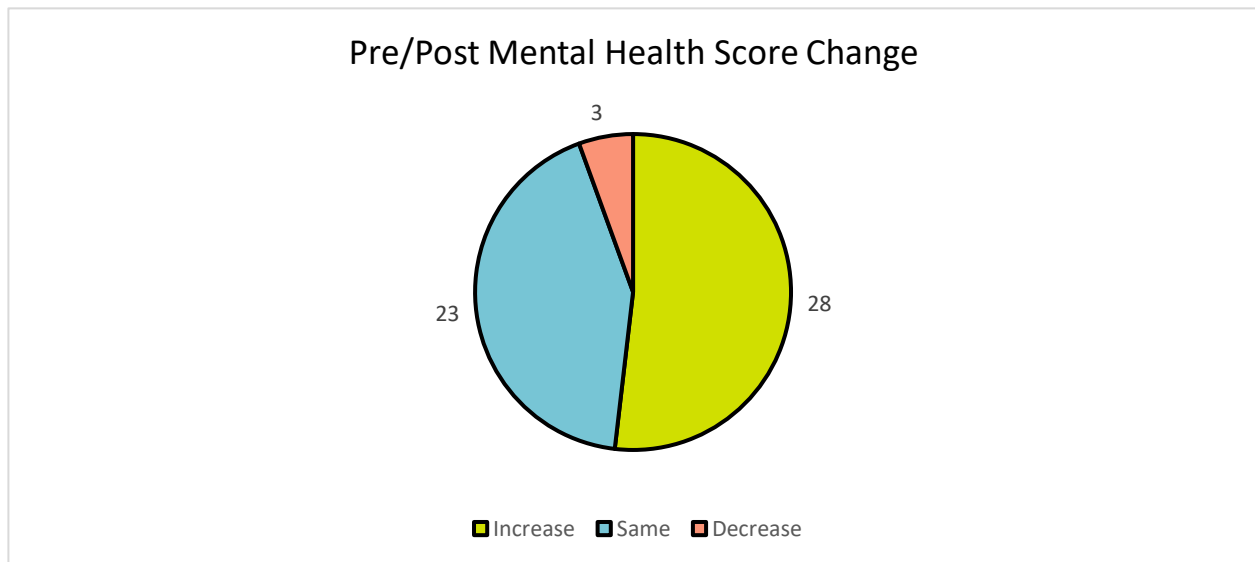


Figure 8. Mental Health Score Change

Of the 25 dads that answered the 6-week follow-up survey, the average was 3.52.

### Parental Confidence

Regarding parental confidence, the item asked; "I have confidence in myself as a parent". The average score for the item in the pre-program survey was 4.08 for **All Dadfit Programs** and 4.22 for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**. This rose to 4.48 in the post-program survey for **All Dadfit Programs**, and 4.65 for the **PHN Dadfit Programs** - indicating increased parental confidence amongst both cohorts. Results were found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) using a two-tailed t-test.

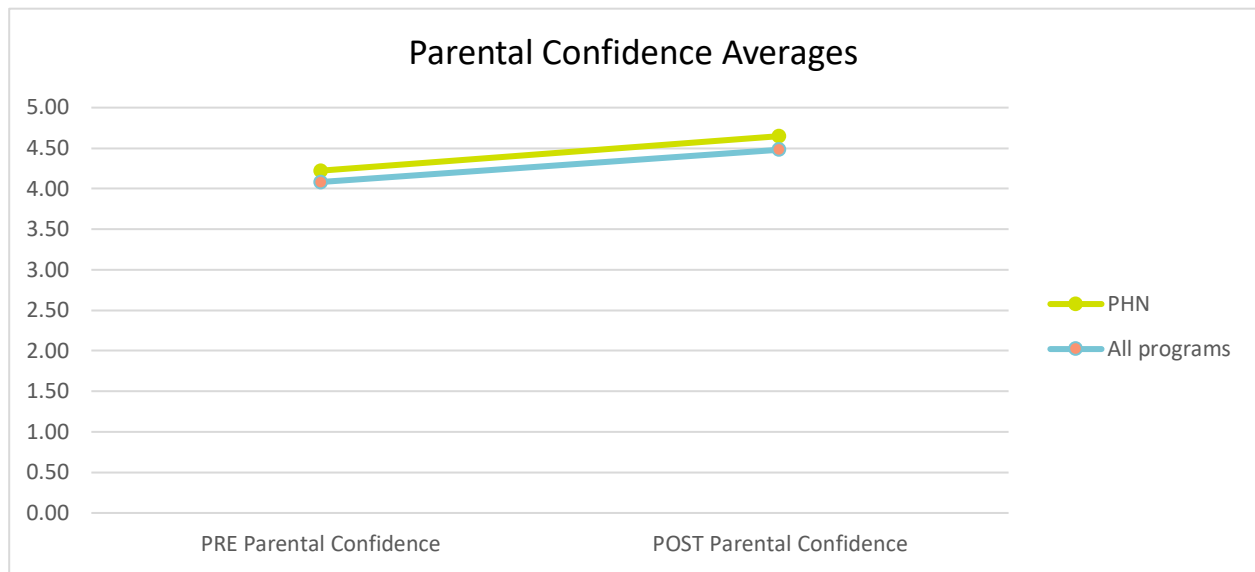


Figure 9. Pre/Post Parental Confidence Averages

Furthermore, of the results for **PHN Dadfit Programs**; 29 participants (48.3%) showed an increased score, 29 (48.3%) remained the same, and 2 (3.3%) perceived a decrease.

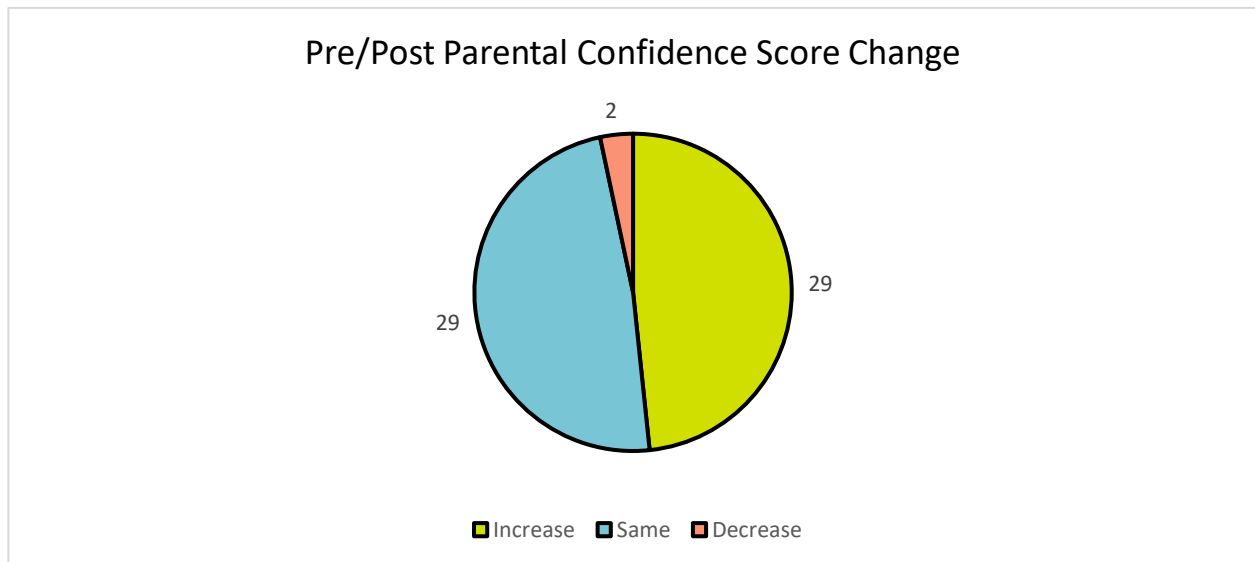


Figure 10. Parental Confidence Score Change for PHN Dadfit Programs

For the 25 dads that answered the 6-week follow-up survey, the average was 4.28.

### Parental Connection

Regarding parental connection, the item asked participants to answer; “I feel connected to other parents in my community”. The average score for the item in the pre-program survey was 4.29 for **All Dadfit Programs** and 4.98 for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**. This rose to 5.82 in the post-program survey for **All Dadfit Programs**, and 6.25 for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, indicating increased parental confidence amongst both cohorts. Results were found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) using a two-tailed t-test.

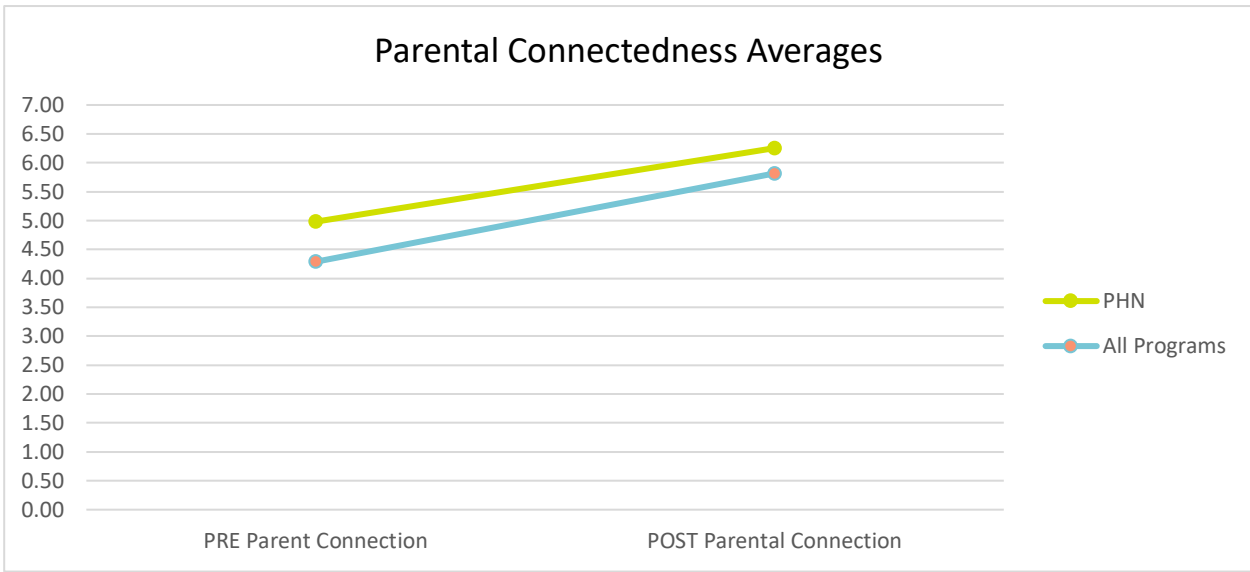


Figure 11. Pre/Post Parental Connectedness Averages

Furthermore, of the results for **PHN Dadfit Programs**; 41 participants (75.9%) showed an increased score, 9 (16.7%) remained the same, and 4 (7.4%) perceived a decrease.

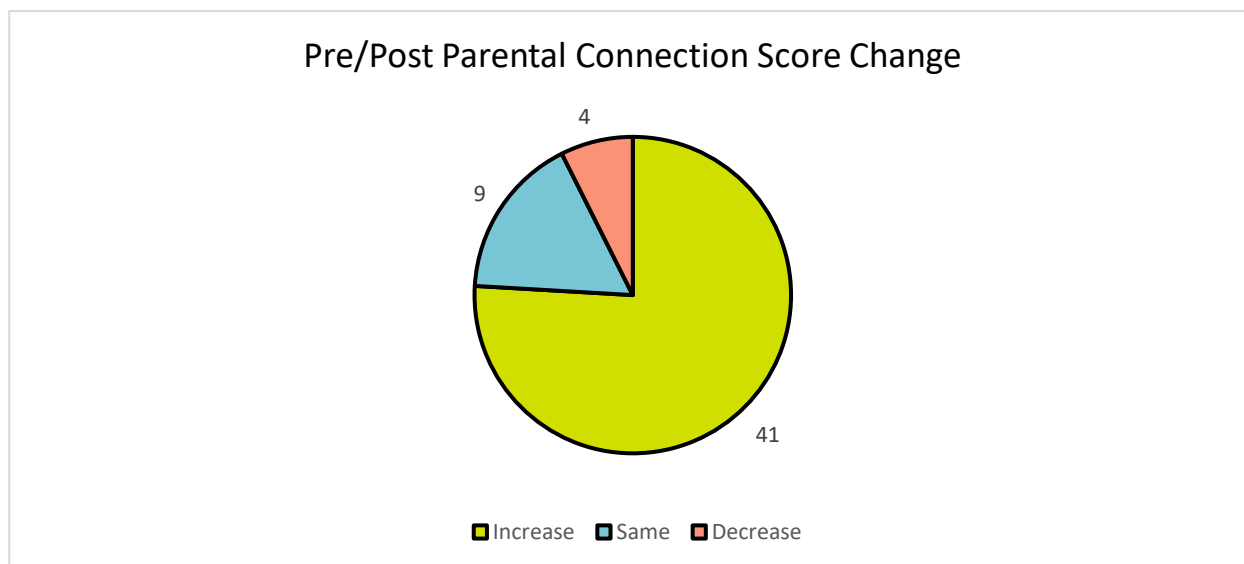


Figure 12. Parental Connectedness Score Change

Of the 25 dads that answered the 6-week follow-up survey, the average was 5.84.

Overall, 14 dads (8.3%) showed an “increase” across all metrics in **All Dadfit Programs** – this was also true of 5 (9.3%) dads from the **PHN Dadfit Programs**. It should also be noted that whilst some of the 6 follow-up surveys may not have yielded the same results as the immediate post-surveys, they had scores higher than the initial pre-program surveys. Physical health perceptions were the most resilient after the program, with the 6-week follow-up scores surpassing those of the post-program surveys.

## Post-Program Sentiments

The following section provides quantitative results for various metrics that are measured in the post-program survey for Dadfit. Each area is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores (5 being the highest) indicating greater satisfaction/ agreement. These self-assessments range from improvements in physical and mental health, to improved exercise routines, to improved connection with community, amongst others. The table below exhibits all of the results, along with averages for the total program iterations. All dads who completed a survey also completed this area of program assessment.

It appears that dads benefitted greatly across all metrics that were measured by the Dadfit program. All metrics received 85% or above positive feedback from dads in **PHN Dadfit Programs**, and over 75% for **All Dadfit Programs**. Average scores sat at 4.4 or higher across **All Dadfit Programs** – with the overall average being 4.5 (out

of 5), and the **PHN Dadfit Programs** averaging slightly higher at 4.6. Please refer to Table 5 below for further details.

*Please note that the question; “Dadfit has helped me to feel less lonely as a dad” wasn’t initially on the survey, and hence – of the total programs 43 did not answer that question, along with 8 from the PHN Dadfit Programs*

*“Coming to a group of dads and listening to the problems they have, and realising that they're having the same problems or going through the same things that I am, it's kind of nice to know that you're not alone. I mean, you kind of know everyone goes through the same thing, right? Yeah, but when you hear it, like face to face, and like how dads are managing their day to day stuff, with their kids, with their partners, and it's in your face, so it's like, oh, I mean, maybe I shouldn't be too hard on myself as well.” – Dadfit participant at Warreen Primary School*



Table 5. Post Program Self-Report Scores

Category	1 (Very Negative)	2	3 (Neutral)	4	5 (Very Positive)	% Positive (4 or 5), PHN Dadfit Programs	Average for PHN Dadfit Programs	% Positive (4 or 5), All Dadfit Programs	Average for All Dadfit Programs
Positive effect on physical health	0	0	1	8	71	98%	4.9	98%	4.8
Positive effect on mental health	0	0	1	16	63	98%	4.8	99%	4.7
Exercising more regularly	0	0	8	30	42	89%	4.4	80%	4.3
Confident can look after health and wellbeing	0	0	3	19	58	95%	4.7	95%	4.5
More connected to dads in local community	0	0	7	25	47	89%	4.5	93%	4.6
Support network of dads to draw on	0	0	8	26	46	89%	4.5	90%	4.4
I plan to stay connected with dad I have met through Dadfit	0	0	5	17	58	93%	4.7	91%	4.5
Dadfit has helped me to be a better dad	0	0	3	24	53	95%	4.6	93%	4.6
Dadfit has helped me to feel less stressed	0	0	6	25	49	91%	4.5	89%	4.4
Dadfit has helped me to feel less lonely as a dad	0	0	6	17	47	91%	4.6	92%	4.6

Category	1 (Very Negative)	2	3 (Neutral)	4	5 (Very Positive)	% Positive for PHN Dadfit Programs	Average for PHN Dadfit Programs	% Positive for All Dadfit Programs	Average for All Dadfit Programs
I feel more confident seeking support if I need it	0	0	4	26	50	94%	4.6	91%	4.5
Dadfit has had a positive effect on my relationship with my child(ren)	0	0	6	22	60	91%	4.7	90%	4.5
I feel more confident handling challenges or setbacks as a dad	0	0	3	14	54	94%	4.6	91%	4.5
I am more aware of ideas and approaches to use as a parent	0	0	1	15	64	98%	4.8	96%	4.6
Dadfit has helped me to be more involved as a parent	0	0	5	17	56	90%	4.6	83%	4.4
Dadfit has helped me to be a better partner (or co-parent)	0	1	4	18	57	93%	4.6	91%	4.5
Dadfit has had a positive effect on my relationship with my partner (or co-parent)	0	0	4	20	56	94%	4.7	90%	4.5



# Overall Sentiments

## Difficulty of Workouts

Of 236 dads who participated in **All Dadfit Programs**, 214 (90.7%) stated that the workouts were “About right”. 16 (6.8%) stated they’d prefer the workouts to be a “little harder”. 6 (2.5%) participants also stated that they’d prefer the workouts to be a “little easier”. Of 79 dads who participated in the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, 75 (94.9%) stated that the workouts were “About right”. 1 (1.3%) stated they’d prefer the workouts to be a “little harder”. 3 (3.8%) participants also stated that they’d prefer the workouts to be a “little easier”.

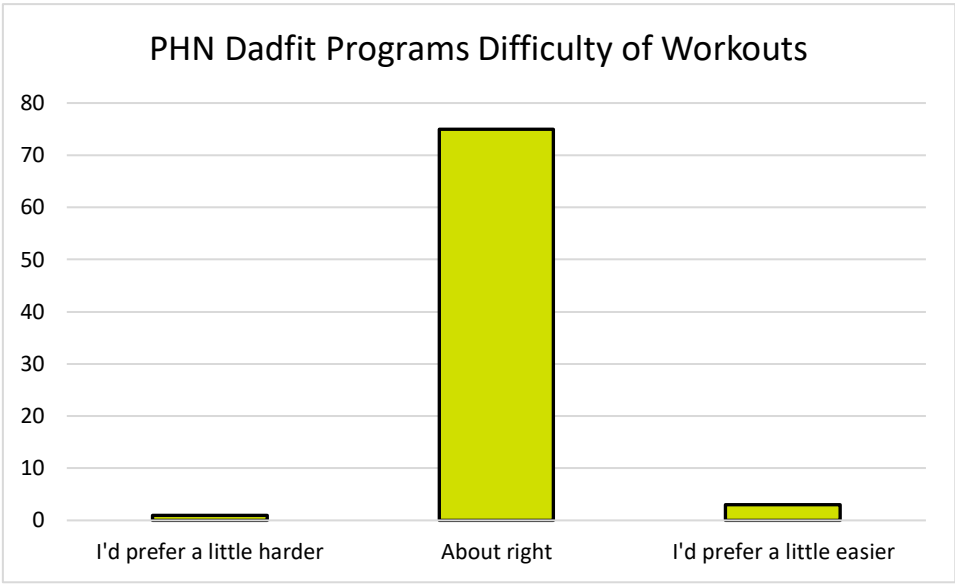


Figure 13. Perceived Difficulty of Workouts for PHN Dadfit Programs

## Post-Dadfit Recommendations & Activities

Almost all dads across **All Dadfit Programs** (227 dads, 95%), and in the **PHN Dadfit Programs** (73 dads, 91.3%) stated that they were “very likely” to recommend the program to a friend (95%). In **All Dadfit Programs**; a further 9 (3.8%) stated that they would be “likely” to recommend the program, whilst 3 (1.3%) would not recommend the program. For **PHN**

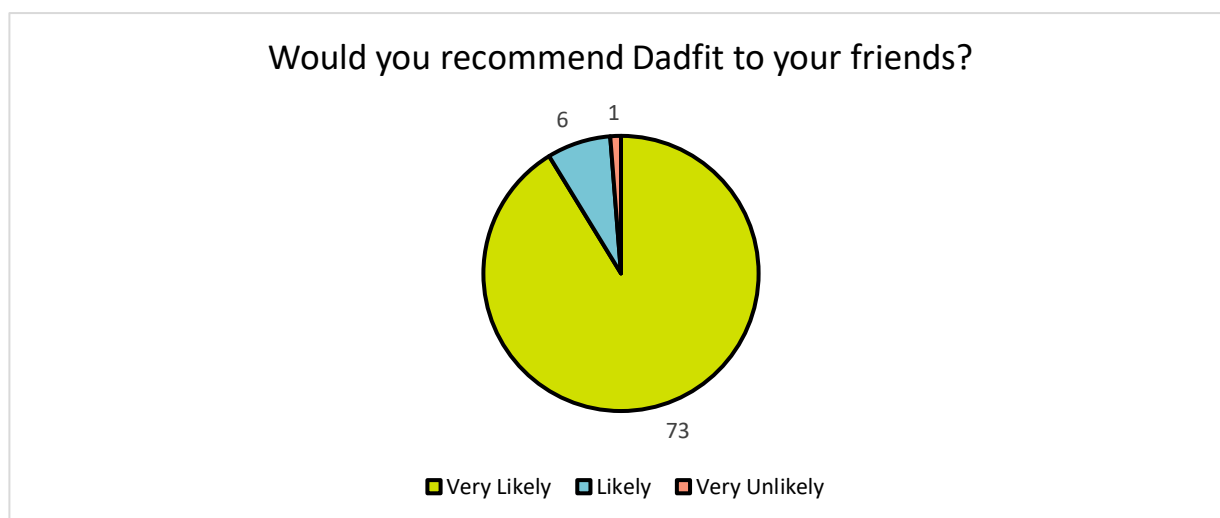


Figure 14. Rate of Potential Recommendation to Friends for PHN Dadfit Programs

**Dadfit Programs;** a further 6 dads (7.5%) stated they would be “likely” to recommend the program, whilst 1 (1.3%) stated they would not.

### Overall Rating of the Program

Overall, the above results indicate that participants were very satisfied with the program. After completion of the program, the participants were asked to rate the Dadfit program overall. Assessing **All Dadfit Programs;** 216 (90.4%) dads gave the program a 5/5 rating, whilst 23 (9.6%) dads gave the program a 4/5. Assessing the **PHN Dadfit Programs;** 75 dads (93.8%) rated the program a 5/5, whilst 5 dads (6.3%) gave the program a 4/5. There were no ratings below a 4. The average rating for **All Dadfit Programs** was excellent at 4.9/5, whilst the **PHN Dadfit Programs** averaged at 4.92/5.

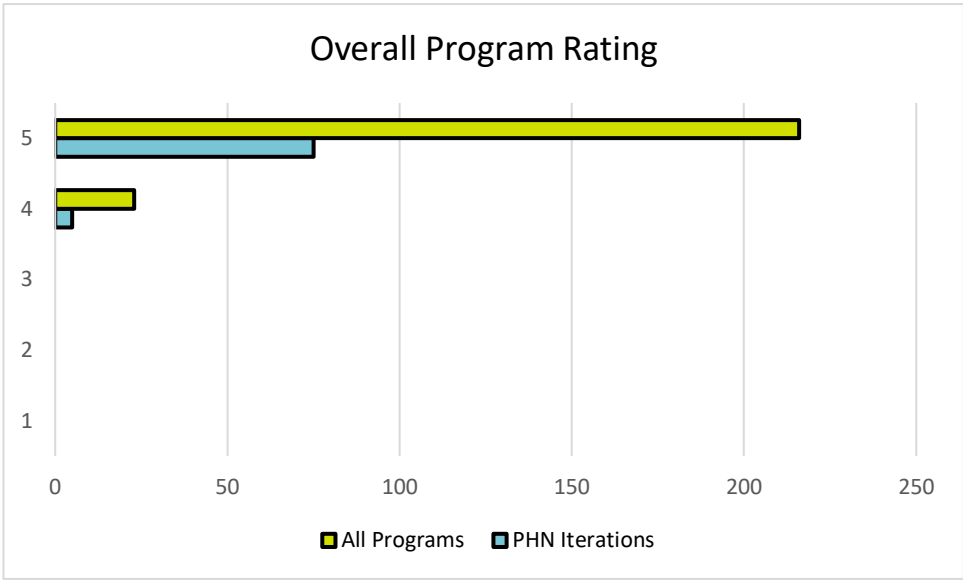


Figure 15. Overall Program Rating Scores

## Partner Surveys

We collected data from partners of dads, to better understand their perceptions of the program. 41 partner surveys were collected across **All Dadfit Programs**.

### Overall Perceptions

Partners were asked to rate their partner’s experience of Dadfit out of 5. A large proportion of partners (39 or 95.1%) answered the question – with 71.8% giving a rating of 5/5, whilst the remaining 28.2% gave a rating of 4/5. Overall, the program received an average rating of 4.72 and all participants through that there was an “increased need for a program like Dadfit in” their area.

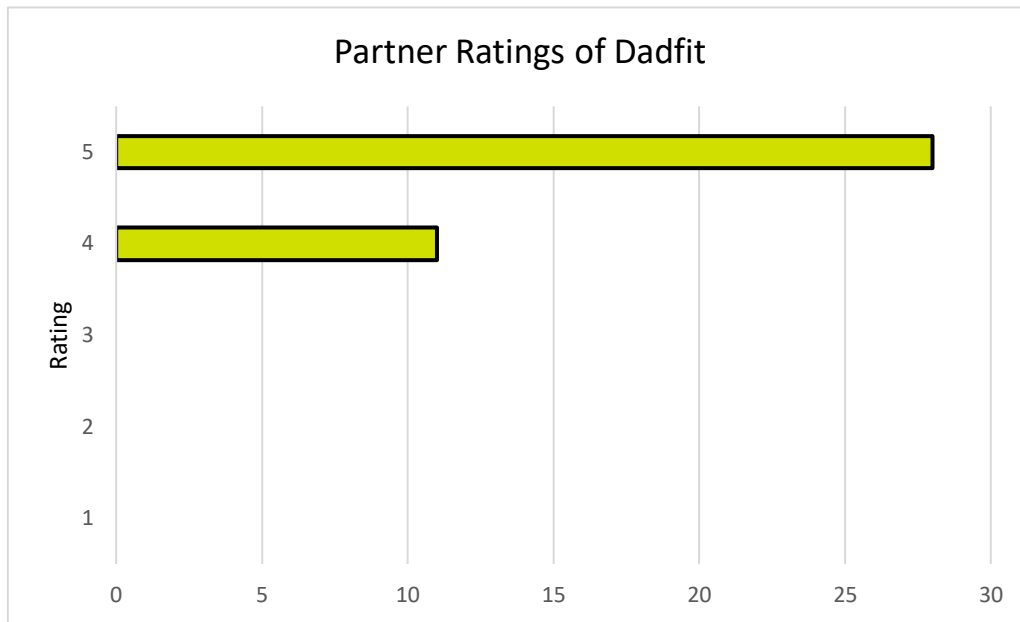


Figure 16. Partner Ratings of Dadfit

Partners were asked a series of questions ranked on a 5-point Likert scale that primarily focused on family connection and confidence after the program. All 41 partners responded to these. As the chart below illuminates - a vast majority of partners had positive perceptions (all above 87%) about the program. These results show how the Dadfit program can have positive impacts on familial relationships more generally.

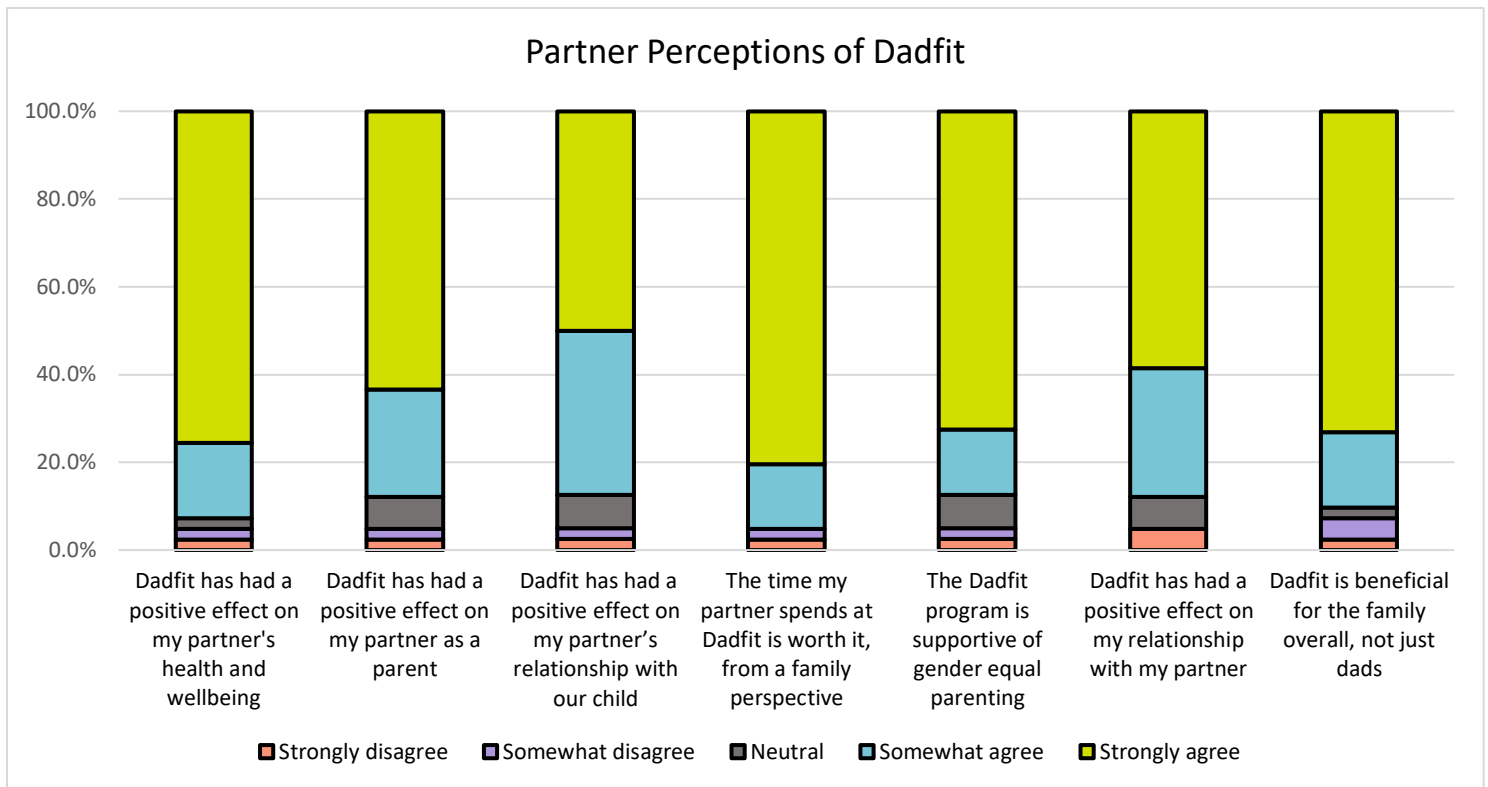


Figure 17. Partner Perceptions of Dadfit

### What did the Partners Say?

The survey also asked; *“What benefits of Dadfit have you noticed for your partner, yourself or your family?”*

Partners highlighted the impact of Dadfit on physical and mental health, along with others.

*“Physically, he has lost 2 kg in just 4 weeks. Mentally, he is more open to conversations and realises that he is not alone in this journey.”* – **Partner of Dadfit participant**

*“He really enjoyed connecting with other dads and sharing, learning from each other’s experience. He came home and implemented practices & tips learnt”* – **Partner of Dadfit participant**

*“Getting back into exercising, openness talking about parenting and emotions, positive reinforcement of good parenting”* – **Partner of Dadfit participant**

*“Greater understanding of parenting challenges. Also, a refreshed focus on our physical health as a family”* – **Partner of Dadfit participant**

These quotes not only exhibit Dadfit’s capacity to provide a plethora of improvements to the life of dads but also to partners and family members. They suggest an improvement in relationships, parenting

proficiency and adaptability, and also help-seeking behaviours through increased openness and sharing with partners (and therefore a reduction in stigma).

## What did the Dads Say?

After the completion of the program, dads were asked to answer two-open ended questions that were part of the post-survey. These questions asked dads what their favourite thing about the program was, and what they deemed to be the most significant change. The qualitative responses revealed a range of common themes.

Some focused on specific aspects such as physical health and fitness, and how the program made them realise the importance of maintenance in these areas. The program also facilitated the formation of positive habits for many participants.

*"I'm at least doing some physical activity two times in a week now."* – **Dad of two children, 40 years old.**

*"Feeling healthier and more motivated to get exercising on a regular basis"* – **Dad of two children, 42 years old.**

Responses also intimated the overall mental health effects.

*"More energy and understanding how to look after you again. Overall mental health"* – **Dad of three children, 35 years old.**

These mental health effects were a consequence of multiple factors. One of the primary factors was greater community connection, and reduced feelings of loneliness.

*"Meeting local dads and the Dad Chat. It's definitely refreshing and you feel that you are not alone."* – **Dad of one child, 38 years old.**

*"Getting involved in the community was probably the most significant change"* – **Dad of one child, 40 years old.**

The importance of being able to share experiences, and learn about alternative perspectives of being a dad, parent, and relationships to family were also shared.

*"Realising everyone dads differently and there is no perfect way"* – **Dad of two children, 39 years old**

These chats reduced stigma towards addressing mental health issues in new dads and men generally, indicating self-awareness and empowerment.

*"Having the confidence to open up my own feelings and thoughts to other dads that I would never do to anyone else unless I was under the influence of drugs and alcohol. I'm an ex-user of*

*both, and the feeling that I'm not the only one who has struggles in family life."* – **Dad of two children, 47 years old.**

Implications for family relationships and improved parenting were also present.

*"Spending conscious time with family and [improved ability to] take care of [my]self"* – **Dad of two children, 40 years old.**

*"More active in my interactions with family, I am now present"* – **Dad of one child, 45 years old**

Dads also felt that the holistic nature and structure of the program (with fitness and social components) greatly enhanced the programs appeal and outcomes. The knowledgeable and welcoming staff also created a positive environment.

*"It's hard to say one thing. Everything was so amazing. If I have to choose, it's Ryan, who is such an amazing person, motivation"* – **Dad of two children, 43 years old.**

Overall, the qualitative responses once again highlighted the multi-faceted benefits of the program they experienced.

*"Mentally fit, physically fit, made new friends. So many things about myself and family. Focusing on family."* – **Dad of two children, 43 years old.**

The following section will present these themes through a composite case study<sup>4</sup> of a dad in the western suburbs of Melbourne that participated in a 5-week Dadfit program. It is inspired by the MSC and "favourite thing" responses from dads who participated in Dadfit.

### David's Dadfit Journey (Case Study)

David is a 32-year-old male who was born in India. Arriving in Australia 12 years ago as an engineering student, he used to play for the university football team as a way to make new connections and enjoyed participating in organised sport that he had at home.

David got married at the age of 27 after completing his degree, and got a full-time job soon after. David and his partner had their first child 2 years later, when he was 29. He found that between work and having a new child, his free time had been limited; often spending time with family without any consistent hobbies external to family life.

As a new dad, pressures of parenting, cultural expectations, and work commitments were affecting his mental health. His fitness and physical health also declined. David would occasionally meet his friends at the pub to catch-up, but his anxiety would keep him from being present. He began to feel more isolated and lonelier as a new dad. This continued until David and his partner had a second child.

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<sup>4</sup> A case study about a fictitious individual based on the qualitative responses collected from participants.

David and his partner were both worried about the compounding responsibilities and expectations. 12 months after the birth of their second child, his partner told him about a program called Dadfit and encouraged him to go. He was worried that he wouldn't have time, but after seeing it was only a five-week program, he thought it wouldn't hurt to attend the first session.

At the start of the first session, David felt welcomed by the facilitator and meeting other dads helped him realise that he was not alone in his situation. He enjoyed the exercise routines; finding them accessible, and that they didn't require any specialty skills. After his first exercise in a while, David noticed the positive influence this had on his mood.

David continued to attend the program and would come to look forward to the first 45 minutes of fitness, wondering how he could continue these routines outside of Dadfit.

From there, David found the Dad Chats really helpful because of the guidance, advice, and ability to share his thoughts with others. Being a new dad to two kids under 3, David noticed how much he had needed these chats with other dads in similar situations.

David also recognised the importance of the lived experience of the facilitator, and their ability to motivate, listen, and share. For David, he connected with the facilitator's shared experience of being a migrant and a new dad.

The chats allowed David to open up and share his experiences and his perceptions around parenting, and also life in general. He found that sharing his experiences and listening to others' experiences were both beneficial to his mental health and parenting confidence.

David gained new perspectives on parenting, and relationship building (with his partner, children and other dads) – becoming more conscious of being intentional with both. The Dad Chats led to David feeling more comfortable reaching out when he needed help, advice or someone to listen to his concerns, improving his help-seeking behaviours, that would continue to positively shape his interactions with other dads and his partner outside of the program.

As David attended more sessions, the feelings of loneliness dissipated, and he was excited to meet with this community of dads that he had connected with. Dadfit became a safe space, where interactions within the space contributed to improved social connection, self-awareness and confidence, as well as help-seeking.

David felt himself being more present at home, and the Dad Challenges meant that he could make conscious efforts outside of the program to think about parenting differently, with less pressure or rigidity. This allowed David to have more vulnerable conversations with his partner, that involved him sharing his feelings and thoughts about being a new dad.

After the program, David now feels more motivated to tackle the challenges of being a new parent again. This time, he is aware of maintaining protective factors that he can put into place to assist with this transition period, and he also exercises more frequently.



David consciously considers his mental health and looks for avenues to reduce stressors and the impacts they have on him and the people around him.

As he now participates in informal sporting practices and meet-ups with the dads from his 5-week Dadfit program, he is often able to reflect upon his learnings and continue to build his capacity across physical fitness, mental health, parenting, and relationship building.

### 6-week Follow-up Qualitative Data

In the 6-week post-program survey, dads responded to; *What, if anything, has changed for you as a result of doing Dadfit (e.g. physical or mental health, parenting, social / community connection, work habits, partner relationship)?*

Responses showed continued improvements in awareness around all aspects of physical and mental health, familial relationships, parenting, and primarily the impact of social connectedness. The idea of community and opening up to others was prominent.

*"I have continued my social interactions at least with 1 other member from the group. I have also started being more physically active incorporating a few Swim and Gym sessions every week" –*

**Dad of two children, 42 years old.**

*"After Dadfit, my mindset has completely changed and I have now started paying more attention to my physical & mental health. I have stopped rushing into things and I always take a moment to think and then act. I feel more energetic and more present and have started to enjoy everything more." – Dad of one child, 32 years old.*

*"Physical and mental health both improved a lot. I have been hanging out with some dads and bumping into people creating a real sense of community. Also I am much more present at home."*

**– Dad of one child, 40 years old.**

Once again, these quotes highlight the program's ability to enhance protective factors and behaviours for dad's mental (and physical) health in longer-term settings.

## Suggestions & Improvements

The post-survey also asked participants if they had any suggestions regarding improvements for the program. Of **All Dadfit Programs** 156 participants (65.3%) didn't have any suggestions for improvement, implying a great level of satisfaction with the program. This was also the case for the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, as 54 dads (67.5%) had no suggestions.

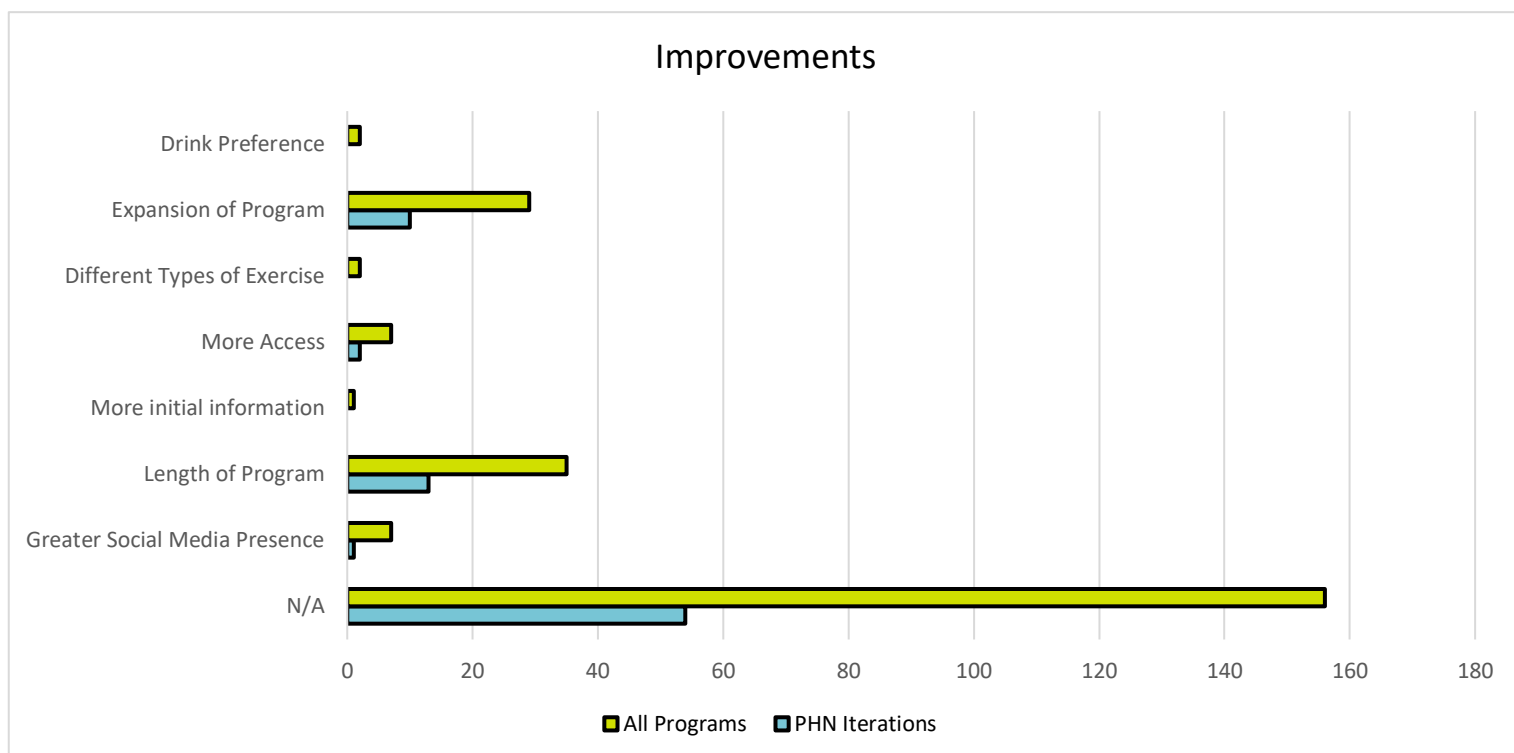


Figure 18. Recommended Improvements

From the suggestions, as seen above – the length of the program, and expansion of the program were the most common suggested improvements. Please note that some of these suggestions came at varying points across the program.

*“Longer term sessions, 10 weeks instead of 5” – Dad of two children, 36 years of age*

*“If a community of closely located different dad fit groups like Trug, Point Cook, Wyndham Vale etc could get together regularly at a place that could be arranged, it would be great to continue*

*the community program within the group of likeminded dads in the west” – Dad of two children, 42 years old*

*“Increase the session to at least 2 months to get into fitness routine” – Dad of two children, 40 years old*

A few requested greater social media presence to make it easier to acquire information about Dadfit or related programs. A couple focused on drink or exercise preferences.

## What did the Staff say?

In early May 2025, a focus group attended by 3 Dadfit staff members was conducted. The period of employment within Dadfit ranged from being there at the inception of the program to around 3 months.

### Unique Elements and Strengths of the Program

All three staff members suggested that Dadfit helps fill a gap in services for new dads. They highlight that whilst many mothers and birthing parents are encouraged to join post-natal programs, new dads are often caught in between having to perform parental roles, and continuing work. Staff believed that the combination of these roles amplified the impact fatherhood had on new dad’s lives. These could range from the micro-level to the macro-level;

*“There is a real awareness in our society of the impact of when dads are not thriving. We know that when men are isolated ... they are at risk of [using] family violence, negative relationships, and poorer outcomes for communities and family development” – Dadfit staff*

Hence, the program aimed to “manage the growing pains” and support dads through this process. Staff spoke about the limited barriers to entry in both the fitness elements and the Dad Chats, and the enhanced accessibility for marginalised communities. There was “no need for muscles, the latest gym equipment, or a 6-pack”. The short, 5-week core program once a week (split into a fitness session, and Dad Chats) was designed to be appropriate for dads that may struggle to find time for themselves, when juggling multiple commitments. The program acknowledges that new dads live busy lives, and longer sessions, or a longer program length, may discourage them from attending.

Dads are often seen encouraging and persevering together in these sessions despite differences in skill or fitness. For the latter, there was a focus on sharing experiences and “walking alongside [each other]”, rather than whether people were doing things that were deemed “right or wrong”.

*“[Primarily it’s about changing expectations and realities that we have to face into” – Dadfit staff*

Another key element was that of creating a well-structured, welcoming environment, that was more casual than clinical.

*"[Everyone always] makes a huge effort to shake everyone's hand and embrace everyone" – Dadfit staff*

*"It's not a therapy session...although sitting in a circle is very close to it... no one is reading out of a book" –*

**Dadfit staff**

Staff highlighted that they encouraged everyone to be themselves during sessions, aiming to create a "safe space" for new dads. They also tried to create a "horizontal hierarchy", where they encouraged everyone to share their thoughts.

Facilitators found that their lived experience, as dads, was a major strength of the program. It was noted that over 50% of facilitators had previously completed an iteration of Dadfit prior to their engagement as facilitators.

Furthermore, many facilitators also had lived experience of being new migrants. They felt that their ability to draw on their own experience, helped them tailor the program cater for other migrant dads within the program.

Facilitators expressed that they were also able to take away valuable knowledge from the experience.

*"Even though I've got two kids and have been a father for many years, I always learn new things... it's great to see all of these perspectives" – Dadfit staff*

Overall, the program was deemed by the staff to "fill a huge and important gap". Through the unique interplay of fitness-based activities, Dad Chats, and weekly DadChallenges, the staff often saw improvements from the individual to family and community levels. These included;

- Improved fitness
- Improved mental health
- Improved self-confidence and compassion for others
- Practical knowledge and awareness around parenting and relationships in general
- A sense of belonging
- Greater attention to their family life and relationships
- Greater connection to community

*"Probably the most special feedback we receive is: I thought I was the only one who was facing these issues in a new country, now I realise I'm not alone" – Dadfit staff*

*"[There is a shift from] I have to tackle this on my own, silently, to; it is something that I can put central to my identity and share with others" – Dadfit staff*

The latter quote once again highlighting how Dadfit's focus on community building can enhance protective factors of dad's long-term mental health. It also suggests a reduction in stigma, towards help-seeking.

## Expansion of the Program

Staff agreed that expansion beyond the standard 5-session Dadfit programs was a "natural" and necessary step to assist dads in the community. These expansions included helping set-up groups or teams that would regularly meet after the program or other programs such as the Dads & Kids SportsFest events. The expansion was pragmatic and

takes into consideration feedback from dads themselves. Staff also detailed how these events are great for community bonding and allowing dads to get a sense of the opportunities around them – making them feel less isolated. The expansion of Dadfit overall is noted as an important element to maintaining the sustainability of the program. For those involved in Dadfit, they offer a way to further create deeper connections with community members. For those who are attendees outside of Dadfit, the Dads & Kids SportsFest events can assist with recruitment into Dadfit, or providing them opportunities to connect with the community around them and tips on how to address the challenges of being a dad.

*“There is something very powerful about the programs ... it could be their first time [with their children or with other dads]” – Dadfit staff*

Additionally, staff from Dadfit and Drummond Street’s Ready Steady Family program saw the partnership as fruitful for both parties, where both could share their expertise and provide referrals for the other.

### Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement

All three staff members lauded the programs progress, and expansion. Despite this, they stated that consistent, additional funding was needed to maintain the program so that more communities could reap the benefits.

A lack of consistent funding made it more difficult to consistently train staff, provide broader programs and reach more targeted cohorts. The staff were excited to expand outreach in areas, where there would be more multicultural and multifaith participation (a mosque was used as an example).

Program staff also stated that additional funding would assist with building a Dadfit ‘community hub’, as a space to centre the current offerings. Staff recognised the need for a broader awareness for dads services, particularly programs that could work in conjunction with programs for birthing parents. They stated that they hope the program will assist with enhancing advocacy efforts in this area.

*“There still aren’t as many services in this area as there should be... I’d love to see every council have a worker that could assist with guiding dads and refer them to programs [and other forms of assistance]” – Dadfit staff*

Furthermore, additional programs would enable more partnerships with local organisations and teams that could assist with referrals, triage, and aiding Dadfit members (and the community more broadly).

After the program, staff shared that dads often wanted to meet up with other dads that they met during the program. There were however some logistical issues finding venues for dads to continue meeting up. Currently, Dadfit are working to foster additional partnerships with local libraries or community centres that may be able to provide spaces for dads to meet up after the program. This would also allow the Dadfit team to collaborate with other organisations that may have certain expertise with some communities and assist with overall sustainability of the program.

## Dads and Kids SportsFest

As an addition to the **PHN Dadfit Programs** funding stream, Dadfit ran a series of 6 Dads and Kids SportsFest afternoons. The afternoons consisted of physical games, and bonding exercises between dads, their children, and fellow community members. These acted as a form of assertive outreach and an extended community engagement strategy, as SportsFest provided an opportunity to promote the Dadfit program to the dads that had previously not attended. This approach contributes to improving the overall sustainability of the program. Dads and Kids SportsFest was designed for dads and kids to get active, connect with each other, and meet other families in the local community.

The following data is sourced from post-Dads and Kids SportsFest surveys, that were offered to participants who attended the sessions.

### Implementation of Dads and Kids SportsFest

Dadfit hosted a total of 6 Dads and Kids SportsFest– with a total of 100 dads, and 127 children participating. Sessions were held at the following locations:

- One in Warreen (Truganina) with a total of 25 dads, of which 16 (64%) completed surveys, and 35 children. 4 dads (16%) from this program were also in a Dadfit program.
- One in Cambridge (Hoppers Crossing) with a total of 10 dads, of which 8 (80%) completed surveys, and 14 children. 5 dads (50%) from this program were also in a Dadfit program.
- One in Riverwalk (Werribee) with a total of 34 dads, of which 21 (61.8%) completed surveys, and 41 children. 5 dads (15%) from this program were also in a Dadfit program.
- One in Point Cook with a total of 12 dads, of which 10 (83.3%) completed surveys, and 13 children. 3 dads (25%) from this program were also in a Dadfit program.
- One in Doherty's Creek (Truganina) with a total of 9 dads, of which 8 (88.9%) completed surveys, and 12 children. 4 dads (44%) from this program were also in a Dadfit program.
- One in Mt. Ridley (Craigieburn) with a total of 10 dads, of which 7 (70%) completed surveys, and 12 children. 2 dads (20%) from this program were also in a Dadfit program.

There were a total of 70 completed Dads and Kids SportsFest surveys (70% completion rate). On average, around 20% of dads who participated in a Dads and Kids SportsFest Event, went on to participate in a five-week Dadfit program.

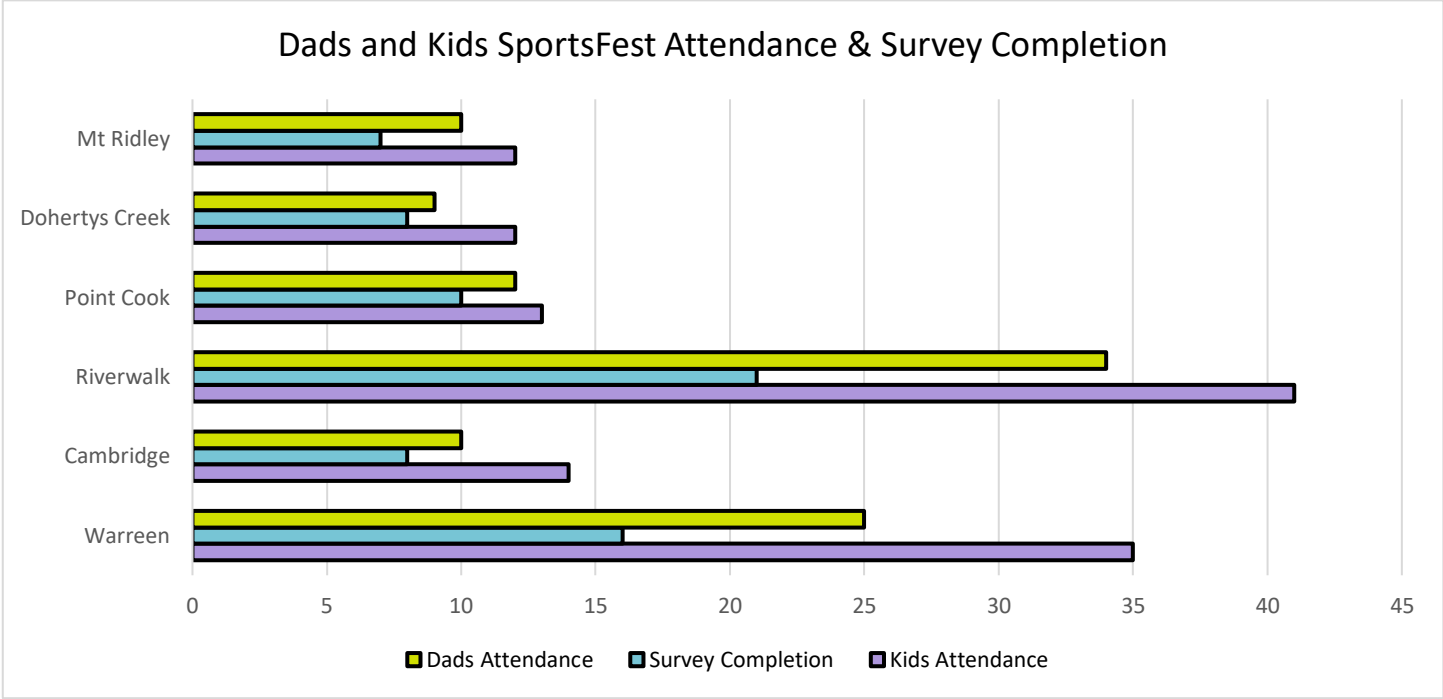


Figure 19. Dads and Kids SportsFest Attendance and Survey Completion

### Age

The average age of dads in attendance at Dads and Kids SportsFest was 40.5 years of age. The youngest dad was 31 years old, whilst the oldest was 51 years old.

## Children of Dads

For Dads and Kids SportsFest attendees; 21 dads (30%) had 1 child, 43 dads (61.4%) had 2 children, and 6 dads had 3 children (8.6%).

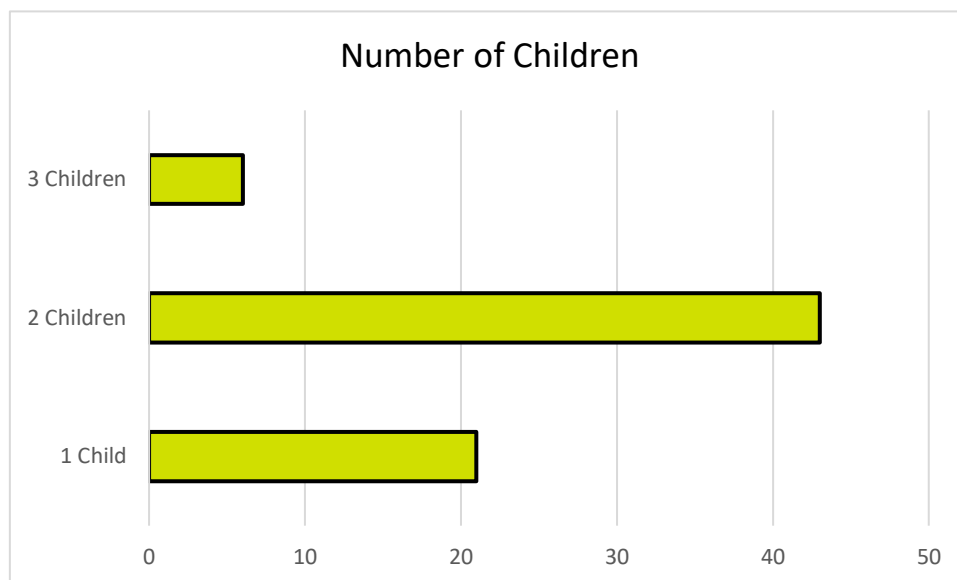


Figure 20. Number of Children for Dads and Kids SportsFest Attendees

## Diversity and Cultural Information

The majority of participants were born in India (42 participants, 60.8%), whilst 15 participants (21.7%) were born in Australia. One participant did not disclose their country of birth. There were a total of 11 countries of birth represented – as shown in the table below:



Table 6. Number of Children for Dads and Kids SportsFest Attendees

Country of Birth	Number of Dads	%
India	42	60.8%
Australia	15	21.7%
Fiji	2	2.9%
Nepal	2	2.9%
Sri Lanka	2	2.9%
Bangladesh	1	1.4%
Germany	1	1.4%
Indonesia	1	1.4%
Pakistan	1	1.4%
Philippines	1	1.4%
South Africa	1	1.4%
Total	69	100%

## Impact of Dads and Kids SportsFest

After the program, dads were asked 7 questions regarding their experience. Questions were self-reported on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (rating of 1) to “Strongly Agree” (5). Overall, all metrics received over 91% positive responses, and averages were all above 4.74. This indicates a great satisfaction with the Dads and Kids SportsFest afternoons.

Table 7. Dads and Kids SportsFest Questionnaire Results

Category	1 (Strongly Disagree)	2	3 (Neutral)	4	5 (Strongly Agree)	% Positive (4 or 5)	Average
I had fun attending Dads and Kids SportsFest	0	0	0	0	52	100%	5
Attending Dads and Kids SportsFest helped me to connect with my child(ren)	0	0	0	2	59	100%	4.97
Attending Dads and Kids SportsFest helped me to connect with other parents	0	0	5	5	48	91.4%	4.74
Attending Dads and Kids SportsFest had a positive effect on my physical wellbeing	0	0	1	0	65	98.5%	4.97
Attending Dads and Kids SportsFest had a positive effect on my mental wellbeing	0	0	0	2	64	100%	4.97
Attending Dads and Kids SportsFest had a positive effect on my child's wellbeing	0	0	0	0	63	95.5%	4.91
I plan to try out some of the activities we did at Dads and Kids SportsFest with my kids in our own time	0	0	0	0	64	100%	5

### Overall Sentiments

A total of 55 dads (84.6%) gave the program a 5/5 overall rating. 6 dads (9.2%) gave their Dads and Kids SportsFest experience a 4/5 rating. 2 (3.1%) gave it a rating of 3/5, whilst 2 dads (3.1%) gave it a rating of 1/5. No one gave the program a rating of 2/5, whilst 5 people did not answer the question.

The average rating for Dads and Kids SportsFest overall was 4.74.

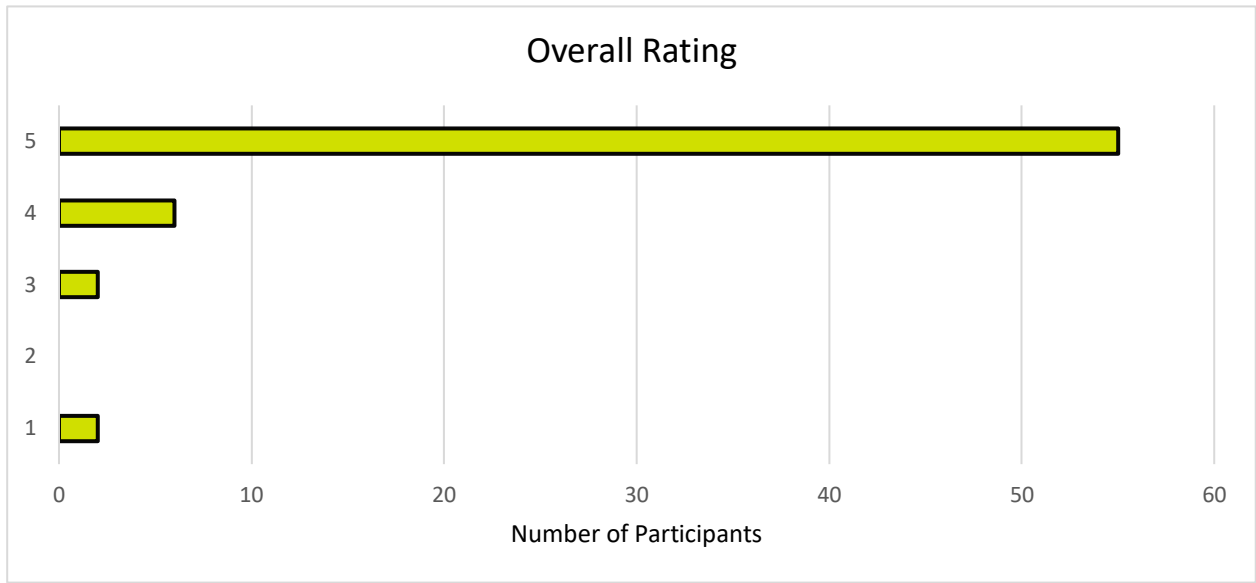


Figure 21. Dads and Kids SportsFest Overall Ratings

Attendees of Dads and Kids SportsFest were also asked whether or not they would recommend attending a Dads and Kids SportsFest afternoon to their friends. A vast majority of 65 dads (92.9%) stated that they were “Very Likely” to do so. 3 (4.3%) stated that they were “Somewhat Likely”, whilst 1 (1.4%) was “Neutral”. 1 dad (1.4%) stated that they were “Very Unlikely” to recommend the program.

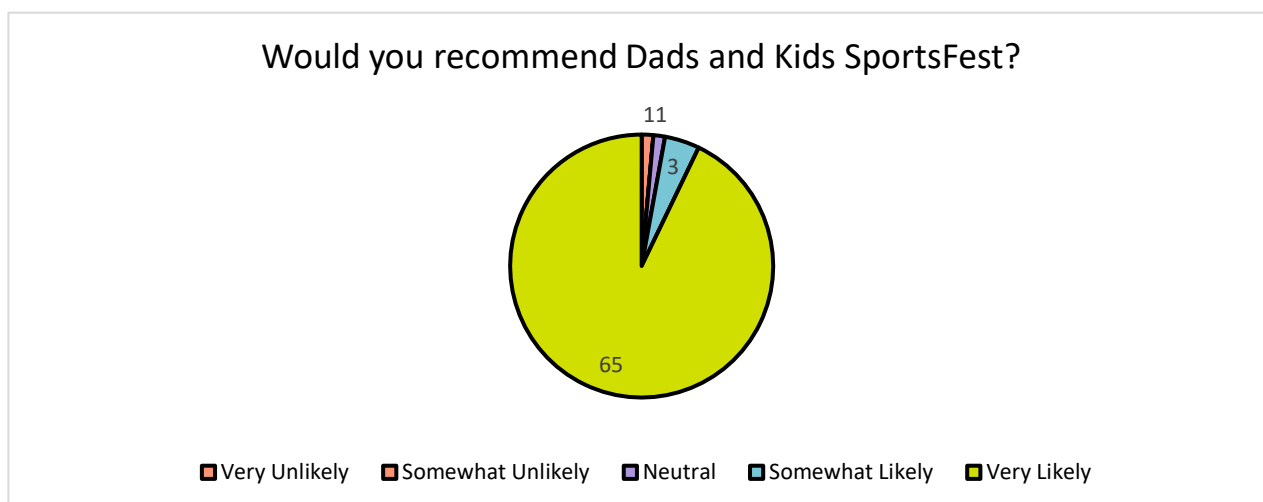


Figure 22. Dads and Kids SportsFest Recommendation Sentiments

### Future Participation in Dadfit Programs

Dads were also asked whether or not they'd want to participate in a Dadfit program in the future. Out of 65 dads; 27 (41.5%) stated "yes", 29 (44.6%) stated "potentially – please send me some more information", and 9 (13.8%) stated "no".

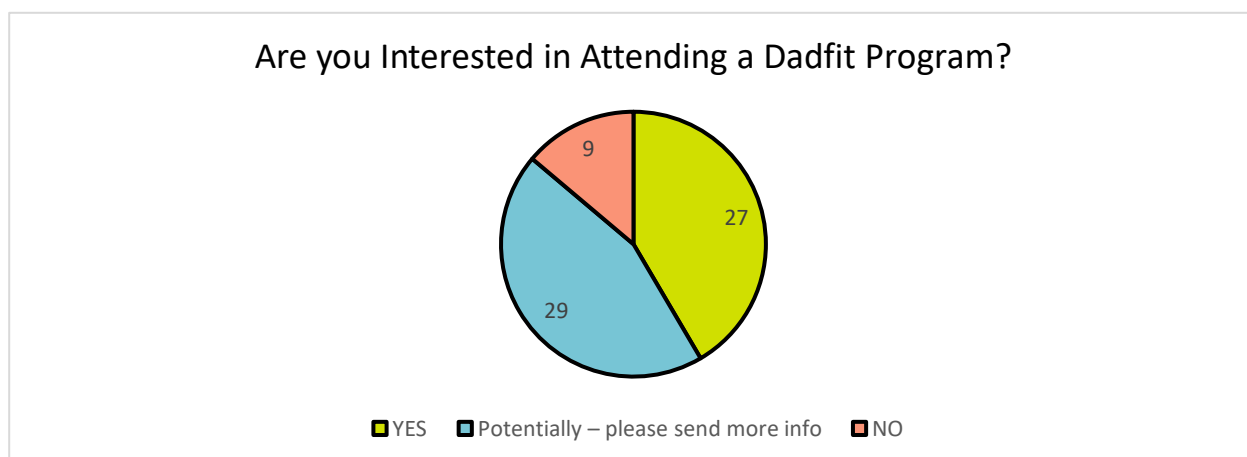


Figure 23. Interest in Attending Future Dadfit Programs

### Favourite Things about Dads and Kids SportsFest

There was also space for qualitative responses regarding participants favourite elements of Dads and Kids SportsFest. Responses seemed to be evenly distributed between themes of; "Spending time with [my] child and playing", or specific activities such as "playing cricket", "Fun and a good workout", and creating an environment with "good energy" conducive to fun and "loose", as one dad described.

## Suggestions for improvement

Whilst a vast majority of dads were extremely satisfied with their Dads and Kids SportsFest experience, and did not have any suggestions to improve programs, there were a few recommendations. Some included “more games” or more indoor or outdoor settings, ice-breaker events, and more sessions.

*“I was already like, maintaining myself, always training, doing this and that, but talking with other dads and realising, you know, how I treat my family and how I behave, yeah, it has changed. Like, totally changed. It's kind of like I'm trying to gather everybody's wisdom in my life. Yeah, this changed a lot in me.”* – **Dadfit participant at Richmond**

# Program Analysis & Summary

The current section will summarise the results in order to address the evaluation questions. This area will focus primarily on the **PHN Dadfit Programs** of the Dadfit program.

## Program Implementation

### 1. How well has the Dadfit program been implemented and achieved its planned activities in an efficient manner?

Based on findings gathered from demographic data, the staff focus group, Dads and Kids SportsFest data, and post-program survey data, the quality of the implementation was defined by achieving good reach, and solid attendance across the first eight iterations of the **PHN Dadfit Programs** and Dads and Kids SportsFest. The Dadfit program also reached its target cohort; culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) dads. The findings show that Dadfit exceeded expectations in terms of reach, breadth, and engagement (especially with CALD dads).

129 dads participated across the first eight iterations of the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, assisted by the Ready Steady Family team at Drummond Street Services. 69 of these were from the first 4 programs in 2024, showing an overachievement in terms of reach. Dads and Kids SportsFest also overachieved in terms of reach; with 100 dads, and over 120 children participate. For both the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, and the **All DadFit Programs** attendance averaged just over 3.95 sessions per program – with a majority attending 4 sessions. The accessibility of the 5-week program does not require new dads to make a great time commitment, and this has likely contributed to attendance.

The program reached a wide array of demographics. For the **PHN Dadfit Programs**, a majority of participants were born outside of Australia (over 80%), showing that the implementation reached CALD dads. This is almost double the proportion in **All Dadfit Programs** (44%). Dads and Kids SportsFest events have also both exceeded the expected numbers that were indicated for the program upon applying for the PHN grants. In addition, 62% of participants completed a pre/post survey for the usual programs, and 70% for Dads and Kids SportsFest – both commendable completion rates. Furthermore, overall ratings (as seen in the post program survey “overall rating of Dadfit”) for the **PHN Dadfit Programs** seem to be higher and more promising than **All Dadfit Programs** – potentially showing a greater level of efficiency in these programs and Dadfit implementation becoming more adept as more programs are undertaken.

The high overall rating of the program at 4.92, and the lack of qualitative improvement suggestions indicate a great satisfaction with the program. Qualitative responses from program staff and dads highlighted the structure of Dadfit (fitness component and “Dad Chats”) and the lived experience of facilitators for the successful implementation of the program. Program staff described a “horizontal hierarchy” that fosters a space where dads felt safe to share their own experiences. Facilitators with lived experience as both new dads, and on occasion, new

migrants also assisted with the implementation of the program and its ability to cater for various communities. Hence, the programs' structure is a catalyst for its efficiency and ability to achieve its planned activities.

Implementation (and attendance) could be improved with greater flexibility (as suggested by the dads in the post-survey "improvements" section); both in terms of program structure, and the type of programs. The former could entail targeting specific groups (such as refugees, or certain communities aided by cultural workers), and making a more flexible schedule for the 5-week program (or varying lengths and options). The latter could entail more community-based events, building on the success of the Dads and Kids SportsFest events. As a community engagement strategy, Dads and Kids SportsFest received positive feedback – with an overall average of 4.74 – it also helped dads connect with their children and the broader community. Events like SportsFest can also act as a pipeline for potential Dadfit participants (with around 20% joining a Dadfit program), and speak to the sustainability of the program through recruitment, reach, and flexibility.

## Program Effectiveness

2. **To what extent does Dadfit meet its specific objectives and outcomes?**
3. **To what extent does Dadfit contribute to improved physical and mental health, social connectedness, and family relationships?**

### Effectiveness in meeting objectives

The Dadfit program had the primary objectives of:

- At least 80% of all participants report positive effects on their physical health
- At least 80% of all participants report positive effects on their social connectedness
- At least 80% of all participants report positive effects on their mental health
- At least 80% of all participants report positive effects on family relationships

Based on the post program survey, all of the above objectives were met and exceeded; with 98% of dads reporting a positive effect on their physical health and 98% also reporting a positive effect on their mental health. For social connectedness, 89% of dads reported that they felt more connected to other dads in their community, and 89% reported they now had a support network of dads to draw upon. Impressively, 93% wanted to maintain contact with dads they met in the program. For family relationships, over 90% of dads reported that Dadfit helped them feel more involved as a parent, be a better co-parent, and had a positive effect on the relationship with their partner. These results show that Dadfit has the capacity to exceed a broad range of objectives to support the wellbeing of dads participating in the five-week program.

## Effectiveness in achieving outcomes for dads

The Dadfit program focused on achieving outcomes for dads across physical health, mental health, parental confidence and parental connection. The extent to which Dadfit has contributed to wellbeing outcomes for dads has been indicated by pre-post outcome data (including 6-week follow-up data), post program survey data, as well as qualitative responses from dads. Dads' partners also provided their insight into the impact of the program through a survey. Program staff provided their qualitative insight into how Dadfit is achieving intended outcomes for dads.

There was a total of 54 matched pre-post surveys. On average, there were statistically significant improvements in physical health, mental health, parental confidence and parental connection for dads accessing the Dadfit program. The post program survey indicated that 89% of dads were exercising more regularly, and 91% stated that the program helped them feel less stressed. At the 6-week follow-up, 25 dads showed sustained improvements in physical health, mental health, parental confidence and parental connection, compared to when they first attended the program. Dads' partners further demonstrated the positive impact that Dadfit had on family relationships. Partners said they noticed the positive impact of the program on the dads, and felt that after participating in the program, dads were now more aware, confident, considered, and less rigid.

Dads also reported positive changes in help-seeking behaviours and social connectedness. The post program survey showed that 95% of dads were confident that they can look after their health and wellbeing after the program, and 94% of dads stated that they feel more confident seeking support if they needed. Qualitative responses demonstrated that many dads found the "Dad Chats" were a safe space wherein they could freely express themselves, with the support of facilitators, and fellow dads. For some, it was the first time they had addressed these issues or spoken about mental health and parenting challenges. For many, the greatest impact of the program was hearing the stories of other dads who were facing similar issues and recognising they were not alone in their challenges. Many dads who engaged in the program felt they now had a community they could engage with, turn to, and confide in, if they needed. Program staff also noted that dads were coordinating regular meetups after the program.

Qualitative responses from dads described their increased capacity to cultivate and build protective factors that support their mental and physical health. Dads spoke to an increased appreciation for, and incorporation of physical activities in life outside of Dadfit. Dads shared their increased knowledge about ways to address anxieties and stressors. For example, sharing concerns with other dads.

Dads shared that the program had such a profound impact in their lives that they felt motivated to become facilitators themselves. Program staff reported that 50% of facilitators were formally dads that participated in the program. This speaks to the sustainability of the program and building the capacity of those that have lived experience – and occasionally this is intersectional lived experience – to deliver the program in a sustainable way.



## Effectiveness in achieving broader community and longer-term outcomes

The expansion of Dadfit to include Dads and Kids SportsFest events improved the program's capacity to reach more dads and build community connections. These afternoons engaged diverse community members and gave people a chance to engage socially with their children and other families. The program ran a total of six Dads and Kids SportsFest events with two more planned into the future. There was an overwhelmingly positive response from attendees with over 90% reporting that the events helped them connect with their children and connect with other parents. This contributes to the program achieving lasting local community connections for dads. The Dads and Kids SportsFest events provide promising insight into the sustainability of the Dadfit program; enhancing reach, scalability and flexibility.

Community connection also extends beyond the individual, as Dadfit aims to foster partnerships with organisations such as Drummond Street Services to help deliver programs, improve capacity, and support the program's long-term sustainability.

Whilst longer-term outcomes are difficult to assess, Dadfit appears to be exceeding its objectives and achieving outcomes for dads and the broader community to a great extent. Follow-up results after dads had participated in the program demonstrate sustained improvements in mental and physical health, as well as parenting confidence and connection.

With 50% of facilitators also being dads that had participated in the program, Dadfit has shown its profound capacity to have far-reaching impacts in the lives of dads and their local communities. It must be reiterated that the presence of medium and long-term outcomes at all is very impressive for a short, 5-week program.

# Recommendations

Results indicate that Dadfit is a program that is greatly valued by dads and communities around them. The following recommendations look to build on this momentum, and aid with the future expansion of the program. These are divided up into recommendations for the program, and for the NWPHN.

## Recommendations for the NWPHN

The following recommendations are for the NWPHN.

### Recurring & Increased Funding

This evaluation has shown Dadfit to be an effective short intervention to engage fathers that improves mental health, physical health, help-seeking and family relationships of dads. The program fills a critical gap in service delivery for dads, and over 95% of participants would recommend the program to a friend. This evaluation therefore recommends ongoing, recurring funding for the program. Increased funding for the program would allow

for more training for coordinators, the ability to up-scale programs, host more Dads and Kids SportsFest days, which would contribute to community cohesion across the North West region.

This recommendation fits with the NWPHN's strategy to commission programs that facilitate positive parent-child relationships, to support child and family health.

### Advocacy and Awareness

As highlighted by program staff, broader awareness of issues that new dads face and advocacy for programs such as Dadfit, would assist with providing long-term, sustainable outcomes. The PHN could support advocacy and awareness of programs such as Dadfit, for furthering the goals of the National Men's Health Strategy (2020-2030) through supporting health promotion of dads, through the Dadfit program. The program aligns with the National Men's Health Strategy (2020-2030), in leveraging community partnerships to intervene early to prevent poor physical and mental health outcomes for men.

The program has shown positive outcomes and promise in promoting physical activity, improved mental health outcomes, resilience, community building and social connections, improved family relationships, and reduced stigma for new dads.

This advocacy could also be supported, at a community level, by having dedicated workers for new dads in more places across the NWPHN catchment, with links into the Dadfit program.

## Program Recommendations

These recommendations are directed towards program staff to further enhance outcomes and maintain sustainability. These are guided by the learnings from this evaluation. When further developing or expanding the program, Dadfit should leverage off promising elements of the program – some of which are already being implemented.

### Expansion of the Program

Whilst this is partially contingent on greater funding, increased flexibility of the program should be prioritised, including options for length. One of the main suggestions from dads was that they would like more time spent in the program. Hence, there could be options for an additional 3-5 weeks in the program, if dads want to continue for longer than the original five-weeks.

Another way to expand the program may be to provide an option for dads to form a social sports team after the program. Dadfit can establish a pathway for dads to access further opportunities to participate in sport, which would support physical health and social connectedness beyond the program. Furthermore, more events such as Dads and Kids SportsFest afternoons for communities (particularly CALD communities) would be of great benefit.

SportsFest events provide a good mechanism for encouraging others to join Dadfit programs, ensuring future sustainability.

Expansion of the program could also entail greater adaptability for specific sub-cohorts. An idea for this would be to deliver more focused activities for certain demographics (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, alongside and in collaborations with First Nations organisations and/or community members).

The success of the **PHN Dadfit Programs** show that the program is already capable in reaching CALD communities. There is great diversity within the CALD acronym, and part of this iteration of the Dadfit was to make the program accessible for CALD dads. This might mean that the general Dadfit content and activities are adapted for specific communities so that they are culturally appropriate and tailored. Competency in these areas could be enhanced through the continued recruiting of lived-experience workers. The universal nature of sport and leisure activities can assist in providing this space for a wide range of cohorts as a unique entry point.

### Increased Partnerships

Whilst Dadfit currently shares partnerships with programs such as Ready Steady Family in Drummond Street Services, there are many other opportunities for partnerships. Partnerships with organisations that assist other marginalised communities or partnerships with other mental health organisations, may be useful. As would greater partnerships with local councils who deliver new parent groups and other programs, during the transition to parenthood. Dadfit could also foster community connections with social clubs/areas (such as in libraries or at parks) and local community leaders to assist with creation of a space that can facilitate future Dad Chats.

Partnerships with local sporting clubs to engage those potentially looking to socialise into, out of, or through sporting activities could also be beneficial. These partnerships could be mutually beneficial for both parties (take recruitment at/from sporting clubs or assisting with those that can no longer commit to formalised sporting practice due to their parenting duties). The potential of setting up games with more casual sporting clubs at the end of each program could also be of interest. It could also help set-up social nights and mental-health awareness activities within or external to sporting clubs, whilst using facilities as a hub. These partnerships and community connections would assist in providing a network/web of services to help achieve longer term outcomes and sustainability that Dadfit desires.

### Increased Capacity Building

Whilst staff seem well lauded and well equipped, if the program expands there will certainly be a need for increased staffing. Furthermore, as new demographics are reached around Victoria and beyond, trainings will be necessary for staff to remain culturally competent. These trainings will support Dadfit programs to be executed at a high level and remain consistent. Furthermore, the continuation of the already adapted hiring process of those with lived experience and those who have previously been part of the program should be continued. This would

improve sustainability supporting scalability, adaptability, the program's high standards, and participant acquisition – along with the ability to improve outcomes for dads, families and communities.

### Streamlined Evaluation Process

Capacity building could also be centred around evaluation and data collection. Demographically, intake could capture data about participants who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and those who belong to LGBTQIA+ communities. This could help tailor certain programs and keep progress of intake of these populations – a proposed objective of Dadfit (in regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities specifically).

There is a possibility that the evaluation and review-based questions could be streamlined. A move into an electronic-based service such as Microsoft Forms or SurveyMonkey could be useful. This could assist further with follow-up survey up-take and tracking how the decentralised groups (such as teams or regular catchups formed out of initial Dadfit participation) progress, post program. It would also assist with the uptake of the 6-week follow-up surveys, which can yield powerful information for longer-term outcomes, and positive behaviour changes. Continuation of reflective activities such as Most Significant Change is also recommended.

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