

Play must beat cost of living

Paul Nicolaou



It's time to sound the alarm far, wide and loudly that a quarter of families are cutting back on children's sport because they can no longer afford it.

This trend is more than a symptom of the cost-of-living crisis. It's a real threat to the mental health and wellbeing of our children.

Earlier this year, Business Sydney, Lifeline Australia and Sport NSW released a detailed study on the mental health benefits of sport.

Parents intuitively understand this. It's no surprise they now feel guilty and concerned at being forced to deny their children access to it.

We are after all a sporting nation and sport is part of our city's DNA.

A survey commissioned by

Compare Club, an Australian-owned company that compares insurance and utility costs, found that 55.3 per cent of those surveyed were "just getting by or struggling financially".

Parents were having to make heartbreaking decisions to pull kids out of swimming lessons, sports days and outings.

At Business Sydney, our focus is primarily on making Sydney a vibrant and prosperous city, but we want positive mental health to flourish here as well.

Falling participation in sport was already a concern being taken seriously by Minister for Sport Steve Kamper, especially in the light of the alarming incidence of mental health problems in the community.

According to the latest National Mental Health and Wellbeing Survey, 47 per cent of

16 to 85 year olds experienced mental ill health issues in the previous 12 months.

Forty per cent of young Australians aged 16 to 24 – more than one million people – have experienced a mental health disorder.

When Lifeline Australia, the longest serving crisis support service in Australia, tells us there is a problem, we should listen.

There is a state budget coming up. It's a chance for Premier Chris Minns and Treasurer Daniel Mookhey to help struggling families keep playing sport.

We say, let the kids play.

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney