The Australian Fitness Industry Risk Management (AFIRM) Project was funded by Fitness Australia (major partner) and Sports Medicine Australia (minor partner) and supported by a Linkage Project Grant from the Australian Research Council. Australian Research Council grants are only made to research projects of the highest quality, and then only after an independent and rigorous review process.

The AFIRM Project, which has gathered data during 2012-2014, included:

- The AFIRM Focus Group Research conducted in 2013, involving exercise professionals sampled from seven urban and regional locations across four Australian States (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia). Nominal group technique was employed to ensure meaningful feedback and in order to inform the development of a questionnaire with both content and construct validity. The participants identified six principal safety concerns. The results of this research were published in the June 2014 issue of the *Journal of Law and Medicine*, an A-grade peer-reviewed journal.

- The AFIRM National Survey is the largest survey of Fitness professionals that has ever been conducted in Australia. Using an innovative, social media sampling technique, the AFIRM Survey, developed on the basis of the focus group research, has generated a wealth of data about perceptions of contemporary industry practices, and charts a path for skills development in the industry. The results of this research have also been published in the June 2014 part of the *Journal of Law and Medicine*.

Observational audits and in-depth interviews have also been conducted, and this research will be released later in 2014. At the conclusion of the AFIRM Project at the end of 2014, a website will republish the findings of this research, which will be incorporated into Fitness Australia materials, guidelines and tools.
The Top Safety Concerns in the Australian Fitness Industry

The research findings have been published in the Journal of Law and Medicine. A summary of the key issues identified by fitness professionals in the AFIRM Focus Group Research chart the path forward:

- **Education, competency, knowledge and courses**: Fitness professionals have identified a need for more robust training in risk management, additional support for new trainers, and a need for further, post-qualification professional training and development to ensure that they have the necessary skills to manage risks and deliver safe and effective services.

- **Pre-exercise screening and management of de-conditioned clients**: Fitness professionals have identified a need for more focus to be placed on pre-exercise screening, particularly in relation to de-conditioned clients.

- **Supervision of technique and use of equipment**: Fitness professionals have identified the need for improved supervision in fitness facilities and training for staff and clients in correct exercise techniques and use of equipment.

- **Scope of practice, nutrition and managing client expectations**: Fitness professionals have identified the need for staff to adhere to scope of practice guidelines, and manage the expectations of their clients carefully and appropriately in order to minimise risks of injury and adverse health outcomes.

- **Equipment**: Fitness professionals have identified the need for facilities to ensure that equipment is appropriately maintained, hygienic and properly positioned.

- **Environment**: Fitness professionals have identified the need to ensure that exercise environments are free from hazards.
The National Survey identified three key challenges for the fitness industry:

1. Management, implementation and monitoring of safety policy
2. Implementation of client training and education in exercise programs
3. Maintenance, design and operation of facilities/equipment.

To supplement the focus group research and national survey research, the AFIRM Project will in due course publish evidence drawn from physical audits of facilities by suitably trained assessors.

Fitness Australia will work with the AFIRM Team to develop a suite of educational materials and best practice guides and checklists to address the six most important safety concerns identified above. This work will be supported by further research material to be published by the AFIRM Team, including in-depth interviews and observational audits of fitness facilities.

The Australian Fitness Industry Risk Management Manual provides the fitness industry with materials that will help fitness facility operators, fitness professionals, and fitness service users navigate their legal risk management and risk management obligations.

- Part 1 – Risk Management in the Australian Fitness Industry

An introduction to the topic of risk management in the fitness industry and information that supports risk management planning including quality frameworks, safety tools, codes of practice, professional scope of practice and pre-exercise screening.

- Part 2 – Summary of the Law governing the Australian Fitness Industry

Legal regulation of negligence, contract and consumer law, workplace health and safety, criminal liability, and liability for discrimination and bullying.

- Part 3 – Equipment, premises and emergencies

Risk management issues relating to the use, misuse and maintenance of equipment, keeping safe premises, and emergencies.

- Part 4 – Risk management planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Material that will assist fitness service operations and exercise professionals in the development of their risk management plans, and materials relating to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of those risk management plans.

The full Manual is available at fitness.org.au/exercisesafe
The ExerciseSafe initiative embodies Fitness Australia’s substantial commitment to supporting the fitness industry to deliver high quality, safe and effective services to the public.

As part of this commitment, Fitness Australia and Sports Medicine Australia, together with the Australian Research Council, have supported the Australian Fitness Industry Risk Management (AFIRM) Project. The AFIRM Project has brought together leading experts in risk management, exercise science, injury prevention and the law to generate data on industry practice, to review contemporary regulation and safety protocols, and to produce training resources for the industry to enhance client safety.

The data and resources developed by the AFIRM Team will assist the fitness industry to:

- Identify and manage risks
- Understand the principles, processes and frameworks that inform the risk management environment
- Understand the legal environment within which fitness environments in Australia operate.

The AFIRM Project’s Research Team includes:

- **Professor Patrick Keyzer** (La Trobe University, Lead Chief Investigator)
- **Professor Joachim Dietrich** (Bond University)
- **Professor Caroline Finch** (Federation University)
- **Professor Kevin Norton** (UniSA)
- **Dr Betul Sekendiz** (CQUniversity).

Visit fitness.org.au/exercisesafe
In addition to the AFIRM Project, Fitness Australia recognises that outdoor training is a significant and growing aspect of the contemporary fitness industry. The ExerciseSafe App provides the fitness industry and other stakeholders with an assessment tool for the delivery of fitness services in a safe and suitable outdoor environment.

The App will also support a collaborative approach to public open space policy development through the collection of detailed information as to the delivery, frequency and safety of outdoor training services.

The ExerciseSafe App:
- Is an online tool that’s accessible on smart phones and tablets
- Enables trainers to enter and access information relating to location, safety and park features
- Calculates a suitability for exercise, or ExerciseSafe score
- Supports the integration and implementation of local government outdoor training policies
- Will capture and record information for further analysis by Fitness Australia.

fitness.org.au/exercisesafe