

# Strength in numbers

The Perth not-for-profit using exercise to change the lives of prostate cancer patients

Geoffrey Thomas



The recipe is "muscle, mateship and mood" and it's served up by master chef Vian Botma, an exercise physiologist from Holistic-Strength, twice a week to PROST! members who are recovering from prostate cancer.

Mr Botma says exercise is highly beneficial in fighting cancer, with muscles an ecosystem that produces a cancer-fighting agent.

"It helps improve the treatment and reduces impacts of hormone treatment, while improving the men's mood," he says.

The not-for-profit PROST! was created 10 years ago by Dr Jo Millos, of Complete Physiotherapy, in recognition of the large gaps in services provided for men dealing with prostate cancer.

According to chairman Ian Simmonds, PROST!'s mission is to educate, inspire and support men experiencing prostate cancer, chronic pelvic pain, incontinence and sexual health disorders, "through high-quality clinical care, continuing research, community outreach and tailored evidence-based group exercise physiology programs".

The program is based at one of the key sponsors, the Subiaco Football Club at Leederville Oval, but is extending to the West Perth Football Club in Joondalup.

Mr Botma says he challenges the men at the twice weekly one-hour program.

"Their response has surprised me, and it's surprised them. We challenge and push them and they are making huge improvements," he says.

Former State Government minister Bob Kucera agrees and says it has opened his eyes to the issues.

"Most of my functionality is being restored and it has been a real boon to me," he says.

Mr Kucera adds he has been surprised and disturbed by the lack of the resources in supporting men in the battle with prostate cancer. "And what is not understood is the impact on your partner," he says.



Vian Botma, Ron Manners, Ian Simmonds and Bob Kucera at Subiaco Football Club's gym. Picture: Matt Jelonek

**"We challenge and push them and they are making huge improvements."**

But that is where PROST! helps, he says. "Being able to talk about something that is very private with other men suffering the same condition is a real benefit," he says.

"You just have to make some adjustments and you are still alive."

That sentiment is sobering, with 10 men dying every day in Australia from prostate cancer.

Ron Manners waxes lyrical about the program. "We absolutely appreciate it. Rain hail or shine, we turn up," he says.

"You wouldn't miss it and we all make sure we are all OK."

"Once I had to miss a session and I received a text message from a colleague to make sure I was fine.

"The inclusive atmosphere and support is fantastic."

"I have been here for eight years. I was given a few months to live."

Mr Simmonds says the West Australian Football Commission is "100 per cent behind the concept, which is fantastic".

"We have received positive responses from WFFC and are approaching other clubs," he says.

"These clubs are in areas when there is a high instance of prostate cancer. Our goal is to take PROST! to the people."

"The program is unique and is attracting attention around Australia and the world."

"It is our goal to not only deliver the program in the Perth metro area but to broaden it to

regional locations in WA with the support of the WAFC and their regional clubs.

"Additionally, two of our PROST! board members recently travelled to Melbourne, where there is interest, to talk to groups there about starting up a PROST! program."

According to the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, this cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia, with an estimated 24,217 Australian men to be diagnosed this year. Of those, 3517 will die — or 10 every day.

The PCFA has warned that the number will increase as the population ages.

There are many treatments for prostate cancer. They can include, among others, surgery, radiation, hormone therapy and chemotherapy.

Mr Simmonds says these treatments deal predominantly with the cancer. "In most cases, they are successful in curing the cancer in the body," he explains. "However, a key issue with the treatment of prostate cancer are the side

effects post-surgery or treatment.

"Incontinence and erectile dysfunction are common. While there is a great deal of literature guiding men as to what can be done to assist with these conditions, PROST! goes much further."

"Research has identified exercise pre and post-prostate treatment can greatly assist in the reduction of the after-effects. Exercise is a key component of the PROST! program."

"But PROST! takes this further by adding the mateship and mood components to further assist prostate cancer sufferers with their mental wellbeing."

PROST! is looking to attract grants and/or sponsorship to assist in the "Taking PROST! to the people" goal. This will assist in covering the set-up costs of the new locations and first-year promotional costs. PROST! is a not-for-profit organisation and a registered charity. All donations are tax deductible.

More information is available at [prost.com.au](http://prost.com.au).

## The benefits of PROST!

1. Preserve and increase strength, muscle mass and reduce fat, even if the men are pre and/or post-prostate surgery, radiation, hormone and chemotherapy treatments.
2. Reduce physiological and mental distress and improve social functioning.
3. Improve or recover from incontinence.
4. Improve or recover erectile function.
5. Reduce fatigue.
6. Help preserve bone strength and density.
7. Can help preserve and improve muscle and physical performance when performed before surgery.