

Australian Olympic Committee to send more psychologists to Rio Olympics to help athletes

- JESSICA HALLORAN
- THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH
- SEPTEMBER 29, 2013 12:00AM

THE Australian Olympic Committee is set to send more psychologists to the Rio Olympics to meet athletes' increasing demand for mental support.

It comes after sporting stars, including champion swimmers Leisel Jones and Ian Thorpe, spoke out about the mental anguish they endured in pursuit of winning a gold medal.

Aware of the growing issue, the AOC and its Athletes' Commission have shifted their focus to "culture and leadership" and the psychological welfare of athletes in the build-up to the 2016 Games.

Ruth Anderson was head psychologist for Australia's Olympic team in Beijing and London, and last year experienced a huge demand for her services. Anderson said yesterday the nation's sporting bodies must provide more mental health support to their athletes because if they did not, it would "limit" the Olympians' performance at Rio.

She said it was imperative to integrate services that catered for athletes' mental health and the development of their abilities to perform if they were to achieve at the highest levels.

"That's the area that is going to limit athletes in Rio if it is not addressed over the next few years," Anderson warned.

Last week The Sunday Telegraph revealed how Leisel Jones's pursuit of gold in Beijing had "cost" her mental well-being. The retired swim star, along with five-time Olympic champion Thorpe, said more needed to be done to "protect" athletes' welfare.

"We still have a long way to go within sport organisations in terms of their investment into this area," Anderson said.

"Everyone acknowledges and supports the need in principle that athletes need psychological support, and that psychological well-being is of great importance, not only to the individual's life but to their direct performance.

"But I think sport organisations are a long way from investing the amount of resources that are required to provide comprehensive services, rather than token access to some services. There's a lot more that can be done."