

Collective Calls to Action

Enhancing Disabled Joy and Authentic Inclusion in Sport in Manitoba

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Introduction

In the fall of 2024, [Sport Manitoba](#) convened participants, leaders, partners, and allies to provide direction on the enhancement of disability and parasport in Manitoba. Early consultations involved multiple partner organizations and contributing voices, tasked to identify core issues and develop potential solutions. Sport Manitoba engaged anti-ableist consulting firm [Inclusive Experiences \(IX\)](#) to support the development of shared and systemic solutions.

We formed a Working Group of 11 members, who committed to working collaboratively, openly, and contributing in whatever way worked best for them. Guided by a Collaboration Charter, we set out to create a “bold and practical Action Plan for Disability Inclusion in Sport in Manitoba”. We hoped to:

- Ground our efforts in diverse and lived experiences of disability,
- Make the most of individual and collective efforts, and

- Give the sport system something clear to act on.

From the outset, our intent was to generate a subset of initiatives or ideas that could serve as a practical roadmap. Despite great insight, intention and commitment, it proved difficult. Simultaneously, our ideas felt too big and too small. Tension rose around who ultimately bore the responsibility to drive change, and, as one member aptly put it (*paraphrased*),

“You keep asking us to imagine an ideal future, which is very hard to do when we keep having to fight for the bare minimum”.

This reflection underscored an important truth, a handful of new initiatives or programs would be wildly insufficient to spark the systemic, collective, and seismic shift needed.

Deeply inspired by the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action](#), our **Calls to Action** are designed to name those urgent shifts, and to hold the sector accountable for meaningful change. Through surfacing these Calls to Action, we can begin to envision a future where success is measured not just by medals or numbers of disabled athletes or leaders, but by the joy, safety, creativity, and collective care they experience.

We hope this document makes clear that disability inclusion in sport is not optional or aspirational. It is fundamental and urgent. These Calls to Action affirm that disabled people belong in sport in Manitoba, not as guests or beneficiaries, but as leaders and co-creators. They affirm disabled joy and authentic inclusion, and seek to end systemic discrimination and harm.

These Calls to Action are directed at every part of the sport system in Manitoba—including local clubs, athletes, coaches, volunteers, Provincial and Local Sport Organizations (PSOs/LSOs), Sport Manitoba, the Department

of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, and adjacent sectors (education, health, recreation). They are not abstract ideas, nor are they a checklist to follow. They will require you and your organisation to reflect, learn and take action within your unique context and in partnership with others. We urge you to do this work in earnest relationship with people with disabilities. While we anticipate these calls to grow and change over time, we ask you to take them up as urgent and necessary steps build a future where disabled people and their families can shape change, create belonging, and flourish in sport.

A Case for Change

Disabled people are not a small subset or “special interest” group. People with disabilities make up more than a quarter of the Canadian population, and face higher rates of discrimination ([ableism](#)), poverty, and violence than non-disabled Canadians. These inequities touch every role in sport: athletes, parents/guardians, coaches, referees, staff, leaders, volunteers, collaborators and fans. If sport is to be safe(r)^{*1}, inclusive, and fair, disability must be moved from the periphery to the center, no longer an afterthought.

Before you read these Calls to Action, please consider some key realities:

- **1 in 4 Canadians** (27% — more than 8 million people) live with at least one disability (StatCan, 2022). This does not capture those living on First Nations reserves, in group homes, hospitals, or assisted-living residences. In Manitoba, the disability rate in 2022 was 29.2%, reflecting a 4.4% increase from 2017. This rate is notably higher than the national average of 27% for Canadians aged 15 and older (StatCan, 2022).
- **20% of young people** (15–24) report disabilities — including 25% of young women and girls (StatCan, 2017). Canada collects no complete data under age 15, hiding the realities of many children with disabilities.

¹ Disability, Safety & Sport: A Collective Entry to Future of Sport in Canada Commission. Forthcoming.

- **Disability touches everyone.** 71% of disabled people live with two or more types. Common disabilities include: physical (27%), pain-related (17%), cognitive (12%), mental health (10%), seeing (7.4%), and hearing (5.6%) (StatCan, 2017). Many are invisible — like chronic pain, mental health, or hearing loss — but still affect daily life and sport. **Hearing loss alone** affects almost 1 in 5 Canadian adults, but only 3–4% self-report it. About 357,000 people identify as culturally Deaf, yet more than 3.2 million face serious hearing challenges.
- **Poverty and disability are linked.** Canadians with disabilities live in poverty at twice the national rate (1 in 6). Causes include unsafe labour, unaffordable or unfair healthcare, food and housing insecurity, and impacts of racism, gender-based violence, and trauma.
- **Discrimination is widespread.** Over half (52%) of human rights complaints in Canada relate to disability (CHRC, 2022). Women, girls, and non-binary people with disabilities face gender-based violence at 2–3 times the rate of non-disabled peers (DAWN Canada). Canadians with mental health–related disabilities report triple the sexual assault rates of others, and 69% have been physically or sexually assaulted at least once since age 15 (CAMH, 2019).

Calls to Action

Participation and Representation

1. We call upon all levels of sport to acknowledge and plan for disabled participation across all roles including athletes, parents, guardians, volunteers, coaches, sponsors, leaders, referees, and fans.
2. We call upon all levels of sport to recognize that equity is not the same as equality. Reporting, evaluation, and resourcing must account for differences in population size, privacy, and participation patterns.

3. We call upon all levels of sport to recognize that membership numbers do not reflect the full reality of disabled participation, and to treat disclosure of disability with care. Disclosure of disability is personal, people may choose to disclose only if they feel welcome, respected, and confident that their information will be used for meaningful action.
4. We call upon sport funding bodies to stop penalizing organizations when disabled membership appears lower. Disabled people are fewer in the overall population, and barriers such as history, access, discrimination, and microaggressions affect representation and participation. Disabled participation must not be measured with the same expectations or quotas as non-disabled participation.
5. We call upon all levels of sport to ensure disabled athletes are not pressured or required to play more than one sport, or have their participation monitored in ways non-disabled participation is not. Tracking participation in ways that assume or require multiple-sport touchpoints (for example, across Provincial Sport Organizations) is ableist. If unique non-disabled participation is not tracked, it should not be applied to disabled participants.
6. We call upon all sport governing bodies to ensure athletes with disabilities have the same access to high-quality coaching, sports science and sports medicine services, training facilities, and competitive opportunities as non-disabled athletes.
7. We call upon all levels of sport to ensure disabled athletes are given equal recognition, visibility and honour for their accomplishments as non-disabled athletes.
8. We call upon all levels of sport to design programs that are flexible and inclusive for participants of all abilities and skill levels. A one-size-fits-all, highly competitive model of sport can unintentionally exclude

many children, youth, and adults with disabilities. Programs should provide multiple entry points and pathways.

9. We call upon sport leaders at every level to promote fun, skill development, and social connection as equally important outcomes to competition. This includes offering non-traditional or adaptive sports and activities (not just paralympic sports) and scheduling programs at times and formats that accommodate various needs.

Access and Inclusion Planning

10. We call upon all levels of sport to comply with and exceed the requirements of the Accessibility for Manitobans Act (2013), proactively identify and eliminate systemic barriers that exclude people with disabilities.
11. We call upon the Government of Manitoba, municipal authorities, and all sport facility providers to ensure that sport and recreation environments are fully accessible in both design and operation, for participants, staff, guardians and spectators with disabilities.
12. We call upon all sport and recreation facility operators to audit and retrofit spaces to enhance accessibility. Inclusive design also means accommodating sensory and communication needs.
13. We call upon all levels of sport to preemptively set aside budget for access, accommodations and accessibility. Include disabled people, access, and accessibility in financial planning and budget lines.
14. We call upon all levels of sport to source, create, and maintain accessibility templates or checklists for venues and event planning.
15. We call upon all levels of sport to ensure digital and print communications (e.g. registration forms, websites, social media posts) are accessible. Even if your sport does not have a para, Special

Olympics, or Deaf sport pathway, disabled parents, guardians, or participants deserve access to information.

16. We call upon all levels of sport to know where and how to source sign language interpretation.
17. We call upon all levels of sport to co-create and normalize the use of [access riders](#) in registration forms, job postings, program registrations, and volunteer descriptions.
18. We call upon all levels of sport to know where to source live captioning for in-person and virtual events and online training.
19. We call upon the Manitoba education system – including the Department of Education, school divisions, and educators – to ensure that school-based physical activities and sports are fully inclusive of students with disabilities.
20. We call upon all sport organizations, including disability-specific groups, to practice [cross-disability solidarity](#).

Funding and Accountability

21. We call upon all levels of government, funding agencies, and sport governing bodies to provide dedicated funding and resources to ensure cost is not a barrier to participation. We urge governments (provincial and federal) to expand financial supports such as grants or tax credit programs for individuals with disabilities and their families to offset costs.
22. We call upon sport funding bodies to resource disabled sport participation equitably, ensuring funding does not privilege non-disabled or Paralympic-only pathways at the expense of community-based, Deaf or Special Olympic sport.

23. We call upon sport funding bodies to prioritize funding for programs identified by the disability community as effective, with sunset clauses for symbolic or low-impact initiatives.
24. We call upon all levels of sport to embed mechanisms to evaluate and improve the experiences of disabled participants and leaders.
25. We call upon governments and sport funding bodies to establish clear accountability mechanisms to track progress on disability inclusion in sport.
26. We call upon governments and sport funding bodies to publicly report on how sport funding and policies are impacting people with disabilities. We recommend that all sport organizations collect and report data on the participation of people with disabilities in their programs, as well as their representation in leadership roles.
27. We call upon all levels of sport to critically review their rules, culture, and assumptions, recognizing and disrupting ableist policies and norms (e.g. assuming disabled athletes are “less capable” or “not interested”) or where disability is absent.
28. We call upon all levels of sport to ensure disability is considered during strategic and operational planning and reviews, asking “are disabled people reflected, represented, and resourced here?”

Collaboration and Leadership

29. We call upon all levels of sport to actively include people with disabilities in leadership, coaching, and decision-making roles.
30. We call upon sport funding bodies to seed and resource a disability-led hub or collective that provides coordination, knowledge-sharing, and advocacy across the disability and parasport ecosystem.
31. We call upon all levels of sport to implement a “Nothing About Us Without Us” principle: whenever policies, programs, or initiatives

affecting people with disabilities are created, people with disabilities must be at the table.

- 32.** We call upon all levels of sport to compensate disabled people for their expertise, particularly in advisory or leadership roles.
- 33.** We call upon all sport and recreation organizations, coach education programs, and certification bodies to mandate comprehensive, high-quality, ongoing disability inclusion and/or anti-ableism training for coaches, volunteers, and staff.
- 34.** We call upon all levels of sport to invest in ongoing mentorship and professional development focused on disability knowledge, collaboration, and knowledge transfer.
- 35.** We call upon sport funding bodies to incentivize projects developed in partnership with disability-led organizations, requiring evidence of collaboration.
- 36.** We call for cross-sector partnerships to support this work: sport organizations should collaborate with schools, healthcare providers, disability service organizations, and Indigenous and newcomer communities to reach participants who might otherwise be excluded, co-design an inclusive system and to share resources/expertise.
- 37.** We call upon all those within the sport system to be [**active witnesses**](#), standing up to address ableist and disability-exclusionary language, actions, and inaction.
- 38.** We call upon all those within the sport system to share wins, knowledge, and resources, and not keep them proprietary. Be open to updating resources so that more can be developed and existing ones are not constantly reinvented.
- 39.** We call upon everyone in the sport system to move beyond asking and listening; for change to happen, action is required.

40. We call upon everyone in the sport system to ensure that disability inclusion work is not [extractive](#).
41. We call upon everyone who reads these Calls to Action to share and discuss them with at least one other person.

Conclusion

Each of us has a role to play. Whether you are an athlete, parent, volunteer, coach, official, leader, or policymaker, you hold the power to make sport more accessible, more welcoming, and more just. Making sport better for disabled people in Manitoba requires everyone take action and accountability. Non-disabled allies and accomplices are welcome and required.

We invite you to...

Glossary

Ableism - Treating people unfairly or assuming they are less capable because they have a disability.

Access Rider - A living document or video to capture access and accessibility needs of participants.

Active Witness - Someone who notices ableism and other forms of exclusion and takes action to stop it. An active witness doesn't just see problems; they speak up, support change, and help make sport more welcoming for disabled people and others often marginalized in society.

Cross Disability Solidarity - When people with different types of disabilities work together to support each other and fight for equal rights.

Extractive – When someone benefits from the knowledge, experience, or work of disabled people without giving back, respecting their time, or creating real change. In sport, extractive behaviour happens when disabled voices are used for show or research but not included in decisions or leadership.