

Special Olympics: Partnering to Advance the Health of People with Intellectual Disabilities

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Special Olympics as a catalyst

Sports at the core:

- 31 Olympic-type sports
- 33,000 annual competitions
- World Games every two years
- Major Regional Games

Broad scope:

- Programs in 175 countries
- 3.2 million athletes
- 260,000 coaches
- 779,928 volunteers



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But significant barriers are faced throughout the lifespan

- Disparities...
 - in access to healthcare and quality of care received
 - that deepen in adulthood, with scarcity of adult care providers
 - in access to education, employment and community participation
 - that are reinforced by policies and systems
- Outcomes: exclusion, discrimination, institutionalization, injustice, and loneliness -- all of which further worsen physical and mental health

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Health Disparities

Findings from past four Special Olympics World Games (average age=25)

HEALTH PROBLEM	PERCENT (%)
Untreated Tooth Decay	45.7%
Referred for Urgent Follow Up Care	12.1%
Failed Hearing Tests	25.2%
Low Bone Density	13.4%
Eye Disease	11.3%
Gait Abnormalities (feet)	41.6%
Bone Deformities	15.1%

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Training of healthcare professionals

Survey of 2,500 Med & Dental School Deans, Residency Directors and Students

- 81% of medical school students say they are not getting any clinical training and 66% say they are not getting enough classroom instruction
- Over 80% of Deans say that “lack of curriculum time” is the primary reason
- Three-quarters of students say they are interested in treating people with ID as part of their career

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Convening healthcare providers and our athletes to improve health:

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes[®]

- Over one million health screenings
- Over 90,000 healthcare professionals trained
- Over 75,000 eyeglasses distributed



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<p>1991</p>  <p><i>Special Olympics</i> Lions Clubs International</p> <hr/> <p>Healthy Athletes Opening Eyes®</p>	<p>1999</p>  <p><i>Special Olympics</i></p> <hr/> <p>Healthy Athletes Healthy Hearing</p>	<p>2001</p>  <p><i>Special Olympics</i></p> <hr/> <p>Healthy Athletes Health Promotion</p>	<p>2004</p>  <p><i>Special Olympics</i></p> <hr/> <p>Healthy Athletes MedFest®</p>
<p>1993</p>  <p><i>Special Olympics</i></p> <hr/> <p>Healthy Athletes Special Smiles</p>	<p>2000</p>  <p><i>Special Olympics</i></p> <hr/> <p>Healthy Athletes FUNfitness</p>	<p>2003</p>  <p><i>Special Olympics</i></p> <hr/> <p>Healthy Athletes Fit Feet</p>	

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SOI 5-Year Strategic Health Priorities

- Expand alliances to connect athletes to community-based follow-up care and treatment.
- Adapt current health protocols, content, and implementation to better address global variations in need, systems, and culture
- Integrate health programming to strengthen family support and early childhood development initiatives.
- Enhance health partnership base at the state/national Program level to foster increased sustainability.

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Special Olympics as a Catalyst for Health

SO data are increasingly being published in the academic literature and presented at conferences worldwide

SO data have primarily been used to influence policies around:

- Providing greater access to health care
- Training and raising awareness among health care professionals

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Data are enhancing access to care...



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Developing inclusive health promotion...



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But More is Needed

- SO athletes represent approximately 3% of people with ID
- SO athletes may not be representative and may, on average, be healthier than most people with ID
- Surveillance data is needed for ALL Americans with ID

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A New Surveillance Effort

- Working with the Gallup Organization to create a population-based sample of 600 US families of adults with ID, ages 21-40
- Immediate goal is to create a comparison sample of athletes for an employment and employability study
- Long-term goal is to take advantage of this population-based group for other studies

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Special Olympics role as a partner:

We convene, challenge and change

- **Convene:** we provide a platform for people with intellectual disabilities to come together with policy makers, corporate leaders, universities, NGOs, others
- **Challenge:** we dispel misperceptions and stereotypes about intellectual disability and work to debunk manifestations of those attitudes at the systems level
- **Change:** using sport as the vehicle, we strive to create opportunities for engagement that promote more aware, active and inclusive communities beyond the field of play

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And as a partner in health: We convene, challenge and change

- **Convene:** Healthy Athletes events are a prime opportunity to bring together healthcare providers, policy makers, educators, professional associations and advocacy organizations to bring focus to health in the context of a larger sports and social change movement.
- **Challenge:** Healthy Athletes casts light on the health disparities in this population and their underlying causes
- **Change:** by training healthcare providers, informing improved policies, forging community-based partnerships, collecting and disseminating data, and educating athletes, Healthy Athletes enables improved health

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The Promise of Partnership...



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