



# FITNESS THROUGH SPORT

GUIDING STRATEGY 2023-2026



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**Health**

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# FITNESS THROUGH SPORT

**To be a great athlete, you must be a healthy athlete.**

Fitness through Sport describes the promotion of health and fitness within sports settings.

Special Olympics defines fitness as “optimal health and performance through adequate physical activity, nutrition, and hydration.” Higher levels of fitness can enhance athletic performance and reduce the risk of injury, contributing to a better sports experience.

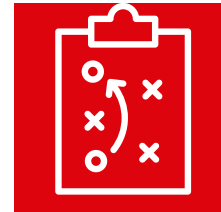
For our athletes to be fit, they must practice healthy habits year-round and lifelong. The sport and competition setting provides a perfect opportunity to build a culture of fitness that surrounds our athletes and encourages a focus on fitness on and off the field of play. This expands the reach of our health and wellness programming to more of the athletes we serve and ensures that all athletes know how to lead a healthy life.

**Fitness through Sport aims to enhance fitness activities within sports settings to maximize impact on the sports performance, health and wellbeing of Special Olympics athletes.** We operate under three main strategic areas: sports practices, competitions, and key supporters.





# STRATEGIC GOALS



**Sports practices** serve as a catalyst for fitness and healthy lifestyles



**Competitions** provide a healthy and safe environment for athletes to achieve their personal best



**Key supporters** have the knowledge and resources to assist athletes to be healthy and fit



Athletes and coaches **utilize data** to drive personal improvement



Members across the movement **spread messages** to promote a healthy lifestyle for all athletes

# KEY OBJECTIVES



## Sports practice is a catalyst for fitness and healthy lifestyles



- Introduce Minimum "Fit" Practice Standards to Programs and sports coaches
- 40 Programs conduct Fitness Programming in Sport Settings before/after practice
- Develop a recognition system for sports teams implementing increased levels of "Fit" Practice Standards

## Competitions provide a healthy and safe environment for athletes to achieve their personal best



- Offer Performance Stations at all Major Games (including World Games and Regional Games) to introduce more Programs to the model and promote a healthy and safe competition experience
- 75 Programs offer Performance Stations
- 50 Programs adopt Healthy Food & Beverage Guidelines
- Fitness and Performance Stations are included in 100% of available Sport Impact Standard and Technical Manuals for Major Games
- 75% of Performance Stations participants (athletes and coaches) are satisfied with their experience

## Key supporters have the knowledge and resources to assist athletes to be healthy and fit



- 55,000 sports coaches trained about fitness
  - 12,000 coaches complete the Fitness for the Sport Coach eLearning
- 900 Fitness Captains trained to promote fitness in sports settings
- 100% of updated coaching guides include a section on sport-specific fitness
- 5,000 volunteers trained as Fitness Coaches
- Develop a series of resources for families/caregivers about fitness for sports performance

# STRATEGIC DRIVERS



Drivers are the tools used to support the work explained in our strategic goals.

Athletes and coaches **utilize data** to drive personal improvement

- Athletes complete fitness assessments and changes in results are monitored
- Injury and competition results are collected and analyzed to make programmatic improvements
- Physical activity levels are monitored at sports practice

Members across the movement **spread messages** to promote a healthy lifestyle for all athletes

- Engagement of Fitness through Sport content including resources and social posts is monitored
- Global Ambassadors are engaged in the promotion of fitness
- Partnership agreements recognize and support Fitness through Sport initiatives and opportunities

# ACTION PLAN

## Sports practice is a catalyst for fitness and healthy lifestyles



- Develop guidelines for a "fit" sports practice with minimum practice standards
- Create a Fitness through Sport resource library and develop sport-specific fitness resources
- Explore opportunities to digitize FTS initiatives, including the promotion of the SO FitNow mobile app to sports coaches
- Launch guidelines and suggestions for SO Programs that want to count FTS initiatives as "fitness programming"
- Create a Fitness through Sport toolkit and disseminate to Programs through SO Health and Sport channels

## Competitions provide a healthy and safe environment for athletes to achieve their personal best



- Develop the Healthy Food & Beverage Guidelines and disseminate standards for local, state, national and international competitions
- Integrate fitness and Performance Stations into every competition protocol via the Sport Impact Standards
- Update the Performance Stations manual to support consistency and quality across all levels of competition
- Support Delegations preparing for Major Games through initiatives such as fitness challenges, coach education and training plan development

## Key supporters have the knowledge and resources to assist athletes to be healthy and fit



- Provide Regional and Program staff training (TTT) to ensure consistent training of key leaders
- Embed fitness and Performance Stations into Competition Manager Training resources
- Develop resource toolkit and standards for in-person or virtual coach education on fitness and health
- Disseminate Fitness Captain training, resources and activations with Programs globally
- Train Health and Fitness Professionals as "Fitness Coaches" to support health promotion at practice
- Develop caregiver guide to provide information on how to support Special Olympics athletes to practice a healthy lifestyle on and off the field of play

# ACTION PLAN

## Athletes and coaches utilize data to drive personal improvement

- Using the Lifestyle Survey and SO FitNow data, track individual and aggregate changes in healthier behaviors.
- Provide grant funding to encourage Programs to collect Fitness Assessment data pre and post season.
- Develop guidance on using Fitness Assessment results, including information on interpreting the data, goal setting, and measuring changes in results over time.
- Develop a dashboard for tracking athlete fitness metrics that provides access to SOI, Programs, coaches, and individuals
- Develop an assessment plan that is feasible and acceptable for athletes, coaches, and Program staff that can clearly evaluate the impact of health promotion through sport on athlete health.

## Members across the movement spread messages to promote a healthy lifestyle for all athletes

- Develop athlete communication plan to increase direct communication about health and fitness in sport
- Recruit global ambassadors and prominent SO athletes to encourage SO athletes to adopt a healthy lifestyle
- Develop global partnerships with companies and NGOs in the sport, fitness, and physical activity sector
- Translate FTS resources into 5 official and other requested languages
- Update and promote resources and technical assistance through enhanced communication and peer learning among Program staff





# GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

**Minimum "Fit" Practice Standards** defines the components that should be included in every sports practice. These can be led by coaches, or other key leaders like Fitness Captains.

**Fitness Programming in Sport Settings** refers to guidelines to count fitness programming in the sport setting. Program examples can be found in the Fitness Implementation Guidelines.

## Minimum "Fit" Practice Standards

- 5 minute warm-up with dynamic stretches
- 5 minute cool-down with static stretches
- Health Tips shared during practice
  - Encouragement to be active and healthy outside of practice
- Focus on active practice
  - Sport conditioning integrated into practice
- Water breaks every 15-20 minutes
- Healthy foods encouraged at team functions, including field of play

## Fitness Programming in Sport Settings

- Fitness programming includes activities and health education that:
  - Takes place before or after a sports practice
  - Follows the Fitness Implementation Guidelines
  - Is at least 15 minutes long
- Delivered at least once per week for 6 or more weeks
- Following Minimum "Fit" Practice Standards does not count as fitness programming
- Some components can be virtual, such as a step challenge