

SPECIAL OLYMPICS FITNESS STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2026



Special Olympics
Health

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Health

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CENTERS FOR DISEASE™
CONTROL AND PREVENTION

The work of Special Olympics Health is made possible by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States, and by the Golisano Foundation around the world.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS FITNESS

We support individuals with intellectual disabilities to maximize their health and wellbeing by developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation to lead a healthy and active life.

A focus on fitness means being physically active, eating healthy and staying hydrated. Fitness can boost athletic performance, prevent and reduce chronic and noncommunicable diseases, improve the quality of life and extend the number of years of life.

This Fitness Strategic Plan guides our fitness activities to maximize impact on the health and well-being of Special Olympics athletes. We operate under four main areas: **ongoing programming, education, technology, and advocacy.**

Whether you are an athlete, coach, volunteer, fitness professional, researcher, educator, or supporter of the Special Olympics movement, we encourage you to be involved in fitness promotion.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS HEALTH

The [SOI Global Strategic Plan](#) 2021-2030 provides the direction, focus and goals for our global movement, including Special Olympics Health (SO Health). Special Olympics Fitness directly supports the SO Health strategy. The vision of SO Health is that **all people with ID benefit from quality healthcare and maximize their well-being**, and is comprised of the following goals, priorities, and enablers through 2031:

SO Health Goals

- 1 million children and families will show improved developmental outcomes
- 1 million athletes will be engaged in ongoing preventive health programming and social-emotional well-being
- 4 million health assessments will be conducted and preventable health conditions, like high blood pressure will be reduced by 25%
- More than 250,000 health professionals will be trained and 10% of health professional schools in 20 Programs routinely include training on ID
- At least 20 states and countries will be promoting significant inclusive health reforms as a result of the first Global Report on Health of People with ID

Strategic Priorities

1. Expand ongoing motor development and activity, fitness, wellness, and health education programming.
2. Enhance health assessments and ensure appropriate follow-up care for Special Olympics athletes.
3. Train the future and current health workforce to better serve and be more inclusive of people with ID including those from marginalized populations.
4. Advocate at Program and global levels for better health outcomes and better care for people with ID.

Strategic Enablers

1. **Tiered, progressive approach** to uptake based on Program capacity.
2. **Financial sustainability** - built in from the outset at the relevant levels.
3. **Data, research, evaluation, and quality improvement** - to document our progress and impact, and inform our decisions and continuous development.
4. **Digital technology** that supports access to specialized information and resources, innovation, connectedness, efficiency, and effectiveness.

OUR STRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS

ONGOING PROGRAMMING

Goal	To provide high quality programming that supports Special Olympics athletes in achieving higher levels of fitness
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of athletes participating in 6+ weeks of structured fitness programming to 550,000 • Increase school-based participants in 6+ weeks of structured fitness programming to 55,000 • Reach 700,000 athletes in any structured fitness programming (of any duration)
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update and promote fitness resources and technical assistance through enhanced communication and peer-to-peer learning among Program staff • Offer Performance Stations at all Major Games (including World Games and Regional Games) to introduce more Programs to the model and foster a healthy and safe competition experience • Develop the fitness through sport strategy and toolkit and disseminate to Programs through Special Olympics Health and Sport channels
Key Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of athletes participating in structured fitness programming for 6 weeks or longer • Number of athletes participating in any structured fitness programming of any duration • Physical activity minutes, nutrition, and hydration trends
Data Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Olympics Annual Census • Special Olympics SO FitNow app • Unified Champion Schools Liaison survey and focus groups with athletes ages 40 and older
Key Collaborators	SO Global Youth Engagement and Unified Champion Schools teams; SO Regional Health Managers (RHMs) and Regional Sport Directors (RSDs); Research & Evaluation; Leadership and Organizational Development

OUR STRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS

EDUCATION

Goal	To educate Special Olympics leaders to promote adoption of healthy lifestyle behaviors among athletes
Objectives	<p>Train 17,000 individuals in fitness and healthy lifestyle practices, inclusive of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12,000 sport coaches trained to promote fitness • 3,000 fitness professionals or students trained in inclusive fitness • 1,100 educators trained to implement school-based fitness programming • 900 fitness captains trained to promote fitness in sports settings
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop resource toolkit for in-person or virtual coach education on fitness and health and include in coach education standards. • 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 • Create Fitness Captain training and resources and launch globally with all needed translation support
Key Indicators	Number of leaders trained to promote fitness (athletes, coaches, educators, fitness professionals)
Data Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Council on Exercise Inclusive Fitness Training Course completion numbers • Special Olympics Online Learning Portal fitness courses completed • Individuals trained by Programs as reported by Health Impact Grants • Reach of fitness industry professionals trained on inclusive fitness at conferences
Key Collaborators	SO Coaching Education team; SO RHM and RSDs; fitness industry partners and professionals; universities with adapted physical activity and exercise science programs

OUR STRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS



TECHNOLOGY

Goal	To build awareness of fitness and health behaviors to facilitate health behavior change
Objectives	Reach 15,000 registered users in the SO FitNow app, inclusive of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300 coaches • 300 caregivers
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct first pilot of app outside of US with 3 countries in 2023. • Adapt app architecture to increase accessibility and usability for SO athletes • Create resources to increase app participation among coaches, caregivers, Unified Partners, and athletes
Key Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of users registered in SO FitNow app (athletes, coaches, caregivers); segmented by active and inactive users • Improvements in accessibility and increased usage of app as reported by focus group participants on an annual basis
Data Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SO FitNow app • Focus groups with athletes, coaches, caregivers, and Program staff
Key Collaborators	Special Olympics Digital Health, Research & Evaluation, and Informational Technology teams

OUR STRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS

ADVOCACY



Goal	To increase accessible fitness opportunities for all individuals with intellectual disabilities
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [D] Increase the number of Program-based and regional-based fitness partnerships • [D] Increase the number of trained athlete leaders advocating for physical activity and nutrition access and policies.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop global partnerships with companies and NGOs in the sport, fitness, and physical activity sector • Integrate physical activity and nutrition advocacy training and opportunities into health messenger advocacy training • Develop opportunities and resources for athletes and fitness centers to participate in inclusive fitness programming within the community
Key Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Fitness partnerships created • Number of athletes who report engaging in at least one physical activity advocacy initiative
Data Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Impact Grant reports • SOI and Regional Health staff Fitness partnerships reporting • Health Messenger reports
Key Collaborators	Special Olympics Pillar 4: “Rise up to Reform” team; Regional Health staff

[D] indicates a Developmental Objective. These refer to those objectives in which there is not yet enough data and tracking measures to establish a baseline.

KEY THEORIES & FRAMEWORKS

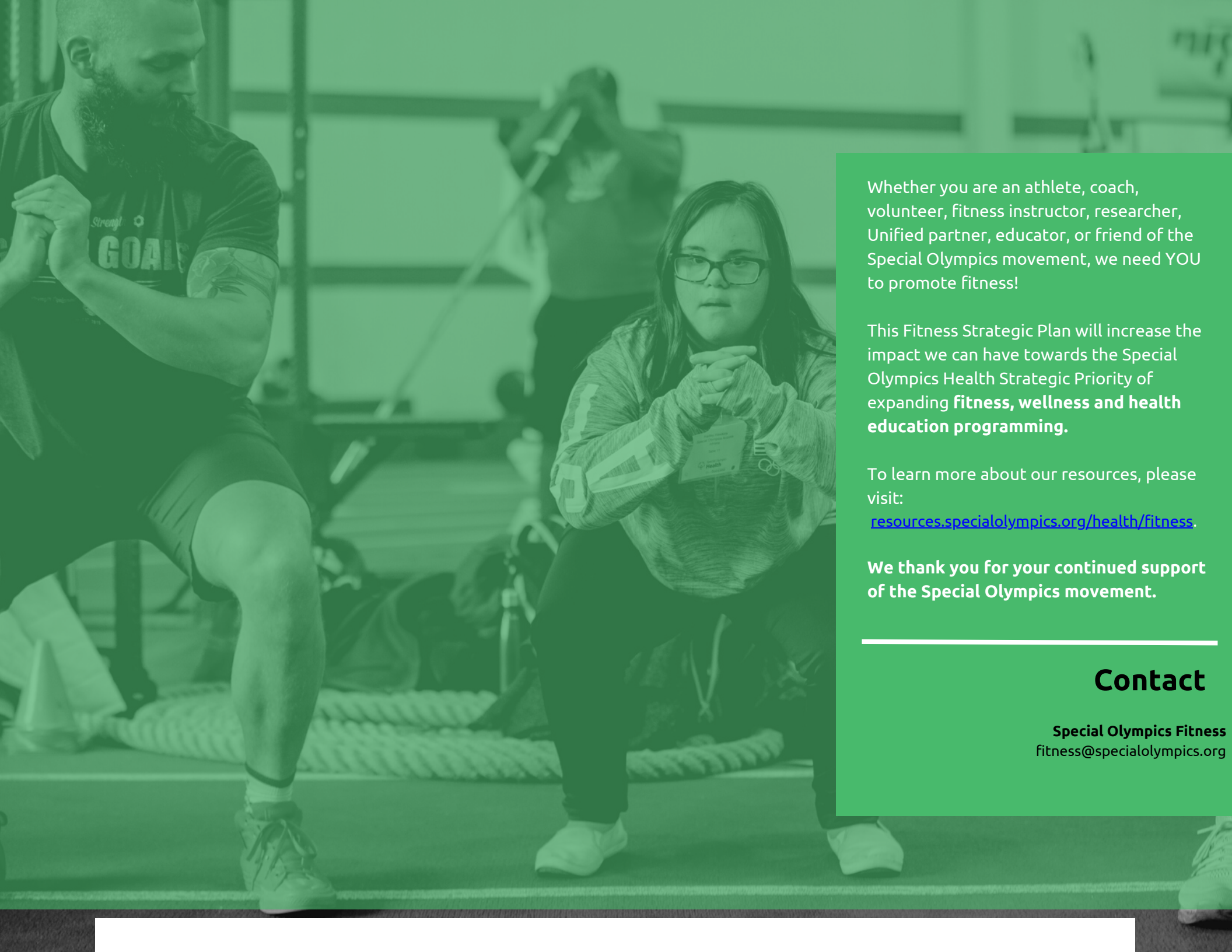
Special Olympics Fitness embeds **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**, **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**, and the **Social Ecological Model** as primary theories to promote the evidence-basis for our work. Using athletes and coaches to lead and role model healthy behaviors fosters **observational learning** while setting **outcome expectations** by providing resources for adapting fitness testing and training to meet the needs of a variety of athletes.

Further, we incorporate subjective norms by promoting Health Messengers and Athlete Leaders in fitness programming and resources. Further, we promote behavioral control by including health goals and affirmations, as well as strong supporting messaging, into our resources and programming.

Lastly, we provide resources to foster community-based physical activity opportunities and evaluate the effectiveness of these programs to ensure growth of effective programming, with emphasis on supporting access to physical activity and healthy nutrition.

Using **evidence-based frameworks makes our work more impactful**. These frameworks inform our work and are embedded in all of our programming and resources.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Active People, Healthy Nation
- CDC Comprehensive School Physical Activity Plan (CSPAP)
- Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- Healthy People 2030 (United States)
- IHRS Inclusive Fitness Club and Sector Toolkit
- International Society for Physical Activity and Health's Eight Investments That Work for Physical Activity
- National Physical Activity Plan (United States)
- Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- World Health Organization Guidelines on Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviors



Whether you are an athlete, coach, volunteer, fitness instructor, researcher, Unified partner, educator, or friend of the Special Olympics movement, we need YOU to promote fitness!

This Fitness Strategic Plan will increase the impact we can have towards the Special Olympics Health Strategic Priority of expanding **fitness, wellness and health education programming.**

To learn more about our resources, please visit:

resources.specialolympics.org/health/fitness.

We thank you for your continued support of the Special Olympics movement.

Contact

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