

# Health Messenger Training

## Facilitator's Guide



Special Olympics

# Health

MADE POSSIBLE BY **Golisano** FOUNDATION

### OVERVIEW:

The goals of the Health Messenger training are to:

- Train Special Olympics athletes to serve as health and wellness leaders, educators, advocates and role models within their teams, Special Olympics Programs, and communities.
- Empower Special Olympics athletes to advocate for the health needs of people with intellectual disabilities (ID.)

The objectives of the training are to:

1. Educate Health Messengers about the health status of people with ID and the Special Olympics Health Program;
2. Review how to build positive health behaviors and be peer role models;
3. Teach the skills and activities Health Messengers can use to help their local communities, Special Olympics Programs or teams become healthier;
4. Empower Health Messengers to advocate for the health of people with ID;
5. Create individual Health Messenger activation plans;
6. Develop a network of Health Messengers who can share ideas, discuss challenges and celebrate successes with each other.

As a result of attending the training, Health Messengers will:

1. Increase their confidence in acting as peer leaders and role models for health education, wellness and fitness within their Special Olympics communities.
2. Understand the steps involved to lead activation and advocacy within their communities, raise awareness and influence everyone to be more inclusive of people with ID.
3. Know on how to inspire, mobilize and support external organizations to work toward making their services, programming, or policies more inclusive.
4. Have a plan in place for how they will deliver a health practicum based on the training – to put their learning into action.

### Step 1: Plan Your Training

#### 1. Assemble your Health Messenger training planning team:

Athletes have keen insight into the health problems they face as well as ways these problems can be addressed, so include them in every stage of the planning process. Consider bringing together an “athlete council” to gather input and guide the design of your training. It is also a good idea to learn as much as you can by talking to coaches, caregivers, Healthy Athletes Clinical Directors, and others. Each of these groups can provide you with valuable insight that will aid in training planning.

#### 2. Determine the health needs of your Special Olympics athletes:

Think about the health issues and barriers to health facing people with ID in your Program, country, state, or community, and what health knowledge and behaviors you want to address.

#### 3. Determine the role(s) of your Health Messengers:

Where can Health Messengers assist in changing the landscape for the health of people with ID? Do you need peer educators? Health advocates? Media spokespeople? Athletes who can provide presentations on the health of people with ID and meet with partners? Keep in mind that every athlete is different and has different leadership skills.

#### **4. Select your Health Messengers:**

There are a few different options for selecting your Health Messengers. You might have existing athlete leaders who would be natural fits for the program. Alternatively, you might ask coaches, teachers or volunteers to nominate athletes who they consider leaders and would be strong leading in health and fitness. You could also invite interested athletes to complete a short application.

A sample application can be found on the Health Messengers Resources page:  
<https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.

#### **5. Design your training agenda:**

To certify an athlete as a Health Messenger, there are components that **MUST** be included in the training:

1. Overview of Special Olympics health programming and the health status of people with ID.
2. Peer-to-peer group discussions and activities.
3. Implementing at least 2 hands on health education modules (i.e. nutrition, hygiene, physical activity, FIT5, Strong Minds.)
4. Time for athletes to develop a plan for their health practicum.

The training agenda should include a combination of:

- Classroom style lecture (10%)
- Group discussion (25%)
- Hands on skills development (40%)
- Individual work time (25%)

You should also provide your athletes with ample breaks, refreshments, and opportunities for fun.

When creating your agenda, consider the health knowledge and literacy levels of your participants, the health needs to people with ID in your community, and what your Health Messengers' roles will be. You might want to work with health partners or others with expertise in developing training materials that are appropriate for your trainees. If you bring in an outside presenter or speaker, it is important to educate them in advance on how to present to people with ID, ensure the session is interactive and agree upon the material that will be delivered.

You will need to determine when is the best time to conduct your training. For some that could mean a 1 day, 8-hour training, for some it could be a 10-hour training divided over 2 days, and for some it could mean 12 one-hour sessions given once a week for 12 weeks. You will also need to determine if it is better for you to host your Health Messenger training as part of a larger Athlete Leadership University, Athlete Congress or sporting event, or if it will be better for you to host a stand-alone event.

To help you design your training there is a sample agenda, resources, presentations and activities provided on the Health Messengers Resources page:  
<https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.

#### **6. Determine Logistics and Meeting Materials**

It is important to secure meeting space that allows for an interactive training experience, and have meeting materials available that fully support participant learning. See Appendix A for more information.

#### **7. Distribute the Health Messenger Practicum Guide:**

To certify an athlete as a Health Messenger they **MUST** complete a health practicum, or project, within a year of completing training. These health practicums help Health Messengers think about what leadership skills they can use and ensure they are putting into practice what they learned at the training.

Each athlete and mentor selected to attend the training should be sent the Health Messenger Practicum Guide in advance, so they have time to discuss together which health practicum to focus on. During the training, allow time for athletes to work on developing a plan for their practicum.

For more information see Health Messenger Practicum Guide on the Health Messengers Resources page: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.

## Step 2: Implement Your training:

Successful Health Messenger Training facilitators:

### 1. Set clear expectations:

Attendees should be told at the beginning of the training what they will learn and how, what a Health Messenger is, what the different Health Messenger roles are, and what they will be expected to do as Health Messengers.

### 2. Encourage peer-to-peer discussions:

There should be many opportunities for peer-to-peer athlete discussions on a variety of health topics, led by an athlete leader whenever possible. A Health Messenger Workbook has been created to guide participants through these discussions. Find it on the Health Messenger Resources page: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.

### 3. Put learning into action:

Include hands-on learning activities that equip Health Messengers with health knowledge and tools they can take back to their communities. Interactive presentations, lesson plans, and activities - include talking points and step-by-step instructions - have been developed to make it easy for you to deliver this hands-on health education during your training. A Health Messenger Workbook has also been created to guide participants through these activities. Find these resources on the Health Messengers Resources page: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.

You may wish to create your own activity, as well! If you create a new activity, please share it with [healthmessenger@specialolympics.org](mailto:healthmessenger@specialolympics.org).

### 4. Assist Health Messengers with their practicum plans:

Give participants time and assistance during training to finalize their plan for putting their health practicum into action over the next year.

### 5. Recognize Health Messengers:

It is important to recognize your Health Messengers for their hard work at the training.

- Present them with a Health Messengers Certificate. See certificate template on the Health Messengers Resources page: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.
- Provide a Health Messenger shirt. See shirt template on the Health Messengers Resources page: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.
- Distribute a press release with photos of participants
- Post the story on your website and social media channels
- Submit success stories to Special Olympics International for posting on national media channels at <https://www.specialolympics.org/stories/share>.

### 6. Gather Participant Feedback:

It is important to gather feedback from attendees immediately following the training to determine what worked, what did not work, and if your Health Messenger feel prepared for their new role. Take their opinions seriously and use the feedback to shape future health programming or training.

To help you collect this data the Health Messenger Post Training survey is on the Health Messengers Resources page: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.

### Step 3: Support Your Health Messengers:

After the training, check in with your Health Messengers periodically to monitor their work, gather lessons learned, celebrate successes and provide any necessary support. Consider asking health volunteers, teachers or coaches to work with your Health Messengers and assist them as they serve in their new roles. The Health Messengers should have someone in your Program to go to if they need more materials, are asked a question they can't answer, or need any additional support.

There is a central Facebook group for trained Health Messengers.:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/soathleteleadersinhealth/>. Once they have been trained, they (and their mentors) can request to join the group. In order to gain access to the group, they need to be registered as a Health Messenger (see below).

### Step 4: Capture Data:

#### 1. Keep track of the number of athletes you train and who becomes Health Messengers:

An online [registration survey](#) has been created so Special Olympics can keep a central repository of contact information, preferred method of communication, biography and desired health area of expertise for all trained Health Messengers. Special Olympics Program staff should complete the [registration survey](#) for each of your trained Health Messengers after your trainings. To help you collect this data a paper survey is also available on the Health Messengers Resources page: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.

#### 2. Distribute the Lifestyle Survey:

Collecting information on health behaviors helps Special Olympics to understand the baseline health levels of Health Messengers. Further, it helps Health Messengers be accountable for monitoring and evaluating their own health. The data can then be used to understand the impact of health messenger trainings on improving health outcomes.

[The lifestyles survey](#) asks athletes to answer questions about their health behaviors, such as fruit and vegetable intake, water consumption, and physical activity. It also provides a place for athletes to record their sport and health goals. This survey can be taken [electronically](#) or on paper (found the Health Messengers Resources page:) <https://resources.specialolympics.org/health/health-messenger>.

#### 3. Keep a Health Messenger activation "diary":

In order to keep track of all the Health Messenger activities in a year and measure the number of athletes reached (i.e. provided with peer education, mentorship, engagement in wellness opportunities, etc.) we have set up an online [activation "diary"](#) that coaches, mentors or Health Messengers can complete after **each** health messenger event or activation. If Health Messengers are giving presentations, they could record the number of athletes in attendance. If they are engaging athletes in conversation outside of a Healthy Athletes screening, they could record the number of athletes they spoke to. Try to also capture qualitative data, including inspirational stories, feedback and suggestions. If you can, make sure to have a camera and digital video recorder available for the activities. This content can be used for a later pitch to media and to share the best stories with your internal network and with the wider Special Olympics Movement.

### Questions? Planning to hold a Health Messenger Training?

We would like to support your efforts in putting together your Health Messenger training! If you are planning to hold a Health Messenger training, please send an email to [healthmessenger@specialolympics.org](mailto:healthmessenger@specialolympics.org).

## Appendix A: Recommended training logistics:

### Room set up:

- Round tables to allow for group discussion
- Open space for fitness breaks and hands on learning activities

### Audio/visual:

- Microphones (2: 1 podium; 1 floor)
- Podium
- Laptop
- Projector

### Food/beverage:

- Provide healthy meals and snacks
  - Morning and afternoon, if a day-long session
- Have water available the entire day
  - Bring reusable water bottles for the Athletes to keep, if available.

### Other materials:

- Flip charts
- Markers
- Pens
- Name tags
- Folders
  - Training agenda
  - Attendee contact information
  - Health Messenger overview presentation
  - Hands on health education modules – presentations, lessons plans
  - Health Messenger workbook
  - Practicum overview
- Lifestyles survey (if using paper)
- Health Messenger Post-Training survey
- Health Messenger certificate
- Sunscreen, chap stick, sun safety bracelet or other health related giveaways

### Attendee Attire:

- Attendees should plan to be active and work up a sweat during this event! Comfortable workout attire (t-shirt and shorts/yoga pants/sweat pants), socks and tennis shoes/sneakers should be worn. Attendees should also plan to bring a sweatshirt or jacket in case they get cold.
- Participants should be provided with a Health Messenger t-shirt or uniform, if available, to wear at the training and as they are activating at home.