



## A Healthy Start

### *Improving Health and Development Outcomes for Children with Intellectual Disabilities*

The early childhood years are critical for all children, but particularly for children with intellectual disabilities (ID). These years are a time of great vulnerability for the general health and well-being of a child and can impact their foundation for life-long health and development. Effective early childhood development (ECD) and early intervention services are critical in supporting a child and their entire family. Unfortunately, children with ID often have limited access to these programs and services.

To ensure children of *all abilities* have access to the opportunities to live healthy, fulfilling lives, Special Olympics has built an evidence-based early childhood intervention program for children with and without ID and their families. [Special Olympics Young Athletes](#) delivers direct, evidence-based support to children ages 2-7 through [inclusive developmental skill](#) activities, impacting the social, cognitive, psychological, and physical development of young children. Young Athletes takes place in homes, schools, and communities, led by parents, families, teachers, and volunteers supported with Special Olympics training and resources. This program opens the door to provide support for families newly dealing with their child's intellectual disability, providing inclusive play opportunities, social outlets, and access to critical information.

### *Addressing Critical Health Disparities*

Too often, people with ID are a forgotten population when it comes to access to quality care. Many of the more than 200 million people with ID around the world face higher rates of isolation, stigma, physical abuse, poverty, and insufficient access to services. These inequities compound to create significant health disparities and a lack of basic protections. On average, people with ID die 16 years earlier than their peers without ID due to delays or problems with investigating, diagnosing, and treating their illnesses. Special Olympics has been addressing this issue since 1997 by delivering over 2 million free health screenings to athletes and training close to 300,000 health professionals and students to treat people with ID. However, this work has been only targeted towards adults – until now.

*By addressing health issues and detecting developmental challenges from an earlier age, children with ID will have the opportunity to lead healthier lives.*



### *Prioritizing Pediatric Health for Children with ID*

To ensure all children can access quality and appropriate services and supports, Special Olympics has developed the [Healthy Young Athletes](#) as a holistic screening to identify previously undiagnosed health and development conditions in children with ID. The pediatric screening is intended to complement a child's primary care and provide an additional review of the child's health and development. The screening is paired with a comprehensive referral and community support strategy that links families with providers, community services, and education resources for follow-up and continued support.

The Healthy Young Athletes Pediatric Screening will be implemented by trained Clinical Directors, with expertise in pediatrics and family care, and supported by health professional volunteers. The screening will have flexibility to be implemented across the three Young Athletes implementation models – school, community, and home – as well as in conjunction with large-scale [Healthy Athletes](#) events, and includes three core components:

- 1 Prescreening Survey:** An introductory screening to be completed by the child’s parent or caregiver before the screening event, that highlights key health information for the volunteer and allows a parent to reflect on their child’s successes and challenges.
- 2 Screening Event:** A physical or virtual event where a child meets with various providers to complete a physical exam, health history overview, and developmental screening. Some core components addressed in the screening include: vaccination history, biometrics and vitals, hearing and vision, nutrition, sleep, dental, and core developmental areas.
- 3 Referrals and Follow-up:** Following the screening, each family will meet with a clinical volunteer to discuss the findings of the screening and areas where the child may need additional supports or services, and then link families to resources and providers in the community. The Special Olympics Program or Clinical Director will follow up with families at multiple interviews following the screening event to ensure families are able to access the referral resources provided.



*Join Special Olympics in addressing critical health needs and changing the life trajectories of children with intellectual disabilities across the world.*