

# FOCUSING ON THE INVISIBLE

The Overlooked Needs of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Actions to Strengthen Health Systems for Inclusion

## INTRODUCTION LETTER FROM DAVID DUNCAN

Dear Reader,

It means a lot that you're taking the time to learn about the health of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), like me. Many of us aren't living our best lives because we aren't as healthy as we could be. This is because we are overlooked, invisible, excluded, and so are our needs.

That's why this report is so important.

I myself have had both good and bad experiences with health care. I've been to doctors who didn't listen to me, who made me feel like I didn't matter. I've also had care from people who took the time to understand me, including my autism, and who made me feel like I was part of the process. That made all the difference.

In April 2024, I joined the Editorial Review Group for this report as it was being set up. In May, my fellow Special Olympics athletes with IDD around the world gave me their trust to serve as the Chair of the Global Athlete Leadership Council (GALC). The GALC gets feedback from athletes across our regions and shares the feedback with Special Olympics International, to help decide the direction of the global Special Olympics movement. I've helped shape this report from the beginning, when it was just a concept. It's been a long journey, and I'm proud of what we've created and how it captures the voices, needs, and wishes of my fellow athletes and me. All along this journey, I have thought about why Special Olympics would publish this report. It's because Special Olympics has done, at a smaller scale, much of what we are calling on you to do.

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes screenings are just one example. The experience isn't frightening, like when you go to a general hospital. The volunteer doctors have been trained to work with us: they are kind, they use visuals and simpler language, and it's just such a supportive environment. I have friends who have had bad experiences with health care in the past who make the effort to go to Healthy Athletes screenings because the experience is better.

So, I know it's not impossible to do and I even know what it looks like!

Give people with IDD a seat at the table. Listen to our unique perspectives. We want to be included in what's going on; we have our



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own views and challenges that might be a little different. Give us a say and the supports we need to use our voices, claim our health, and live our best lives. Give us a line in the curriculum, the budget, the policy document, the survey ... and don't forget to let us be a part of writing those lines.

We are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for a level playing field. We want to be seen, heard, and respected. We want the chance to live healthy lives.

Here's hoping this report helps make that a reality.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' followed by a series of loops and a long, wavy horizontal line extending to the right.

*Yours truly,  
David Duncan  
Chair, Global Athlete Leadership Council  
Special Olympics*