
Policy and program considerations for increasing sport participation among members of underrepresented groups in Canada. 2nd Edition

Presented to Sport Canada

Sue Cragg Consulting

**Executive Summary:
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Executive Summary

Sport should be available and responsive to the needs of all Canadian residents who want to participate. Sport participation benefits individuals and society overall through improved physical, psychological and social well-being, increased civic pride, engagement and cohesion, and increased economic development and prosperity. However, some women and girls, Indigenous people, persons with a disability, recent immigrants, new Canadians, socio-economically disadvantaged Canadians, older adults, members of the LGBTQ2IA+ community, and Canadians living in rural, remote and isolated regions do not participate at the same rates as their mainstream counterparts. Inclusive policies and programming benefit all who may feel excluded from sport.

This report provides the results of a literature review intended to serve as a common evidence-base for collaborative policy and program development work aimed at increasing participation in sport, particularly among members of underrepresented groups. This second edition is an update of the original 2016 report and includes additional findings from literature published in the three subsequent years.

The first section of this report presents participation rates and barriers to participation by each of the target groups, while the second section presents evidence for addressing barriers and increasing sport participation. Practical ideas for action are

presented in supplements entitled *Evidence-Based Ideas for Action to Increase Sport Participation Among Members of Underrepresented Groups*. These supplements are created for policy makers, national and provincial/ territorial sport and recreation organizations and local sport providers, coaches, leaders and teachers.

Sport is about more than training and performance, and participation is about more than just the number of participants who show up to a program. Sport participation includes experiential aspects related to inclusion and community integration including mastery, challenge, autonomy (choice), engagement, meaning and belongingness. The bulk of the evidence for increasing participation in sport is organized in the report by these aspects, followed by considerations for policy, training, dissemination and evaluation.

The concepts of sport, recreation and physical activity are not exclusive of one another. Strategies to increase participation in physical activity or include members of marginalized groups in recreation both in the community and in schools are often applicable to increasing sport participation of the same groups. Relevant strategies from these related sectors have been included.

Developing physical literacy and cultural capital at any age

While the Canadian Sport Policy focuses on early physical literacy and sport skill

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development, members of underrepresented groups may not have had these opportunities at a young age, due to socio-economic disadvantage, physical or health limitations, residency in other countries, cultural norms or marginalization due to other reasons. The lack of physical literacy development at a young age creates a significant barrier to entry into sport. People may feel awkward, as they do not have the basic skills, and they may be excluded from teams who are focused on winning.

However, having physical literacy levels below those of one's peers is only part of the sport shortfalls that exclude some Canadian residents. Consistent early participation creates cultural capital (abilities, values and desires celebrated in a sport). Without early sport opportunities, potential participants may not be familiar with the rules or strategies, feel they don't fit in with the culture of the team or that a sport is not for them.

While members of the underrepresented groups discussed in this report are diverse, both between groups and internally, their barriers and challenges to participation in sport are similar. In addition to lacking sufficient physical literacy and cultural capital, barriers can include fear of judgement and the attitudes of others; lack of relevant role models; lack of access to relevant, appropriate or enjoyable programming; lack of facilities, equipment, transportation, or information; and economic and time constraints. The solutions, while

requiring tailoring to each group, fall into the same general categories.

Identify and customise the right combination of solutions

No single action will increase sport participation alone. For example, offering subsidies without providing a welcoming environment will not entice people to come or to stay. A holistic approach to increasing sport participation is needed. This involves addressing the whole person, including emphasizing the health benefits of sport; involving community members in suggesting and designing solutions; supporting and promoting participation; and building linkages with community partners, both by involving them in promoting sport offerings and by including sport in their broader programming. It is imperative that policy makers and practitioners work with members of each target group they are hoping to serve, to gain an understanding of the group's culture, challenges, sport inclusion needs and preferred solutions, and then tailoring a critical mass of context specific solutions.

Honouring reasons for participation

To encourage participation at all levels, there is a need for sport leaders and organizations to support the delivery of fun, socially inclusive sport programs that support a healthy active lifestyle for all Canadian residents. It is important to understand, acknowledge and honour reasons for participating in a sport and not to enforce athletic development standards on those

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who are not looking for that type of experience. Accommodating all levels of skill and competition and supporting choice of participation level provides the variety of experiences sought by different individuals.

Ideas for Action

To improve sport participation among Canadians and particularly among members of underrepresented populations, stakeholders could consider:

- Developing programs to introduce basic skills and improve physical literacy for all ages, abilities and skill levels;
- Creating a welcoming environment and ensuring that experiences are positive, encouraging, safe and fun;
- Offering a variety of types, levels and modifications of sport programming to meet the interests and needs of a broad range of potential participants;
- Celebrating diversity and ensuring that sport participation experiences are inclusive, non-judgemental, and free of harassment and inappropriate language;
- Honouring and supporting the choices regarding type and level of involvement, competition and scheduling;
- Increasing access to sport by opening many types of buildings and facilities, ensuring physical and operational access;
- Ensuring facilities are maintained, accessible and meet the privacy and cultural needs of participants;
- Working with intersectoral and community partners and participants to ensure that programming meets the

needs of the community and that promotion efforts are accessible and relevant;

- Providing professional development and mentorship opportunities to coaches, leaders and administrators;
- Encouraging peer leadership and mentorship;
- Removing transportation, equipment, registration and other access barriers;
- Encouraging support networks and social interaction, and prioritizing fun;
- Attracting participants through the provision of broader social and cultural experiences in addition to the sporting experience;
- Ensuring equity in media representation of a diversity of Canadians that avoids stereotypes;
- Celebrating and promoting diversity and working from a mindset of inclusion; and
- Ensuring policy supports these goals.

Next Steps

The contents of this report and the accompanying supplements can be used as a basis for consultation with multiple sectors to gather feedback to build upon the foundation laid. Furthermore, there is a need to gather information about the types of policies and programs underway across the country and for monitoring the participation rates of members of target groups over time. This information, along with that of existing reports on serving underrepresented groups, needs to be actively shared and promoted. Now is the time to find ways to promote

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identified approaches broadly and support their implementation. Finally, efforts should be evaluated and monitored to gauge their impact, identify ways to improve, identify promising practices and continue to share what works with programmers and policy makers across the nation.

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