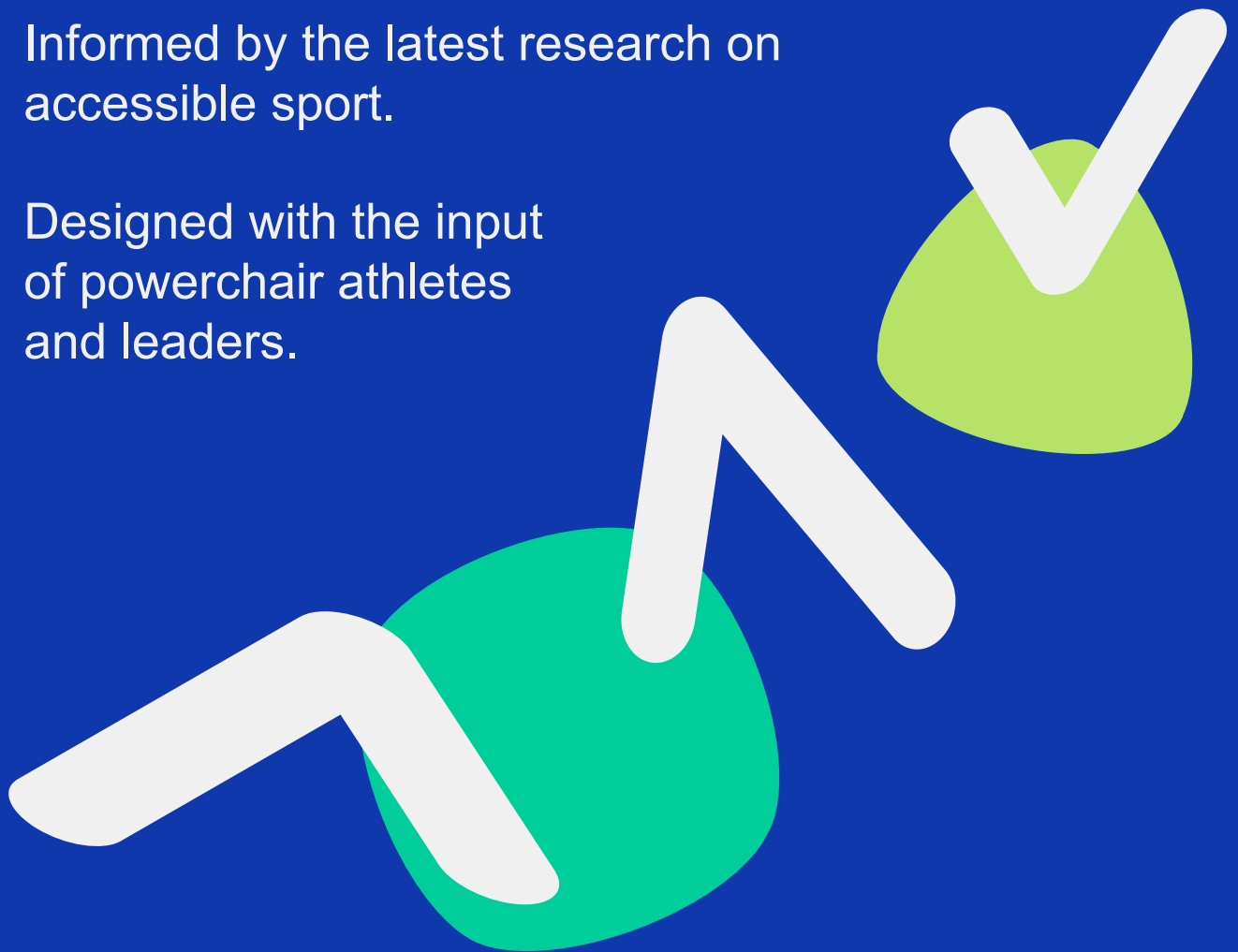


The Powerchair Playbook

A Guide to Starting or Enhancing Powerchair Sport Programs

Informed by the latest research on accessible sport.

Designed with the input of powerchair athletes and leaders.



A collaborative project by PowerHockey Canada, the Steadward Centre for Personal & Physical Achievement, and the Canadian Disability Participation Project 2.0

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Preface

Overview

The Powerchair Sport Playbook is a guide to starting or enhancing powerchair sport programs. The Playbook is informed by the latest research on accessible sport. It was designed with the input of powerchair athletes and sport leaders.

The research evidence supporting this Playbook will be presented in an upcoming scientific paper:

Lawson, J. A., Leavitt, T. C., Herbison, J., Desaulniers, P., Hines, M., Jain, S., & Latimer-Cheung, A. E., (in press). “We’re all in this together. We’re a real team.” Perceptions of powerchair sport in Canada. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*.

The Playbook is organized according to: The Steadward Centre for Personal & Physical Achievement (2021). *Becoming Para Ready*. Visit the [Steadward Centre website](#) to view the Becoming Para Ready book.

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Design

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A Note on Language

Recognizing that language about disability is deeply personal, nuanced, and ever-evolving, person-first (athlete with a disability, people with disabilities) will be used interchangeably with identity-first (disabled person). Along these lines, “nondisabled” or “without disabilities” are used, and generally preferred, to “able-bodied”. A variety of vocabulary will be used to describe sport (Para sport, powerchair sport, disability sport) and those who play sport (athlete, Paralympian, Para sport participant, powerchair athlete).

“Athlete” and “participant” will be used interchangeably in hopes that anyone engaging in powerchair sport finds the level of fun and competition that suits their unique preference.

“Classification”, “impairment/eligible impairment”, and “athletes with high support needs (AHSN)” are terms used and endorsed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) primarily with regards to classifying athletes into categories for the sake of competing in international competition, but sometimes used in other levels of competition as well. These terms will be used when referring to those specific contexts.

Read more about classification on the [International Paralympic Committee website](#).

How was the Playbook developed?

The authors of this Playbook engaged various community members, parasport athletes, and program directors from across Canada for two working-group meetings to gather their input and guidance.

Surveys were distributed to current powerchair athletes, prospective athletes (those eligible but not yet playing), family members of eligible athletes and sport administrations and venue leaders interested in starting powerchair programs. One-on-one interviews were also conducted with current and prospective athletes. Additionally, the authors reviewed recent research on disability sport in general, and powerchair sport specifically, to gather insight from the latest academic literature.

The recommendations in this Playbook result from current best practices and are meant to serve as a starting point for your community-based program.

Part 1: Introduction

Why this Playbook?

If you're browsing this Playbook, congratulations! You have taken a great step to supporting inclusive sport opportunities for a wide variety of athletes and participants. We hope this Playbook will be a helpful tool to guide the development and implementation of a community-based powerchair sport program.

This Playbook is designed to provide you the following:

- A basic overview of powerchair sport (PCS)
- A discussion about disability: language, concepts, and how to foster inclusive environments.
- Highlights from two research-informed frameworks that can be helpful to use when designing powerchair sport programs.
- Some principles to help guide you through your journey with powerchair sport and supporting athletes with disabilities.
- Practical advice to help you start, or enhance, your powerchair sport program.
- Ideas to help you foster inclusive sport environments.
- Information on three (3) powerchair sports: powerhockey, powerchair soccer, and boccia.
- References and resources to discover more about the topics that interest you most.

Who is this Playbook for?

We hope this Playbook will be a useful resource for many audiences. You will find information here that could be especially helpful if you are:

- Someone who wants to start a new powerchair sport program.
- A volunteer who is about to get involved in a powerchair program and would like to learn a bit before getting started.
- A powerchair sport participant who would like to learn about other powerchair sports and/or help your own program grow.
- A parent or supporter of a powerchair sport athletes who would like to learn more about PCS program design.

What is Powerchair Sport?

Overview

Powerchair Sports, or PCS, are considered a collection of Para sports specifically adapted primarily for participants or athletes with high support needs (AHSN) and are most often played while using power wheelchairs. PCS athletes may use powerchairs as a mobility aid in their daily life as well as on the field of play, or they may use a manual day chair and switch to a powerchair for certain sports. You will learn about a few specific sports in [Section 5](#).

The fact that PCS participants typically use powerchairs on the field of play differentiates powerchair sports from some sports where they may use a powerchair for daily mobility but then transfer out of the chair completely (such as swimming or sailing).

Powerchairs make sport accessible to athletes with greater physical disabilities and eliminate performance differences usually associated with gender and age. Because of these unique aspects, powerchair sports are considered some of the most inclusive sports because they allow athletes of diverse abilities, ages, and genders to compete together on one team, or against each other equitably.

In Canada, some of the most popular powerchair sports include powerhockey, powerchair soccer, and boccia. Each sport will be explored in greater detail in Section 5.



Benefits of Powerchair Sport

Participation in sports often leads to **physical, psychological, and social benefits** for participants, creating room for **personal empowerment**. One study found powerchair sport was **good exercise** that led to enhanced performance of daily activities. Some powerchair athletes have described that participating in the sport leaves them **deeply satisfied from being apart of competitive sports**, and accessing the **opportunity to be independent**.

Additionally, PCS participants speak of making **connected friendships** and **strengthening communication skills** through sport. Other unique benefits include:

- Mentorship: players not only learn sport skills from each other, but also about life skills and about living with a disability. Powerchair athletes connect and share tips about sport as well as experiences with attendant care, funding options, traveling with a disability, and education.
- Parents also watch older players and imagine what's possible for/how to support their child with a disability.
- Growing and evolving within the sport: many powerchair sports have equipment options and rules that support athletes whose disabilities progress. For example, powerhockey players can change the type of stick they use or boccia players can progress from throwing manually to using a ramp.
- The broad age range and the fact the sport is played in the powerchair means people don't necessarily age out of powerchair sport as early as they might in other sports.

When I first started, I just wanted to play. I wanted to do something because there weren't a lot of activities out there for somebody of my level of ability, but as I played on it has become far more about the people for me and far more about friendships and a peer group then it has been about the game.

- PCS Participant

Understanding Barriers

A lot of things can hold people back from participating in sport and physical activity. Sometimes called “barriers”, these obstacles can be unique for disabled people compared to people without disability.

Barriers can range from very personal factors at the individual levels — like a person’s own motivation to play and how much family or social support they have — all the way up to facility accessibility, availability of equipment, program costs, policy decisions, and even climate.

Challenges in any of these areas, such as high program costs, inappropriate equipment, or inaccessible venues could lead to negative experiences, or keep people from trying sport altogether.

Finding Facilitators

On the flip side though, any of the items above could also be helpful in a person’s journey to sport. In contrast to the examples above, picture a program with low registration fees, well-maintained, safe equipment, and accessible, inclusive venues. These types of helpful factors, often termed “facilitators”, are the things we want to make sure are in place to help disabled athletes access safe, fun, quality sport and physical experiences.

Throughout this Playbook, we will provide information, tactics, and resources to help you reduce potential barriers and support the helpful facilitators to make your program one that will be a positive place for PCS sport participants to play. We will use two main frameworks to guide your learning.

The first, the Steadward Centre’s **Becoming Para Ready**, will provide overarching principles as well as ideas and actions for you to consider as you plan your program. We will look at this framework first, and its concepts will guide the rest of the Playbook.

The second guiding document is **The Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, Youth, and Adults with a Disability**. We will explore this in [Section 4](#), when we look at participation more closely.

Check out [Becoming Para Ready](#). You can also explore the [Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, Youth and Adults with a Disability](#).

What is the Becoming Para Ready Framework?

The Becoming Para Ready Framework was developed by the Steadward Centre at the University of Alberta. It is a guide intended for coaches and sport program leaders to gain skills, knowledge, and confidence to support inclusive sport experiences. The Becoming Para Ready Framework was originally designed to be used by athletics (track and field) programs where the “para” prefix is commonly used. However, the principles and tips offered adapt well to a wide spectrum of inclusive and adapted sport programming, so don’t worry if that’s not the terminology you use.

The Becoming Para Ready Framework is anchored on five (5) key principles. According to the Framework, “the 5 Becoming Para Ready principles were created to support all key participants in the sport ecosystem (sport leaders, clubs, coaches, parents, athletes) to think about how they can collectively provide quality and safe experiences for all athletes with a disability”.

You can think about these five principles as you plan your powerchair sport program, or when you review your program to check if it is meeting the goals that you and the program participants hope to achieve.



An Overview of the Becoming Para Ready Principles

1

Be proactive

- Plan for inclusion. Take initiative to improve inclusion for your program and anticipate the needs of others.
- All people benefit from an inclusive approach.

2

Include the voices and choices of people experiencing disability

- Center the disability community in the creation of inclusive programs
- Include people with lived experience at all stages of your program and practice development and delivery.

3

Be reflective and purposeful in your actions

- You can have a positive impact; it takes time and continued commitment to improve inclusion.
- Your attitudes and behaviours set the tone for disability inclusion in your context.

4

Disability is one facet of identity

- Consider intersectionality: people experiencing disability have diverse backgrounds, life experiences, and perspectives.

5

Disability is a social construct and impairment is experienced on a continuum

- People experience impairments, that may seem similar, very differently.
- Disability has been created through social understandings and it may vary by social, cultural, and individual interpretations.

I think in powerchair sport we have this ability to actually reimagine what sport and competition kind of looks like.

- PCS Athlete

Becoming Para Ready – Understanding Para Readiness

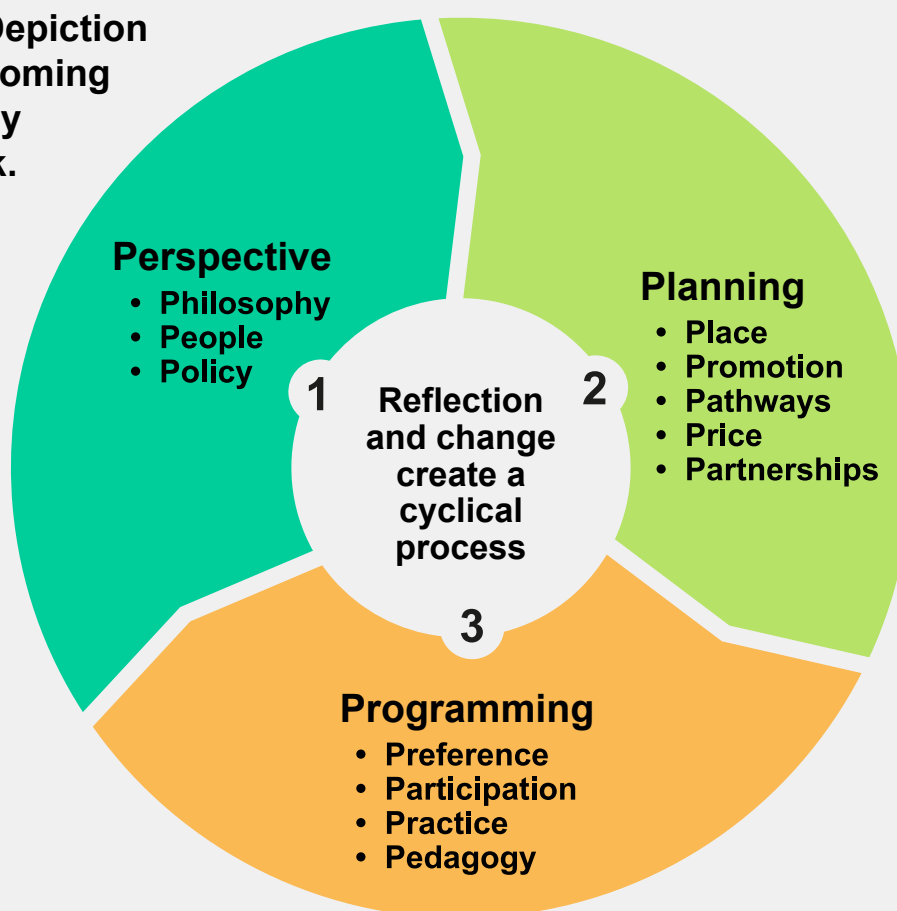
Once you have reflected on the five principles, you will be ready to move through the “Ps” of Para Readiness. The Becoming Para Ready Framework has three (3) main categories, and a group of sub-categories, that all start with the letter “P”, hence the nickname. The main categories are:

Perspective

Planning

Programming

Image 1. Depiction of the Becoming Para Ready framework.



[Find a detailed description of Image 1 in Appendix 1.](#)

Within each of these main categories, there are several sub-categories, or concepts, to read about. These 12 extra “Ps” will give you ideas of decisions you could take, processes you could implement, or concepts to test out in your program. You could move through these ideas in any order, but they will be presented in an order that may make sense to go through chronologically.

Additionally, a goal of the Becoming Para Ready Framework is to always reflect on your program and revisit the concepts in order to continually grow and change in a cyclical process.

Part 2: Becoming Para Ready — Perspective

The first category of **Perspective** encourages program leaders, coaches, participants, and supporters, to think about their starting point with disability and disability sport. In this section, you're encouraged to think about your own experiences with disability (which may be very personal or may be quite new) and to consider how you can be proactive, thoughtful, and intentional about how you will design your program from the start.



Philosophy: Understanding disability, sport, and society

Overview of Disability models

A disability “model” can be thought of as a mental map, or a way of seeing and (sometimes subconsciously) categorizing disability. There are many models of disability and three that are among the most well known and discussed are the **medical model**, the **social model**, and the **social relational model**.

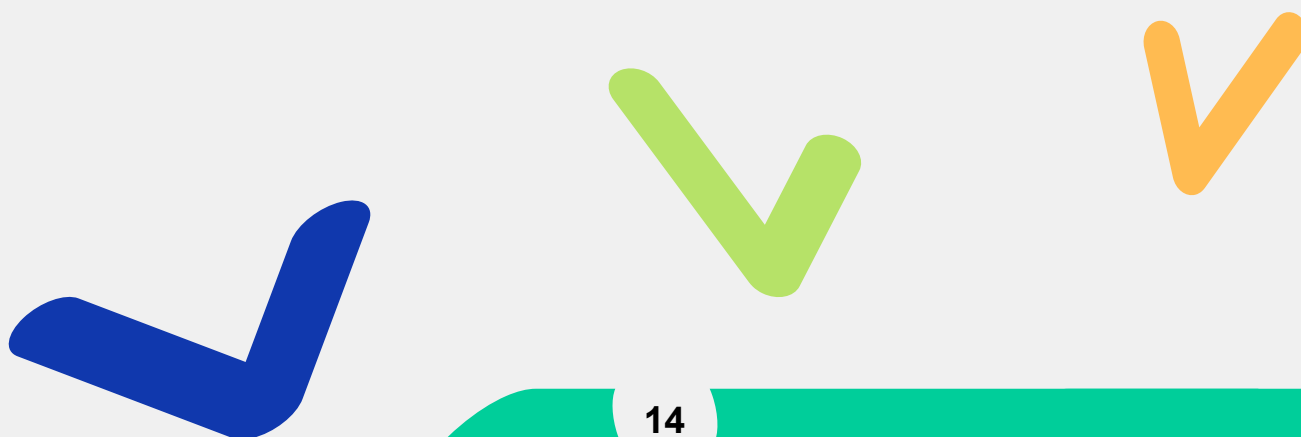
Ableism is conscious and unconscious discrimination towards persons with disabilities. It happens when persons with disabilities are treated as less important or capable than others. Ableism remains prevalent in our sports systems today. You can be a part of challenging ableist notions and practices.

Some of these models, especially the medical model, have contributed to demeaning attitudes towards disabled people, and helped perpetuate negative stereotypes. It’s important to think about these models because they have enormous impact on the lives of persons with disabilities.

While there are mixed ability powerchair sport programs, the majority of people who come to powerchair sport programs will have at least one disability. Some may have complex and/or multiple disabilities, and each person will be unique in what their disability means to them. As a program leader or coach, you do not need to know everything about a person’s disability, nor be an expert on societal views of disability.

What is important, as a starting point, is to think about how certain ways of broadly categorizing or labelling disability and disabled people may impact people individually. Athletes who come to your program may have experienced limited sport choice, condescending or patronizing attitudes, or overt discrimination in their lifetime.

You can be a part of developing a program that is thoughtful and co-creates genuinely positive and empowering spaces.



Medical Model: The athlete is a problem to be “fixed”

Medical models of disability dominated how disability was viewed, discussed, and subsequently valued (often devalued) for many decades. The medical model assumes that a disabled person is “broken” or “abnormal” and needs to be “fixed”, often by nondisabled people. The medical model is important to keep in mind, as it can be easy for sport to slide into this viewpoint and inadvertently promote the idea that sport is a “cure” for disability, or a way to help athletes with disabilities be “more normal”. Not surprisingly, this type of view is **least preferred** by many people with disabilities.

Social Model: The social environment disables participants

The social model shifts the focus from the individual to social and environmental conditions around the individual and in society at large. **The social model says that disability is a “constructed” concept: it is the choices and cultural norms of society that lead to disability.** A common example you may have heard before is a person who uses a wheelchair would like to enter a building, but the only entrance is a daunting flight of stairs. Is the issue the person’s mode of movement, or the fact that a decision was made to not include a ramp? Many of the barriers noted in the previous section could in fact be removed simply with different decision-making.

Social Relational Model: Social conditions are disabled, but limitations are real

The social model has received criticism at times for discounting the tangible impacts of disability that are real and experienced by disabled individuals. The stairs vs. ramp example above, while it shines a light on where we have the ability to make change, may also oversimplify the experience of disability, or even erase it by implying that once the stairs are gone, so is the disability. **The social relational model tries to strike balance of the personal experience of disability and the socially constructed aspects.**

When I play hockey, yes I am in a wheelchair,
but it makes me feel like an athlete.

- PCS Athlete

Types of sport programming

Sport programs for disabled participants come in many formats and use many different names and descriptions. You might come across some of the following terms as you plan your powerchair sport program:

- **Para sport:** the prefix “para” comes from “parallel”
- **Adapted/Adaptive sport:** modifications in sport environments to support varying needs, abilities, and goals. “Adaptive” is more commonly used in the United States.
- **Disability sport:** an umbrella term sometimes used to describe any and all types of sport program for people with disabilities. More commonly used in the United Kingdom.
- **Inclusive sport or Accessible sport:** terms that may not be helpful without following up with clear, specific details about how the program or event will support inclusion or accessibility.
- **Integrated program:**
 - At the program level, a program where participants with and without disabilities practice and compete together.
 - In Canada, at the national and provincial/territorial levels, “integrated” sports mean that one governing body is responsible for overseeing streams of sport for both nondisabled and disabled participants (for example, both Olympic and Paralympic programming)

You may also come across broad terms that apply beyond sport programming such as:

- **Barrier Free:** usually refers to building codes and is centered on architectural/physical access and was traditionally very focused on wheelchair users.
- **Universal Design:** sometimes mistakenly used interchangeably with “barrier-free”, the goal of Universal Design is to “render products, processes, services, information and environments equitable and inclusive for all, allowing all people to realize activities autonomously and equally”.

Check out this [policy paper](#) for more information about these terms, and other related concepts.

People will use different vocabulary, and there is rarely one perfect or universally accepted definition for any of these terms. Ultimately, programs often fall into a few main categories of whether all participants identify as having a disability (sometimes the same or similar type of disability, and other times a mix of various disabilities) or programs that are open to people with and without disabilities who practice together. Like many sports, programs are sometimes catered to specific age groups or genders.

Lots of different types of programs can offer safe and quality experiences for the people who use them — there is no “one size fits all” or “best” option. Some athletes note that they have played sport in programs with disabled athletes as well as mixed settings. When thinking about what your program will look like, it’s a good time to go back to the [Becoming Para Ready Principles](#). Have you included the voices and choices of people with lived experience? Have you reflected and been purposeful when deciding what type of program you will lead?

People: Including and empowering people with lived experience

Inclusion can only be effective if everyone is on board with a common vision or understanding. Listening to key collaborators, community members, participants, and supporters who have lived disability experience, as well as people in their core networks (such as parents, caregivers) is crucial.

If you are already leading a powerchair sport program, or perhaps coaching or volunteering at one, have a look at who leads the planning and makes decisions for the program. Check out who has influence over the program’s outcomes and who is visible on websites or at practice. The phrase “Nothing About Us Without Us” can be a helpful reminder to always include the voices of people with lived experience.

[Read more about why disabled people use the phrase “Nothing About Us Without Us”.](#)

You can also ask yourself: Are disabled people at the center of the leadership? Could the program benefit from more input from people with disabilities? And in either case — are you helping to create an environment where contributors with lived experience are being fully supported and feel empowered?

Some things to think about could be:

- Does the program lean heavily on the same few people all the time? Can the workload be spread?
- Are people being compensated for their time and energy – if not financially, perhaps with a discount on membership, occasional gift of thanks, or public recognition at programming or through social media to recognize their contributions?
- Are the opportunities to engage inclusive and accessible — are meetings and documents taking accessibility into account? What is the format of information, what time of day are meetings held, and for how long? Have you asked everyone for their preferences?
- Have nondisabled leaders and volunteers been offered information for how they can support respectful and inclusive environments so the people with lived experience are not always responsible to educate everyone?

Well, I think that everything about being disabled is unique. I think the fact that you get to share that experience with other people with disabilities is really interesting and really profound because you know people are coming together for their passion for the game, but they are also coming together for their shared experience with disability.

- PCS Athlete



Policy: Embedding inclusion from the start

The Becoming Para Ready Framework suggests that once you have spent time reflecting on your **Perspective**, it is time to write a Club/Coach Inclusion Commitment Statement, which should be made public and posted wherever possible: Club, social media, integrated in Code of Conduct, etc.

Be mindful during this exercise though, it can be easy to fall into catch phrases and clichés that will lead to inauthentic policies, or worse, policies that will actually contribute to harm. The ReCreation Collective is a group of scholars and practitioners who have studied sport policy extensively and created resources to better understand creating truly inclusive and intersectional sport policy.

Check out the [ReCreation Collective](#). You can also explore their [policy tip sheet](#), and find more of their resources in the [Further Reading](#) section of this document.

It is also important to think about your commitment to inclusion in any and all policies and protocol you will develop, and to think about how you will implement these policies. While “policy” can sound like pages of texts stashed away in a bylaw manual, policies ultimately guide a sport program and have real impact on people who use them.



Part 3: Becoming Para Ready — Planning

In the Sections I and II, you received an **Introduction** to powerchair sport and to this Playbook, and then you reflected on your **Perspective**, as guided by the Becoming Para Ready Framework. In this next section, **Planning**, we will introduce another tool to help you as you prepare to get your powerchair sport program started, or to make some adjustments to keep improving your program.



The Quality Participation Blueprint — What is it?

The [Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, Youth, and Adults with a Disability](#) — or, “the Blueprint” for short — is a free resource that introduces key concepts that underpin quality participation and provides tools for building quality participation for disabled participants in sport programs.

This resource was developed by the Canadian Disability Participation Project (CDPP) by using research and consultation to create the Blueprint. The CDPP defines quality participation as “when athletes with a disability view their involvement in sport as satisfying and enjoyable, and experience outcomes that they consider important.”

Quality experience is built from six building blocks: autonomy, belonging, challenge, engagement, mastery, and meaning. In turn, these building blocks must be supported with **a proper foundation consisting of physical, program, and social environments that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive.** Repeated and sustained exposure to these building blocks can lead to quality experiences, which should contribute to lasting quality participation. We will look at the building blocks in detail in [Section 4, Programming](#).

The Becoming Para Ready approach you learned about in the last section gave you high level concepts to think about when developing or refreshing your powerchair sport program. The Blueprint provides some more ideas to think about, and also detailed strategies and tools that can complement the Becoming Para Ready framework. There are also some follow up resources, such as program audit tools and checklists, that program builders (including administrators, coaches, and policy makers) can use to develop and enhance sport programs for participants with disabilities.

In fact, there is a powerchair sport specific version of the Blueprint, ‘A Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, and Youth, and Adults Participating in Powerchair Sport’, developed in partnership with PowerHockey Canada, that was informed by listening to powerchair sport athletes, coaches, and program leaders that may be of interest to you. We will review a few key components of the Blueprint in this next section, and any resources mentioned can all be found on the [CDPP website](#).

Strategies for Creating Quality Experiences and Participation

The Blueprint encourages program leaders to think about three types of environments that exist in any given sport program: the physical environment, the program environment, and the social environment. Many strategies can be used to ensure these environments can provide a solid foundation to foster quality sport experiences and participation.

A few of these strategies are listed below, and you can find more strategies to create effective environments in the Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, and Youth, and Adults Participating in Powerchair Sport.

Find this blueprint and other useful resources on the [Publication section of the CDPP 2.0 website](#).

Physical Environment

The physical environment is often what we first think of when considering how to make sport programming accessible and inclusive: **things like venues and equipment**. Certainly, a powerchair sport program can't be hosted in a physically or architecturally inaccessible building or area!

A few questions to ask yourself as you begin to think about the location of your program and the equipment you will need:

- Does the coach or instructor have an appropriate level of knowledge (e.g., training or certification)? (see more about coach training in [Practice and Pedagogy](#) on page 36 of this document)
- Does the coach or instructor foster positive relationships with participants?
- Are participants working together to achieve a common goal?
- Do participants have opportunities to be mentored, or to provide mentorship to other participants?
- Do participants' family members have opportunities to get involved (e.g., as a volunteer)?
- Are volunteers and staff trained to provide an appropriate level of support for participants with a disability?

Program Environment

The program environment refers to **decisions you make about how to run the program**: from big choices such as what types of activities you will offer and how you will fund the program, to seasonal or day-to-day choices that impact what the experience is like for athletes, families, coaches, and volunteers. Some questions to consider are:

- Can activities be adapted to meet the needs of all participants?
- Are a variety of options (e.g., opportunities to choose between different activities) available for participants?
- Are measures in place to ensure that activities are physically and psychologically safe?
- Do activities provide an appropriate level of challenge for all participants?

Safe Sport

You may have heard the term, “Safe Sport” before. Sometimes called “Safer Sport” or “Sport Safety”, Safe Sport is both a concept and responsibility that is important to foster physically, psychologically, and socially healthy environments for all sport participants.

The [Coaching Association of Canada \(CAC\)](#) offers a variety of information, training, and resources to support you in creating safe and healthy sport environments. Some basics for you, your coaches, and volunteers and to explore are:

- [Safe Sport Training](#) (online, free) provides tools to recognize, prevent and address maltreatment in sport.

- [Safe Sport Toolkit](#) provides a suite of videos, templates, helplines, and partner organizations where you can find out more about creating safe and respectful environments.

- [Responsible Coaching Movement](#) to learn about three pillars to promote Safe, Smart, and Secure environments:
 1. **Rule of Two:** two responsible adults (such as a coach, staff, parent, or screened volunteer) are present with a participant.
 2. **Background Screening:** employees, coaches and volunteers meet requirements such as criminal record checks, interviews, and reference checks.
 3. **Ethics Training:** training to help coaches and volunteers identify the legal, ethical, and moral implications of challenging situations that may arise.

Let's have a look at **some specific factors that can support safe and welcoming physical, social, and program environments** by getting back into the next set of "Ps" of Becoming Para Ready.

Place

Place can mean the physical building, but also how to get there, how to find your way around the venue, if washrooms are accessible and inclusive, and more. There are detailed audits and checklists you can use to examine potential venues for your program, including the [Rick Hansen Foundation's Accessibility Certification Tip Sheet](#).

As a start, you could think about things like:

- Adequate accessible parking
- Facilities accessible by public and accessible transportation
- Signage inside and outside of venues
- Building entrances and wayfinding
- Emergency exits and evacuation plans
- Accessible washrooms

Promotion

Whether a program leader, a coach/instructor, a participant, or volunteer, most of us genuinely want to make programs inclusive. But is saying a program is “inclusive” enough? It’s not! In fact, describing a program as “inclusive” without being very specific about exactly what you mean can lead to disappointment or frustration for program participants. Words like “inclusive”, “adapted” or “accessible” are used often, but sometimes with different intended meanings.

For ideas on using terms like this effectively, and on promoting your program to families of children with disabilities, check out these [free, evidence-informed recommendations](#).

Being intentional, clear, and consistent with language will help your audience understand what your program is all about.

Once you have reviewed this Playbook, try making a list of how your program can — or cannot — implement the recommendations and strategies you have learned about. Then take care to communicate these possibilities (or limitations) in all your promotional materials. Be sure to:

- Be clear about the service and support you can provide.
- Let people know who you are, what programs you have, how your programs are inclusive (or not) and to whom.
- Make sure your website, social media, brochures, and other forms of promotional materials are in accessible formats.

If you realize you’re still missing some pieces to be as inclusive as you would like, that’s ok: but **let potential participants know what’s not there yet so they can make an informed decision about whether they’ll come play or contact you to ask a few more questions.**

Growing up as a powerchair user, I would often hear about accessible sports but given my limited strength I never thought I could participate in any of them. When I discovered powerhockey and saw that people with similar disabilities like me could participate I felt so welcomed and included.

- Powerhockey athlete

Partnerships

Partnerships are crucial to developing and sustaining powerchair sport programs. As a relatively small community, it's a great idea to make connections in order to share ideas and avoid "reinventing the wheel". Consider who could be in your network, search what's available in your community already.

Who can you partner with, share with, and learn from?

- Existing powerchair sport programs
- Other types of accessible sport programs
- Disability/disability sport communities
- Health and rehabilitation centres
- Parents, support workers, and caregivers

Existing programs in Canada

Check out the resources at the end of the Playbook to find out more about powerchair sport organizations across Canada.



Price

Cost is a stubborn barrier to accessing sport programming. Participants with disabilities often face financial disadvantages not experienced by their nondisabled peers, and sport can get left at the bottom of the priority list.

When you are planning to create your powerchair sport program, develop a thorough budget and consider the sustainability of your program, because this will impact if (and how much) you need to charge participants to play.

- Will you be able to maintain program funding to support participants' involvement while keeping the costs as low as possible?
- Can you considering flexible fee structures ("sliding scale") and develop safe and discrete ways for participants to access a lower fee if that would help them?
- Can you offer participants strategies to obtain funding assistance or support to write grants?



Pathways

“Pathways” refers to the various journeys in powerchair sport that participants may want to access. These preferences may evolve over time, so it’s important to think about what type of choice you can offer.

Athletes will arrive with a wide variety of goals and prior experiences. Some will be seeking social connections, some may want to get out and exercise, and some may be seeking to fill an intense competitive drive. Some may be interested in taking on leadership, coaching, or administrative roles.

The key thing is to listen to participants’ objectives and have ongoing conversations about what they want to get from powerchair sport.

- Remember participants will arrive with a spectrum of goals – fun, connection, health, high performance, and more!
- Consider the pathways beyond playing: are you supporting athletes to become coaches, officials, and administrators?
- Stay open minded, and work with athletes to hear their goals and develop creative solutions to potential barriers.

There is this prevailing viewpoint that athletes or former athletes can’t really transition to other roles in the [powerchair sport] community, such as a referee, because athletes ... who are in wheelchairs cannot get down to the floor and adequately measure distance with a measuring tape...Why are we not using lasers or other technology that wouldn’t require somebody to bend down? It is not wrong to acknowledge and admit that we might not be able to do something, but it is important that we try and come up with solutions to these issues so we can participate.

- PCS athlete

Part 4: Becoming Para Ready — Programming

This section will look at the third major component of Becoming Para Ready. So far you have thought about **Perspective** and reviewed some ideas for your program **Planning**. Now it's time to look at what your actual **Programming** will look like.

Becoming Para Ready suggests thinking about the four “Ps” of **Preference**, **Participation**, **Practice**, and **Pedagogy** when you develop your program. In the ‘Participation’ section, we will dive a little further into the Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, Youth, and Adults with a Disability. We will also add one more “P” to the list to everything together: **Powerchair**, where will look at some specifics about supporting powerchair athletes.



Preference

Making sure your programs offer different levels of integration and inclusion is important to give new (and existing) athletes choice. If time and resources permit, you could consider offering a variety of programming, for example:

- Sessions designed for participants with disabilities only.
- Sessions where manual wheelchair users or nondisabled community members can come play as well.
- Custom programming, such as programs where siblings without disabilities could borrow equipment or used modified set ups to play with their disabled brother or sister.

By offering options, participants could choose a type of setting that feels most inviting for them. If you are just getting started or in a small community, opening your program to siblings or participants beyond powerchair users may help boost numbers and interest as well!

As mentioned in the [Pathways section](#), athletes will arrive with different long term goals. Preference and choice can also be about small choices made available each day and at every practice. Encourage coaches, instructors, and volunteers, to reflect on where they can offer participants choice throughout each lesson, practice, or session.



Participation

This “P” is one that is important to both the Becoming Para Ready framework and is central to the Blueprint. If you’re planning to start a powerchair sport program, it’s a pretty good bet you’re hoping that quality participation will be central, so let’s take a closer look at this important concept.

Refresher: What is quality participation?

You’ll may recall that quality participation is when athletes view their involvement in sport as satisfying and enjoyable, and experience outcomes that they consider important. **Quality experience is built from six building blocks: autonomy, belonging, challenge, engagement, mastery, and meaning.** Finally, these experiences should all take place in physical, program, and social environments that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive.

Let’s take a closer look at what we mean by the building blocks of quality participation and read some case studies to help bring them life.



The Building Blocks



Autonomy

Autonomy can be defined as an athlete having independence, choice, and/or control. This building block refers to the athlete's ability to make their own choices with regard to their participation in sport.



Belonging

Belonging can be defined as participants experiencing a sense of connection, acceptance, and inclusion during the sport experience.



Challenge

Challenge can be defined as feeling appropriately tested. Challenge exists when activities are appropriately tailored to the skill level or ability of each participant, while offering opportunities to realistically push skill boundaries to improve.



Engagement

Engagement can be defined as feeling fully involved in the activity while participating. If an athlete is engaged, they are more motivated to participate.



Mastery

Mastery can be defined as experiencing achievement and feeling confident in one's skills and abilities.



Meaning

Meaning can be defined as making each and every sport experience matter. Athletes experience meaning if they feel that their participation is helping them to achieve a valued goal.

A Closer Look: building block case studies

The following case studies provide you an opportunity to reflect on various ways you could incorporate the building blocks of quality participation in your program.




What could supporting Autonomy look like?

Max is a 60-year-old who joined a powerhockey program three years ago, in hopes of meeting new people in a competitive and enjoyable sports environment. As a recent retiree, the program has been a great way to connect with other members of the disability community and make new friends. At the start of each practice session, Max's program leader, Ali, describes the first practice drill and then asks Max and their teammates to think about the drill and explain what skills they will improve by completing it. Ali listens to the athletes' ideas and makes sure to highlight when they achieve those skills later in the practice. After explaining the drills, Ali always invites athletes to request a volunteer if they would like support to attach their stick to their chair or make any equipment adjustments. By asking for the team's insight on the drill's purpose, and highlighting their understanding in action, Ali helps to foster autonomy by supporting feelings of control, solidifying understanding, and strengthening buy-in from the team. Ali further supports autonomy by ensuring athletes always take the lead in managing any support they would like during the practice.



What could supporting Belonging look like?

Alex is a 14-year-old who has been participating in a local power soccer program for children and youth in the community for the past five years. Alex is the team captain, loves being a part of the power soccer community, and wants to create the same feeling of belonging for new and incoming athletes. To reach that goal, Alex always makes sure that new athletes have an athlete or volunteer buddy who can "show them the ropes", such as how to safely transfer into their sport chair. Alex also ensures that no athlete is alone during paired drills and takes time to check in with new players often throughout the practice. By carefully pairing up teammates for drills and focusing on making sure new athletes feel comfortable in the space, Alex aims to create belonging – a community feeling within the program. Consistent attention to these details will help everyone feel like they are an important part of the team for the entire season.



What could supporting Challenge look like?

Ananya is a 22-year-old who recently joined a Boccia program in her local community. Ananya recently acquired a disability and now uses a powerchair daily. She has always played sports and, while she fell in love with Boccia quickly, her skill progression is uneven. She is not alone though - there is a wide range of skills and goals in the program, so Ananya's coach, who is also a Boccia athlete, carefully monitors each team member's goals and skill development throughout the season. At each practice, Ananya's coach sets up different drills with modifications for beginner, intermediate, and advanced Boccia skills. Each team member can select which level drill they would like to complete, with no repercussions, and move freely between different drills. As such, Ananya's coach offers them the opportunity to challenge themselves alongside their teammates at the level that feels right. The opportunity to safely try drills at a higher skill level pushes the athletes' limits in an appropriate manner.



What could supporting Engagement look like?

Sophie is an 8-year-old who has been participating in powerhockey for the past two years. Sophie has cerebral palsy and also dysarthria, a motor speech disorder that impacts her speech. Like one of her other friends in the program, Sophie uses a communication board to express herself. Sophie understands information best when verbal instructions are supplemented by visual demonstrations as well as quick individual check ins. Sophie's program leader provides visual demonstrations and spoken instructions for each exercise and drill. The leader also checks in often and supports the athletes to ask questions in any way that works for them. By offering a variety of ways to exchange information, the program leader supports Sophie to reach maximum engagement within the team activities. By creating a safe space for Sophie to feel focused and included, Sophie's engagement is fostered.



What could supporting Mastery look like?

Leo is a 12-year-old who is in his first season of powerchair soccer. Leo's muscular dystrophy has progressed recently and he is fairly new to using a powerchair, having used a manual chair up until about year ago. While he is athletic and a quick learner, his chair skills are still developing and he tends to get frustrated if he cannot succeed on the first try. During a complex drill that requires an accurate pass to a small target, Leo gets flustered when he misses the pass three times in a row. Leo's program leader quietly guides Leo to the side to provide some words of encouragement and tips for passing. She provides him a larger target for a few extra practice shots before returning to the drill. With encouragement from the program leader and fellow teammates, Leo successfully passes to the target on the next try and feels a sense of mastery from having achieved the complex skill.



What could supporting Meaning look like?

Yining is a 16-year-old who has been participating Boccia since age ten. Yining loves the sport, is a dedicated athlete, and dreams of going to the Paralympics one day. At the start of the season, Yining's coach met with them and asked Yining to develop their goals for this season. Yining's coach consistently provides opportunity for Yining to work towards those goals in each practice and game session, and the two of them debrief and discuss Yining's progress regularly. By supporting Yining to develop their own athletic goals, Yining's coach has fostered meaning because she recognizes the importance of allowing athletes to work towards the success of tasks that are personally important and have meaningful value.



Practice & Pedagogy

Athlete-centred coaching is critical when working with powerchair athletes to ensure you are co-creating practices and sport experiences in partnership with them. Sometimes called reciprocal coaching, this means the program leader or coach learning as much from the athletes — who is an expert on their body, abilities, and goals — as the athletes are learning from their coaches. A coach's pedagogy (approach to teaching) should be focused on creating quality experiences through close athlete collaboration and the consideration of professional, sport, and disability knowledge.

- Encourage coaches to use athlete-centred coaching to co-design practices with participants.
- Carefully consult with each athlete to accommodate skill level.
- Facilitate athlete decision making and engagement as often as possible.
- Encourage coaches and volunteers to take appropriate training and professional development (see below for ideas)

Coach Training

In Canada, training and certification for sport coaches is governed by the [Coaching Association of Canada \(CAC\)](#). The CAC has created a robust coach training, certification, and professional development program called the National Coach Certification Program (NCCP). The NCCP covers a wide range of general and sport-specific learning opportunities.

The scope and depth of training needed from your program will depend on your program's offerings, athletes' goals, and your coach and volunteers' previous experience and training. For people just getting started in coaching, the CAC recommends first-time coaches take these foundational courses:

- [NCCP Make Ethical Decisions](#)
- [NCCP Coach Initiation in Sport](#)
- [NCCP Plan a Practice](#)

Additionally, since you will be working with athletes with disabilities, you could also check out some specific resources, including an online training, in the [Coaching Athletes with a Disability](#) section of the CAC website.

You can also explore many more resources and training opportunities on the CAC's website, and there are additional coaching and instructor resources in the [Resources section](#) at the end of the Playbook.

An Extra P: POWERCHAIR

Powerchair Basics

What is a powerchair?

A powerchair is simply a type of motorized assistive device that people use to get around and for many different activities in daily life — including playing sports!

Who uses powerchairs?

A wide variety of people of all ages use powerchairs, and each will have a unique reason and individual set up. Some factors that may influence the use of a powerchair could include (and are not limited to) chair users who have:

- Limited range of motion or strength in upper limbs
- Difficulty or inability to propel a manual wheelchair
- Risk of skin/tissue breakdown, and would benefit from having a range of tilting/reclining options to alleviate pressure points
- History of repetitive strain injuries (rotator cuff, carpal tunnel syndrome)
- Significant fatigue or conditions that impact endurance

What types of powerchairs are there?

There is a variety of types of powerchairs and motorized mobility aids. People will choose a chair that suits their needs and lifestyle, usually with the help of a healthcare professional such as an occupational therapist or physician. The chair frame, seat, head and arm rests, and drive control will all be specially customized to the individual.

Some options or configurations you may see include:

- Chairs with recline or tilt functions
- Chairs with an elevate or “stand up” function
- Chairs operated by a small joystick at the armrest
- Chairs operated by using the head or chin to activate a switch or joystick
- Chairs operated by breath using straws (“sip and puff”)
- Chairs with varying speeds and speed controls

Additionally, some sports have sport-specific powerchairs for certain levels of competition, so they will transfer from their day chair to a sport chair. You can read more in Section V!

Each chair will be customized to the users, however there are a few typical characteristics common to most powerchairs:

- An on/off button or switch
- Manual freewheel levers (levers on the chair’s motors that when engaged, put the chair in “manual mode” so it can be pushed)
- Larger drive wheels (may be front, mid, or rear wheel drive)
- Smaller caster wheels and anti-tip wheels
- Tie-down brackets to secure chairs when travelling

Should you ever need to move a powerchair when the athlete is not in it (for example, they have transferred to a sport chair) ask the athlete about the safest way to move the chair. This may be putting it into “manual” mode or putting the chair on the slowest speed. **Never move an athlete’s chair without discussing with them first and asking permission.**

How can I make a powerchair-friendly space at my program?

- Know where charging outlets are and, if possible, label them clearly
- Have a bike pump or small air compressor on hand in case of flat or low pressure tires.
- Water on playing surfaces can be dangerous, and salt can damage powerchairs, so have some soft, non-abrasive towels/rags on hand to wipe off slush or water when weather is messy. (Note that cleaning powerchairs must be done very carefully – these are expensive pieces of machinery! Always make sure the chair is turned off before drying it and have the powerchair user guide any drying off/mopping up, they will know best!)
- Athletes will usually have a go-to service or repair provider (in case of breakdown at practice). If your team is travelling to competition, it's also a good idea to work with athletes to identify service providers ahead of time in the new location.



Supporting Powerchair Athletes

Respecting a person's powerchair and personal space

Many people consider their mobility aids as an extension of their body — so treat any type of wheelchair, walker, or other devices as you would a person and give respectful personal space. A few other tips to consider are:

- Avoid touching or leaning on a person's powerchair or personal devices (ventilators, head rests, etc.) unless they have asked
- If you are helping an athlete attach a piece of sport equipment to the chair, ask first and explain as you go, following their directions. For new athletes who may be unsure, have a discussion and maybe seek support from experienced athletes to figure out the best plan.
- If you are speaking with a group of chair users for an extended period of time (for example, explaining a drill), and you do not use a chair yourself, consider sitting down to be at eye level with the athletes. Sitting is preferred if possible, as bending down, especially for long periods, could feel awkward
- When meeting new athletes with limited /no hand or arm movement (for example, an athlete with quadriplegia), a friendly smile or a gentle touch on the arm are appropriate replacements for a handshake.



Some Extra Considerations to Working with Powerchair Athletes

As noted above, people use powerchairs for all sorts of reasons, they will also come to your program with all sorts of experiences and goals — so the most important thing is to get to know each player and family individually. Some athletes may have the same condition or physically present in a similar way, but have very different interests, needs, and abilities, so it's very important to not make any assumptions.

Communication

Above all, using clear, considerate, and ongoing communication is most important.

- The athlete is the expert on their goals, needs, and abilities. Listen to, and work with them, to develop plans for enjoyable and quality participation in your program
- Some athletes may have conditions that impact their verbal speech. It's ok if you have difficulty understanding someone, and asking an athlete to repeat or rephrase is fine. It's important to never pretend to have understood if you did not. With time, you will likely find a good pattern of interaction that will work for both of you.
- If athlete use communication boards to communicate (a physical or digital board with symbols, letters, or words) take some time to become familiar with the board and practice communicating effectively with the athlete. It's ok if this takes some time if this is a new skill for you!
- When communicating with athletes in ways that are new to you, or if you are having challenges understanding someone, repeat back what you have understood to check you are both on the same page
- Remember that speech patterns or communication techniques are not an indication of cognitive or intellectual ability!
- Some athletes may arrive with a caregiver, personal support worker, parent, or spouse. It's important to speak directly to the athlete and not the person accompanying them. If the athlete does have a system where their support person assists in communication, they will let you know.

Skill Development

- As you would with any athlete, having ongoing conversations with each athlete about their athletic goals will help you both to develop meaningful practices and effective seasonal plans.
- Seek input often from athletes when developing drills and leading practice.
- Some athletes may have conditions that lead to fluctuations in strength, muscle spasticity, or energy levels: what was achievable one week may be different the week after. This is out of the athlete's control and could be frustrating. Strive for compassionate, open dialogue to move through these ups and downs.
- Some athletes may also have a degenerative condition that leads to a continuous decline in function. Again, respectful and honest conversation is the key. Many powerchair sports have a suite of options to adapt as the body changes: perhaps a sport assistant, a different piece of equipment, or a different role or position in team sport. Listen to the athlete's wishes and work together to adapt as needed.

Supportive Devices

Besides a custom powerchair and the equipment attached to it, some athletes may have other important pieces of equipment to support daily living needs. These could include items such as:

Ventilator: a device the athletes wears or has accessible to them to support or recreate breathing, may be a tube or tubes to the nose/mouth

Urostomy bag: often called a "urine bag", this is a bag to collect urine for athletes who use a catheter and may be strapped to the athlete's leg

Colostomy bag: similar to a urine bag, but for feces

Feeding tube: a tube to supply nutrition, often connected directly to the stomach via the abdomen

With any of these devices, all you need to know is that they are important parts of an athlete's daily routine, and they will be the expert on how to manage them. To support, you can:

- Remember that these pieces of equipment are **normal and important** parts of the athlete's life
- **Listen to athletes** who can let you know if they need to adjust their training or competition schedule to incorporate their daily routines effectively
- **Discuss with athletes** how to work around any of this equipment safely if you need to help them in close quarters (such as attaching a hockey stick, setting up a bocchia ramp, or helping to put on a team soccer jersey)



Part 5: Powerchair Sport Deep Dive

Powerhockey

I ended up being a player that was valued...
Powerhockey gave me an opportunity to
actually have valuable skills and to do
something new.

- Powerhockey player

Game overview

Powerhockey, or Powerchair hockey, as it is known outside North America, is similar to the game of ice or floor hockey and played by athletes using powerchairs on the field of play, which is typically a gym court. The sport is inclusive at its core, allowing for the co-participation of athletes with varying disabilities from various ages and genders to compete to the best of their ability.

The following information outlines the rules and requirements for North American powerhockey. There are some nuances with International Powerchair Hockey which players from Canada participate in when competing internationally. For more information on International Powerchair Hockey, check out the [International Powerchair Hockey website](#).

- Powerhockey generally consists of teams comprising 12 players maximum, with five on the floor at a time, including the goaltender.
- A game consists of three 15-minute periods.
- Field of play is 5.25 meters (50 feet) by 30.5 meters (100 feet) and is sometimes enclosed by boundaries with a height of 20cm.

Equipment

- Players use powerchairs to propel across the playing field, using sticks to guide a ball and try to score on the opponents' net.
- In North American rules, players must use powerchairs used for everyday purposes as opposed to sport chairs, and some may fit protection to keep their chair from being damaged in play. Powerhockey is not technically a contact sport, but some contact can happen!
- Safety glasses are required
- Sport-specific chairs are also available within the international version of powerchair hockey; players transfer from their day chair to a sportchair which is specifically designed for powerchair hockey due to the speed and turning ability of the chair.
- The ball, known as a floorball ball, is a lightweight, hollow plastic ball with holes in it.
- Players can use one of two types of sticks: a handstick, held manually and no more than 132cm in length, or a T-stick, which is a T-shaped stick attached to the front of the powerchair used by players who prefer this equipment given their strength and/or dexterity.

Who plays?

- People of all ages, genders, and abilities who use a powerchair can enjoy powerhockey. Players who do not use a powerchair are welcome to play as well. If resources permit, having an extra chair or two at your program could help welcome extra participants. In recreational programs, sometimes participants can also play in manual wheelchairs.
- The powerchair can act as an equalizer on the field of play, so athletes with a wide spectrum of disabilities can play alongside or against each other.
- To get involved recreationally or compete on local and national levels, there is no need for Classification or eligibility standards.

Classification

- Classification is an aspect of disability sport relevant for athletes playing at a competitive level. Players who wish to compete may need to be classified.
- Classification likely will not be a major concern in community or recreation programs. Should your team or program begin to focus on competitive opportunities, you can check with the powerhockey rulebook.
- Classification is the system used in disability sport to determine who is eligible to compete in a sport and to group athletes into sport classes based on a player's physical ability. Classification aims help ensure equity on the floor amongst teams. There are certain rules associated with the number of players from each classification level which can or must be on the floor at a time, and in certain positions.

Key contacts/organizations

- [PowerHockey Canada](#)
- Internationally, [International Powerchair Hockey](#) is responsible for the sport



Powerchair Soccer

Game overview

Powerchair soccer, or powerchair football as it is known internationally, originated in France in the 1970s. Similar to soccer, two teams compete against each other and attempt to score goals by propelling the ball into the opponent's goal area, as marked by two goals posts.

Play takes place on a 30 x 18m court (standard basketball court). Each team has four (4) players on the field of play at once, including the goalie. Players quickly maneuver their chairs around the court to pass, dribble, and shoot using a specially mounted foot guard on the front of the chair.

Equipment

- Ball (33cm/13" diameter)
- Footguard to control and strike the ball. Footguards are attached to the front of the chair, and can be made of metal or, sometimes, plastic in a "try it" setting.
- Powerchair:
 - In entry level and local play, most athletes will use their daily powerchair
 - For higher levels of competition, some athletes will opt for a powerchair soccer-specific chair that is lighter and spins more easily.

Who plays

Like the other sports described, people of all ages, abilities and genders play powerchair soccer. Powerchair soccer is enjoyed in many countries around the world.

Classification

Like all Para sports, players can get involved in powerchair soccer for fun, to learn, to stay fit, and to compete locally without the need to be classified. For higher levels of competition, classification comes into play.

The Fédération Internationale de Powerchair Football Association, or FIPFA, states that the goals of classification are to:

1. Determine Eligibility to Compete

- Athletes undergo a thorough assessment to determine their eligibility.
- This assessment gauges the extent and nature of the athlete's impairment and its impact on their performance in Powerchair Football.

2. Group Athletes for Competition

- After the assessment, athletes are grouped into specific classes that align with the nature and impact of their impairments.
- This ensures that each athlete competes against others with comparable activity limitations, thereby ensuring a fair and balanced competition.
- There are two sport classes in powerchair soccer, PF1 and PF2. [Find out more about classification.](#)

Key contacts/organizations

The [Fédération Internationale de Powerchair Football Association \(FIPFA\)](#) governs the sport internationally.

In Canada, you can contact [Powerchair Soccer Canada](#).

I enjoy power soccer because it is a fast paced and strategic game. Power soccer creates a level playing field for all athletes regardless of ability. I love it because I have been able to achieve success despite my limited strength. Power soccer is unique from other sports as it is all about creating space, and there are rules in place to ensure players are spread out.

- Powersoccer player

Boccia

Game overview

Boccia is not a powerchair sport specifically. However, unlike many other sports, athletes may compete using a powerchair. Because athletes may compete using a powerchair, it is covered in this Playbook.

According to Boccia Canada, “Boccia is a Paralympic sport that can be played by anyone, with or without a disability. Originally designed for people with severe cerebral palsy, it is now enjoyed by players with a wide variety of disabilities. It’s easy for a beginner to pick up quickly, but builds in intensity and complexity as players hone their skills.”

- Co-ed sport played indoors on a hard court
- Precision sport, similar to curling or lawn bowls
- A small white ball known as the “jack” is the target for two teams
- Two teams take turns throwing their balls (red or blue) in an attempt to land closest to the jack
- Boccia can be played one on one, in pairs, or in teams of three
- Players can throw, roll or kick the ball, or use specialized equipment to help propulsion (see below)

Equipment and Support

- A ball set includes 13 balls (1 white, 6 red and 6 blue).
- Boccia balls are available in a variety of densities, from hard to super soft, so that athletes can choose the type that works best for them.
- Boccia Ramp (for individuals who aren’t able to throw or kick a ball)
- Head, mouth or arm pointer (for ramp users who need support to release the ball)
- Basket, tray, bag or other holder to keep balls within easy reach
- ‘Grabber’ tool to pick up balls
- Some athletes use a manual wheelchair while playing, or transfer to a different chair from their daily one for play. However, using a daily powerchair is very common!

Some players are supported by an Athlete Assistant such as a Ramp Operator or Sport Assistant.

- Ramp Operators may position the ramp, stabilize the athlete's chair, or adjust athlete's positioning — only at the athlete's directive. They may not face the playing area when adjusting the ramp.
- Sport Assistants can assist with similar tasks, but not adjust the ramp
- Sport Assistants play an important role and develop close bonds with the athletes.

Very competitive players have to have a personal and committed assistant that you can work with and learn together. It's like golf, where you have the athlete and the caddy. The same thing is in boccia, where you have the athlete and the sports assistant, who need to learn the game and need to know the athlete.

- Boccia player



Who plays?

Boccia is a very accessible sport, and anyone can play! Many boccia athletes have impairment in all four limbs and/or limited trunk control.

People of all ages, genders and abilities can play together for fun and physical activity, however athletes who are interested in pursuing advanced competitions will have to go through a process called classification to determine if they are eligible.

Classification

Like all sports, classification is not a requirement to play boccia for fun or local competition. Through classification, athletes are observed by a group that includes an individual knowledgeable about the technical aspects of boccia and a physiotherapist and/or a doctor. This team ensures athletes are grouped into similar categories to ensure an equitable playing field.

There are five classifications in boccia that group athletes together with similar functionality (BC1, BC2, BC3, BC4, and BC5) as well as an “Open” category for athletes who have a disability but do not qualify in one of the BC1-5 categories. More information is available on Boccia Canada’s website in the [Eligibility and Classification section](#).

Key contacts/organizations

In Canada, [Boccia Canada](#) it is governed by the [Canadian Cerebral Palsy Sports Association](#). Internationally, it is governed by the [Boccia International Sport Federation](#).



Other Sports

There is a wide variety of other sports that, while not actually played in a powerchair, are very adaptable and can be a great fit for people who are powerchair users. Some might even be sports you did not expect to be as accessible as they are!

A few ideas are provided below, and you can ask around your local community to find out what may be available nearby. Other sports can be great cross-training for powerchair athletes, and as a program leader you can learn a lot from the creativity and success of other programs. You can find out more about each of these sports in the [Resources section](#) of this document.

- **Alpine (or downhill) skiing** has sit-ski options including duo-sit skiing where a participant with limited/no core strength or upper limb movement can participate
- **Cycling** has handcycling options and even battery assisted handcycles to support a variety of riders, including in off-roading conditions
- **Hiking and wilderness adventures** have become increasingly accessible with various assistive equipment such as the TrailRider, a specially designed sort of rickshaw that can navigate gnarly terrain
- **Kayaking** can be adapted with a variety of seats, outriggers, paddles, and hand grip supports to enhance its accessibility
- **Sailing** has a variety of options so sailors can control a sailboat with a joystick or even sip and puff system, and has a variety of supportive seats with trunk or head control available
- **Wheelchair rugby** is a fast-paced team sport open to individuals with conditions that affect 3 or 4 of their limbs, often quadriplegic or multiple limb amputees
- **Volt Hockey** is another floor hockey style game played in customized electric chairs. Open to everyone, Volt hockey has been particularly appealing to children and youth.

Appendix 1: Image Descriptions

Image 1: Depiction of the Becoming Para Ready framework.

A diagram depicting the Becoming Para Ready framework. At the top, the words “Reflection and change create a cyclical process” are encircled by three numbered arrows, each pointing to the next. Arrow 1 is labelled Perspective, with three sub-labels: Philosophy, People and Policy. Arrow 2 is labelled Planning, with five sub-labels: Place, Promotion, Pathways, Price and Partnerships. Arrow three is labelled “Programming”, with four sub-labels: Preference, Participation, Practice and Pedagogy.

[Find Image 1 on Page 12.](#)

Appendix 2: Resources

CDPP and Partner Resources

[Becoming Para Ready](#) by The Steadward Centre for Personal & Physical Achievement.

[A blueprint for building quality participation in sport for children, youth and adults with a disability](#) by the Canadian Disability Participation Project.

[Building quality participation in sport for blind and partially sighted athletes: A guide for program leaders](#) by the Canadian Disability Participation Project

Government Resources and Policy Documents

[“Nothing Without Us”: Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada](#) from the Government of Canada

[“Nothing About Us Without Us” - Mantra for a Movement](#) by Eli A. Wolff and Dr. Mary Hums

[CIHR glossary of terms used in accessibility and systemic ableism](#) by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research

[Policy Paper: Accessibility in Buildings](#) by the Government of Canada

Coaching Resources

[Safe Sport Training](#) by the Coaching Association of Canada

[Safe Sport Training Toolkit](#) by the Coaching Association of Canada

[Responsible Coaching Movement](#) by the Coaching Association of Canada

[RHFAC Tip Sheet](#) by the Rick Hansen Foundation

[Recommendations](#) by Assisting, Informing and Motivating Physical Activity (AIMPA).

[Coaching athletes with a disability](#) by the Coaching Association of Canada

[Become a Powerhockey Coach](#) by Powerhockey Canada

Resources about Powerchair Sports

[Power wheelchair guide](#) by Permobil

[What is Powerchair Hockey?](#) by International Powerchair Hockey

[What is Powerchair Soccer?](#) by Powerchair Soccer Canada

[What is powerchair football?](#) by the Fédération Internationale de Powerchair Football Association

[Official home of power soccer in the U.S.](#) by the United States Power Soccer Association

[Classification](#) by the Fédération Internationale de Powerchair Football Association

[What is boccia?](#) by Boccia Canada

[International Boccia Rules](#) by the Boccia International Sports Federation

[Sitski, Sitwake, outdoor wheelchair](#) by Tessier Adaptive Sports

[Bikes](#) by Bowhead Corp

[TrailRider](#) by the British Columbia Mobility Opportunities Society

[Adaptive paddling](#) by Angle Oar

[Adaptive sailing programs across Canada](#) by AbleSail Network

[Start playing](#) by Wheelchair Rugby Canada

[VOLT Hockey Canada](#) by Variety – the Children’s Charity of Ontario

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