

APTA-Special Olympics Centennial Celebration Service Initiative



About Special Olympics

Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

The History of the APTA-SO Partnership

APTA and Special Olympics (SO) have been long-term partners in advancing the health and fitness of athletes with intellectual disabilities. This partnership became formal with APTA becoming a core collaborator in the Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® program that has offered over 2 million free health screenings since 1997, and a founding partner of its FUNfitness screening in 1999. Since the development of FUNfitness, physical therapy professionals and students have provided SO athletes with fitness screenings, education about fitness improvement, and physical therapy referrals as appropriate in Special Olympics programs in the United States and around the world.

Even with the success and impact to date of Special Olympics health programming, people with ID continue to face higher rates of preventable disease, have a shorter lifespan and experience more barriers to accessing quality care than those without ID. However, the APTA and Special Olympics partnership demonstrates that it is possible to improve these outcomes and help close the gaps of health inequity for people with ID around the world.

Special Olympics health strategy prioritizes improving opportunities for athletes to perform at their best and working with governments, non-governmental organizations, universities and the private sector to encourage them to provide better health care for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This strategy is well aligned with APTA's own vision of "transforming society by optimizing movement to improve the human experience."

As such, in 2017 APTA sought to formalize the existing partnership between APTA and SO to build on that long-standing relationship to expand access to fitness screenings, health management and wellness opportunities, and to increase participation and improve the health of athletes during and beyond Special Olympics activities, including at their training sites, homes and communities.

Special Olympics Service Opportunities

If you'd like to get involved with Special Olympics to learn more about working with people with intellectual disabilities and offer free health screenings to athletes, here are a few options for you to consider:

- **For the Individual**
 - Enroll in Special Olympics' Online Learning Portal to learn more about intellectual disabilities and how to better communicate with persons with ID: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/online-learning-portal>. These courses are free!
 - Contact your local Special Olympics Program in your state to find out if there are opportunities to volunteer, such as:
 - FUNfitness screenings
 - Partnership opportunities
 - Current virtual programming which may need support

- Program fundraising opportunities/drives (e.g. Polar Plunge team).
- **For the Component**
 - Provide information to component members about the free courses on Special Olympics' Online Learning Portal: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/online-learning-portal>.
 - Coordinate with the FUNfitness Clinical Directors from your local Special Olympics Program to support volunteer recruitment and event planning for FUNfitness screenings:
 - Post volunteer opportunities through APTA Engage
 - Promote the program during the 100 Days of Service Initiatives
 - Consider a fundraising activity for your local Special Olympics Program (i.e. coordinate a Polar Plunge team, other fundraising opportunities).
 - Contact your local Special Olympics Program to see if they need support in virtual programming.
- **For the Practice Setting and Academic Programs**
 - Provide information to practitioners, faculty and students about the free courses on the Special Olympics Online Learning Portal: <https://resources.specialolympics.org/online-learning-portal>.
 - Coordinate with the State FUNfitness Clinical Directors to support volunteer recruitment and event planning for FUNfitness screenings:
 - Promote the program during the 100 Days of Service Initiatives.
 - Consider a fundraising activity for your local Special Olympics Program (i.e. coordinate a Polar Plunge team, other fundraising opportunities).
 - Contact your local Special Olympics Program to see if they need support in virtual programming.

Share Your Achievements

During and after your own service initiative it is important that you engage your colleagues, other APTA members, and potential members. We want to be inclusive of the entire profession when we're giving back, and what a great way to do good, and at the same time, engage other physical therapists.

- **Recruit Service Activity Volunteers via APTA Engage**

List your event on APTA Engage to publicize your event and recruit volunteers.
- **Share Your Event on the Centennial Celebration Calendar**

If you plan to hold an event, be sure to add it to the events calendar on the [APTA Centennial Celebration microsite](#). This is the central place to share activities and events that are available in your area.
- **Social Media**

Share your activities with your social media followers on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. And be sure to tag APTA, aptapics, and @APTAtweets on each platform respectively, and use the hashtag **#APTA100** on all of your social media posts. Share photos, videos, and stories, and encourage your colleagues, family, and friends to do the same.
- **Keep APTA National in the Loop**

Let us know what you're planning and how things went. Share your photos and stories with us via the [online form](#) on our centennial celebration microsite.

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