

PROVIDING SUPPORT TO PARA ATHLETES ACROSS THEIR HP JOURNEY

PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH, WELLBEING AND PERFORMANCE



The purpose of this resource is to highlight unique and essential considerations for para athletes as they move into, through and beyond high performance (HP) sport. This guidance is provided to support those who directly support athletes as well as for the wider HP ecosystem, noting attention to areas should be intentional and, where possible, include dedicated roles for para athlete support.

IN

Classification considerations

- eligibility/status
- education about and support through the process, including costs involved.

Needs assessment

- performance health (e.g., general practitioner (GP), psychologist)
- health & safety (in HPE and for campaign)
- impairment specifics and performance enhancement (e.g., prosthetics, biomechanics)
- adapted equipment (e.g., cost, availability, development)
- unique needs in both training and competition environments (e.g., carer, facilities, travel considerations, required athlete support personnel (such as pilot for visually impaired cyclist), additional NSO or Para athlete costs)
- coach alignment/qualification in Para sport
- wellbeing and welfare – family/partner or other support involvement (know What and Who is needed)

THROUGH

Classification considerations

- re-classification – implications and frequency; change in status from Review to Confirmed (understanding what this entails)

Competition/sport class

Understanding of mixed classes and impact on competition and competitiveness (e.g., potential impact for Para athlete and NSO if competition classes are changed by the International Federation midway through a cycle)

Nature of disability

- congenital or acquired (e.g., from birth or caused by an accident)
- progressive or static (degenerative or 'wear and tear' or relatively stable through the athlete's journey)
- recurrent or episodic (e.g., periods of time without limitations or changing in severity with symptoms that come and go)

Wraparound support

- mental health and wellbeing resources (via the sport and system)
- community resources - e.g.,
 - Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), Ministry of Social Development, Work and Income (MSDWI)
 - financial support via ACC/MSDWI (loss of potential earnings, supported living payments)
 - formal support roles - e.g., Recovery Coordinator, Case Manager, GP
 - local networks - e.g., Brain Injury Waikato, Para Federations, Blind Sport NZ (BSNZ), Archilles, Limb Centre, Spinal Unit Society, Halberg Foundation, RDSOs, NSO and local clubs.

BEYOND

Transition support

- social, peer and alumni networks
- dual career, identity, inclusion support
- access to ongoing physical fitness options
- opportunities to maintain connection with sport in various capacities (mentor/alumnus, volunteer, coaching, athlete councils or governance)

Wraparound support, as in prior stage:

- mental health and wellbeing resources (to be confirmed via transition communications)
- community resources (e.g., Para Federations, NSO, Halberg Foundation, Regional Disability Sport Organisations (RDSOs), BSNZ, Archilles)

Shared Perspective from a Para Athlete

Para athletes are often the experts in their own impairment and needs. When making decisions about equipment, classification, training and competition, the decision making should always be led by the Para athlete, due to the need for adaptability. Consideration should also be given to the impact on fatigue, general energy and load management, as often there will be medical complexities for Para athletes beyond those that strictly impact performance.

Further, consideration should always be given to robust emergency planning whilst travelling and in training and competition environments, as situations can escalate quickly with Para athletes, particularly depending on their impairment type.