

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 In, Through, and Beyond high performance (HP) Para sport. This guidance is provided to support those who directly support Para athletes, as well as for the wider HP ecosystem, noting attention to areas should be intentional, in conjunction with each Para athlete and, where possible, include dedicated roles for Para athlete support.

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 there may also be other complexities for Para athletes to navigate beyond those that strictly impact performance.

Each Para athlete and Para sport journey is unique

Support can be provided through one or more channels – with National Sports Organisations (NSOs), Paralympics New Zealand (PNZ), the NZ Paralympic Team, and HPSNZ, all playing different roles in the Para athlete's HP journey.

With an understanding of the below elements that are unique to each Para athlete journey, In, Through, and Beyond, the support that is provided can positively promote mental health, wellbeing and performance:

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 Para athlete's journey)
- recurrent or episodic (e.g., periods of time without limitations or changing in severity with symptoms that come and go)

Needs assessment

- performance health (e.g., general practitioner (GP), psychologist)
- health and 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., facilities, travel considerations, required Para athlete support and care personnel (such as pilot for visually impaired Para cyclist, or support with daily living), additional Para athlete, NSO, or NZ Paralympic Team costs)
- coach alignment/qualification in Para sport
- wellbeing and welfare – family/partner or other support involvement (know What and Who is needed)
- 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

Wraparound support

- collaboration between delivery organisations to support each Para athlete as they transition In, Through, and Beyond their Para sport journey (including handover before and following pinnacle events)
- direct Para athlete focused mental health and wellbeing resources (via the NSO, HPSNZ, PNZ, the NZ Paralympic Team, and wider sport system)
- indirect community accessible resources may also be available via organisations such as the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), Ministry of Social Development, Work and Income (MSDWI), which depending on Nature of Disability, may include:
 - financial support via ACC/MSDWI (loss of potential earnings, supported living payments)
 - formal support roles - e.g., Recovery Coordinator, Case Manager, GP
- further indirect support may be available via local networks and community organisations such as NSO affiliated local clubs, Regional Disability Sport Organisations, and impairment specific groups (e.g., Blind Sport NZ, Limb Centre, Spinal Unit Society)

Competition/Para sport classification

- each Para athlete will be assessed against an international Classification Code, and assigned a classification, based on their eligible impairment
- changes or combining (mixed) classes occurs, and can 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)

Para sport classification considerations

- eligibility/status
- education about and support through the process
- understanding the impairment specific classification assessments required, including potential costs involved
- explore opportunities to link classification process with event attendance and competition
- working in conjunction with NSOs and PNZ to map classification progression through the Para athlete journey
- re-classification – implications and frequency; change in status from Review to Confirmed (understanding what this entails and how this might impact preparation, performance, and wellbeing)

Transition support

- social, peer, Para sport and other alumni networks
- dual career, identity, inclusion support
- access to ongoing physical fitness options
- PNZ Athletes' Council or the Athlete Leaders Network
- opportunities to maintain connection with Para sport in various capacities (mentor/alumnus, volunteer, coaching, NSO councils or governance roles)
- any other mental health and wellbeing resources (to be confirmed via transition communications led by NSO and HPSNZ)

If you need more support, please contact Paralympics New Zealand via info@paralympics.org.nz or reach out to the Lead HPSNZ Performance Life coach for your Para sport.