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# CANADIAN SPORT FOR LIFE

## No Accidental Champions

Athletes with a disability (AWADs) are first and foremost athletes. Therefore virtually everything in the able-bodied Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model is applicable. AWADs pass through the same stages as able-bodied athletes, although the ages and rate of progress may differ.

Between 10% and 14% of Canadians have a disability. For optimum health it is critical that all Canadians, with or without a disability, fully engage in physical activity. Athletes with a disability who aspire to the highest levels of sport performance need a sport system to help them achieve their goals.

While there are many similarities between AWADs and able-bodied athletes, there are some differences that change the LTAD process.

- Athletes may have been born with a disability (congenital disability) or may have acquired a disability later in life.
- Children with a disability may not have the same opportunities to learn FUNDamental movement skills as they may not always have the same opportunities for vigorous, physical play during their early years.
- AWADs may operate in a sport environment in which there are participants not found in able-bodied sport. For example, runners who are blind need sighted guides.
- Many AWADs require equipment or facilities adapted to take full advantage of their athletic ability and to minimize the sport-performance impact of their disability.
- Access to appropriate competitive experiences may be difficult due to few other athletes with the same type and/or level of disability.
- Some AWADs require personal care support, interpreters, and other personnel not found in able-bodied sport.

Development of AWADs requires two additional stages beyond the able-bodied LTAD model. These stages are called Awareness and First Contact/Recruitment. They are particularly important for individuals with an acquired disability who, prior to injury or illness, may have had no contact with, and no knowledge of, sport for AWADs.

The purpose of these two stages is to inform individuals of the range of activities in which they can participate and to provide ways for them to experience those activities. A positive first experience goes a long way to engaging AWADs in both competitive and recreational sporting activities.

LTAD is not just about developing the athlete. It is also about developing the system in which the athlete learns and performs the sport so that optimal long-term development is supported. For AWADs, this means making sure that each sport plans for and delivers what the athlete needs at each stage of development.

Systematic implementation of LTAD is critical if Canada is to retain its international leadership as a country that is successful in sport for AWADs. LTAD for high performance success and for the long-term health of Canadians with a disability will not happen by chance, but only through the concerted and coordinated efforts of all partners in the Canadian sport system.

A more detailed explanation is available in the AWAD supplementary document "No Accidental Champions" at [www.canadiansportforlife.ca](http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca)