

Becoming Para Ready: A resource to help club and school athletics programs support more effective integration



THE STEADWARD CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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INTRODUCTION



The goal of this resource is to help clubs and schools move from wanting to be more inclusive to knowing "how" to be inclusive.



While athletics is a highly inclusive sport that offers opportunities for almost all athletes to play, **more often than not, only para athletes who can be most easily accommodated actually get to play.** This is largely because athletics programs don't have the **capacity, knowledge, and confidence** to support all para athletes. In addition, there is a lot of confusion about what the integration policy is and what integration looks like or can look like at the grassroots level.

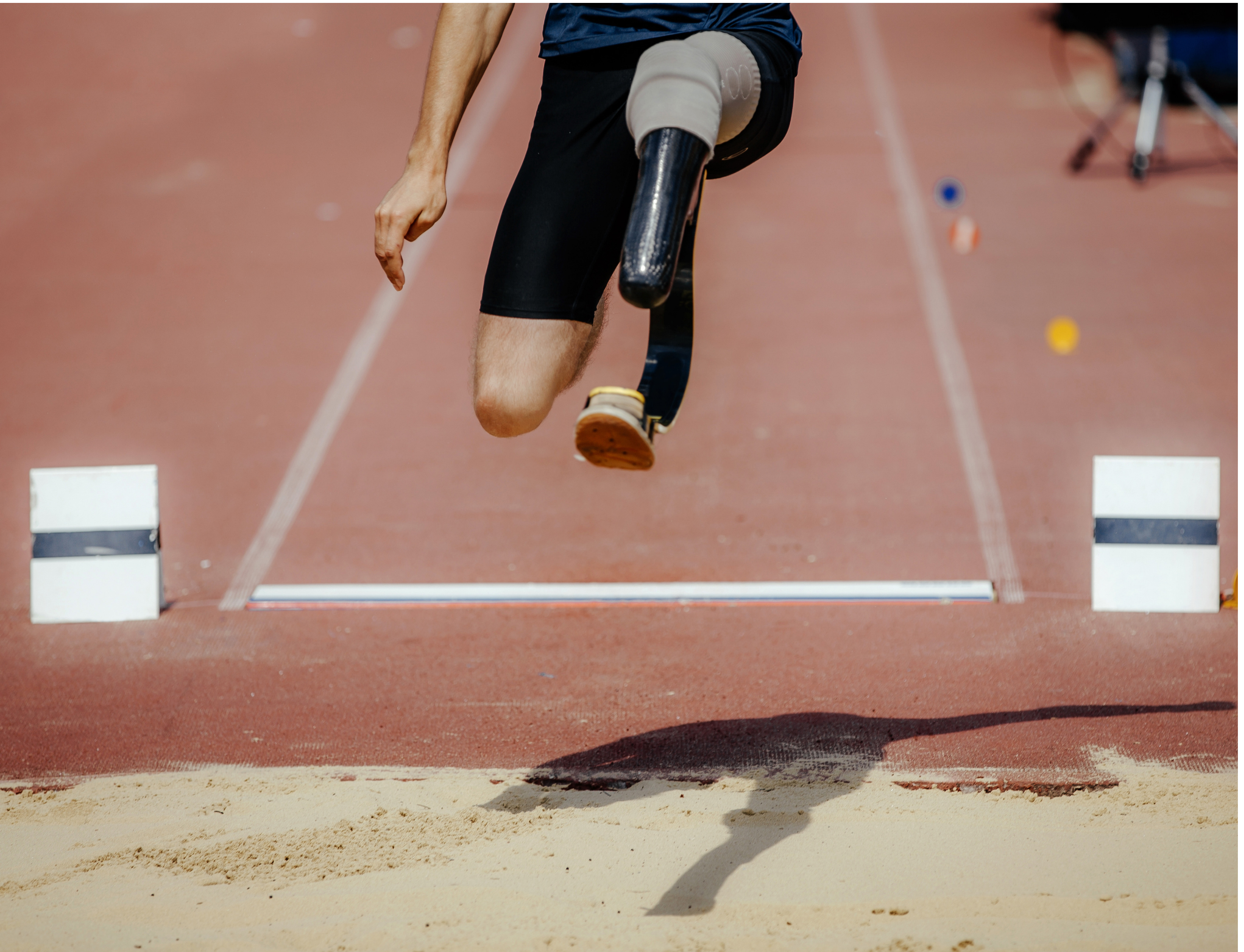
This resource has been **created for school and club sport administrators, coaches, and policy makers.** It is meant to introduce what being para ready means and the many ways it can be achieved.

This resource is an **important first step** to increase participation in para athletics.



PART 1

PARA READINESS



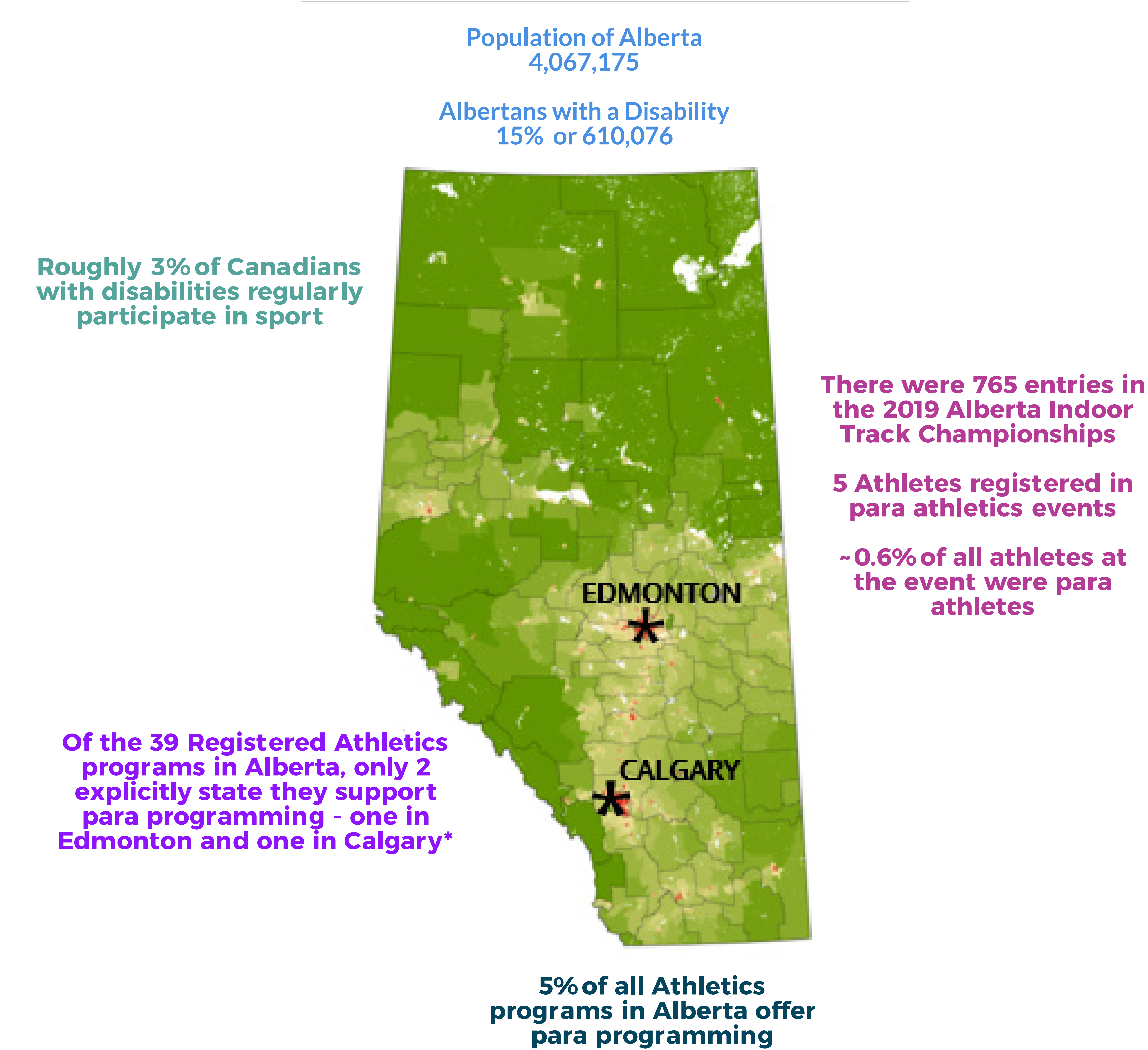


WHAT IS PARA ATHLETICS?

Para Athletics has been part of the Paralympic Games since 1960. There are a wide range of events open to both genders, in every disability group, such as visual impairment, cerebral palsy, intellectual, amputee, and spinal cord injuries.

For more information about the sport's history, the events, classification and equipment used, check out the World Para Athletics page [HERE](#), and Athletics Canada's page [HERE](#).

PARA ATHLETICS PARTICIPATION IN ALBERTA



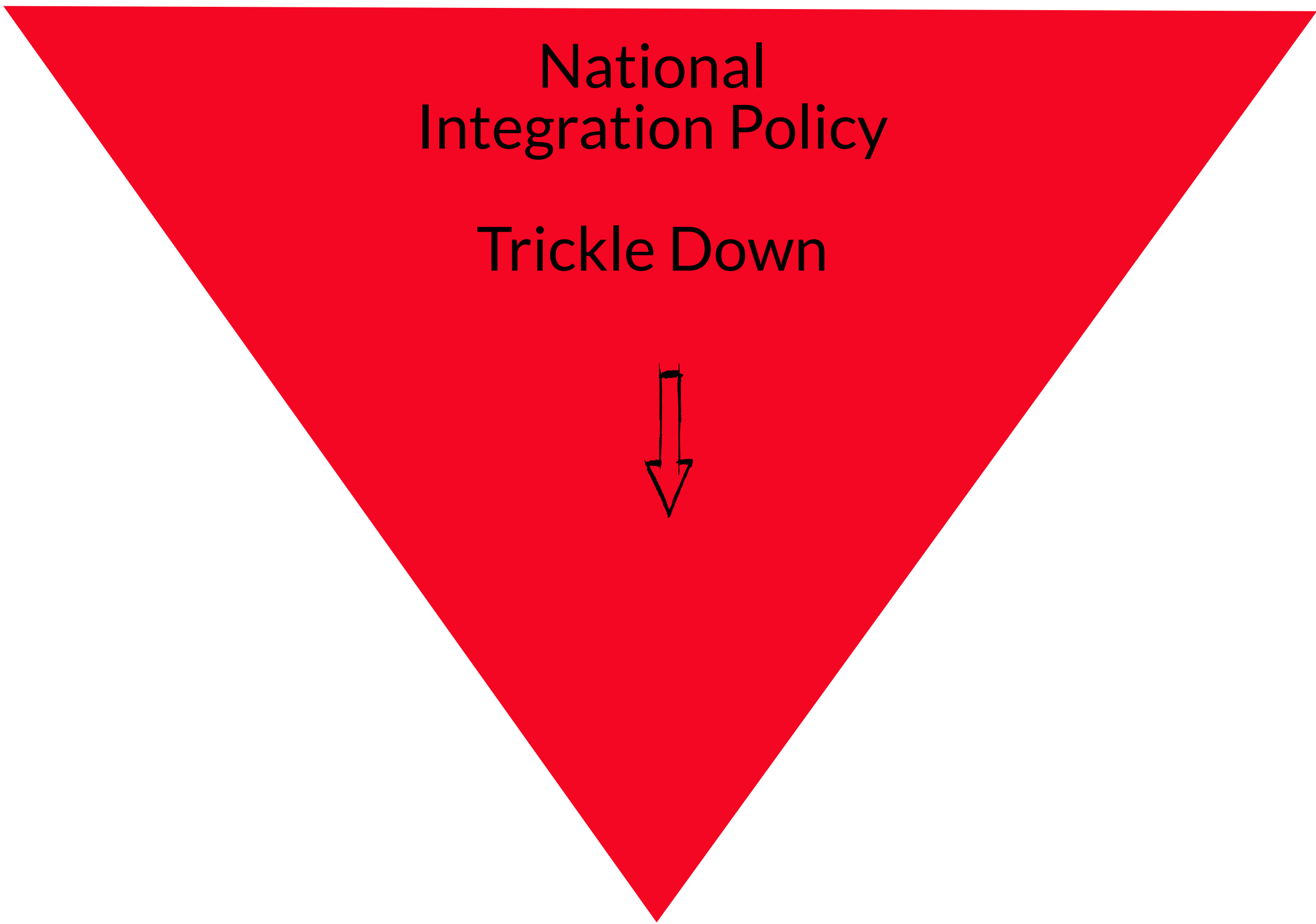
* Some Alberta athletics programs might have individuals training within the program but they are not recognized online as offering a para program



WHAT IS INTEGRATION IN PARA ATHLETICS?

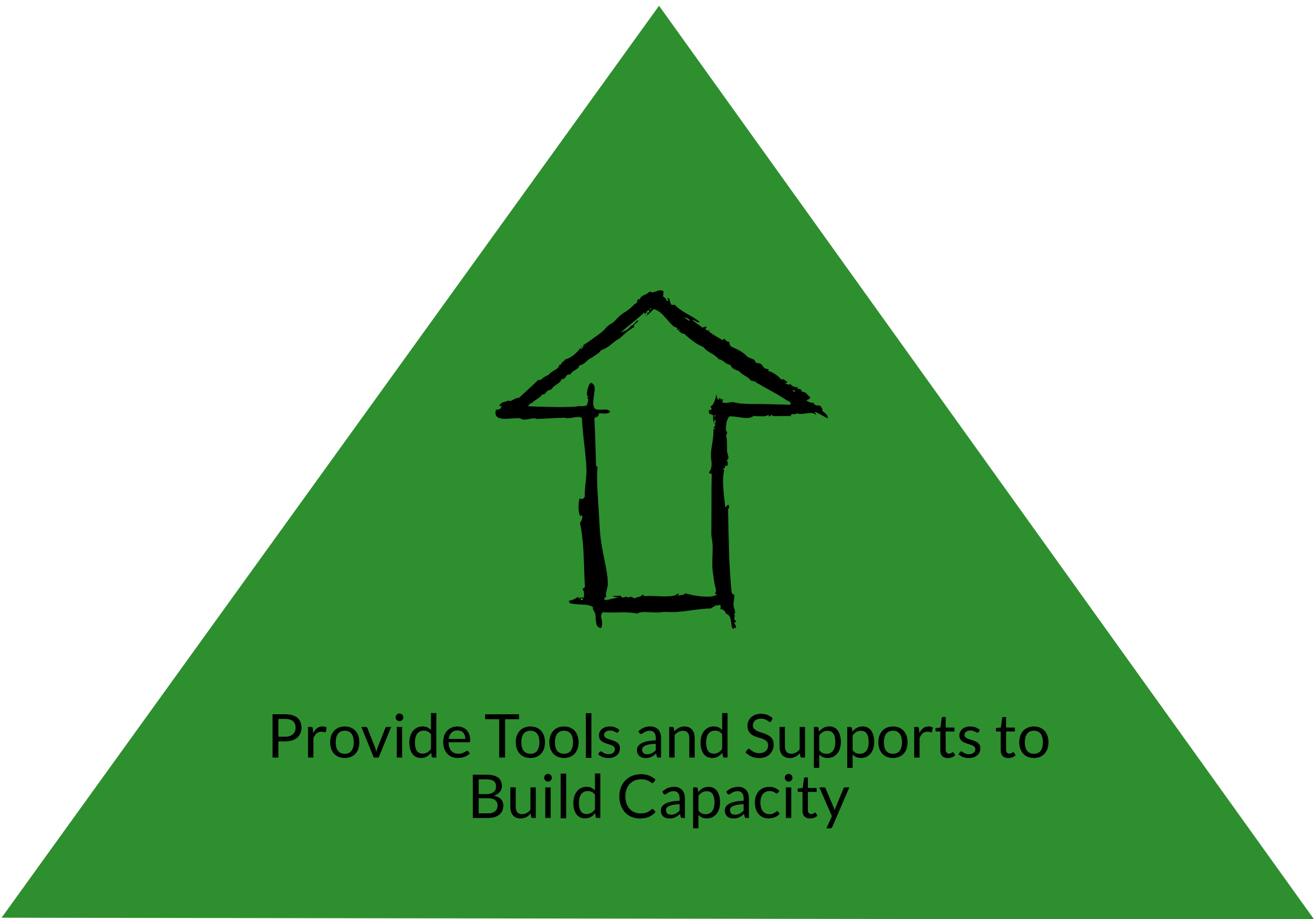
Integration is the process of combining or bringing together two things to create a whole. Integration in athletics brings para athletes into already established mainstream athletics programs. Integration policy was initiated in 1997 as a **top-down approach to integration** that started with Athletics Canada (national level organization) and was meant to trickle down to the program level so that all athletics programs across Canada would be fully integrated to support all para athletes. Without widely available funding and supports, this approach has not been highly successful.

Top-Down Approach



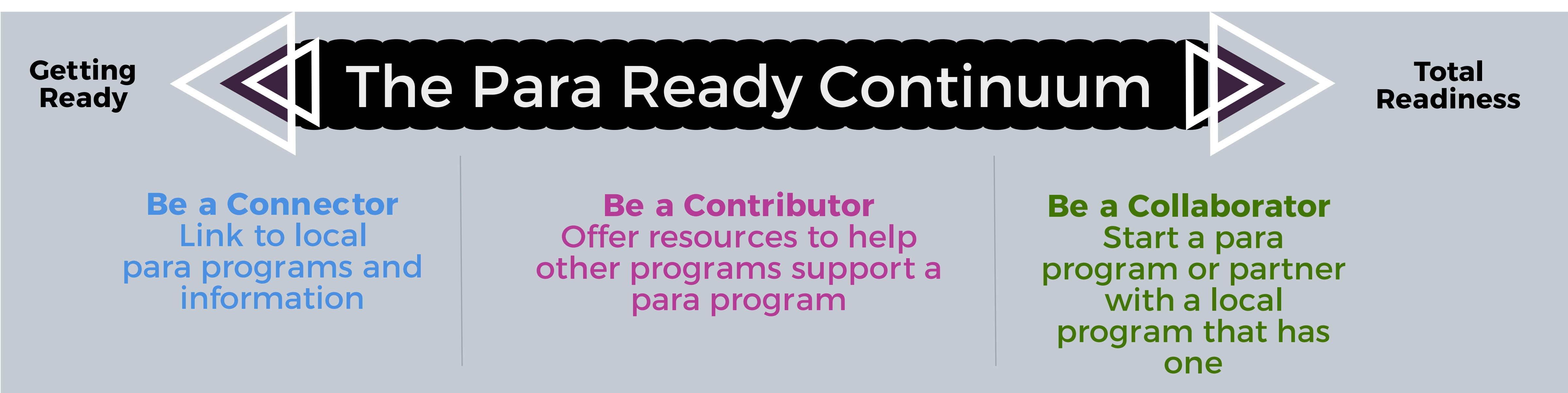
Research has shown that integration is not happening effectively at the program level. That is, there are **still a number of barriers in programs** that are limiting their ability to include all para athletes. Moreover, confusion about what integration means and looks like makes it hard to know which programs can support para programming and to what degree.

This resource takes a **bottom-up approach to integration** to help build para capacity in athletics by giving programs the tools and supports to be able to better support para athletes with strong policies and programming.



Bottom-Up Approach

WHAT IS BEING "PARA READY"?



This resource is meant to serve as a starting point to help athletics program administrators and coaches support the quality participation of more para athletes by becoming **Para Ready**.

Para readiness has been adapted from two concepts used in the sport management literature. These are organizational readiness and capacity building. Organizational readiness refers to an organization's shared beliefs, capability, and commitment to implementing organizational level changes. Capacity building in sport refers to an organization's ability to draw upon and use their resources, such as people, networks, relationships, infrastructure, and knowledge.

Para ready means your club or school program is prepared to support para athletes in some way. To do this, your program needs to have all the necessary tools in place to support all para athletes.

It's important to note that to be para ready doesn't mean that a program needs to start a para program. Instead, programs can be para ready by either **providing programming or connecting to those programs that do!**

BARRIERS PREVENTING PARA READINESS

Research has identified the following as barriers that prevent people with a disability from participating in parasport. Note that this is a comprehensive list of all barriers that might prevent participation. Programs are not expected to attend to each one individually. Many of these barriers can be addressed through making small changes discussed later in this document.

Barriers in Promotion

According to the most recent Long-term Development in Sport and Physical Activity Framework, awareness is a key barrier for all participants, but this has been found to be especially important for people with a disability.

Barriers include:

- Program awareness on website
- Inaccessible social media and email communications
- Inaccessible websites
- Incomplete information e.g., is the facility accessible? What accessible features are available?
- Limited communication between healthcare professionals, support workers, parents, coaches and athletes

Barriers in Programs

- Cost
- Accessibility of track facility
- Nearby public transportation options
- Coach attitude and confidence
- Knowledge of disability
- Equipment, especially for wheelchair athletes

Barriers to Building Program Capacity

- Availability of interested coaches
- No budget for Para Coach
- Education
- Volunteer support
- Some athletes require greater ratio of coaches or volunteers to athlete (e.g., athletes experiencing autism)
- No local disability sport organization (e.g., The Steadward Centre) for disability support



PART 2

BECOMING A PARA READY PROGRAM



THE NINE P'S OF A PARA READY PROGRAM

PROACTIVE

The key to becoming para ready is to prepare before an athlete contacts your program. You need to say that your program is welcoming to all and also say how.

POLICY

Have a policy, statement, or commitment on your website that says you are inclusive to the athletes you are able to include. Ensure all promotions and messaging about program activities is accessible and uses [inclusive and appropriate language](#).

PROMOTION

Include at least these key points: Accessibility Information; Local Transportation Options; Parking; Specialized Equipment Available; Level of Challenge; and Coach Certification.

PROGRAMMING

Consider what equipment you need and if your programming will be fully integrated or segregated. To learn more about the inclusion spectrum [CLICK HERE](#).

PEOPLE

Find the coach(es) who will champion your para program and provide them with PARA coach education.

Place

Ensure your home and away track facilities are fully accessible to all disability groups, not just those competing in a wheelchair.

PATHWAY

Not all para athletes will become Paralympians!

Athletes will enter the sport at different moments along their pathway, so programs need to adjust expectations and programming accordingly.

price

Research has identified cost as a key barrier to participation for people with a disability.

Partnership

Develop (in)formal partnerships with local and provincial disability sport organizations.

Brought to you by:

THE NINE P'S OF A PARA READY PROGRAM

Proactive The key to becoming para ready is to prepare before an athlete contacts your program. You need to say that your program is welcoming to all and also say how.

Policy Have a policy, statement, or commitment on your website that says you are inclusive to the athletes you are able to include.
Ensure all promotions and messaging about program activities is accessible and uses [inclusive and appropriate language](#).

Promotion Include at least these key points: Accessibility Information; Local Transportation Options; Parking; Specialized Equipment Available; Level of Challenge; and Coach Certification.

Programming Consider what equipment you need and if your programming will be fully integrated or segregated.
To learn more about the inclusion spectrum [CLICK HERE](#).

People Find the coach(es) who will champion your para program and provide them with PARA coach education.

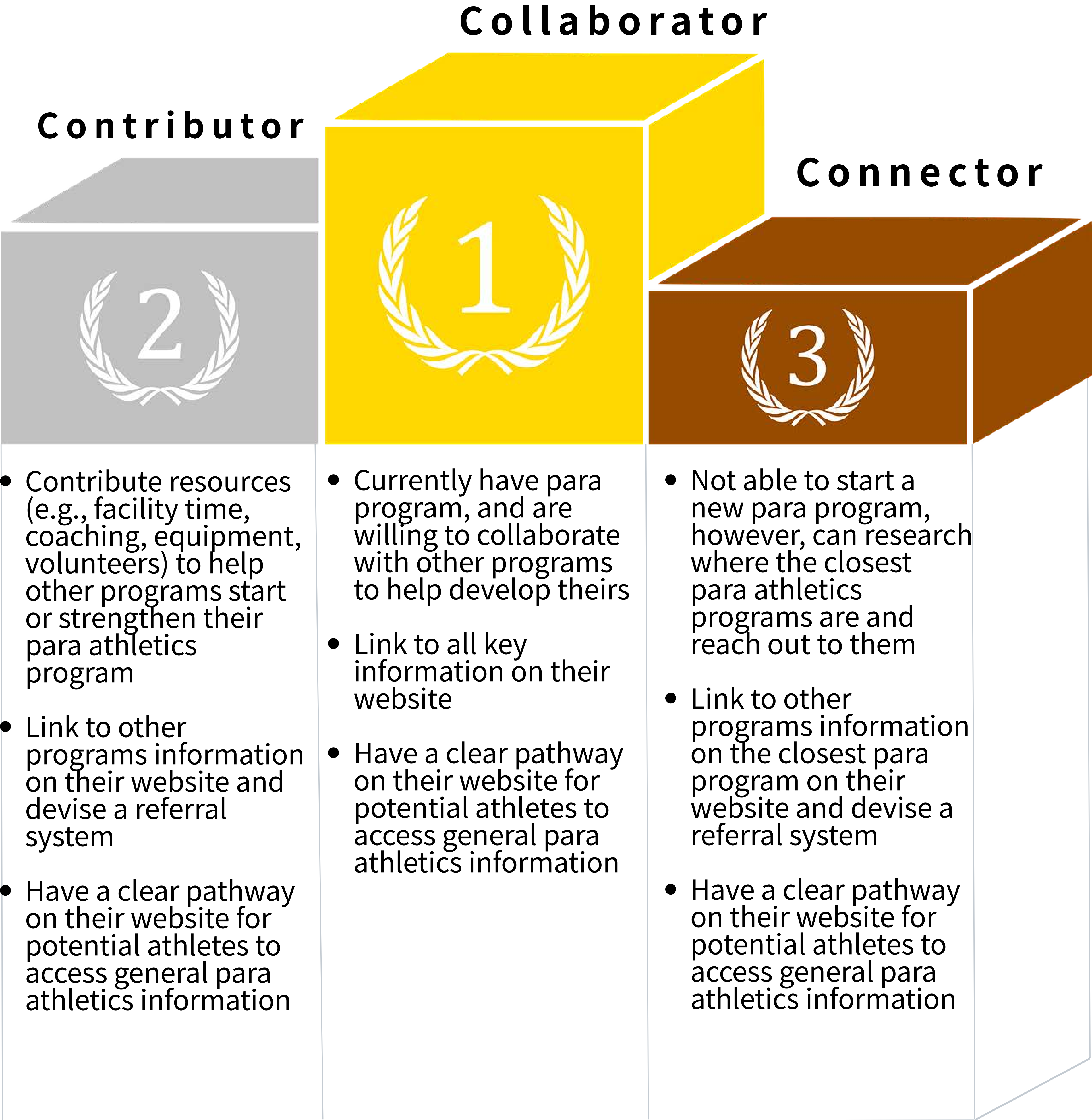
Place Ensure your home and away track facilities are fully accessible to all disability groups, not just those competing in a wheelchair.

Pathway Not all para athletes will become Paralympians!
Athletes will enter the sport at different moments along their pathway, so programs need to adjust expectations and programming accordingly.

Price Research has identified cost as a key barrier to participation for people with a disability.

Partnership Develop (in)formal partnerships with local and provincial disability sport organizations.

Take the Para Ready Challenge!



Contact the Steadward Centre for individual program support.
Share with us on Instagram
or
Facebook how your program is para ready.

PART 3

ALBERTA PARA READY PROGRAMS IN ACTION!



This section provides an overview of two athletics programs structures in Alberta who both support para athletics programming. Note that each program uses a different approach to para athletics inclusion.

This resource is not saying one is better than the other. Instead, they both aim to serve different athletes. The data for this section came from websites and personal contact with the Head para coaches and para athletes from each of the programs.

An Integrated Approach to Para Programming Calgary Track and Field Athletic Association (CALTAF)

Calgary, Alberta [@caltaf](#)



Founded in 1958, the [Calgary Track and Field Athletic Association](#) (CALTAF) is a track and field club based in Calgary, Alberta. CALTAF is a well established organization which provides facilities, training programs, competition, and leadership to promote personal development and excellence in athletes, coaches and officials for the betterment of track and field in Calgary.

The Head Coach started the para athletics program while she was already coaching in the CALTAF club. Therefore, the para athletics program is fully embedded within the power and speed events group (i.e., throws, jumps, sprints) that the Head Coach coaches. The program has limited support from additional volunteers, which means they are not always able to support para athletes who might require a high ratio of coach/volunteer to athlete. On that note, the club has taken a more high performance para focus with few developmental athletes. Able-bodied and para athletes train together at the same time as one group, however, they attend different track meets. Also, there can be differences in recovery between repetitions and the type of implement used.



Who's in the program?

- 10 athletes including:
 - 2 seated throwers
 - 8 ambulatory athletes competing in throws and sprints (multiple sclerosis, 2 x amputee, hemiplegia, cerebral palsy, 3 x little people)

Who is supporting the training practices?

- 1 Head Coach
- 2 Assistant Coaches

What are the key community connections?

- Athletics Canada
- Athletics Alberta

What is shared with mainstream group?

- Facility space and booking support
- Training times
- Coaching and training
- Athlete administration (e.g., competition registration)
- All coaches' technical expertise

What is not shared with mainstream group?

- Events

What's unique?

- Para is fully integrated into an already established training group in the club
- Little support from local disability organizations
- Head coach has taken the lead to champion para integration within the club with lots of self-driven learning and co-creation of practices with para athletes

About the coach!

- Is a teacher who has years of experience in track as a former athlete and a high performance coach
- Was approached by a para athlete to start coaching
- Worked very closely with the athlete to educate herself on how to coach para throwing
- Most of the coach's para learning has been self-taught and experimental
- Coaches athletes in all power and speed event groups
- Open to connecting and answering any questions in para athletics' community of practice facebook group

Click [HERE](#) to access and join the group!

Athlete advice!

This athlete has been competing in para athletics for over a decade and represented Canada at the Paralympic Games 2016 in Rio.

- **“Coaches think integration of para athletics into your club is much more complicated than it really is!”**
- Integration has been smooth for this athlete since her disability group is **“considered closest to an able-bodied category”**
 - But the athlete recognizes that integration can be different for other groups, such as those competing in wheelchairs
- CALTAF is a big club that has made a strong commitment to open the club to ALL athletes, which can be seen and felt at all training practices
- **“We all want to get better, and we all wear the same jersey!”**
- **“Coaches need to recognize that personal bests and improvements can look different and happen on different timelines for everyone”**

Coach's tips for mainstream athletics programs

1. It is much easier to fully integrate para athletes into track and field events that are done individually, such as throwing and jumping events, because athletes can be coached one at a time making them easier to give personalized feedback
2. **“It's important to always call track meet directors ahead of time to make sure they can accommodate all your athletes”**
3. For athletes wanting to compete, research the ins and outs of the classification process found [HERE](#)
4. **“Use your connections in the track world (e.g., other coaches, administrators) to let them know you are open to coaching para athletes”**
5. **“Coaches need to educate themselves on the rules for each event as this can vary by disability group within the same event”**
6. **“Coaches need to be motivated and open minded enough to seek out support when needed; it won't come to them!”**
7. **“For full integration in club, all coaches need to have effective communication and be open to change”**



A Partnership Approach to Para Programming

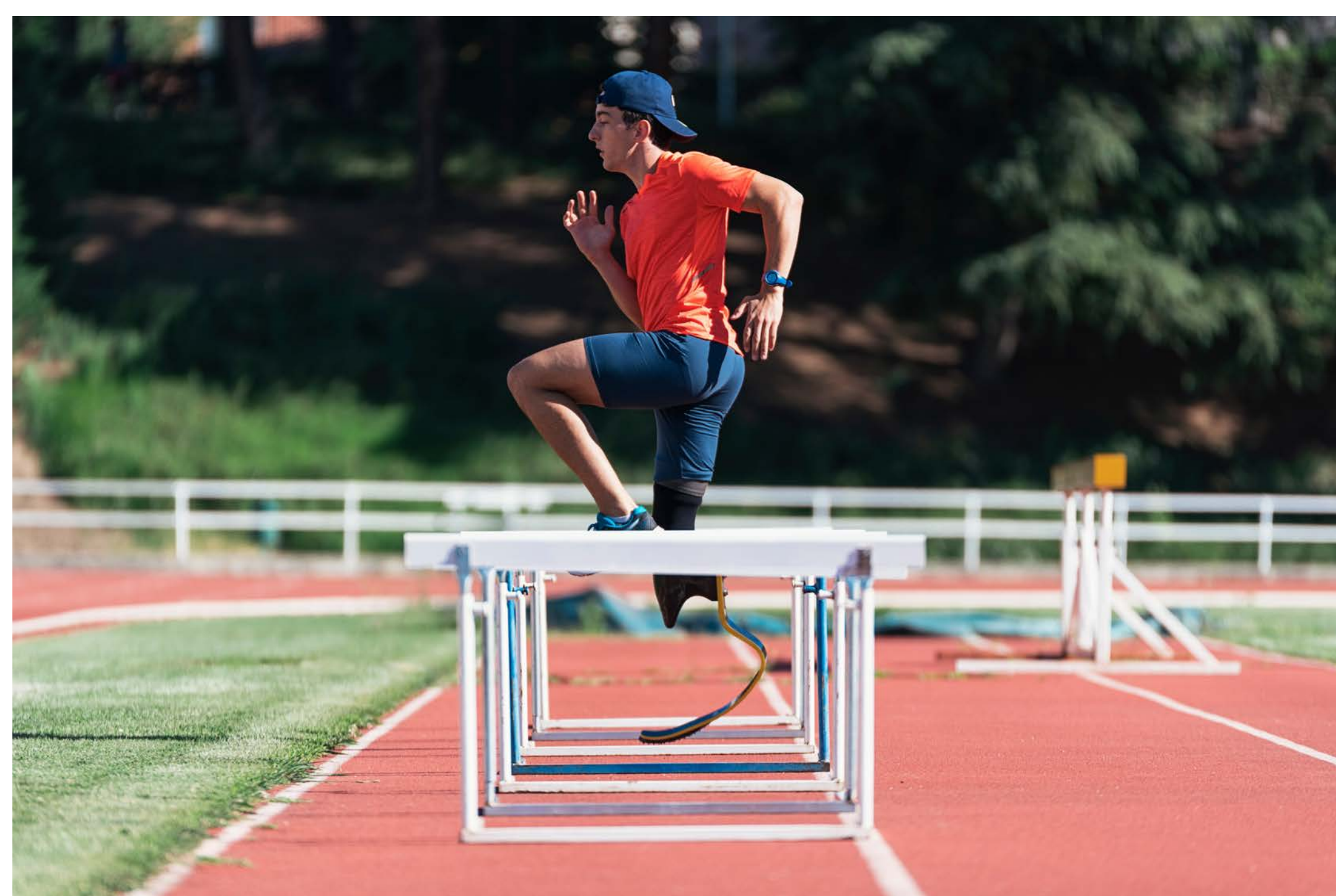
Steadward Bears Para Athletics Team (with the Green and Gold Track and Field Club)

Edmonton, Alberta @steadwardcentre



The Steadward Bears Para Athletics Team, based in Edmonton, trains as a segregated program with its own head coach. The group practices at the same location as the mainstream athletics program (Green and Gold Track and Field Club) except during different training times. The program is almost entirely segregated for logistical and safety concerns - some of the athletes require additional support and it can be difficult to safely integrate wheelchair racers with sprinters on the track. In addition, the para program only has a few high performance-minded athletes and tends to cater to developmental and recreational focused athletes.

The Green and Gold Athletics Club is an athletics club based at the University of Alberta, within the Golden Bears and Pandas Athletics and the Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation. The club provides intentional and purposely designed developmental and high performance opportunities for athletes, coaches, officials, and volunteers via training, competition, and educational platforms. The club has partnered with the Steadward Centre to offer para athletics as one of its core programs since 2016.



Who's in the program?

- 12 athletes including:
 - 4 wheelchair racers
 - 3 sprinters (2 x visual disability, 1 amputee)
 - 5 sprinters, throwers, and long distance runners with an intellectual disability

Who is supporting the training practices?

- 1 Head Para Athletics Coach
- 4-6 regular volunteers

What are the key community connections?

- Athletics Alberta
- Special Olympics Edmonton
 - Athlete recruiting and extra training
- Wheelchair Sports Alberta
 - Grants and equipment
- Capital City Track Club
 - Coaching and technical support

What is shared with mainstream group?

- Facility space and booking support

What is not shared with mainstream group?

- Athlete administration (e.g., competition registration)
- Coaching and training
- Coach education
- Event travel and organization

What's unique?

- The Steadward Centre partnered with an already established athletics club
- The partnership is critical for para athletes to access world-class track facilities during weekdays

About the coach!

- Is a former varsity track athlete who started as a volunteer with The Steadward Centre
- Coaches athletes in all para athletics events
- Has a background in adapted physical activity
- Open to connecting and answering any questions in para athletics' community of practice facebook group

Click [HERE](#) to access and join the group!

Athlete advice!

This athlete started swimming with The Steadward Centre, heard about track through swim coach, and has competed in para swimming, handcycling, wheelchair racing and is now combining all these as she trains for para triathlon events!

- Equipment is key
 - **“It is so aggravating to deal with equipment that doesn't fit or to wait for equipment. Ask to see if they have the right equipment for you.”**
- It can be overwhelming to figure out which track meets have para athletics events
 - **“Ask to make sure the meet is accessible and they can have the event you want”**
- It can also be hard to find people to compete against
 - Connect with people you know and encourage them to start racing too!

Coach's tips for mainstream athletics programs

1. **“Seek out someone who does para athletics coaching to connect with”**
2. **“Do your homework to find out who has what equipment ‘before’ you need it”**
3. Take ["Coaching Athletes with a Disability"](#) course for basic overview of disability groups
4. **“The program could not run without a number of volunteers”**
 - a. Best ratio of volunteers to athletes is **1:2 or 1:3** (depending on the needs of athletes)
5. Be open to learn from your athletes and change your typical practices
6. **“Don't be overly diagnosis focused...individuals with similar diagnosis on paper can have very different levels of ability and body mechanics”**
7. **“Integration is great, but for some athletes, segregation works best”**
 - a. Ideally have integrated and segregated training options for athletes to choose from
8. Be proactive - **“Sometimes you need to call ahead to educate race directors about what your athletes need to compete”**
9. Programs should find out what disability organizations (not only sport) are in the community and connect with them about their para program (see page 17 for a graphic of some organizations)



TABLE #1: The Para Ready Checklist

Please remember this checklist represents the "gold standard" of what a para ready program might look like. Programs are not expected to implement all the parameters below. Instead, use the information below to understand how you could begin moving towards improving your programs inclusion and accessibility for para athletes.

The first P is for **Proactive**, an overarching philosophy. Show a readiness to include all para athletes.

The P	Subcategory	Examples
Policy	Para Ready Inclusion Commitment Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have a para inclusion statement (i.e., a public record that expresses the program’s dedication to para inclusion) on your website saying that you are committed to providing programming or connecting in some wayYou must say ‘how’ you will do thisCan be short or long e.g., Joe’s Track Club is committed to providing athletics programming for all athletes with a disability in our community (short version)
Promotion	Website Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Check your website to make sure it meets accessibility requirements (i.e., all pictures have alt text,Click HERE to find out more about creating an accessible website
	Key Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Make sure it is clear on your website that you support a para athletics programBe clear about which disability groups your program is capable of coachingAt minimum, provide information about: available equipment; cost of program; practice times; coach qualifications; accessible facility features
	Social Media and Emails	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensure all social media posts are easy to understand for your target audienceClick HERE to find out more about inclusive communications and language
	Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use images that promote inclusion by showing all the diverse athletes involved in your program (click HERE for more information)Implement strategies to attract new athletes (e.g., try-it days, practice observations, meet the coach nights)
Programming	Access to Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Program has (or has access to) affordable (rental) equipment for all athletesAdministrators are knowledgeable of grants available for para athletesSpace is available for equipment storageEquipment is appropriately sized and up-to-date
	Ratio (coach/athlete)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ratio will vary depending on athlete make-upIn general, persons with intellectual disabilities, such as autism, require more support (approx. 1:1 or 1:2)Person(s) who compete in wheelchairs might not need full support (approx. 1:5)
	Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Opportunities for AWD to modify their practice to meet their unique needs
	Level of Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Program has different integration optionsAthletes have the choice to be fully integrated with able-bodied peers, partially integrated, or segregated
	Practice Co-design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Uses athlete-centred coaching to co-design practices with participantsCarefully consult with each athlete to accommodate skill levelTry and facilitate athlete decision making and engagement in the entire process.Click HERE to learn about the STEP model (Space, Task, Equipment, People) for practice adaptations
	Tracking Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Develops appropriate benchmarks to record athlete progressCoach provides athlete with continuous feedback on personal progress
People	Coach Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Coach(es) have taken coaching athletes with a disabilityCoach has opened up lines of communication with an experienced para athletics coach (see next section for coach details)
Place	Facility Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Smooth surfaces to easily access track and field structures are presentBuilding is equipped with ramps and/or elevatorsConsider making a video or taking pictures of your track to show accessible features (e.g., ramp, surfaces, equipment, washrooms, etc)Click HERE to find out more information on building accessibility
	Competition Track Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Research the accessibility of track facilities where your program competes
	Washrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">All washrooms and change rooms are wheelchair accessibleWide entrances and access features (Click HERE for more information on access to sporting facilities
	Public Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Bus stops are located close to track facility
	Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Accessible parking is available
	Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Every track is different!When travel to a competition prepare yourself and athletes for transportation barriers and accessibility of new venue
Pathway	Unique Pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensure athlete have support to pursue their individual pathway, whether it be development, competitive or a mix of both
	Classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Athletes get to practice with other athletes of similar abilities (when applicable)Classification opportunities are available (when applicable)Contact Athletics Alberta HERE to find classifiers in your area
	Board Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none">AWD have the opportunity to have a member as part of the board to ensure continued para inclusion in all facets of the program
	Support Team Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Support team has the opportunity to get involved with on committees (e.g., fundraising) or in another role (e.g., official, volunteer coach)
Price	Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Program is low costAdministrators are knowledgeable of grants available to AWDYou can do specific things to lower costs, for example:<ul style="list-style-type: none">If you need more coaches, get the senior athletes in your program (or the city) to volunteer and work with athletes who either need more support or who are learning introductory skillsCollaborate with the facility to get reduced rates
Partnership	Disability Sport Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Research and develop (in)formal partnerships with local and provincial disability sport organizationsThese organizations can help you connect with resources needed to feel confident when working with people with disabilities
	Other Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reach out to other programs in your local area to find out if they are offering para programming and to find out how your program can help

*This checklist has been partly adapted from the Canadian Disability Participation Project’s ‘Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, Youth and Adults with a Disability’
**Additional elements have been created using the references found in the references section above and through online practical resources

Alberta Para Athletics Network Map

Connect with the Alberta Para Athletics Community!

Mainstream Sports Organizations

- [ATHLETICS CANADA](#) (Western Canada Recruiter)
 - Program and coach contacts
 - National classification information
- [ATHLETICS ALBERTA](#)
 - Program and coach contacts
 - Event schedule
 - Classification information
 - Equipment (seated throws chair)
- [ALBERTA SCHOOLS' ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION](#)
 - School track team information
 - Equipment available (wheelchair racers and rollers)

Multi-disability Sport Organizations

- [PARALYMPIC SPORT ASSOCIATION](#)
 - Access to racing chairs
 - Volunteers
- [THE STEADWARD CENTRE FOR PERSONAL AND PHYSICAL ACHIEVEMENT](#)
 - Coaching support
 - Volunteers
 - Equipment
 - Coach education
 - Adapted physical activity support

Disability-specific Sport Organizations

- [ALBERTA SPORT AND RECREATION ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND](#)
 - Coaching and disability support
- [WHEELCHAIR SPORTS ALBERTA](#)
 - Grants (\$500 to \$2000)
 - Equipment (race chairs)
- [ALBERTA DEAF SPORTS ASSOCIATION](#)
 - Disability support
 - Equipment
- [ALBERTA CEREBRAL PALSY SPORT ASSOCIATION](#)
 - Disability support
- [SPECIAL OLYMPICS ALBERTA](#)
 - Programs for people with intellectual disabilities

Coach Contacts

- [STEADWARD CENTRE'S PARA ATHLETICS COACH](#)
 - Practice support
 - Local connection support
- [CALTAF'S PARA ATHLETICS COACH](#)
 - Practice support
 - Local connection support



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"Para Athletics Program Connect" Facebook Group Get in on the conversation!



"Para Athletics Program Connect" Facebook Group is a Facebook page, created by the Steadward Centre, that is meant to serve as a community of practice for all para athletics community discussion and questions.

Click the Facebook logo to join the group to learn about para athletics coaching, programs, events, and more about how to become para ready!



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tim Konoval (University of Alberta)
Maegan Ciesielski (The Steadward Centre)
Erin Jackson (The Steadward Centre)
Kim Cousins (Calgary Track and Field Athletic Association)
Jennifer Brown (Calgary Track and Field Athletic Association)
Nora Johnston (Centre for Active Living)
2001 Edmonton Athletics Legacy Foundation

CITATION

Konoval, T., Leo, J., & Ferguson, J. (2019). Becoming Para Ready: A Resource to Help Club and School Athletics Programs Support More Effective Integration. Edmonton, AB.