



WRITTEN BRIEF TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Safety in sport is inextricably tied to the decades-long fight for women to be valued, respected, and fairly treated in sport. Without gender equity, sport will not be a safe space for women and girls. And without safety, full inclusion for women and girls is impossible.

Maltreatment in sport is a systemic issue, which requires a systemic review and coordinated, multifaceted response. Prevention must be the priority. The goal should be transformation, culturally and structurally, at all levels of sport to create safer sport for everyone. To achieve this, we must seek to understand and address the root causes of the issue. Otherwise, maltreatment will persist.

Successful transformation requires a vision for a new destination, not just a rejection of the status quo. We join with others in envisioning a sport system that is values-based. We envision an inclusive sport system that welcomes and supports all Canadians equitably to reach their full potential through sport. Rather than avoiding harm, we propose that our focus should be on achieving full inclusion. This requires us to put the needs of participants at the heart of decision-making, to welcome critical conversations, and to challenge longstanding ways of doing things that we know are misaligned with a values-based sport system.

In such a system, the dignity, rights, and wellbeing of participants would be central to governance, programs, operations, investment, and evaluation. Among other things, this vision requires a rethinking of medals—or wins—as the primary performance indicator in the sport system. If we measure what matters in a values-based system, we will instead turn our attention to measuring participation rates, participant satisfaction, and retention of participants in sport across a diverse range of Canadians. This will have a direct impact on who and what we prioritize for the betterment of all in sport.

Achieving a values-based sport system that is safe, welcoming, and inclusive starts with understanding what is holding back positive culture and where the opportunities lie to do better. As such, we strongly support an independent judicial inquiry—or another appropriate mechanism—that will result in transformational change akin to the Dubin Inquiry. We believe that such an inquiry could and should:

- Generate a systemic, objective view into the current state of sport at all levels, from community sport to high performance.
- Identify the root causes contributing to maltreatment on a systemic basis.
- Be expansive in recommending avenues for achieving a new vision for sport. Within this, it would ideally reflect upon solutions already in play, such as the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner and identify ways to further optimize their impact.
- Create accountability to implement the recommendations.
- Galvanize the sport system around the vision and recommendations, generating the necessary buy-in across the system to participate actively in a coordinated plan.

The severity of this issue demands this level of rigour. It will inspire confidence in the solutions and help to restore faith in the sport system. Most importantly, it will help to create safer environments for all in sport.

Among the solutions identified through an inquiry, we would ideally like to see:

- A new set of metrics for measuring the health of the sport system (as discussed above)
- For these metrics to become the core criteria for government funding to sport, with mandatory minimum standards for accessing and maintaining government funding. As a starting point, these standards should reflect diversity, equity, inclusion, and safeguarding in governance and operations with emphasis on positive participant outcomes for health and well-being. This should be consistently applied to all sources of government funding for sport, including Own The Podium, events hosting, infrastructure, and more.
- Clear accountability frameworks with consequences for failing to uphold the standards.
- Government investment in the sport system to develop the capacity of organizations and leaders to meet these new standards on a sustainable basis. Targeted gender equity and safety in sport funding since 2018 is welcomed and essential. We would like to see this funding be offered on a permanent basis to enable the persistent, long-term effort required for cultural and systems change.
- Commitment from the federal government to support this transformation beyond national sport, with a particular focus on expanding its support for community sport.

We have an opportunity to create a sport system in which every Canadian will want to participate, and to prevent countless more Canadians—mostly young people—from being exposed to harm in the pursuit of sport. In doing so, we can set a new global standard for other countries to follow. If the scope of the solution matches the scope of the challenge, the legacy of this moment could be profound.

Summary of recommendations:

1. Initiate an independent judicial inquiry into maltreatment in sport.
2. Assert values as the defining framework for sport in Canada. Reflect this through values-based metrics and standards for evaluating sport and for determining eligibility for any form of public funding.
3. Establish clear accountability mechanisms with consequences for failure to meet expectations.
4. Establish long-term sources of funding to support systems change work over a sustained basis.
5. Commit federal government support for community sport on an ongoing basis.

About Canadian Women & Sport

Canadian Women & Sport is a national non-profit and the leading voice and authority on women and sport in Canada. We aspire to achieve equity for women in society through the power of sport. To accomplish this, we are dedicated to creating an equitable and inclusive Canadian sport and physical activity system that empowers girls and women – as active participants and leaders – within and through sport. With a focus on systemic change, we partner with governments, organizations and leaders to challenge the status quo and to advance solutions that result in measurable change.

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