

Minister  
of Sport and Physical Activity



Ministre  
des Sports et de l'Activité physique

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0M5

October 16, 2023

Karen Vecchio, M.P.  
Chair  
Standing Committee on the Status of Women  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Karen Vecchio:

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons and on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am pleased to provide you with the Government Response to the Seventh Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women entitled: *Time to Listen to Survivors: Taking Actions Towards Creating a Safe Sport Environment for all Athletes in Canada*.

The Government acknowledges with gratitude the care and attention that Committee members gave to the diverse and complex issues brought forward by the witnesses who appeared before the Committee. These witnesses expressed the importance of safe sport for all athletes and participants in Canada, and the need for systemic reform. I would like to acknowledge the courage of the survivors who came forward and to assure them that the health and well-being of all sport participants is important to me and is a priority for the Government of Canada.

My initial reaction, when I was appointed as Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, was to acknowledge that trust in our sport system has suffered in recent years and that we must work to restore this trust. Canadians deserve a sport system that reflects and celebrates our Canadian values of equality, fairness, and inclusion and I strongly believe that a system based on a foundation of human rights, including the right to live free from violence and discrimination, and the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, will result in a safer and more responsible sport system.

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The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' statement (July 6, 2023) regarding sport as a driver of inclusion, and a vector for promoting human rights in the world, further strengthened my belief. This statement spoke to me as it asserts that sport is anchored in human rights values and is a conduit for societal change through empowerment and inclusion. By supporting sport environments that are fully inclusive, we, as a government, will strive to meet the needs of all individuals who wish to participate in sport and physical activity.

The Government recognizes the value of sport and the need for all sport activities to be free from maltreatment which may include grooming, neglect, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, harassment, and discrimination. However, maltreatment does exist in the Canadian sport system, and in some contexts has been normalized. Furthermore, women and girls, racialized persons, persons with a disability, and 2SLGBTQI+ persons are more at risk of maltreatment. As the single largest investor in Canada's sport system, the Government has committed to ensuring that organizations in receipt of federal funding help drive the change towards a more inclusive and welcoming Canadian sport sector. Budgets 2018, 2019, 2022, and 2023 have invested in safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments for all sport participants.

The Government plays a leadership role by coordinating a pan-Canadian approach to sport development through federal, provincial and territorial collaboration; policy and research to inform and guide sport stakeholders; and engagement and strategic positioning within the sport community. Provincial and territorial governments work with their provincial, territorial, and local sport organizations and clubs to support policy and program development that directly affect the athlete experience at the local level. Private and professional areas of the sport sector primarily support athletes through sponsorships and by providing additional competition outlets. To be effective, it is critical that all actors in the sport sector work together to support the well-being of sport participants and ensure a healthy sport sector.

The Government intends to continue to build upon the strong foundation set by my predecessor, the Honourable Pascale St-Onge and her announced sport reform measures. These sport reform measures are consistent with the priorities identified in the report. The Government Response is grouped in three thematic areas, namely:

1. Safe Sport;
2. Gender Equity and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; and
3. Partnerships and Collaborations.

## **Theme 1: Safe Sport (Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14, 19, 20)**

The Committee's safe sport recommendations focus on the development and implementation of mechanisms and processes to protect sport participants' rights and contribute to a safe environment that is free from maltreatment. The recommendations also mention using federal funding as a lever to drive positive change and centering any new sport policies around the safety and well-being of participants.

The Government has heard the calls for an independent national inquiry into maltreatment in sport in Canada. The Government agrees that a systemic reform is needed to ensure that sport is safe, and that leaders and organizations are held accountable. While we have begun to put in place a safe sport framework in this country, broad systemic reform is needed to ensure sport governance and operations are safe, welcoming, and accountable. More work is required to protect our children and ensure the well-being of all sport participants, which is why I am making safe sport my top priority. I am currently exploring the best way to achieve this much needed culture change and system reform in a way that is trauma-informed, supportive of survivors, and draws on the relevant expertise. Let me assure Committee members, as I have said publicly, that there will be a formal process that will acknowledge and address the safe sport crisis in our country: one that is trauma-informed, supports survivors and focusses on broad system reform.

The Government supports the Committee's recommendation to make the core objectives of any new Canadian Sport Policy centered on the safety and well-being of sport participants as well as equity, diversity, and inclusion in sports. The Canadian Sport Policy is a federal, provincial and territorial policy designed to communicate a shared vision, values and objectives for sport in Canada. It facilitates alignment between governments and stakeholders who contribute to the policy goals in a manner consistent with their core mandate and jurisdictions. The Government and partners are still working on the next Canadian Sport Policy. Extensive consultations and a comprehensive "What We Heard Report" will inform the shared values of the next Policy. It is expected that values of "Safe", "Welcoming", and "Healthy" sport, which directly address the Committee's concerns for sport participants' safety and well-being, will be included. Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation are committed to endorsing the next Canadian Sport Policy and anticipate that the proposed values will form the foundation for action plans, strategies, and policies for all stakeholders within the Canadian sport system for the next ten years. These values will benefit all who participate in sport and physical activities, including those who belong to equity-deserving groups.

Significant investments have been made by the Government of Canada to help ensure safe and healthy sport environments. Federal funding has been provided to the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada to support, among other activities, the establishment and delivery of the Abuse-Free Sport program. This new program serves as the independent system for addressing and preventing maltreatment in sport. The Abuse-Free Sport program includes:

- The Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner that works primarily with federally funded sport organizations to prevent and address alleged violations of the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport;
- The Canadian Sport Helpline;
- A legal aid program;
- Mental health services;
- A research grant program; and
- A training accreditation program.

As of July 1, 2023, the Government has made it mandatory for all federally funded sport organizations (National Sport Organizations, Multisport Service Organizations and the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Sport Institute Network) to be Abuse-Free Sport program Signatories to receive federal funding.

Using its financial levers, the Government will be setting guidelines and expectations for federally funded sport organizations, including escalating actions that would be proportionate to the severity of the non-compliance with the Contribution Agreement of the funding recipient. At Sport Canada, a Compliance and Accountability Division has been created to develop and implement a new accountability framework for sport organizations at the national level. This new approach includes dedicated resources to enhance monitoring of National Sport Organizations' performance, including in the areas of governance and safe sport, by requiring tailored monitoring reports through Contribution Agreements. These reports will include, among other elements, the results of the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner Sport Environment Assessments, which serve a dual function in both addressing and preventing maltreatment and other behaviour prohibited in the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport. As announced by the former Minister of Sport, National Sport Organizations must have action plans on governance and safe sport in place by April 2024 to be eligible for Sport Canada funding. The Compliance and Accountability Division will support the organizations in the development of those action plans and will also monitor their implementation in collaboration with them.

The Government of Canada continues to support AthletesCAN as the collective voice of national team athletes. AthletesCAN supports an athlete centered sport system by developing athlete leaders who influence sport policy and inspire a strong sport culture. The Sport Canada Athlete Advisory Committee, supported by Sport Canada will be established to increase the representation of athletes in the sport system and to provide advice and guidance to the Government. The creation of the Advisory Committee demonstrates a commitment to amplify athletes' voices and will inform Sport Canada's policies and programs, including its safe sport initiatives, moving forward.

In May 2023, my predecessor announced that non-disclosure agreements or non-disparaging clauses should never be used to prevent athletes and other sport participants from disclosing maltreatment they have experienced or witnessed. National Sport Organizations must now integrate language in their Athlete Agreements to clarify that athletes' rights under the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport cannot be restricted. Sport Canada, through funding agreements with National Sport Organizations, will prohibit any contracts, policies, procedures, or actions from restricting participants' rights under the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport.

These initiatives demonstrate the Government's ongoing commitment to supporting athletes at all levels throughout the Canadian sport sector, particularly when it comes to fostering a safe and inclusive sport environment.

The Government of Canada acknowledges the two safe sport recommendations that would require legislative changes as well as amendments to the *Physical Activity and Sport Act* to expand the powers and protections currently afforded to the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner.

The Government has accelerated its safe sport agenda and prioritized safe sport through funding initiatives over a number of years. I believe that we are on the right track in terms of supporting a safe sport environment, and fostering a Canadian sport sector that is free from all forms of maltreatment and we will continue to work towards this goal.

**Theme 2: Gender Equity and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (Recommendations 9, 12, 24)**

The Committee made three recommendations that could be grouped under a theme of Gender Equity and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion which the Government supports. These recommendations state that the Government should continue to invest in, develop, and support initiatives that promote gender equity, diversity and inclusion. Sport Canada will continue to fund these activities to ensure that Canadian sport better reflects Canadian society by:

- Supporting more women in coaching, officiating and leadership positions;
- Providing more opportunities for girls and women to participate in sport; and
- Enhancing the data collection and research necessary for decision-making.

The Government recognizes that women and girls are more likely to suffer from maltreatment in sport. The Government further recognizes that those with intersecting identity factors (i.e. racialized persons, Indigenous people, 2SLGBTQI+ communities, persons with a disability) may be at further risk. The Government thanks the Committee for ensuring that the needs and realities of equity-deserving groups are embedded in the recommendations. Although considerations surrounding equity-deserving groups pervade all Sport Canada initiatives, the following examples demonstrate this commitment.

Sport organizations must adopt the foundational governance principles in the Canadian Sport Governance Code by April 2025. These principles include: target requirements for diversity on boards of directors, the development of a policy for diversity at the board level, and the publication of an annual report on the diversity at the board level. Sport Canada's Compliance and Accountability Division will monitor the performance of National Sport Organizations in implementing this requirement as part of their action plans and will work with experts to define the right markers and indicators to monitor their performance in governance.

With funding in Budget 2018 that was renewed in 2022, Sport Canada has supported activities for equity-deserving groups, including women and girls. These activities contribute to, among other things, improving research and data to support evidence-based decision making and supporting sport organizations to build gender equity, diversity and inclusion capacity. Sport Canada will also fund eligible projects that seek to recruit, train, and develop individuals in equity-deserving populations which will lead to increased participation and retention of individuals in those communities, and also prepare them to take on leadership roles within the sport system.

The Government recognizes that investing in activities that will reduce barriers to women and girls' participation in sport is critical. The measures described above demonstrate the Government's commitment to building gender equity capacity within federally funded sport organizations and improving the availability of research and data to support evidence-based decision-making.

**Theme 3: Collaboration and Partnerships (Recommendations 4, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23)**

The report presents diverse recommendations that include mechanisms for supporting safe sport and activities to improve gender equity, and equity, diversity and inclusion at other levels of government, supporting the athlete voice at the federal level, and recognizing the importance of visibility of athletes who belong to equity-deserving communities. The sport system in Canada is complex, with a diverse group of governments and organizations feeding into its ecosystem. The Government recognizes the importance of these recommendations and agrees that collaborative relationships and partnerships must be developed, maintained, and/or nurtured to respond effectively to the recommendations under this theme.

The Government recognizes that any activity related to athletes is more meaningful and relevant when the athlete voice is at the table. In May 2023, the former Minister of Sport announced several measures to ensure that athletes are an integral part of decision-making structures:

- National Sport Organizations will be required to have athlete representation on their board of directors, which is a requirement under the Canadian Sport Governance Code;
- Sport Canada will dedicate an additional \$300,000 in funding for AthletesCAN to strengthen its capacity as athlete leaders, to collaborate across the sport system, and to support governance training opportunities; and,
- The establishment of a Sport Canada Athlete Advisory Committee.

Funding will also be used to support activities that expand efforts to include other demographic groups that are underrepresented in sport. Supporting partnerships through this funding will enhance the understanding of gender equity and equity, diversity and inclusion issues in sport and help advance future sport policy and program development.

In August 2022, Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers directed officials to:

- Work towards establishing appropriate policy and financial approvals to facilitate a mandatory third-party independent mechanism (Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada or another entity) in each jurisdiction, including processes for the reporting and the management of maltreatment allegations for all funded sport organizations in 2023.
- Work in collaboration with the sport sector and athletes to implement, where appropriate, training and education on anti-harassment and abuse specifically for athletes, including peer-to-peer relationships.

In February 2023, Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers built upon this foundation by agreeing to work together to have all athletes and participants in Canada protected by an independent third-party mechanism and identified a target date to achieve this by the end of 2023. Provinces and Territories can access the services of the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner through the Abuse-Free Sport program or establish their own process.

Given the critical nature of addressing maltreatment in sport at this time, the conversations at the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Sport Ministers table will continue, with the goal of working collaboratively to collectively address maltreatment in sport. This includes the establishment of a Federal-Provincial/Territorial Sport Committee working group on maltreatment to discuss and examine common issues.

## **Conclusion**

The Government recognizes the urgency of the situation, and that action is needed across Canada to ensure a safe and inclusive sport environment for athletes to thrive at all levels of participation and performance. The Government will continue working on and identifying activities and initiatives to prevent and mitigate maltreatment in the Canadian sport sector. I will lend my full support as we work towards a safer Canadian sport sector for all participants.



The Government continues to stand by the sport sector through ongoing commitments delivered through the Department of Canadian Heritage's Sport Canada Branch, as well as through engagement with other governments and organizations to hear and understand the concerns of sport stakeholders on this important issue. Sport and physical activity are integral to the physical and mental health of Canadians, and the Government remains committed to supporting Canadians' participation in sport and physical activity, as well as removing barriers that may be preventing Canadians from being active.

The Government of Canada remains steadfastly committed to advancing the principles of Safe Sport and Gender Equity and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, which will protect all athletes from maltreatment at all levels within the sport system in Canada.

On behalf of the Government, I would like to thank the Committee for its work on behalf of Canada's athletes and I remain available should the Committee wish to discuss further.

Please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carla Qualtrough', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

The Honourable Carla Qualtrough, P.C., M.P.