

**CANADIAN DEAF SPORTS
ASSOCIATION**



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DES SOURDS DU CANADA**

Gender Equity Study in Deaf Sport in Canada

Presentation of the Study to Improve the
Inclusion of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Women in Sport
Canadian Deaf Women's Conference

Winnipeg, Manitoba - July 2026

1. Study Objectives

- Update the 2017–2021 Gender Equity Study.
- Collect and analyze gender equity data for the 2022–2026 period.
- Conduct a study, based on the data collected, on the inclusion of Deaf and hard of hearing women in sport.
- Develop and implement recommendations to improve the inclusion of Deaf and hard of hearing women in sport.

2. Speaker Presentations

Greta Davey – Biography

- Volleyball athlete with more than 10 years of competitive experience.
- Represented Canada at the 2025 Summer Deaflympics in Japan as a member of the national volleyball team.
- Board member and Secretary of the Ontario Deaf Sports Association for more than three years.
- Strong advocate for inclusion, teamwork, and excellence in sport.
- Passionate about Deaf sport and the development of athletes within the Deaf community.
- Enjoys following women's hockey and celebrating the achievements of female athletes.

Nyla Kurylowich – Biography

- Fun fact: My first sport was figure skating at the age of seven. I have loved sports ever since.
- Served on the Board of Directors of the Alberta Deaf Sports Association from 2011 to 2016.
- Women's Athlete Representative for the Canadian Deaf Sports Association from 2016 to 2020.
- Member of the Canadian Deaf Sports Association Board of Directors since 2020.
- Competed in three World Deaf Curling Championships (2009, 2013, and 2017).
- Competed in curling at the 2019 Winter Deaflympics in Italy.
- Former curler who now dedicates her time to leadership and supporting Deaf and hard of hearing female athletes.
- Enjoys hiking and skiing.

3. Review of the 2017–2021 Gender Equity Data Analysis

[YouTube Video](#)

Presented in 2021 by Nyla Kurylowich
former Deaflympian curler

Following the completion of the previous study, an action plan was developed, resulting in several positive improvements, including:

- Adoption of a Gender Equity Policy;
- Organization of a Women's Sport Leadership Congress in Banff, Alberta;
- Increased participation of Deaf and hard of hearing women on Boards of Directors and within Team Canada mission staff.

4. Study Methodology

The study included three main components:

1. Collection of participation data for the 2022–2026 period.
2. Interviews with representatives of Provincial Deaf Sports Associations.
3. A questionnaire completed by female athletes who represented Team Canada.

5. Study Results

Female Participation (2022–2026)

a. Data Source

CDSA Annual Reports: 2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–24, 2024–25 & 2025–26

b. Gender Equity Target

The Canadian Deaf Sports Association (CDSA) aims for **40% to 60% representation for each gender.**

	Fiscal Year ⁽¹⁾			
	2016-17 to 2020-21	2021-22 to 2025-26	2016-21 to 2021-26 for each 5-year period comparative	
National Teams ⁽²⁾ :	29%	28%	-1%	 stable
National Clinics ⁽³⁾ :	27%	36%	9%	 increase
National Deaf Championships ⁽⁴⁾ :	26%	17%	-9%	 decrease
National Staff Mission ⁽⁵⁾ :	17%	42% ⁽⁶⁾	25%	 increase
CDSA Board of Directors ⁽⁵⁾ :	43%	50% ⁽⁶⁾	7%	 increase

Legend

- note 1: Fiscal Year beginning April 1 and ending March 31
- note 2: Team Canada at international competitions (Deaflympics, World Championships, or Pan American Games)
- note 3: National Try-Out, National Training Camps & Participation in national / provincial / regional competition (including hearing)
- note 4: Canada Deaf Games & Canadian Deaf Sport Championships (golf, curling)
- note 5: As of March 31, 2021 and As of March 31, 2026 (Active Sports at CDSA)
- note 6: Gender equity target (between 40% and 60%)

c. Key Findings

The analysis identified several important trends:

- The number of women representing Team Canada at international competitions has **not increased significantly**.
- Participation in national clinics increased by **9%**, but still remains below the gender equity target.
- Participation in national competitions has experienced a **significant and concerning decline**.
- Women's representation in leadership positions—including the Board of Directors, team managers, and coaches—has improved and now meets the organization's gender equity objectives.

d. Conclusion

The study concludes that CDSA should:

- Intensify efforts to recruit and retain more female athletes.
- Investigate the causes behind the significant decline in participation at national competitions, particularly the **Canada Deaf Games**, in collaboration with Provincial Deaf Sports Associations.

6. Interviews with Representatives of Provincial Deaf Sports Associations (PDSAs)

The Canadian Deaf Sports Association (CDSA) invited its affiliated Provincial Deaf Sports Associations to participate in Zoom interviews held on June 9 and 11, 2026. Four of the six associations (66.7%) accepted the invitation.

Seven interview questions were organized around four themes:

- A. Current participation
- B. PDSA programs and initiatives
- C. Gender equity goals (40%–60% female participation)
- D. Recommendations

The questions are included in Appendix 1

Summary of Key Findings

A. Current Participation

1. Limited Development of the Next Generation

The lack of structured sports programs in schools for Deaf students and in mainstream schools significantly limits the development of young female athletes, resulting in a very small recruitment pool.

2. Significant Barriers to Participation

Family responsibilities, financial constraints, transportation challenges, and childcare responsibilities greatly reduce women's ability to participate in sports, particularly over the long term.

3. Lack of Visibility and Information

Many athletes and their families are not sufficiently informed about available programs, financial assistance, and sporting opportunities, contributing to lower participation.

B. PDSA Programs and Initiatives

1. Financial Support is Essential

Free or reduced registration fees are considered critical to increasing women's participation and reducing economic barriers.

2. Strong Interest in Women-Only Programs

Participants expressed a preference for women-only sporting environments, which they view as more welcoming, motivating, and supportive of women's engagement.

3. Greater Visibility and Recruitment

Promoting female athletes through schools, social media, and community activities was identified as one of the most effective ways to attract and inspire future participants.

C. Gender Equity Goals (40%–60%)

1. A Challenging Short-Term Goal

Many participants believe that achieving 40%–60% female participation is ambitious and may not be realistic without adopting a gradual approach with intermediate targets.

2. Limited Recruitment and Aging Athlete Population

The small number of young female athletes, combined with the aging of current participants, makes achieving gender parity particularly difficult.

3. Need for Greater National Collaboration

Participants emphasized the importance of stronger collaboration between the PDSAs and CDSA, including knowledge-sharing forums, increased financial support, and expanded women's leadership initiatives.

D. Recommendations

Participants proposed several priorities:

1. National Promotion of Women's Deaf Sport

CDSA and the Provincial Deaf Sports Associations should work together to develop promotional materials—including brochures and videos—to increase awareness of women's Deaf sport across Canada, particularly in schools for Deaf students, mainstream schools, and the broader community.

2. Increase the Visibility of Female Athletes

Produce and share more photos, videos, and stories highlighting Deaf and hard of hearing female athletes in order to inspire future generations.

3. Increase Financial Support

Provide greater funding and reduce participation costs (registration fees, competitions, and events) to remove financial barriers.

4. Create Women-Focused Events and Programs

Develop women-only competitions, leadership programs, and dedicated funding streams to support the growth of women's sport.

5. Strengthen Governance and Strategic Collaboration

Increase women's participation in sport governance through:

- quarterly meetings led by Deaf women;
- dedicated leadership positions focused on increasing female participation for the **2028 and 2030 Canada Deaf Games**;
- partnerships with Deaf women's conferences and organizations.

E. Conclusion

The interviews demonstrate that women's participation in Deaf sport in Canada continues to face significant structural barriers. However, clear opportunities for improvement exist through:

- stronger athlete development pathways;
- reduced financial barriers;
- increased visibility;
- enhanced national collaboration.

A progressive, collaborative, and well-structured approach will be essential to achieving gender equity and ensuring the long-term growth of women's Deaf sport in Canada

7. Survey of Female Athletes Who Represented Team Canada

During the five-year period ending in 2026, **43 female athletes** represented Team Canada at various international competitions.

In June 2026, these athletes were invited to complete a questionnaire. **Seven athletes (16.3%)** responded to the survey, which included the following questions:

1. What sport did you participate in, and for how long?
2. What were the main challenges or obstacles that led you to stop participating in your sport?
3. How did your experiences with coaches, teammates, or sport organizations influence your decision to continue or leave the sport?
4. Were there enough opportunities, support systems, or programs available for Deaf women in sport? Why or why not?
5. What changes or improvements would encourage Deaf women to remain involved in sport longer?

Summary Report

Experiences of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Female Athletes in Canada

1. Insufficient Athlete Development and Lack of a Structured Pathway

Athletes reported a significant lack of structured development opportunities for young Deaf and hard of hearing female athletes.

Many highlighted the absence of transition programs between local, school, and national levels. The limited athlete pool—particularly among young women—creates a substantial gap in skill development and makes it difficult to build competitive teams.

2. Financial Barriers and Lack of Sustainable Support

Funding was identified as one of the most significant challenges.

Many athletes are required to cover the costs of:

- training,
- competitions,
- travel,
- coaching,
- equipment.

Because organizations often cannot provide stable, predictable financial support, athletes frequently rely on personal funds or fundraising efforts, making long-term participation difficult.

3. Communication, Organization, and Planning Challenges

Several athletes described inconsistent communication from sport organizations.

Common concerns included:

- last-minute changes,
- delayed information,
- lack of long-term planning for competitions and budgets,
- limited transparency in organizational decision-making.

These issues create uncertainty and make participation and sponsorship efforts more difficult.

4. Limited Accessibility, Inclusion, and Communication

Athletes reported very different experiences depending on the sporting environment.

In mainstream sport, they encountered communication barriers, limited inclusion, and insufficient accommodations. Within Deaf sport, some athletes also noted:

- a shortage of appropriate programs,
- limited ongoing support between competitions,
- few local training opportunities.

Access to sign language, interpretation services, and accessible communication remains a critical issue.

5. Lack of Visibility, Recognition, and Female Role Models

Participants emphasized that Deaf women receive very little recognition in sport. Individual achievements are rarely promoted, reducing their impact as role models for younger generations.

Greater promotion of female athletes—including sharing their performances and personal stories—was identified as essential for inspiring future participation.

6. Importance of Human Support, Mentorship, and Team Culture

Despite the challenges, athletes consistently highlighted the positive influence of:

- coaches,
- teammates,
- inclusive sport communities.

Strong social support, positive team relationships, and a sense of belonging were viewed as key factors in retaining women in sport. Participants recommended expanding:

- mentorship programs,
- female role models,
- national support networks.

7. Need for Systemic Improvements

Participants recommended significant structural improvements, including:

- more stable and predictable funding;
- better long-term event planning;
- dedicated women's sport programs;
- improved logistical support;
- clearly defined athlete development pathways;

- stronger organizational governance to build trust and ensure the long-term sustainability of women's Deaf sport in Canada.

Conclusion

The athletes' experiences demonstrate that participation by Deaf and hard of hearing women in sport in Canada continues to be shaped by systemic challenges, including:

- insufficient funding;
- limited athlete development pathways;
- communication barriers;
- low visibility.

At the same time, the athletes identified clear solutions:

- improved planning;
- increased financial support;
- stronger athlete development;
- greater inclusion;
- enhanced recognition of female role models.

A coordinated and sustainable approach will be essential to improve both the retention and participation of women in Deaf sport across Canada.

8. Closing Remarks

We sincerely thank everyone who contributed to this study, especially Nyla Kurylowich and Greta Davey for developing the interview questions and presenting the study at the conference in Winnipeg.

We also extend our appreciation to Alain Turpin, Executive Director of the Canadian Deaf Sports Association (CDSA), for coordinating and writing this study.

Our heartfelt thanks also go to the international-level female athletes and the Provincial Deaf Sports Associations for sharing their experiences, concerns, and recommendations for the future.

Finally, this study would not have been possible without the financial support of the **Government of Canada**, through **Sport Canada**.

Funded by the Government of Canada



Appendix 1

Interviews with Provincial Deaf Sports Associations - PDSAs

Purpose of the Interview

We observed a very low participation rate among Provincial Deaf Sports Associations (PDSAs) in the **Canada Deaf Games**.

The purpose of these interviews was to engage with each PDSA to better understand:

- the activities and programs offered at the provincial level;
- existing gaps and challenges;
- recommendations for future improvements.

The information gathered will help develop strategies to improve gender equity at future editions of the Canada Deaf Games.

Interview Methodology

The interviews were conducted using an open-ended format and included **four categories**, for a total of **seven questions**.

Interview Questions

A. Current Participation

1. In your opinion, what are the main factors explaining the current level of women's participation in the **Canada Deaf Games**?
2. What barriers prevent Deaf or hard of hearing women from participating in your PDSA's sport activities?

Possible barriers include:

- Financial costs
- Lack of time
- Family responsibilities
- Transportation
- Limited sport opportunities
- Lack of interest
- Other

B. PDSA Programs and Initiatives

3. Which initiatives have been most effective in recruiting or retaining female participants?
4. What programs or activities would you like to implement to increase women's participation?

C. Gender Equity Goals (40%–60% Female Participation)

5. What are the main challenges that could prevent your PDSA from achieving 40%–60% female participation at the 2028 and 2030 Canada Deaf Games?
6. What types of support from CDSA would be necessary to achieve this gender equity goal?

D. Recommendations

7. If you could recommend three priority actions for CDSA to increase women's participation in the Canada Deaf Games, what would they be?