2026

ACCESS, PARTICIPATION, AND OPPORTUNITY

A National Status Report on Physical Activity and Sport for Persons with Disabilities

Acknowledgements

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Canada

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Established in 1980, the **Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute** (CFLRI) is a long-standing, national research organization. CFLRI is the premier organization in Canada uniquely focused on surveillance and monitoring of physical activity, sport and recreation. As such, the CFLRI provides credible data and collaborates with policy- and decision-makers, practitioners and researchers to translate and exchange knowledge that informs and affects evidence-based policy and practice across Canada and mobilizes and actions it into practice.

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Established in 1989, **Active Abilities Canada** (formerly the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability) supports communities and organizations to ensure that persons with disabilities have access and opportunity to meaningful participation in physical activity, recreation and community sport. We do this by facilitating connections between organization, community and government leaders; ensuring research and knowledge translate into action; and advocating for changes to reduce barriers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Roughly one in four Canadians aged 15 or older has at least one disability, including those commonly reported related to pain, flexibility, mobility and mental health.[1] These rates are higher for women and for older adults aged 65 and above.[1] For persons with disabilities, being active can support better physical health, improve mood and mental well-being, build social connections, lower the risk of other long-term health problems, and enhance overall quality of life.[2,3]

For a long time, there has been very little information about how people with disabilities in Canada take part in physical activity and sport. This report starts to close that information gap by using two national studies (see Appendix A) to understand self-reported and current participation levels. It looks at how much time people who responded to the surveys spend in lighter and moderate activities, as well as activities that build strength and improve balance.

- Persons with disabilities were less likely to participate in sport and certain physical activities than people without disabilities, even though being active can greatly support their health, inclusion, and quality of life.
- Adults who have a disability reported doing fewer minutes of moderate or higher-intensity activities each week.
- They also said they did less strength training, but about the same amount of balance-building and light-intensity activities as adults without disabilities.
- Activity levels were not the same for everyone; they changed depending on gender, age, and income.
- Adults who did not have trouble walking or climbing stairs reported more minutes in moderate or higher-intensity and strength-training activities. Those without visual, hearing, walking/climbing, or self-care challenges reported more time in light-intensity activities. Adults with major communication challenges reported more time in moderate-intensity and balance-enhancing activities.

The report also looked closely at who participates in sport and how they take part. In this report, "sport" means physical activities that involve competition, following rules, and building specific skills.

- More than one in four adults said they participated in sport at least once during the previous year. Among them, adults who identified as having a disability were less likely to participate (21%) than adults who did not report a disability (30%).
- Men were more likely than women to take part in sport, and younger adults were more likely to participate than older adults. These patterns were seen both among adults without disabilities and among adults who reported a disability.
- Sport participation was slightly higher among those who had major difficulties with vision, hearing, cognitive, self-care, and communication, and participation was lower for those reporting major difficulties with walking or climbing stairs.

MORE THAN ONE IN FOUR ADULTS SAID THEY PARTICIPATED IN SPORT AT LEAST ONCE DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

To better understand how people fit sport into their lives, the report also examined how many months per year people took part in sport and how many times a week they participated.

- Adults with a disability were more likely to participate in sport for fewer than six months per year.
- However, among those who did participate, the number of times per week did not differ significantly between adults with and without disabilities.

The report then turned to the style of sport participation, including whether it happened in structured settings, whether people trained, and whether they used a coach or competed.

- When comparing people who mainly participated in organized sport, mainly took part in informal sport, or did both, there were no significant differences between adults with and without disabilities.
- Among those who played sport, adults with a disability were more likely than those without a disability to say they competed, trained regularly, and used a coach.

The report also examined how people perceived sport, physical activity, and recreation in their communities.

- Adults with disabilities were more likely to perceive that these opportunities were hard to afford or access, less available or convenient, and less welcoming, inclusive, fair, respectful or ethical, and safe.
- Adults without disabilities were more likely to give positive ratings about sport, physical activity, and recreation in their communities.

This report paints a picture of how people are taking part in sport, physical activity, and recreation in Canada, and how they feel about the opportunities available to them. It gives the sector stronger evidence to design programs and services that are more accessible, more inclusive, and that truly support meaningful, high–quality participation for people with disabilities. The results make it clear that people with disabilities often participate less, and tend to have less positive experiences and perceptions, than people without disabilities. Closing these gaps means paying attention to their specific needs and viewing sport, physical activity, and recreation through an equity, inclusion, and human rights lens in policy and planning. With this clearer view of participation among people who identify as having a disability, it becomes easier to track progress and to identify where changes are needed so that sport, physical activity, and recreation can benefit everyone in Canada.

This is the first in a series of reports. Upcoming reports will look in more depth at physical and social environments, health, and economic issues, and will provide a detailed set of recommendations for action that draw on the full series. To follow the series and access new releases, visit the **CFLRI** or **Active Abilities Canada** websites, or subscribe to their newsletters.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2022, just over one in four Canadians aged 15 and older—27%, or about 8 million people—reported having at least one disability. This is five percentage points higher than in 2017, mainly because Canada's population is aging and more youth and working–age adults are reporting mental health–related disabilities. Among people with a disability, pain–related disability is most common (62%), followed by disabilities related to flexibility (40%), mobility (39%), and mental health (39%). Disability is more common among women (30%) than men (24%), and women (43%) are somewhat more likely than men (39%) to report more severe disabilities. One in five youth aged 15 to 24 years has a disability, up seven percentage points since 2017, and the rate rises to 40% among seniors aged 65 and older.[1]

There is strong agreement that sport, physical activity, and recreation (SPAR) can play a powerful role in the lives of people with disabilities. Being active and engaged in SPAR is linked to better physical health, improved mental well–being, stronger social connections, lower risk of additional chronic conditions, and a better overall quality of life. Yet people with disabilities are still less likely to take part in SPAR than people without disabilities. Many face barriers, such as fewer suitable programs, higher costs, limited or unreliable transportation, and inaccessible buildings and outdoor spaces. In fact, nearly three–quarters of Canadians with a disability report encountering at least one accessibility barrier in a year, often related to public spaces and basic features like entrances, exits, and sidewalks.[1]

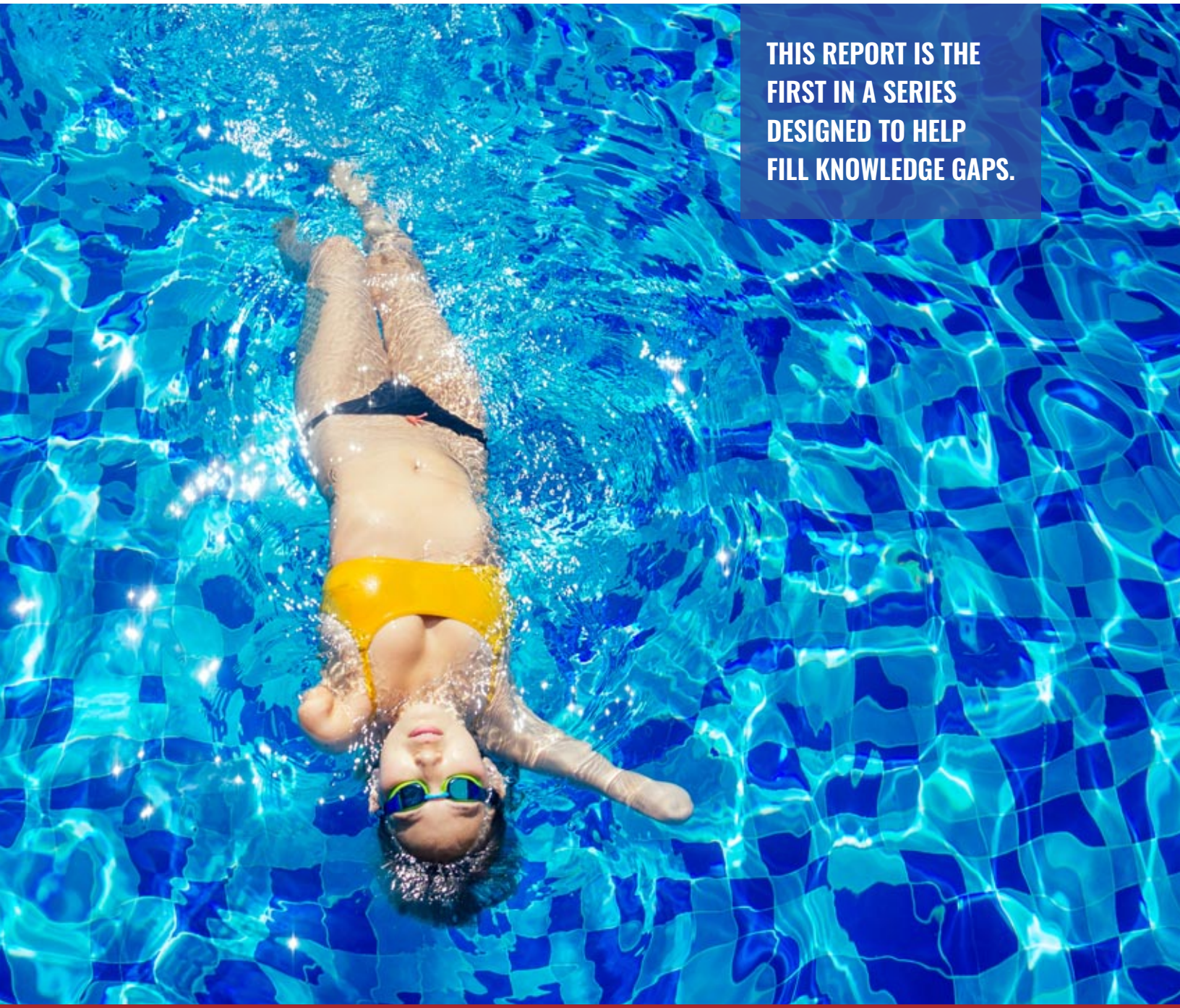
To change this, Canada needs a clearer picture of how people with disabilities are participating in SPAR and what helps or hinders their involvement. Until now, national data have been limited and scattered, making it difficult to compare the experiences of people with and without disabilities over time. A more consistent approach to data collection and monitoring will show how well policies, programs, and infrastructure are supporting inclusion and will help identify where improvements are needed. Recent national studies, which define disability as an impairment that limits full participation in society across physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory domains, now offer better information and form the basis of this report (see Appendix A).

ONE IN FIVE YOUTH AGED 15 TO 24 HAS A DISABILITY.

A strong data system also means being clear about the limits of the data and the benchmarks used to judge participation. For example, physical activity recommendations drawn from the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines are often applied to people with disabilities, even though these guidelines are based mostly on research with people without disabilities.[4] Some methods of measuring activity, such as step counts from accelerometers, may not capture activity accurately for people who use wheelchairs or have other mobility–related needs. The wide range of disability types—such as vision, hearing, cognitive, communication, mental health, mobility, and disease–specific disabilities—adds further complexity.[4] For these reasons, this report focuses on time spent in different physical activities rather than on whether people meet general physical activity guidelines.

This report is the first in a series designed to help fill these knowledge gaps. It provides a detailed analysis of SPAR participation among people with disabilities in Canada and lays the groundwork for measuring SPAR's impact across all population groups. Future reports will examine factors that influence participation, including environmental, social, health, and economic aspects, and will offer recommendations on how different partners can work together to improve participation.

Together, these reports support **Active Abilities Canada**'s mandate to share evidence, knowledge and tools with organizations in the SPAR sector, helping them to create conditions where people with disabilities can be physically active.



THIS REPORT IS THE FIRST IN A SERIES DESIGNED TO HELP FILL KNOWLEDGE GAPS.

TIME SPENT BEING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

For this report, physical activity is described as the time people spend in four types of self–reported movement: light–intensity activity, at least moderate–intensity activity, strength–based activities, and activities that improve balance. Light–intensity activity involves moving without noticeably increasing breathing, such as shopping or walking around the office. Moderate-intensity exercise involves physical exertion that causes a person to breathe harder. Strength–based activities are those that build muscle strength, such as using resistance bands, lifting weights, or using one's own body weight. Balance–focused activities improve posture, stability, and coordination, such as shifting body weight or strengthening core muscles. All of these activity types are important for health because they can help reduce falls, lower the risk of illness, and improve quality of life.

THE MINUTES SPENT IN AT LEAST MODERATE–INTENSITY ACTIVITY WERE SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER AMONG ADULTS REPORTING A DISABILITY.

Across Canada, adults aged 18 and older reported doing an average of 190 minutes per week of self–reported light–intensity physical activity and 153 minutes per week of at least moderate–intensity activity. The amount of time spent being active differed depending on whether people reported having a disability. Adults in the surveys who reported a disability spent significantly fewer minutes in at least moderate–intensity activity than those who did not (see Table 1 for detailed values and Figure 1 for an illustration).

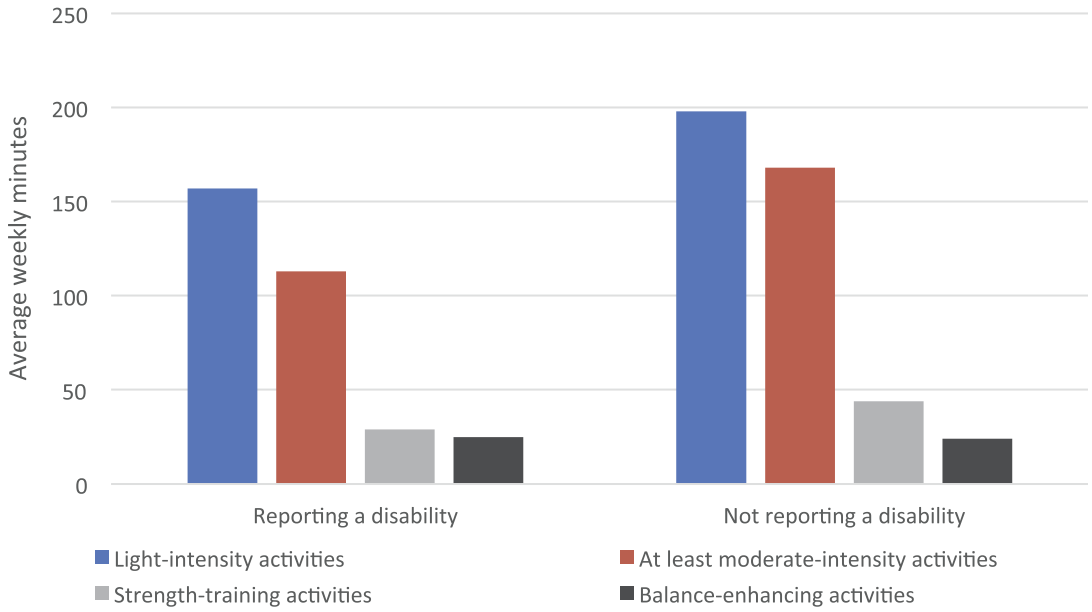
On average, survey participants reported 42 minutes per week in strength–training activities and 24 minutes per week in balance–enhancing activities on average. Adults with a disability reported less time in strength training (29 minutes per week) than adults without a disability (44 minutes per week). However, they reported similar amounts of time in balance–enhancing activities (25 minutes per week among adults with a disability compared to 24 minutes among adults without a disability).

Table 1: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by disability status[5,6]

	Total	Reporting a disability	Not reporting a disability
Average weekly light-intensity minutes	190	157	198
Average weekly at least moderate-intensity minutes	153	113	168[A]
Average weekly strength-training minutes	42	29	44[A]
Average weekly balance-enhancing minutes	24	25	24

[A] Significantly higher than adults reporting a disability

Figure 1: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by disability status[5,6]



Time spent being physically active by gender and disability status

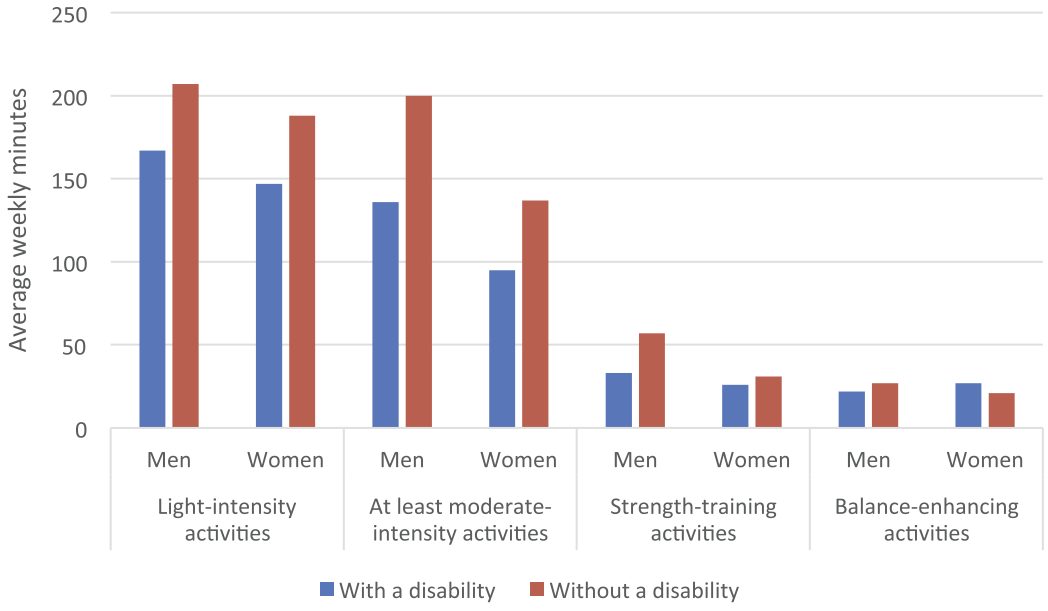
Nationally, when disability is not considered, men reported spending more weekly time than women in moderate– or higher–intensity activities and in strength training. When the results are broken down by both disability status and gender, several differences emerge. Among adults with a disability and those without, men reported more time in at least moderate–intensity activity than women. For both genders within the survey, adults without a disability reported more minutes in at least moderate–intensity activity than adults of the same gender who reported a disability. Among adults without a disability, men reported more weekly time in strength training than women, and they also reported more strength–training time than men who identified as having a disability (see Table 2 for detailed values and Figure 2 for an illustration).

Table 2: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by gender and disability status[5,6]

	Total		Reporting a disability		Not reporting a disability	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Average weekly light-intensity minutes	199	180	167	147	207	188
Average weekly at least moderate-intensity minutes	183[B]	125	136[B]	95	200[A,B]	137[A]
Average weekly strength-training minutes	54[B]	30	33	26	57[A,B]	31
Average weekly balance-enhancing minutes	27	22	22	27	27	21

[A] Significantly higher than the same gender but within the other disability category
[B] Significantly higher than the other gender but within the same disability category

Figure 2: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by gender and by disability status[5,6]



Time spent being physically active by age and disability status

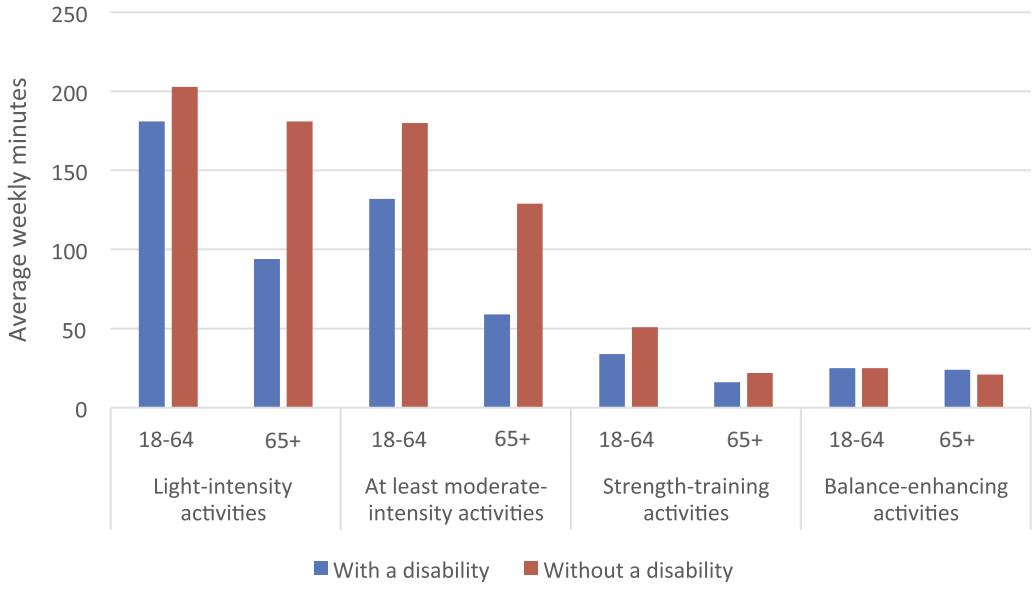
Across Canada, when disability is not considered, younger adults reported spending significantly more time each week in at least moderate–intensity activities and strength training than older adults. When disability status is considered alongside age, additional differences emerge from these surveys. Older adults without a disability reported more time in light–intensity and at least moderate–intensity activities than older adults with a disability. Younger adults without a disability also reported more time in at least moderate–intensity activities than younger adults with a disability. In addition, younger adults without a disability reported more time in strength–training activities than older adults without a disability. Table 3 shows these differences in detail, and Figure 3 presents them visually.

Table 3: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by age and disability status[5,6]

	Total		Reporting a disability		Not reporting a disability	
	18-64	65+	18 to 64	65+	18 to 64	65+
Average weekly light-intensity minutes	200	164	181	94	203	181[A]
Average weekly at least moderate-intensity minutes	167[B]	110	132[B]	59	180[A,B]	129[A]
Average weekly strength-training minutes	48[B]	21	34	16	51[B]	22
Average weekly balance-enhancing minutes	25	21	25	24	25	21

[A] Significantly higher than the same age group but within the other disability category
[B] Significantly higher than the other age group but within the same disability category

Figure 3: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by age and by disability status[5,6]



IN THE GENERAL POPULATION WHEN DISABILITY IS NOT CONSIDERED, YOUNGER ADULTS REPORTED SPENDING SIGNIFICANTLY MORE TIME EACH WEEK IN AT LEAST MODERATE–INTENSITY ACTIVITIES AND STRENGTH TRAINING THAN OLDER ADULTS.

Time spent being physically active by household income and disability status

At the national level, when disability is not considered, time spent in light–intensity, strength–training, and balance–enhancing activities did not differ by household income, but people in the highest–income households spent the most time in at least moderate–intensity activities. When disability status is added to the picture, further differences appear. Among adults in lower–income households, those without a disability reported more time in light–intensity, at least moderate–intensity, and strength–training activities than those with a disability. These disability–related differences were not significant among adults living in higher–income households. For adults with a disability, income still mattered: those in the highest–income households reported more time in light– and moderate–intensity activities than those in lower–income households, while similar income–related patterns were not significant for adults without a disability. Table 4 provides the detailed values, and Figure 4 shows these relationships visually.

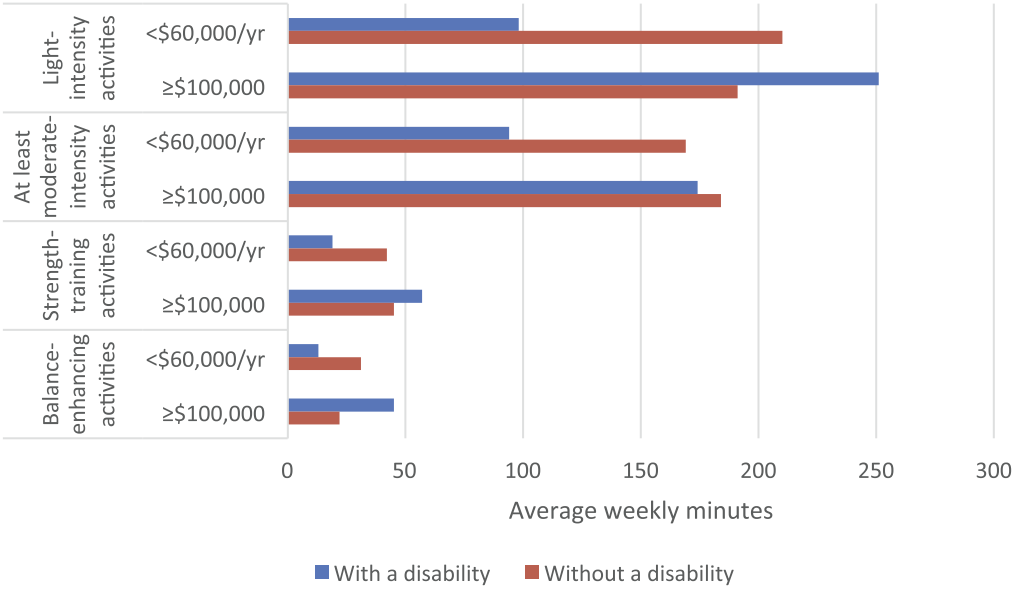
ADULTS WITH A DISABILITY IN THE HIGHEST INCOME HOUSEHOLDS REPORTED MORE TIME IN LIGHT–INTENSITY AND MODERATE–INTENSITY PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES THAN THEIR PEERS WITH LOWER HOUSEHOLD INCOMES.

Table 4: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by income and disability status[5,6]

	Total		Reporting a disability		Not reporting a disability	
	Lowest incomes	Highest incomes	Lowest incomes	Highest incomes	Lowest incomes	Highest incomes
Average weekly light-intensity minutes	186	196	98	251[B]	210[A]	191
Average weekly at least moderate-intensity minutes	140	182[B]	94	174[B]	169[A]	184
Average weekly strength-training minutes	36	45	19	57	42[A]	45
Average weekly balance-enhancing minutes	27	24	13	45	31	22

[A] Significantly higher than the same household income group but within the other disability category
[B] Significantly higher than the other household income group but within the same disability category

Figure 4: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by household income and disability status[5,6]



Time spent being physically active by community size and disability status

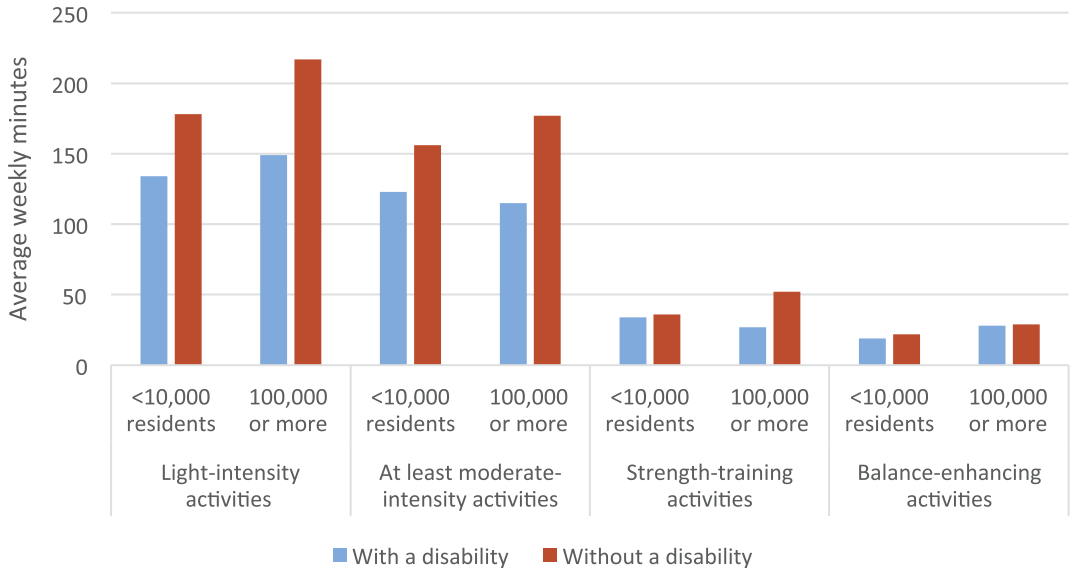
At the national level, when disability is not considered, the time that survey respondents spent in light–intensity, moderate–intensity, strength–training, and balance–enhancing activities did not differ much by community size. When disability status is included, some differences emerge. Adults without a disability who lived in the largest communities (100,000 or more residents) reported more time in light–intensity, at least moderate–intensity, and strength–training activities than adults with a disability living in similarly large communities (see Table 5 for detailed values and Figure 5 for a visual summary).

Table 5: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by community size and disability status[5,6]

	Total		Reporting a disability		Not reporting a disability	
	<10,000 residents	≥100,000 residents	<10,000 residents	≥100,000 residents	<10,000 residents	≥100,000 residents
Average weekly light-intensity minutes	169	206	134	149	178	217[A]
Average weekly at least moderate-intensity minutes	145	160	123	115	156	177[A]
Average weekly strength-training minutes	35	48	34	27	36	52[A]
Average weekly balance-enhancing minutes	21	29	19	28	22	29

[A] Significantly higher than the same community size group but within the other disability category
[B] Significantly higher than the other community size group but within the same disability category

Figure 5: Average weekly minutes by intensity level by community size and disability status[5,6]



Difficulties experienced

Time spent in different types of physical activity varied depending on the kinds of difficulties people reported with their disability. Adults in the surveys who did not have difficulty walking or climbing stairs reported more minutes in at least moderate–intensity activities than those with considerable difficulty. People who reported no visual, hearing, walking/climbing, or self–care difficulties spent more time in light–intensity activities than those with considerable difficulties. Likewise, adults with no difficulty walking or climbing stairs reported more time in strength–training activities than those with considerable difficulty. In contrast, adults who had considerable difficulty communicating reported more time in at least moderate–intensity activities and in balance–enhancing activities than those who reported no difficulty. Table 6 summarizes these findings by activity intensity/type and by type of difficulty.

Table 6: Physical activity participation weekly by type of difficulty[5,6]

Type of difficulty	Average weekly minutes in				
	Level of difficulty	Light-intensity activities	At least moderate-intensity activities	Strength-training activities	Balance-enhancing activities
Visual, even if wearing glasses	No difficulty	196[B]	116	42	23
	Some	192	105	38	25
	Considerable	120	152	57	42
Auditory, even if wearing hearing aids	No difficulty	197[B]	110	43	22
	Some	188	115	27	32
	Considerable	97	140	66	42
Walking or climbing steps	No difficulty	206[B]	178[B]	47[B]	23
	Some	164	106	24	30
	Considerable	118	61	27	21
Remembering or concentrating	No difficulty	203	100	45	25
	Some	176	123	35	24
	Considerable	144	123	32	20
Self-care (washing, dressing)	No difficulty	201[B]	120	42	22
	Some	144	91	34	44
	Considerable	75	147	50	33
Communicating	No difficulty	194	103	41	22
	Some	169	134	39	49
	Considerable	188	208[A]	71	60[A]

[A] Significantly higher than adults reporting no difficulties

[B] Significantly higher than adults reporting considerable difficulties

SPORT PARTICIPATION

In this report, "sport" means physical activities where people compete, follow rules, and build specific skills. Nationally in 2024, 27% of survey participants said they took part in sport in the previous year, with lower participation among adults who identified as having a disability (21%) than among those who did not (30%).

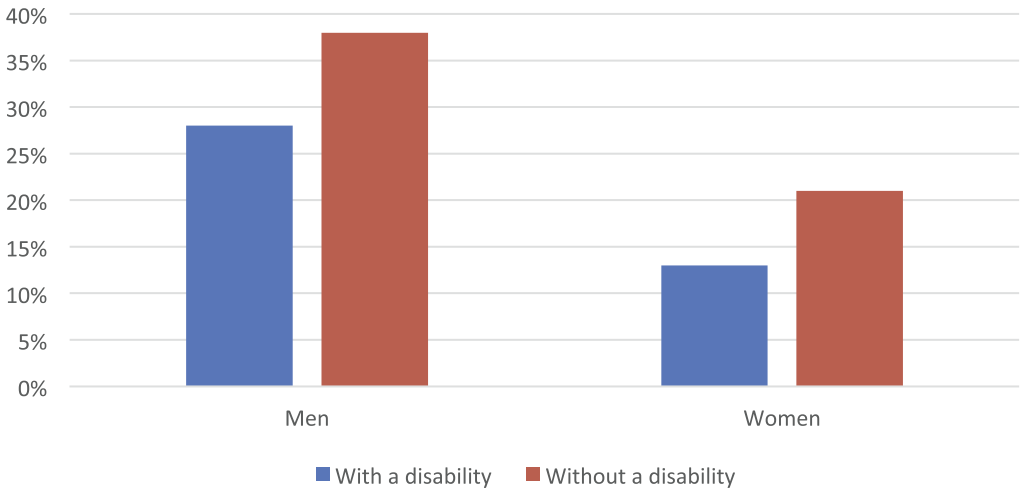
JUST OVER TWO IN TEN PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFIED AS HAVING A DISABILITY (21%) SAID THEY TOOK PART IN SPORT IN THE PAST YEAR, COMPARED WITH THREE IN TEN PEOPLE (30%) WHO DID NOT REPORT A DISABILITY.

Sport participation by gender and disability status

At the national level, men were much more likely than women to say they participated in sport in the past 12 months: 36% versus 19%, a gap of 17 percentage points. This gender gap was present for both adults with a disability and those without, with a 15–percentage–point difference between men and women among those with a disability and a 17–percentage–point difference among those without.

Looking more closely at disability status, 28% of men who identified as having a disability reported participating in sport in the past year, compared with 38% of men who did not report a disability. The same pattern was seen among women: 13% of women with a disability reported taking part in sport, compared with 21% of women without a disability. Figure 6 illustrates these differences.

Figure 6: Sport participation by disability status[5]



Sport participation by age and disability status

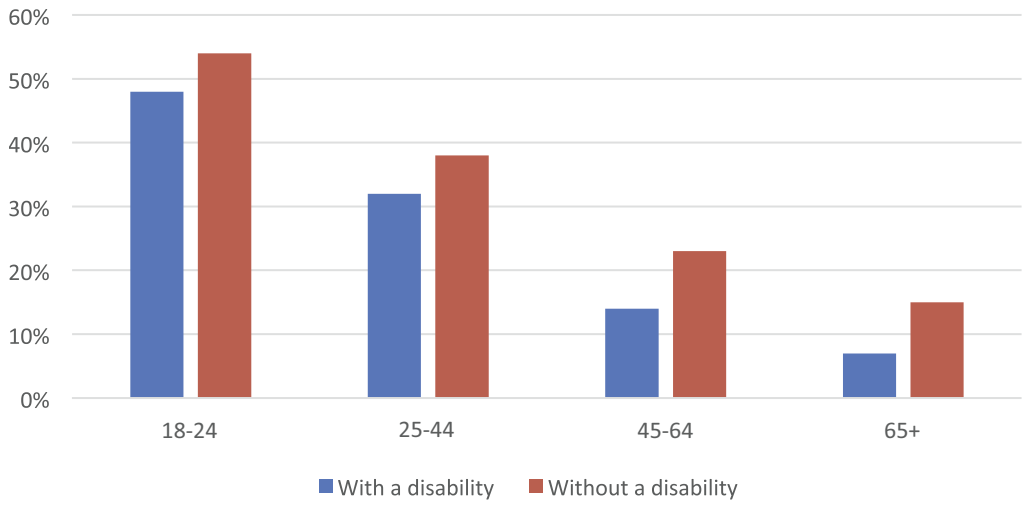
Across Canada, when disability is not considered, sport participation decreases sharply with age: 53% of 18– to 24–year–olds reported taking part in sport, compared with only 13% of adults aged 65 and older. This same drop–off with age was seen for both adults with a disability and those without. Among adults younger than 45, there was no significant difference in sport participation between those who reported a disability and those who did not in the survey. Among adults aged 45 and older, however, people who reported a disability were less likely to have participated in sport than those who did not report a disability. See Table 7 for age–specific percentages by disability status and Figure 7 for an illustration.

Table 7: Sport participation by age and disability status[5]

	Total	Reporting a disability	Not reporting a disability
18-24	53%[B]	48%[B]	54%[B]
25-44	37%	32%	38%
45-64	21%	14%	23%[A]
65+	13%	7%	15%[A]

[A] Significantly higher value than the same age but within different disability status
[B] Significantly higher value than the oldest age group and within the same disability status

Figure 7: Participation in sport by age and disability status[5]



Sport participation by difficulties experienced

Sport participation differed depending on the types of difficulties people reported with their disability. Participation was higher among adults who reported considerable difficulties with vision, hearing, thinking and memory, self–care, or communication, and lower among those who had considerable difficulty walking or climbing stairs. Men generally reported higher levels of sport participation than women, regardless of the level of difficulty. Table 8 outlines these patterns overall and by gender.

Table 8: Participation in sport by type and level of difficulty[5]

	Among sport participants			
Type of difficulty	**Level of difficulty**	**Total**	**Men**	**Women**
Visual, even if wearing glasses	No difficulty	21%	28%[C]	14%
	Some difficulty	19%	25%[C]	12%
	Considerable difficulty	33%[A]	43%	–*
Auditory, even if wearing hearing aids	No difficulty	19%	27%[C]	13%
	Some	22%	27%[C]	13%
	Considerable	34%[A]	40%	–*
Walking or climbing steps	No difficulty	31%[B]	38%[B,C]	23%
	Some	19%	27%[C]	12%
	Considerable	12%	18%	–*
Remembering or concentrating	No difficulty	17%	25%[C]	10%
	Some	20%	26%[C]	14%
	Considerable	30%[A]	45%[A,C]	18%
Self-care (washing, dressing)	No difficulty	20%	28%[C]	14%
	Some	17%	22%[C]	11%
	Considerable	34%[A]	44%[A]	–*
Communicating	No difficulty	17%	24%[C]	11%
	Some	27%	33%	21%
	Considerable	54%[A]	63%[A]	–*

* Data not shown because the sample size for this group was too small to report.

[A] Significantly higher than adults reporting no difficulties
[B] Significantly higher than adults reporting considerable difficulties
[C] Significantly higher than the other gender within the same difficulty category

Regularity of sport participation

The previous section looked at sport "participation" as the percentage of people who took part in activities with competition, rules, and specific skill development at least once in the past year. To understand who builds sport into their lives more regularly, it is also important to consider how many months per year they participate and how often they play in a typical week. This section and the one that follows examine these ideas of regular and frequent sport participation within the survey.

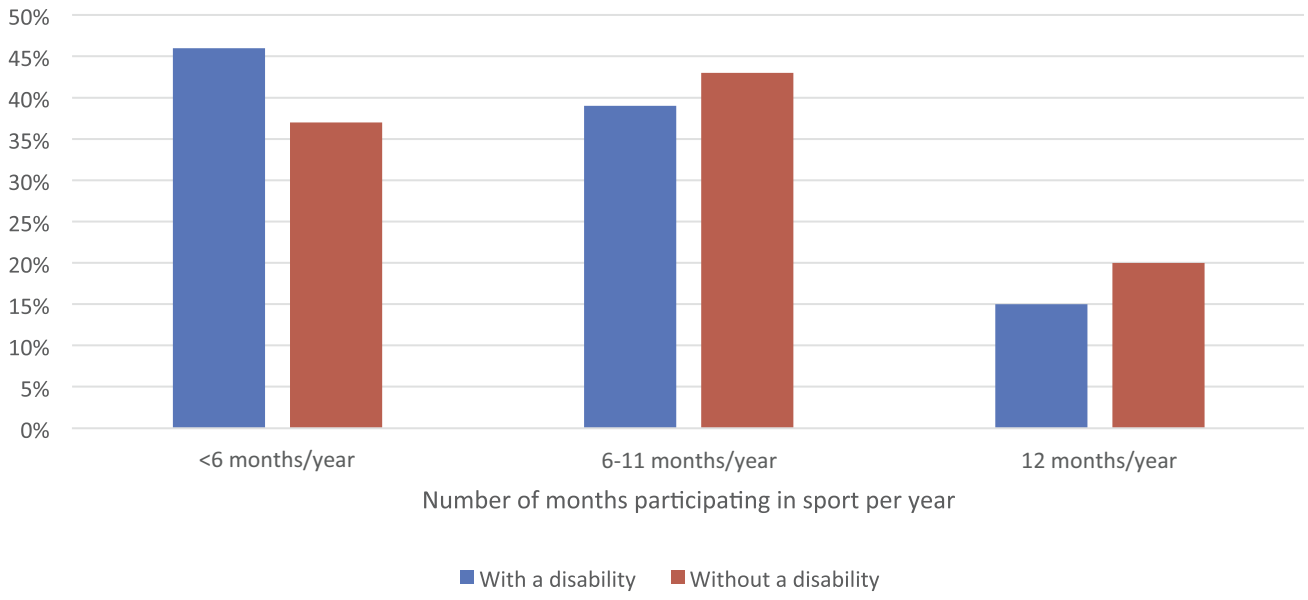
At the national level, before considering disability status, almost two in ten adults (19%) who participated in sport did so every month of the year, and another 42% participated between six and eleven months. The remaining 39% took part for less than half the year. Disability status was linked to these patterns: adults with a disability were more likely to participate in sport less often, taking part in fewer than six months of the year. These findings are presented in Table 9 and illustrated in Figure 8.

Table 9: Regularity of sport participation (number of months per year) by disability status[5]

Among sport participants			
Number of months participating in sport	**Total**	**Reporting a disability**	**Not reporting a disability**
12 months/year	19%	15%	20%
6-11 months/year	42%	39%	43%
Less than 6 months/year	39%	46%[A]	37%

[A] Significantly higher than the other disability status within the same time category

Figure 8: Regularity of sport participation (number of months per year) by disability status[5]



Regularity of sport participation by gender and disability status

Nationally, before looking at disability status, men were more likely than women to say they participated in sport all year: 21% of men who did not identify as having a disability reported participating in sport every month, compared with 16% of women. In contrast, 43% of women said they took part in sport for fewer than six months of the year, compared with 37% of men. When disability status is considered, patterns of regular participation differ by gender, as shown in Table 10. Among men, a higher percentage of those with a disability took part in sport for fewer than six months per year compared with men without a disability. Among adults without a disability, a higher percentage of women than men reported participating in sport for fewer than six months per year, whereas a greater percentage of men indicated participating every month.

Table 10: Regularity of sport participation by gender and disability status[5]

Among sport participants						
Number of months participating in sport	**Total**		**Reporting a disability**		**Not reporting a disability**	
	Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
12 months/year	21%[C]	16%	16%	–	22%[A]	16%
6-11 months/year	42%	41%	39%	36%	43%	42%
Less than 6 months/year	37%	43%[C]	44%[B]	49%	35%	42%[A]

[A] Significantly higher value than the other gender category but within the same disability status
[B] Significantly higher value than the same gender category but within the other disability status
[C] Significantly higher value than the other gender category

Regularity of sport participation by age and disability status

At the national level, when disability is not considered, there were few meaningful differences in how many months per year people took part in sport across age groups. One exception was that a smaller share of adults aged 65 and older reported participating in sport for fewer than six months of the year compared with younger adults. This pattern was generally similar among adults who did not report a disability. Among adults who did report a disability, the relationships were not statistically significant, in part because of small sample sizes.

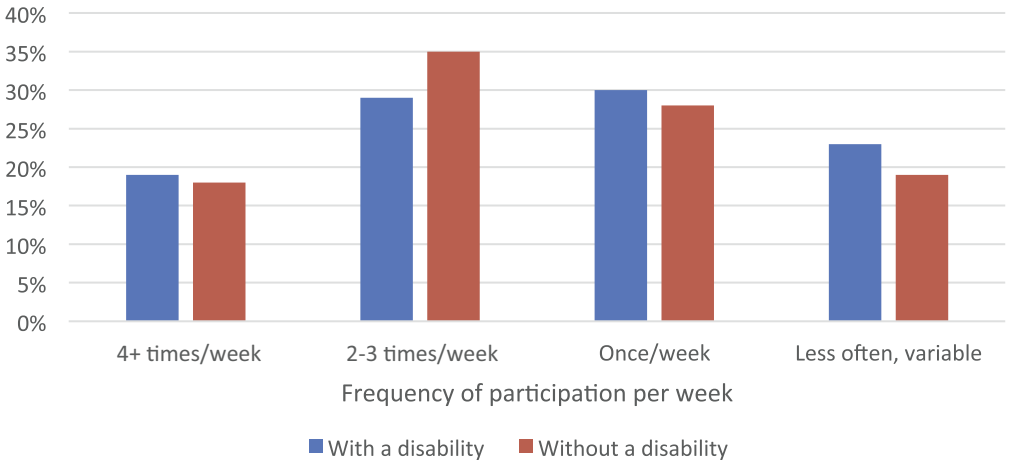
Frequency of sport participation

Sport participants within the survey were also asked how often they engaged in sport in a typical week during the months they participated. This helps tell the difference between people who play sport frequently and those who take part less often. Nationally, before considering disability status, 18% reported participating in sport four or more times per week, 34% played two to three times per week, 28% played once a week, and 20% played less often or at varying frequencies. When these results are broken down by disability status, patterns are generally similar, and there are no significant differences in how often people play based on whether they identify as having a disability or not (see Table 11 for values and Figure 9 for an illustration).

Table 11: Frequency of sport participation (number of times per week) by disability status[5]

Among sport participants			
Times per week	**Total**	**Reporting a disability**	**Not reporting a disability**
4+ times/week	18%	19%	18%
2-3 times/week	34%	29%	35%
Once/week	28%	30%	28%
Less often/variable	20%	23%	19%

Figure 9: Frequency of sport participation (number of times/week) by disability status[5]



78% OF SPORT PARTICIPANTS WITH A DISABILITY TOOK PART AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK DURING THE MONTHS THEY PARTICIPATED.

Frequency of sport participation by gender and disability status

Interestingly, how often people took part in sport each week did not differ meaningfully by gender, either nationally or when gender was combined with disability status. Table 12 shows the frequencies for men and women, but none of the gender differences in weekly sport participation were statistically significant.

Table 12: Frequency of sport participation (number of times/week) by disability status[5]

Among sport participants						
Times per week	**Total**		**Reporting a disability**		**Not reporting a disability**	
	Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
4+ times/week	20%	16%	19%	–*	20%	16%
2-3 times/week	34%	34%	31%	26%	34%	36%
Once/week	27%	29%	31%	30%	27%	29%
Less often or variably	19%	21%	19%	27%	19%	20%

* Data not shown because the sample size for this group was too small to report.

Frequency of sport participation by age and disability status

At the national level, before considering disability, young adults aged 18 to 24 were more likely than adults aged 25 to 64 to say they took part in sport at least four times per week. Among people who did not report a disability, this pattern held, but another difference also appeared: adults aged 65 and older without a disability were more likely than 25– to 64–year–olds without a disability to report participating in sport two to three times per week.

NATURE OF SPORT PARTICIPATION

Level of structure

At the national level, among adults participating in the survey who also participate in sport, 47% reported that they usually do so in a structured environment, 30% reported that they primarily participate in unstructured environments, and 22% reported using both types of environments. A slightly higher share of men (33%) than women (26%) indicated that they mainly participate in unstructured sport environments.

When the level of structure of sport participation was examined by disability status, there were no statistically significant differences between adults who identified as having a disability and those who did not, and there were no significant gender differences within these disability groups. Table 13 presents these proportions for adults with and without a reported disability, broken down further by gender.

AMONG SPORT PARTICIPANTS WITH A DISABILITY, 44% PRIMARILY PARTICIPATE IN STRUCTURED PROGRAMS LIKE ORGANIZED CLASSES, CLUBS, OR LEAGUES.

Table 13: Level of structure of sport participation by gender and disability status[5]

Among sport participants									
Level of structure	**Total**			**Reporting a disability**			**Not reporting a disability**		
	Total	**Men**	**Women**	**Total**	**Men**	**Women**	**Total**	**Men**	**Women**
Primarily structured	47%	46%	50%	44%	43%	49%	48%	47%	51%
Primarily unstructured	30%	33%[A]	26%	32%	35%	25%	30%	32%	26%
Both environments	22%	21%	24%	24%	22%	26%	22%	21%	23%

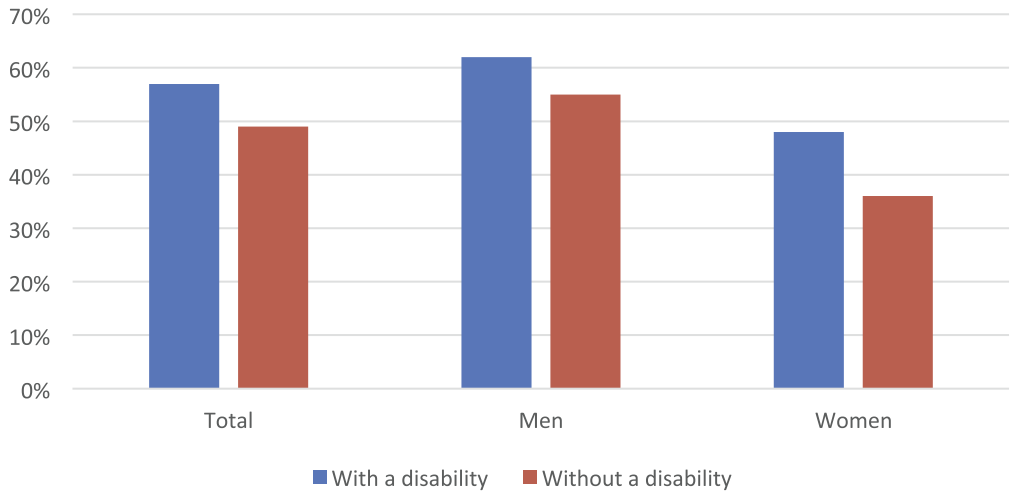
[A] Significantly higher value than the other gender category

At the national level and before accounting for disability status, older adults (65 years and older) were most likely to report that they primarily participated in sport in a structured environment (61% versus 44%–47% among younger adults) and least likely to report a primarily unstructured environment (17% versus 27%–33% among younger adults). When disability status was considered, significant age-related relationships were found among adults who did not identify as having a disability: older adults without a disability were more likely than 25– to 64–year–olds without a disability to participate mainly in structured sport and less likely to participate primarily in unstructured sport. Among adults who identified as having a disability, these relationships were not statistically significant, partly because of smaller sample sizes.

Engaging in competition

Across Canada, about one in two adults who participate in sport say they also compete, with men much more likely to report competing than women (57% versus 39%). When disability status was considered, a greater percentage of sport participants who identified as having a disability (57%) said they competed compared to participants who did not report a disability (49%). The gap between men and women in sport competition is clear among adults without a reported disability, but this gender gap is not statistically meaningful among adults who identify as having a disability. Overall, competition rates do not differ much by age; however, among adults without a disability, 18- to 24-year-olds were more likely than 25- to 64-year-olds to compete, a pattern that did not clearly appear among adults who reported a disability.

Figure 10: Competing in sport by gender and disability status[5]



Use of a coach

Across Canada, about a third of adults who take part in sport say they work with a coach, and this is true for men and women alike. Adults who report a disability are more likely to use a coach than those who do not (44% versus 29%), a pattern that appears for both men and women. Coach use declined with age, from 51% among adults aged 18 to 24 to 16% among adults aged 65 and older. This age-related decline was evident among adults who did not report a disability, whereas differences by age were not statistically significant among adults reporting a disability, in part due to smaller sample sizes. Among adults aged 25 to 64, people who report a disability were more likely to say they use a coach than their peers who do not report a disability.

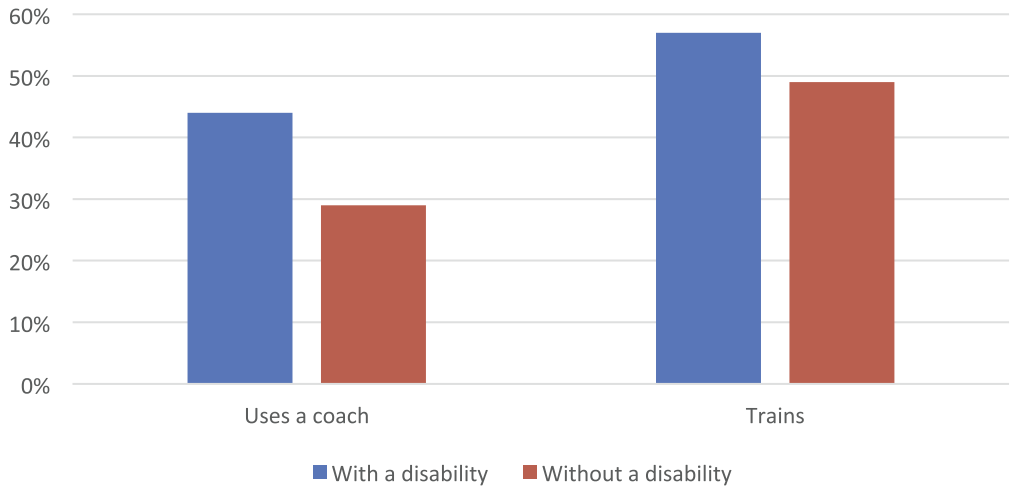
ADULTS WITH A DISABILITY ARE NOTICEABLY MORE LIKELY TO WORK WITH A COACH WHEN THEY PARTICIPATE IN SPORT, COMPARED WITH ADULTS WHO DO NOT REPORT A DISABILITY.

Training for sport

Across Canada, about one in two adults who participate in sport say they train for it, and men are more likely than women to report doing training (54% versus 44%). Adults who identify as having a disability are slightly more likely to train (57%) than those who do not (49%). Clear gender gaps in training mainly appear among adults without a disability, where men are more likely than women to train (54% men, 41% women). See Figure 11 for an illustration of the relationship.

Nationally, the percentage of adults who trained declined with age (from 66% among 18– to 24–year–olds to 36% among adults aged 65 and older), and this decline was significant among adults without a disability but not among adults reporting a disability, in part because of smaller sample sizes.

Figure 11: Use of a coach and training in sport by disability status[5]



PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SPORT, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Perceptions of SPAR opportunities—including views on safety, affordability, and how welcoming or inclusive they are—can affect participation. At the national level and before looking at disability status, most adult respondents agreed to a moderate or great extent that opportunities are safe (72%) and fair, respectful, and ethical (71%), while only 39% rated them as affordable to this extent. See Table 14 for more detailed ratings.

Table 14: Perceptions about physical activity and sport opportunities[5]

	Not at all or a little	Somewhat	Moderate to great extent
Affordable	35%	26%	39%
Accessible	22%	27%	51%
Convenient	18%	25%	57%
Available (e.g., facilities nearby)	17%	22%	61%
Welcoming, inclusive	16%	23%	61%
Fair, respectful, ethical	9%	21%	71%
Safe (e.g., free from crime, physically safe)	9%	19%	72%

Perceptions by disability status

When looking at perceptions by disability status, clear gaps emerge. Adults who identify as having a disability were more likely than others to say that local SPAR opportunities are not very affordable, accessible, available, convenient, welcoming, inclusive, fair, respectful, ethical, or safe. In contrast, adults who do not report a disability were more likely to hold strongly positive views on each of these dimensions, saying to at least a moderate extent that opportunities are affordable, accessible, welcoming, fair, respectful, ethical, and safe (see Table 15).

ADULTS WHO IDENTIFY AS HAVING A DISABILITY ARE MORE LIKELY THAN THOSE WITHOUT A DISABILITY TO SAY THAT LOCAL SPORT, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES ARE NOT VERY AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE, AVAILABLE, CONVENIENT, SAFE, WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE, FAIR, RESPECTFUL, OR ETHICAL.

Table 15: Perceptions about physical activity and sport opportunities by disability status[5]

	Reporting a disability		Not reporting a disability	
	Rating perceptions			
	Not at all or a little	Moderate to great extent	Not at all or a little	Moderate to great extent
Affordable	46%[A]	32%	31%	41%[A]
Accessible	32%[A]	40%	18%	55%[A]
Convenient	26%[A]	49%	15%	60%[A]
Available	25%[A]	51%	14%	64%[A]
Welcoming, inclusive	26%[A]	49%	12%	65%[A]
Fair, respectful, ethical	15%[A]	61%	7%	74%[A]
Safe	15%[A]	62%	7%	75%[A]

[A] Significantly higher value than the same category of perception but within other disability status

Perceptions by gender and disability status

Across Canada, men in this survey were more likely than women to say that local SPAR opportunities are affordable, accessible, convenient, available, welcoming and inclusive, fair, respectful, ethical, and safe to a moderate or great extent. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to say that these opportunities are only a little or not at all welcoming and inclusive, accessible, convenient, or affordable. Similar gender patterns appear when results are broken down by disability status, and these differences are summarized in Table 16 and illustrated in Figure 12.

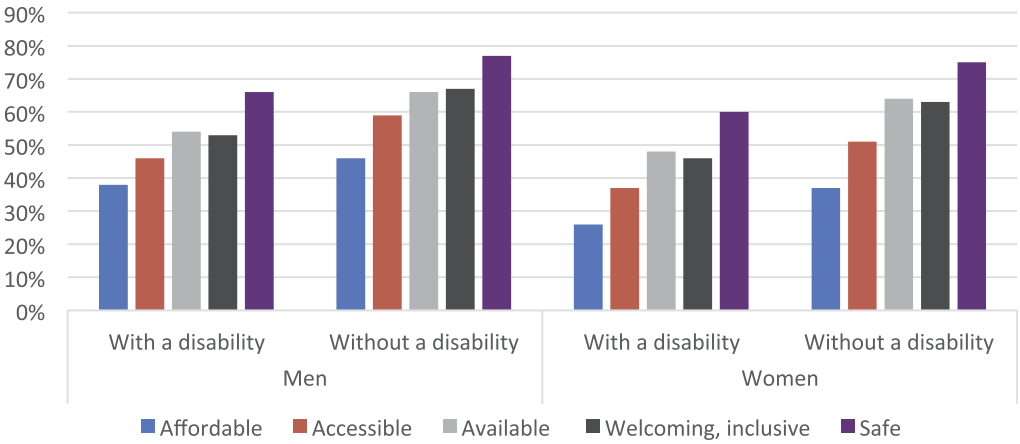
Table 16: Perceptions about physical activity and sport opportunities by disability status[5]

	Reporting a disability				Not reporting a disability			
	Rating perceptions							
	Not at all or a little		Moderate to great extent		Not at all or a little		Moderate to great extent	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Affordable	38%[B]	52%[A,B]	38%[A]	26%	26%	37%[A]	46%[A,B]	37%[B]
Accessible	27%[B]	36%[A,B]	46%[A]	37%	17%	20%[A]	59%[A,B]	51%[B]
Convenient	22%[B]	28%[A,B]	54%[A]	46%	14%	15%	62%[A,B]	58%[B]
Available	22%[B]	27%[B]	54%	48%	13%	14%	66%[B]	64%[B]
Welcoming, inclusive	22%[B]	28%[B]	53%[A]	46%	11%	14%[A]	67%[A,B]	63%[B]
Fair, respectful, ethical	15%[B]	14%[B]	64%	59%	7%	6%	76%[B]	73%[B]
Safe	14%[B]	15%[B]	66%	60%	7%	6%	77%[B]	75%[B]

[A] Significantly higher value than the different gender yet same perception rating and same disability status

[B] Significantly higher value than the same gender and same perception rating, yet different disability status

Figure 12: Gender-related differences in ratings of perceptions to a moderate or great extent by disability status[5]



Perceptions by age and disability status

Age also shapes how people view local physical activity and sport opportunities. Older adults (65 years and older) were more likely than younger adults to say that opportunities are safe, welcoming and inclusive, fair, respectful, ethical, convenient, and affordable to at least a moderate extent. They are also more likely to state that opportunities are not, or are only slightly, available in the first place. Younger adults, by contrast, were more likely than older adults to say that opportunities are not at all or only marginally welcoming and inclusive, fair, respectful, ethical, safe, convenient, or affordable.

When age differences are examined by disability status, people in both age groups who report a disability are generally more likely than their peers without a disability to say that opportunities are not at all or only marginally safe, fair, respectful, ethical, welcoming, inclusive, available, convenient, accessible, or affordable, while those without a disability are more likely to rate these aspects positively.

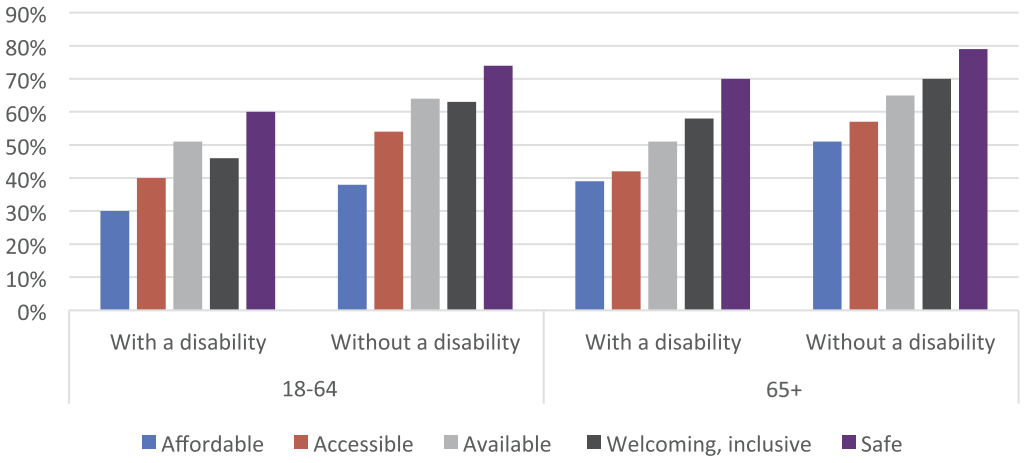
Table 17: Perceptions about opportunities by age and disability status[5]

	Reporting a disability				Not reporting a disability			
	Rating perceptions							
	Not at all or a little		Moderate to great extent		Not at all or a little		Moderate to great extent	
	18–64	65+	18–64	65+	18–64	65+	18–64	65+
Affordable	47%[B]	42%[B]	30%	39%[A]	33%[A]	26%	38%[B]	51%[A,B]
Accessible	31%[B]	35%[B]	40%	42%	18%	20%	54%[B]	57%[B]
Convenient	26%[B]	26%[B]	48%	52%	16%[A]	11%	59%[B]	65%[A,B]
Available	24%[B]	30%[B]	51%	51%	13%	16%[A]	64%[B]	65%[B]
Welcoming, inclusive	26%[B]	23%[B]	46%	58%[A]	13%[A]	10%	63%[B]	70%[A,B]
Fair, respectful, ethical	16%[B]	12%[B]	60%	65%	7%[A]	5%	73%[B]	77%[A,B]
Safe	15%[B]	12%[B]	60%	70%[A]	7%	5%	74%[B]	79%[A,B]

[A] Significantly higher value than the other age yet same perception rating and same disability status

[B] Significantly higher value than the same age and same perception rating, yet different disability status

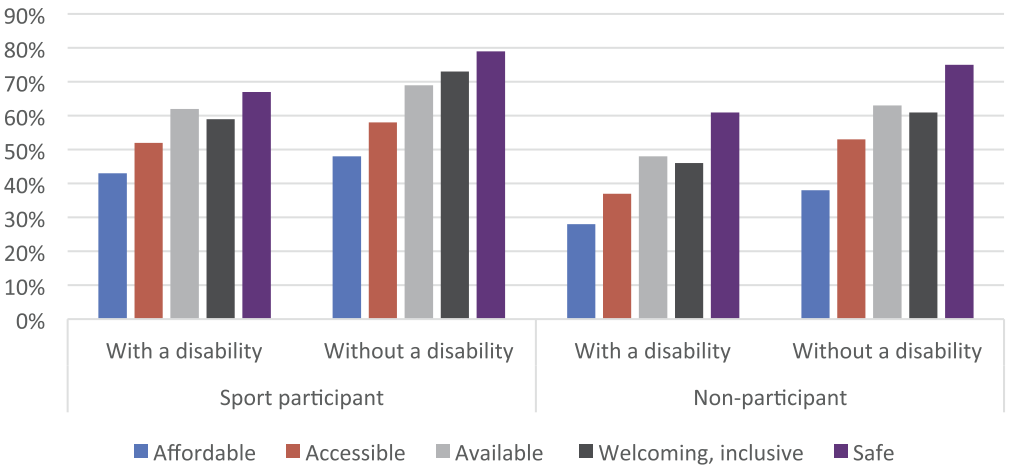
Figure 13: Age-related differences in ratings of perceptions to a moderate or great extent by disability status[5]



Perceptions by sport participation and disability status

Whether people take part in sport shapes how they view local opportunities. Adults who reported participation in sport were more likely than non–participants to say that community opportunities are positive overall, rating them to at least a moderate extent as affordable, accessible, welcoming and inclusive, fair, respectful, ethical, safe, available, and convenient. This pattern generally held for both adults who report a disability and those who do not, although among adults with a disability there was no clear difference between participants and non–participants in how safe or how fair, respectful, and ethical opportunities are perceived to be. Figure 14 illustrates perceptions about opportunities by sport participation and by disability status.

Figure 14: Sport participation-related differences in ratings of perceptions to a moderate or great extent by disability status[5]



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This national status report fills an important information gap about how often people with disabilities in Canada take part in physical activity and sport. With more than one in four Canadians reporting a disability, the previous lack of robust national data has serious implications for population health and for planning inclusive services.[1] The report offers a snapshot of participation levels and experiences, giving governments, communities, and sector partners evidence to design and deliver more accessible, inclusive programs that support quality participation.

Overall, the findings show that persons with disabilities participate less often, and are less likely to report positive experiences of physical activity, recreation, and sport, than people without disabilities. They also report, more often than others, that opportunities are only a little or not at all affordable, accessible, available, convenient, safe, welcoming, inclusive, fair, respectful, or ethical, while adults without disabilities are more likely to rate these features positively. These inequities intersect with gender, age, household income, and disability status, highlighting the need for targeted action.

Addressing these gaps requires framing disability as an equity, inclusion, and human rights issue within key national frameworks, including:

- A Common Vision for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary living in Canada: Let's Get Moving[7]
- Canadian Sport Policy 2025–2035[8]
- Framework for Recreation in Canada[9] and its 2024 Update[10]
- National Active Transportation Strategy[11]
- The Spirit of Sport – Active Together (National Strategy for Indigenous Peoples' Participation in Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation)[12]

THE FINDINGS SHOW THAT BOTH PARTICIPATION RATES AND EXPERIENCES OF SPORT, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AND RECREATION ARE NOT THE SAME FOR EVERYONE. PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFY AS HAVING A DISABILITY GENERALLY PARTICIPATE LESS OFTEN AND ARE LESS LIKELY TO HOLD POSITIVE VIEWS ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO THEM THAN PEOPLE WITHOUT A DISABILITY.

These Canadian frameworks, along with the WHO Global Action Plan on Physical Activity,[2] point to complementary solutions:

- disability-inclusive systems and pathways to promote lifelong participation in sport, physical activity, and recreation,[2,8]
- removal of barriers, universal design, accessible infrastructure and transport,[11]
- equity, reconciliation, and culturally safe Indigenous approaches[12]
- stronger collaboration across health, recreation, disability, and community sectors.[2,7]

In line with these directions, the Future of Sport in Canada Commission has called on the federal government to create an independent disability sport strategy, and the evidence in this and future reports will help shape that work.[13] The CFLRI and Active Abilities Canada are committed to supporting next steps to improve access and inclusion in sport and physical activity for persons with disabilities.

This report is the first in a broader series. Future reports will look more closely at other factors linked to participation—such as physical and social environments, health, and economic conditions—and will present a detailed set of recommended actions drawing on findings from across the series. To follow this work, readers are encouraged to visit the **CFLRI** or **Active Abilities Canada** websites regularly or subscribe to their newsletters for updates on upcoming releases.

FUTURE REPORTS WILL LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT OTHER FACTORS LINKED TO PARTICIPATION—SUCH AS PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS, HEALTH, AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

This report draws mainly on two large national online surveys of adults in Canada:

1. The 2024 Physical Activity Monitor, conducted by Leger in collaboration with the CFLRI, examined beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and participation related to sport and physical activity using an online panel survey of 11,060 adults aged 18 and older, including 2,428 adults (22%) who reported a disability. Because the survey used a panel-based online method, the results cannot be generalized to the entire Canadian adult population within a known margin of error; the percentages reflect only the people who took part in the survey.
2. The 2025 Physical Activity Survey from the CFLRI used a similar online panel approach in January and February 2025 with 3,000 adults aged 18 and older, including 422 adults (14%) reporting a disability. It explored time spent in different types of physical activity, sedentary time, sleep, and perceptions about motivation, competence, and opportunity. As with the 2024 survey, results from the 2025 survey are representative of the sample only and should not be interpreted as precise estimates for all Canadian adults.