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Canada is a country in North America comprised of ten provinces and three territories. The word Canada comes from a word used by the native Iroquois tribe for “village” or “settlement”. It is the second largest country in the world, with a total area of 9 984 670 km² and a population of 32 976 300. It has a border with the United States of America to the south. Canada has two official languages: English and French. Canada’s system of government is a constitutional monarchy, and a parliamentary democracy headed by a Prime Minister in the capital, Ottawa. The climate in Canada ranges from cold, arctic temperatures in the north and throughout the western prairies to temperate weather throughout the south and on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Canada is a multicultural mosaic of a variety of ethnicities and cultures. Some traditional Canadian symbols include the maple leaf, beaver, Canada goose, and the loon. Canada’s official sports are ice hockey and lacrosse. In 2004, there were 1.65 million active participants involved in ice hockey in Canada. The city of Vancouver, British Columbia will be hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics.

Canadian Health Care System

Canada’s health care system is publicly-funded and is regulated by each province or territory. The federal government sets guidelines for the regulations put forth by the provincial/territorial health care providers. The five main principles of the Canada Health Act are public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and

accessibility. The system itself is comprised of a wide variety of insurance plans which provide coverage for all Canadian citizens. This coverage includes preventative care and medical treatments by physicians as well as full access to hospitals, dental surgery, and other medical services. There is no discrimination within the system regardless of socioeconomic status, medical history or standard of living. Some controversies arise from differing opinions towards introducing a private health care system similar to the United States. The current public system has led to long wait times for non-urgent medical services whereas a private system would provide prompt services at a cost. This would introduce inequalities to the health care system with only the wealthy being able to afford some treatments. Under the current system, Canada has one of the highest life expectancies (approximately 80 years) and lowest infant mortality rates among industrialized countries.

Canadian Attitudes Towards Disability Issues

In a 2004 survey conducted by the Office for Disability Issues of Social Development Canada, the attitudes of Canadians towards people with disabilities were assessed. The study found that many Canadians view the prototypical image of disability as a person in a wheelchair; thinking primarily of a physical handicap or reduced mobility. Intellectual disabilities are much less likely to be part of the average Canadian's definition of disability. 75% of Canadians reported to have personally known someone with a disability, and more than half of this group has discussed the disability with this person.

A majority of Canadians believe that persons with disabilities face significant barriers in their lives, especially in terms of financial security and transportation. 55% of Canadians

believe that children with physical disabilities should be fully integrated into classrooms with able children. However, only 33% believe this to be the correct course of action for children with intellectual disabilities. Just over half of persons with disabilities reported to have experienced some form of discrimination on a regular or occasional basis. Only 21% of Canadians acknowledge being aware of any government legislation or policies currently in place to support persons with disabilities.

Canadians have made a conscious effort to use socially constructive/inclusive language to describe individuals who have a disability. Documents such as *A Ways with Words and Images* have been created to inform Canadians about the proper images and words used to describe people with disabilities. For example, the word "disabled" is an adjective not noun. People are not conditions. Therefore it is logical to use the term "person with a disability. One must make the effort to avoid words that may imply inferiority or suffering such as: burden, incompetent or defective. (http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/odi/documents/wayWithWords/way_with_words.pdf)

The Government of Canada has taken many initiatives to promote inclusion of people with disabilities. The following is a list of promotional programs funded by the government to increase awareness and inclusion of persons with disabilities (*advancing Inclusion doc. Government of Canada*)

- *E-Inclusion – Centre de recherche en informatique de Montréal* (New Media Research Networks Fund, 2005-07) – aims at developing audio-visual content processing tools and sensory-specific content creation methods for multimedia producers. The goal is to provide creators with powerful audio-video tools that will allow

them to centre their attention on the creative aspects and thus improve the richness of the multimedia experience for people with sensory disabilities.

- *CulturAll – University of Toronto – Adaptive Technology Resource Centre* (New Media Research Networks Fund, 2005-07) – aims to make inclusive design a naturally integrated component of Canadian cultural productions and act as a catalyst for innovation and creativity. The CulturAll Network continues its work developing innovative approaches, tools, and strategies to ensure that everyone in Canada can participate in the Canadian cultural exchange.
- *Stretch – University of Toronto* (Partnerships Fund 2005-06) – focuses on the realities of people living with disabilities in Aboriginal communities. As an adjunct to the popular online broadcast show “Zed,” the project will collect video, animation, visual artwork, and music that express perspectives on inclusion. Youth and students, with the help of media artists, will showcase their work and their ideas related to the subjects explored by the site in a popular online forum. It is anticipated that at least 30 videos, 55 visual art pieces, and 15 other works in various media will be presented.
- *ASLpah.ca – Canadian Hearing Society* (Gateway Fund, 2004-05) – showcases content by and about people who are hard of hearing, deaf, or deafened. Content such as personal stories and e-zine materials, in sign language (ASL or LSQ) can be found on the site, which also includes video stories on themes of humour, employment, education and other subjects. Participants, particularly deaf youth, are encouraged to create and share their stories and perspectives using their own language.

- *Rick Hansen: Man In Motion* (Canadian Memory Fund 2003-04) – showcases Rick Hansen defying all odds as he circled the world in his wheelchair for over two years to raise awareness and money for spinal cord research. Even when the tour was over, he kept going, a man in perpetual motion.
- *Canadian Network for Inclusive Cultural Exchange – University of Toronto – Adaptive Technology Resource Centre* (New Media Research Networks Fund, 2002-04) developed free guidelines, tools, and learning materials aimed at including people with disabilities in cultural creation, exchanges, and experiences.

Physical Education

The very early developments of adapted physical education in Canada can be traced to Robert Tait McKenzie, Director of Physical Education at Montreal's McGill University in the late 19th and early 20th century. During World War I, McKenzie penned the book *Reclaiming the Maimed*, a text discussing the benefits of exercise and sport for persons with disabilities (Steadward, 2003). After World War II, a growing number of universities began to develop physical education programs into which many returning veterans would enroll (Steadward, 2003).

The recent history of physical education programs in Canadian schools has been shaped by the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Govt. of Canada, 1982). Section 15 of this charter deals with ensuring that inclusive physical education programs are the norm. All students participate in the same physical education classes, regardless of their individual physical abilities. This approach has a positive effect on both able-bodied students as well as students with disabilities. Firstly, able students

improve their understanding of different disabilities and become more accepting of persons with disabilities. At the same time, the students with disabilities improve their fitness, motor skills, social skills, and are better prepared to keep pace with the other students in their class (Steadward, 2003).

Health Canada operates a program entitled the Active Living Alliance (www.ala.ca) which promotes inclusion of persons with disabilities into all forms of physical activity, including physical education classes. The ALA provides “nationally coordinated leadership, support, encouragement, promotion and information that facilitates active living opportunities for Canadians of all abilities across all settings and environments” (ALA website). Many of the resources developed by the ALA are used by schools and communities to help aid in the physical education of persons with disabilities.

Recreation

Health Canada has, in the past several years, been endorsing physical activity as a means to better health. They have done this both through promotion/marketing as well as research investment. This push towards increased physical activity is inclusive of both able persons as well as persons with disabilities. Physical activity and recreation is a great form of rehabilitation for people with or without disabilities. A few examples of initiatives promoting physical activity for children with disabilities include camp programs throughout Canada such as the Easter Seals Camps for children with disabilities and Camp Oochigeas for children with cancer. Programs are also in place for people of all ages with disabilities. One example being the Abilities in Motion program run by the YMCA at the Nova Scotia Rehabilitation Centre in Halifax. This

program provides an opportunity for people with disabilities to exercise in a safe environment with equipment adapted to their needs.

Elite Sport

Sport Canada mission is to **enhance the opportunities for Canadians to participate and excel in sport**. Sport Canada's focus is on providing leadership, expertise and targeted support, as an inclusive, responsive and valued partner within the sport community. The following are some strategic directions that Sport Canada is committed to:

- Strengthen Sport Leadership
- Provide Strategic Support for High Performance Programming
- Promote Technically Sound Sport Development
- Enhance Opportunities for Sport Participation
- Maximize the Benefits of Hosting
- Promote Linguistic Duality in the Canadian Sport System
- Strengthen the Ethical Foundation of Sport
- Expand the body of Knowledge about Sport
- Strengthen Sport Canada Program and Policy Evaluation
- Harmonize Canadian Sport System

In 2006-07 Sport Canada is providing \$12.5 million for sport programming for people with disabilities, which represents over 8% of Sport Canada's grants and contributions budget in 2006-07 (about \$140 million). Of this total, \$11 million is provided annually toward programming initiatives that improve access to sport for people with disabilities (for example, support for Paralympic sport programs run by national sport organizations; mission support for the Canadian team participating in

the Paralympic Games; Athlete Assistance Program stipends to more than 200 carded Paralympic athletes; funding for the Canadian Paralympic Committee's "Ready, Willing and Able" participation project to recruit participants, coaches and leaders; and base funding for Special Olympics Canada, the Canadian Paralympic Committee, and the Canadian Deaf Sports Association). An additional \$1.5 million will be provided annually toward increasing participation in sport for people with disabilities, as stated in the participation objective of the newly released Sport Canada *Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability*. (advancing inclusion doc. Government of Canada)

Canada along with Sport Canada have developed a *Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability* to facilitate the full and active participation of persons with a disability in sport, and to contribute to the inclusive environment as stated in Sport Canada mission statement. This Policy uses three disability sport movements – Paralympics, Special Olympics and Deaflympics as vehicles for the action plan. Essentially the goal of this Policy is to induce behavioral changes leading towards the progressive reduction and, ultimately, elimination of sport-specific barriers. These barriers have prevented persons with a disability from participating in sport to the full extent of their ability and interest.

Today, the majority of Canadians believe that persons with a disability can and should have the opportunity to participate in social, economic and cultural life to the fullest of their ability. Therefore, *The Canadian Sport Policy works towards creating, by 2012, a dynamic and leading-edge environment that enables all Canadians to experience and enjoy involvement in Sport to the extent of their abilities and, for increasing numbers, to perform consistently and successfully at the highest competitive levels.*

Sports and physical activity for persons with a disability often have innate barriers or obstacles that may interfere with ones interests in participating. Barriers, such as the cost of special equipment (i.e. sleds for sledge hockey, specialized chairs or ankle foot orthotics (AFO)) are often hindrances. There is no doubt that the training cost of a person with a disability is often more expensive than training of an able-body individual. These barriers can be manageable when resources and commitment are available. To encourage more sport and physical activity participation among persons with a disability recruitment and first contact programs must be in place to educate and capture interest. Coaches, facilities and equipment all must be readily available and specialized to meet the needs of all abilities.(*Policy on Sport for Persons with a disability Doc.*)

Sport Canada has developed an approach that will minimize if not obliterate these barriers. Firstly, Sport Canada encourages National Sport Organizations to set specific performance targets for the inclusion of athletes with a disability and provide funding for these athletes, this is also true to Multisport Service Organizations. These Organizations inclusive policies are role models for inclusive environment in which all athletes thrive. Secondly, *the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Priorities for Collaborative Action*, encourages and supports inclusive sport service programming and delivery at the provincial and local levels.

Sport Canada vision has dramatically improved the opportunity for persons with a disability to participate in sport. However, certain areas of focus are still in need of more investigation. Areas such as:

- Early childhood sport and physical literacy
- Adequate access to training, coaches and facilities

- Increased opportunities for national competitions
- Application of sport medicine, research and performance evaluations
- Harmonization of federal-provincial/territorial funding

Below are guiding principles that Canadian Sport Policy state:

- Sport is athletes/participant-centered
- Sport promotes leadership
- Sport is based on equity and access
- Sport is focused on development
- Sport champions excellence
- Sport serves the public interests

The following are objectives stated by the *Policy on Sport for Persons with a disability*

- Enhance Participation – raising awareness in specific area of focus such as children, disability-specific sport participation, access to sport facilities and services.
- Enhanced Excellence- support achievements, talent identification and development, provide competitive opportunities, specialized coaching and sport sciences and medical research and needs.
- Enhance Capacity- developing a clear system of eligibility and classification. Research pertinent to sports and persons with a disability.
- Enhanced interaction- Foster interactions through federal-Provincial/Territorial partnership, networking and International Representation.

Paralympic

Sport and physical activity have clear health benefits: reduction in type II diabetes by 26%, colon cancer by 20% and cardiovascular disease by 22% (Canadian Fitness and

Lifestyle Research Institute). A reduction of physical inactivity by 10% would save taxpayers \$150 million dollars. These same benefits are as important if not more important for a person with a disability. Sport and Physical activity brings physical, social, and personal benefits. It also serves to help overcome social isolation and increase self reliance. With 3.6 million Canadians having a disability it is extremely important that adequate measures are taken to educate this high -risk population. The Policy has a guided framework

The Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC) is a non-profit charitable private organization that is recognized by the International Paralympic Committee. The goal of the CPC is to empower a person with a disability through sport at all levels.

The CPC believes in :

Sport -that is both fun and an agent for personal and social growth

Athlete focus- acting in the best interests of the athletes

Excellence -the pursuit and achievement of excellence in all interests

Equity- exemplified by fairness, opportunity, integrity and trust

Leadership- providing leadership in the advancement of the Paralympic Movement

The CPC also has some very innovative programs that propagate their goals in vision across the country. Programs such as *Changing minds*, *Changing lives* educate healthcare professionals of the promising results of sport as a vehicle for rehabilitation. *Feel the Rush* is a participation program designed to encourage and help people with a disability to get involved in sport. There are many other interesting programs that can be found on the CPC website: [www. Paralympic.ca](http://www.Paralympic.ca)

Paralympic athletes can be sponsored through various programs. Sport Canada funds the Athlete Assistance Program (AAP). The AAP is aimed at enhancing the

Canadian high performance sport system. The AAP assists international caliber athletes with their training and competition needs, though the provision of a living and training allowance and, where applicable, tuition expenses.

(www.paralympic.ca)

Rehabilitation

Canada has many branches of therapy that are used as methods of rehabilitation. Methods such as Occupational therapy, Physiotherapy, Recreational therapy and Psychiatry are extremely important to assist an individual through a rehabilitation period. Once the rehabilitation period has concluded it is up to the individual to maintain a way of life that will promote and maintain the gains made in rehab.

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapist, was started in 1972, and has since been a great Association for therapist as well as patients. The Association presents key initiatives and programs that aid in the rehabilitation area, all while promoting health and well-being. Occupational therapist in Canada are most often employed by community agencies, health care organizations such as hospitals, chronic care facilities, rehabilitation centers and clinics, schools; social agencies industry or are self-employed. Some therapist may be specialized to treat special populations such as the elderly, pediatrics or spinal cord injuries. (www.caot.ca)

The Canadian Therapeutic Recreational Association was newly formed in 1996. The philosophy of recreational therapy is to use leisure activities to promote every day health and well-being while promoting and maximizing independence. This association educates health care professional about different streams of recreation and how it can be used as rehabilitation for certain conditions. (www.canadian-tr.org)

Major centres of Rehabilitation and research include are spanned across the country. The Ottawa Hospital rehabilitation center, Toronto rehabilitation institute and Nova Scotia Rehabilitation center are to mention a few.

Expenses

The Canadian Government is developing a disability awareness program entitled "Getting on Board". This program goal is to aid small transportation businesses within the nation to better serve persons with a disability. In general the public transport system for a person with a disability is good if they live in urban areas. Rates for accessible buses are comparable to standard city transportation, for example: 2\$ one way, or 1.40\$ for seniors. However, advance booking may be required in some cities. Rural communities in Canada may have less public transportation, which could lead to costly private transport alternatives.

Recreational activities are often offered for people with a disability at around the same cost as would other activities. For example, AIM, a program run through the YMCA, charges the cost of a YMCA membership. Often therapeutic recreational activities such as therapeutic horseback riding can be claimed through medical insurance.

Employment Opportunities in Adapted Physical Education

APA specialists have many unique employment opportunities at their disposal. Firstly, they can be a valuable asset to the public and private school boards. APA specialist can create individual physical education plans for a student, by assessing and communicating with the medical team, parents and teachers; creating a network of support and encouragement for the student. APA specialist can be active in the physical education classroom, and use their knowledge to adapt the activity to all abilities. APA specialist can often be educators, coaches, trainers and a voice for elite

and recreational sport for persons with a disability. Rehabilitation work and maintenance can also be a possible APA employment opportunity. APA specialist could provide the link after rehabilitation with the occupational or physical therapist, providing recreational activities to maintain and continue the progress made in the rehabilitation stage.

Conclusion

Canada has worked hard and continues to improve their government and societal standards for people with disabilities. Many initiatives have been made to promote inclusion among individuals with disabilities. However, Canada is far from the perfect societal model and must continue in their appointed direction. Progress can be made in the education system as well as the research field of APA. Health care professional must continue to utilize the expertise of APA educators to ensure the continuing progress of their patient's health. APA can possibly lower Canadian health care costs in the future by providing the extra link after rehabilitation, this can lead to reduced visit to health care professional in the future.