Women and Girls in Sport: Action
Message from the Premier

Sports have been a source of joy throughout my life. Growing up, I was on the track, basketball and gymnastics teams. To this day, my favourite mornings are the ones that start with a run, just as the sun is coming up.

Being an athlete has had a direct and powerful influence on my life and career. Sports are where I first learned the importance of discipline and teamwork, and where I gained the self-confidence to take on leadership roles.

I believe that every woman and girl should have the chance to experience the power of sport for themselves, and enjoy the many far-reaching benefits. Providing more opportunities to participate in sports will help women and girls across Ontario stay healthy and fit, develop the skills needed to flourish in their careers—and enrich their lives in so many other ways.

Our government is committed to levelling the playing field between men and women—in sports, employment and every sector of our society. This is part of our work to put fairness at the heart of everything we do. We will give everyone the chance to achieve their potential and make a full contribution to our society. And that will benefit all of us.

I am encouraged by the progress we have made in expanding opportunities for women and girls to participate in sports. But we still have more work to do. Ontario’s Women and Girls in Sport Action Plan demonstrates the steps we are actively taking to make our province a leader on the path to full equality in sports.

Kathleen Wynne
Premier of Ontario
It’s time to create optimal conditions and systems to support women and girls of different ages, abilities and backgrounds to be engaged in sport and recreation.

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT Action Plan
Minister's Message

In November 2015, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport released its first ever plan for amateur sport in Ontario, *Game ON – The Ontario Government’s Sport Plan*. Since then, Ontarians from all backgrounds and abilities have benefitted from increased opportunities to lead healthy, active lives, develop new skills and gain valuable experience that will support them both on and off the field.

To build on this work and in recognition of the importance of increasing equality in sports, I am excited to present *Advancing Opportunities for Women and Girls in Sport: Ontario’s Action Plan*.

Our sport system, which supports athletes from the playground to the podium, should be accessible to everyone, including women and girls. That’s why closing the gender gap in sport is one of *Game ON*’s top priorities. We need to make sure that women and girls can reach their full athletic potential.

Focusing on three pillars—participation, development and excellence—Ontario is working to level the playing field for women and girls in sport. This document outlines a comprehensive series of recommendations intended to engage women and girls in lifelong physical activity.

This action plan has been developed in partnership with our *Advisory Panel on Sport* and with input from across the sport sector and the Ontario government. The plan includes specific action items that can be implemented beginning this year, and recognizes the roles and responsibilities of five key partners in the Ontario sport system—provincial and multi-sport organizations, coaches, schools, colleges and universities, and municipal recreation providers.

It is my hope that this action plan not only provides a roadmap for gender parity in sport, but also is used as a model for other jurisdictions who share our goals of inclusion and equality. I look forward to what we can achieve when we all work together and as always, I am relying on your engagement, continued support, commitment and feedback to ensure our amateur sport system is welcoming and inspiring to all Ontarians.

All my best,

The Honourable Eleanor McMahon

*Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport*
Executive Summary

The Ontario government recognizes that actively engaging women and girls in sport and ensuring they remain active through their lives is a vital part of an effective sport system.

Currently, we face a gender gap in sport participation in Ontario that is significant across all ages, and that increases with age.

The Ontario government recognizes the importance of rectifying this situation and is committed to the work ahead to achieve gender equality.

Over the course of two years, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS) worked with the Minister’s Advisory Panel on Sport, partner ministries and provincial and multi-sport, coaching and school sport organizations to build this action plan and to support the government-wide goal of strengthening the advancement of women and girls in all facets of society.

The action plan supports the following outcomes in:

1. THE BROADER SPORT SYSTEM
   - Women have leadership positions and equal opportunities in sport.
   - Women and girls have the necessary skills and competencies to facilitate lifelong participation in sport.
   - The achievements of women in sport are highlighted across Ontario and there is gender equality in the coaching system.
   - Baseline data and research are available and accessible to all sport delivery partners.

2. PROVINCIAL SPORT ORGANIZATIONS AND MULTI-SPORT ORGANIZATIONS (PSOs/MSOs)
   - PSOs/MSOs have technical programming and system planning that is specific to the needs of women and girls.
3. RECREATION SECTOR

- Opportunities for women and girls to access and participate in grassroots physical activity and sport are readily available and accessible.

4. PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION SYSTEM

- Girls and young women are supported within the education system with quality physical education and access to physical activity opportunities.

5. POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

- Equal access to sport program funds, scholarships, facility space, leadership positions, and programming for women and girls at universities and colleges.

It’s time to create optimal conditions and systems to support women and girls of different ages, abilities and backgrounds to be engaged in sport and recreation.
For women and girls specifically, the impact of sport and physical activity boosts self-esteem, provides positive role models, and fosters inclusion.

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT Action Plan
Mission

Advancing Opportunities for Women and Girls in Sport: Ontario’s Action Plan focuses on four areas of the broader public sector that are considered touch points for sport and recreation: the Ontario sports system, publicly supported schools, colleges and universities, and municipal recreation. Building on Game ON, the action plan’s mission is to:

1. **REMOVE BARRIERS** for women and girls to participate and develop in sport and physical activity, wherever and however they choose to participate;

2. **PROVIDE EQUITABLE ACCESS** for women and girls in sport and recreation programming, training, coaching, administration and governance;

3. **PROMOTE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT** for all women and girls to feel respected, confident and safe to participate in sport and physical activity; and

4. Call on all Ontario organizations involved in delivering amateur sport and recreation to **COLLABORATE AND FOCUS THEIR EFFORTS ON ACHIEVING EQUITY IN SPORT**.
A Foundation for Success

In September 2016, the Premier’s mandate letter to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, included direction to implement Game ON with a special emphasis on advancing equal and fair opportunities for women and girls in sport and recreation. On International Women’s Day in March 2017, the Premier reaffirmed the government’s commitment and announced that a provincial Action Plan for Equal Opportunity in Sport would be developed based on the expertise of the Minister’s Advisory Panel on Sport.

Participation in sport, recreation and physical activity has been proven to provide lasting benefits to social, physical and mental health and it is also a driver for economic growth. For women and girls specifically, the impact of sport and physical activity boosts self-esteem, provides positive role models, and fosters inclusion.

Research shows that girls who participate in sport are more healthy and confident. Sport participation also provides girls with a solid foundation for successful careers and leadership positions.

Since the launch of Game ON in 2015, the Ontario government has made a number of concerted efforts to increase access to opportunities in sport for women and girls.

PREMIER’S ROUNDTABLE ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

On March 24, 2016, a Premier’s Roundtable on Women and Girls in Sport was held with government representatives, including the provincial Minister of the Status of Women, and experts from the sector to identify barriers and discuss issues and trends affecting participation of women and girls in sport. The roundtable discussion resulted in the identification of three major themes that have an impact on women and girls’ participation: body image and confidence issues; a lack of positive role models; and systemic barriers (i.e., funding inequities, access to equal programming and cultural beliefs). The roundtable recommended utilizing the education system to engage girls in sport at a younger age and to keep them engaged, to promote female “heroes” and role models to attract girls and women to sport, and to require gender equity policies for institutions and organizations that are publicly funded.

The information gained from this roundtable discussion continues to be used to inform ministry priorities and government objectives.
COMMISSIONED RESEARCH

In 2016, the Ontario government commissioned a research paper with the Centre for Sport Policy Studies at the University of Toronto, Women and Girls’ Participation, Development and Excellence in Sport. The purpose was to increase our understanding of the barriers and success factors that influence women and girls in sport, in order to promote best practices and support evidence-based policy and programming options.

The research paper examined the current state of women and girls’ participation in sport and recreation in Ontario, as well as at the national and international levels. It provides evidence detailed later in this plan, which substantiates the need for focused efforts to close the gender-based participation gap in Ontario.

The research also makes a strong case to collect benchmarking data and measure longer term change and identifies approaches in other jurisdictions that have helped alleviate these barriers. The report’s findings have been shared with Ontario government sport partners and our federal, provincial and territorial counterparts.

ONTARIO SPORT SYMPOSIUM

In Game ON, the government committed to holding an annual Sport Symposium that brings together Ontario’s sport leaders to discuss current issues and trends and to report back on its implementation and results. Established as an annual event, the first symposium was held in April 2016, with a follow-up event a year later in April 2017. Approximately 200 participants from across the province attend the event each year, including representatives from PSOs/MSOs, universities, foundations, sport facilities, volunteers, athletes, academics and government officials.

The symposium has been a platform to discuss equality in sport programming, leadership, and policy with the Ontario sport sector. In both years, the symposium featured breakout and plenary sessions about the barriers facing women and girls in sport and possible solutions.

ADVANCING THE FPT AGENDA ON WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT

At the Federal-Provincial/Territorial (FPT) Conference for Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation in June 2016, the topic of closing the gender gap in sport was tabled by Ontario as a pan-Canadian issue and adopted as a priority for collaborative action. A working group was formed, comprised of FPT government representatives and national
industry experts such as the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), and has been tasked with providing recommendations to FPT ministers to increase participation of women and girls in all facets of sport. The working group will table a set of recommendations at the 2017 Ministers Conference in July 2017.

A MODERNIZED SPORT RECOGNITION POLICY

In August 2016, MTCS released a revised Sport Recognition Policy for PSOs/MSOs with a new inclusion requirement that will ensure equal and fair opportunities for women and girls to participate in all aspects of sport. Organizational inclusion policies are now a prerequisite in order to be a recognized PSO/MSO and to be eligible for ministry funding through the Ontario Amateur Sport Fund.

TARGETED INVESTMENTS

The Ontario government has made a series of targeted investments to support initiatives aimed to advance opportunities for women and girls in sport. In 2016–2017 alone, over $1.3 million was provided to projects that address the barriers to participation, development and excellence that women and girls experience in the sport sector. Examples of these projects include:

Changing the Game – Changing the Conversation, a program for female coaches, is an Ontario150 Signature Initiative to recruit and train 250 female coaches and 90 female mentors, resulting in gender balanced leadership with more qualified and confident female coaches across different sports, age groups and sport settings. The Coaches Association of Ontario (CAO) is tackling common public perceptions about female leadership to help change stereotypical views.

The Post-Secondary Institution (PSI) Female Coach Salary Partnership was funded by MTCS in 2016 and launched by the CAO to assist PSIs in developing capacity among assistant female coaches who will become eligible head coaches for varsity programs in the near future. The program provides a broader pool of female coaches with qualifications and experience that meet the requirements for head coaches in the post-secondary sport system.
The **Celebration of Women and Sport Project**, led by CAAWS, will commemorate and celebrate the pioneering and transformational efforts made in Ontario and Canada to foster sport inclusion and equity. The project will bring people together from across sectors, communities and disciplines for a dynamic event that will include workshops and interactive sessions, networking activities, exhibits showcasing the history of women and sport in Ontario and Canada, and display booths featuring organizations, initiatives and opportunities. This project is funded through the **Ontario150 Community Celebration Program**.

The **Gender and Physical Literacy Project**, funded through the **Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF)**, an agency of MTCS, is a research project investigating the reasons girls have lower levels of physical literacy than boys and how programming may be enhanced to effect positive change. **Sport for Life** is leading this initiative in partnership with **McMaster University** and the **Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Ophea)**.

The **Fostering More Active Lifestyles** project, a collective impact grant funded through the OTF, aims to increase participation in sport and physical activity among girls across the school day. This includes creating opportunities where sport skills can be developed and sustained for girls in before- and after-school programs, intramurals, recess, inter-school sport, health and physical education. This project is led primarily by Ophea in partnership with CAAWS and Sport for Life.
Context for Action

Although women and girls account for more than 50 per cent of Canada’s population, they continue to be underrepresented in the sport and physical activity system. For example, while 47% of boys ages 5 to 17 average 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity per day, only 25% of girls do. Extensive research has been conducted to identify the reasons behind this trend and to define the factors that contribute to its continued prevalence in the sport system.
Findings from the commissioned research paper, *Women and Girls’ Participation, Development and Excellence in Sport*, by the University of Toronto’s Centre for Sport Policy Studies, as well as other sources, include:

**COACHING**

- There are only 9 female head coaches (16%) out of a total of 54 national teams in Canada.iii
- The Coaching Association of Canada report that of the 98 Canadian coaches selected for the Rio 2016 Olympics, 1 in 5 were women.iv
- In Ontario specifically, the number of female coaches decreases as the level of coaching certification increases (see Figure 1).
- The Coaches Association of Ontario reports that in 2016–17, coaching bursaries were awarded to 760 male coaches (66%) compared to only 389 female coaches (34%).
- In 2014–15, Ontario universities reported 305 male head coaches (83%), but only 64 female head coaches (17%).v
- This trend is also prevalent in the Ontario Colleges system where, in 2017, there were 134 male head coaches (91%) and 13 female head coaches (9%).vi

![Figure 1: Ontario Coaches](image)

**RECREATION SECTOR**

- Out of the four largest provinces (Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec), Ontario has the lowest proportion of women and girls participating in organized community sports (28.9%).vii
- This trend is primarily due to the aging population, a growing proportion of new Canadians (who are less likely to participate in organized sports), and the rising cost and privatization of organized sports in Canada.viii

**PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION SYSTEM**

- According to the 2016–17 participation data provided by the Ontario Federation of School Athletics Association (OFSAA), 109,214 boys and 81,321 girls participated in OFSAA sports. The gender gap between the number of boys and girls participating in school sport has consistently been over 20,000.
POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

- While female full-time students at Ontario universities account for 55% of the student population\(^v\), there are still fewer female varsity and club teams than male teams.\(^x\)

- In 2014–15, Ontario universities reported a disparity in their rosters for varsity and/or club sports, with 58% of positions occupied by male athletes compared to 42% of positions occupied by females. Even though there are more women enrolled in universities, there are 3 intercollegiate opportunities available for every 100 male students, and only 1.8 for every 100 female students.\(^xi\)

- In 2017, all sports and leagues within Ontario Colleges were made up of 53% male and 47% female coaching positions.\(^xii\)

- Staffing within Ontario college and university athletic departments is also predominantly male (see Figure 2A and 2B).\(^xiii\)

PROVINCIAL SPORT ORGANIZATIONS / MULTI-SPORT ORGANIZATIONS (PSOs/MSOs)

- According to program reports submitted to MTCS by PSOs/MSOs in 2017, only 13 of the 58 PSOs/MSOs had a female athlete membership of greater than 50%. Three of those 13 sports were exclusively and/or primarily sports for women and girls (women’s hockey, synchronized swimming and ringette).

- Nine of the 10 sports reporting the lowest proportion of women athletes are sports open to both men and women.

It is the responsibility of governments, academics and sport delivery partners not only to gather information and data on current trends, but also to share and report these findings to the wider sector. And it is everyone’s responsibility to find solutions to address these issues.
Taking Action to Support Women and Girls in Sport

Through this action plan, the government is taking concrete steps to overcome the gender gap in sport.

1. THE BROADER SPORT SYSTEM

Leadership

1 / WE WILL promote equity in the recruitment process for sport and recreation jobs and volunteer positions by establishing and adhering to fair hiring practices.

2 / WE WILL collaborate with cross-ministry partners on a strategy to encourage and promote women in positions of professional, Board and volunteer sport and recreation leadership. The strategy will include skills training to increase the representation of women in coaching, officiating and sport leadership.

OUTCOME > Women have opportunities to assume leadership positions throughout the sport and recreation sector.
Diversity and Culture Change

3 / WE WILL integrate gender-based analysis into program and policy development, to ensure women and girls are not adversely affected by requiring all governments and sport delivery organizations to consider the impacts of their policies, programs and services on diverse groups of women, men, and all gender identities and expressions.

> WE WILL continue to partner with Indigenous organizations to enhance the sport involvement of Indigenous women and girls by taking a holistic approach to programming that respects their unique training and development needs.

> WE WILL explore alternative approaches to facility development and use and sport programming design and delivery, to meet the needs of Ontario’s ethno-culturally diverse women and girls.

OUTCOME > All women and girls, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical or intellectual ability, have equal opportunities in sport.

Physical Literacy

4 / WE WILL establish a Physical Literacy Advisory Group, comprised of key influencers across the sport and recreation sectors, to advise government on the development of an Ontario Physical Literacy Strategy. The strategy will identify actions to improve opportunities for women and girls to begin participating in physical activity and sport.

OUTCOME > Women and girls have the necessary skills and competencies to facilitate their lifelong participation and enjoyment in sport.
Increasing Awareness

5 / WE WILL continue to conduct research that analyzes and identifies the disparity in women and girls’ participation in sport.

6 / WE WILL use all available communication channels to generate social awareness about the contributions of women and girls in sport and recreation, and promote the importance of ensuring equal opportunity and access.

7 / WE WILL create opportunities to celebrate and recognize the efforts and successes of outstanding female coaches, athletes, teams, officials and volunteers on an annual basis.

OUTCOME > The achievements of female athletes, teams, coaches, administrators and volunteers are highlighted throughout Ontario, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts and progressive programming in realizing change.

Coaching

8 / WE WILL encourage collaboration among sport delivery partners for a mentorship program that supports and retains women in coaching roles and opens new opportunities for balanced leadership. We will create opportunities for male coaches to develop the necessary skills to mentor female athletes.

OUTCOME > Gender equality in the coaching system, with women employed as coaches and/or appointed as volunteer coaches in the same proportion as men (See Recommendations #1 and #2 above). All coaches develop sensitivity to the particular needs of athletes of all genders.
Compliance

9 / WE WILL recognize PSOs/MSOs that have shown a commitment to providing sport and coaching opportunities for underrepresented populations in Ontario, including women and girls, with access to additional funding under the Ontario Amateur Sport Fund (OASF).

OUTCOME > Sport delivery partners are committed to ensuring compliance in the equitable delivery of their programming and services.

2. PROVINCIAL SPORT ORGANIZATIONS AND MULTI-SPORT ORGANIZATIONS (PSOs/MSOs)

10 / WE WILL work directly with recognized PSOs/MSOs to develop progressive governance models and athlete and volunteer pathways that encourage and sustain long term participation of women and girls.

11 / WE WILL create an information sharing platform for recognized PSOs/MSOs to promote and share best practices in recruiting, developing, supporting and, retaining gender balance of athletes, coaches, sport administrators and officials.

OUTCOME > PSOs/MSOs have technical programming and system planning that is specific to the needs of women and girls and contributes to excellence.
3. RECREATION SECTOR

12 / WE WILL develop a best practice resource in collaboration with recreation delivery partners on how best to recruit and support women and girls for participation in community sport programming.

13 / WE WILL require all before-school and after-school program providers in the province to:

- provide diversity and inclusion training for staff;
- offer physical activity programming that is reflective of the unique needs of girls; and
- ensure girls have access to participate at the same level and frequency as boys.

14 / WE WILL call on corporate organizations and foundations to commit to investing in initiatives that support young girls’ participation in entry-level sport programs.

15 / WE WILL increase the access to quality physical activity programs for Indigenous women and girls across the province, including in rural and northern communities.

OUTCOME > Opportunities for women and girls to access and participate in grassroots sport and physical activity are readily available and accessible within their communities.
4. PUBLICLY FUNDED EDUCATION SYSTEM

16 / WE WILL promote and support the inclusion of at least 60 minutes of physical activity for children and youth and sport-related opportunities both within schools and connected to the school day, including activities that are responsive to the needs of girls.

17 / WE WILL collaborate with school boards to support sport-related programming suitable for girls and to align with the government’s commitment of 60 minutes of physical activity for children and youth, both within and connected to the school day, with facilitation overseen by trained and qualified educators.

18 / WE WILL convene a broadly based stakeholder committee to develop recommendations for a balanced participation model across organized school-sport (including inter-school and intramural sports).

OUTCOME > Girls and young women are supported within the education system with quality physical education and access to physical activity opportunities across the school day, including organized school sports, intramurals, and after-school programs.
5. POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

19 / WE WILL work directly with university and college sport delivery partners and student representatives for the university sector to review current competition structures and ensure parity between opportunities for female and male athletes/teams.

20 / WE WILL collaborate with university and college sport delivery partners to promote, develop and adopt best practice guidelines and policies to ensure parity in team selection, coaching, officiating opportunities, and hiring practices in college and university athletics.

21 / WE WILL work with Ontario’s colleges and universities to promote and encourage women’s involvement in school athletics and commit to ensuring equal representation of female staff within their athletic departments.

OUTCOME > Equal access to sport program funds, scholarships, facility space, leadership positions and programming are available for women and girls at universities and colleges in Ontario.
Through this action plan the government is taking concrete steps to overcome the gender gap in sport.

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT Action Plan
Conclusion: 
Taking Action Together

The Ontario government is committed to supporting women and girls’ participation at all levels and within all facets of sport. 

Advancing Opportunities for Women and Girls in Sport: Ontario’s Action Plan provides the foundation and direction required to achieve a common goal of creating a positive, welcoming and safe atmosphere in sport for all women and girls in Ontario, and to ensure future growth and opportunities.

The government will continue to work with partners to ensure collaboration and alignment of on-going initiatives to promote equity in sport delivery. This action plan, and its founding document, Game ON, outline the government’s sport priorities and will continue to direct both current and future investments in sport, recreation, and physical activity.
ENDNOTES


iv Ibid.


viii Ibid.


xi Ibid.


xiii Ibid.

AVAILABLE TO READ AND DOWNLOAD ONLINE

Game ON – The Ontario Government’s Sports Plan

Game ON – Year One Progress Report

Sport Recognition Policy for Provincial and Multi-Sport Organizations
ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES

Women and Girls in Sport

ONTARIO ACTION