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SPECIAL OLYMPICS NZ
**2025 NATIONAL
SUMMER GAMES**
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New Zealand

Healthy Athletes Programme Briefing Clubs, Athletes and Caregivers

Providing Healthy Athlete screenings at the 2025 National Summer Games and supporting access to the appropriate follow-up care is a key priority for Special Olympics New Zealand. While the programme can operate by itself, it needs the support of the Clubs, caregivers and athletes to get the best out of it.

Previous Healthy Athlete screenings tell us that Special Olympics athletes have significant unmet health needs.

On average in any team of ten Special Olympics athletes:

- 6 are overweight/obese and at risk for chronic health conditions
- 2 have low bone density making them at risk of osteoporosis. (We don't test this currently in NZ)
- 5 have significant problems with flexibility
- 4 have balance issues that place them at risk of injury.
- Many have simple fungal disease under their toes.
- 4 need wax removal or medical care for their ears (e.g. burst eardrum or ear infection)
- 3 could benefit from hearing aid or other hearing device use.
- 4 need glasses for reading or distance and
- 2 have some kind of eye disease (e.g. glaucoma)
- many athletes have only 1 functional eye (due to strabismus or amblyopia).
- 4 have untreated tooth decay and
- 1 needs an urgent referral to a dentist.

Through the Healthy Athletes referral system to individuals and/or their caregivers, the aim is to improve the overall health of both our athletes and assist the Intellectually Disabled community as a whole.

At the Christchurch games, the Healthy Athletes Programme (HAPs) offers free health screenings across four disciplines for all athletes: Fit Feet, Healthy Hearing, Opening Eyes and Special Smiles. All of which will be located on level 2, at the Parakiore Recreation and Sport centre (the same venue as swimming and basketball).

An introduction to the Strong Minds (Mental health) programme is being offered at the Students Association closer to the accommodation hub at Ilam and will be run outside of the daily Healthy Athlete and sports programmes hours.



Fit Feet (Podiatry) screens for foot conditions that can affect an athlete's ability to participate their best in sport including checks that an athlete has the correct shoe size. (A lot don't)



Healthy Hearing (Audiology) assesses an athlete's hearing. Many athletes have previously undetected or under-treated hearing loss.



Opening Eyes (Vision care) screens vision, plus generously provides free prescription eyewear for those that require them, possibly sports goggles for additional protection or a pair of quality sunglasses for extra sun

protection for those that don't need a prescription.



Special Smiles (Dentistry) provides dental checks and oral hygiene advice.

Each screening is designed to be conducted in a fun and welcoming way, with the basic health screenings carried out by qualified health professionals assisted by students in the appropriate field. Healthy Athletes is seen as a unique and valuable training environment for clinicians to help improve treatment of those with special needs or intellectual disabilities in the wider community.

All the Healthy Athletes disciplines have their own Clinical Directors (CD's) trained in their relevant fields who arrange and coordinate other clinicians (both fully trained and students) for their clinical team.

All our clinicians and their teams are not only providing a valuable service to the Special Olympics and intellectually disabled community, but they are also volunteers.

While some athletes can take just a few minutes to go through one of the disciplines, others may take over an hour – this won't be known until the day.

On the first screening day prior to the opening ceremony, we look to take some of the local or early arriving Clubs through the process, however as it may be the only opportunity for some swimming, basketball and ten-pin bowling athletes - sports that have very full timetables during the games - to attend, we would appreciate your club's help to coordinate getting them to screenings. We will be contacting Clubs shortly to make a preferential booking for the Wednesday and plan to have these early screenings finish in time to allow everyone to get to the opening ceremony.



When sports have either a morning, afternoon or even a full day not competing, we would like to have the athletes come through screening eg Athletics, Football and Power-lifting competitions don't start until the Friday, so we would like to see their athletes on the Thursday where possible.

We have prioritised times for sports that aren't competing on other days and will have a calendar to you soon. With some sports, although the event may still be running, an individual athlete may not be competing for a few hours. Again, we would love to be able to see them for screening during this time while allowing time to get back to their sport venue in time to compete.

Given the numbers participating in both swimming and basketball and that the Healthy Athletes programme is in the same building, even a sports break of two hours should allow a visit to the screening area- and yes, we're happy to have athletes turn up in their playing uniforms, or even with togs and towel!

We have tried to allow sufficient time for athletes to get through each screening and although we don't want to have queues, we may not be able to avoid them. In some cases, if an athlete has started their screening but unable to finish, we may ask them to return on a following day to complete. We apologise in advance if this does happen.

Preparation and Reminders

We have asked athletes to get their earwax checked prior to coming to the games – our athletes often have greater than average earwax build-up which may stop them hearing to their best and may impact and significantly slow the screening process or may mean they can't be screened at all, if this is the case it will be noted on any referral with a suggestion as to who they should see.

For Opening Eyes screening, we ask that athletes bring any prescription glasses or protective sports eyewear with them where possible. Please remind athletes to bring their sunglasses to the games to protect their eyes, as part of the 'slip, slop, slap and wrap' sun protection message. Those athletes who don't require a prescription at Opening Eyes do get to choose a free pair of sunglasses!



Health Screening, Referral and Follow-up Care

Following screening and if required, a referral for further assessment or care is made for each athlete.

The athlete will be screened and either the athlete, or their identified health support person will be provided with the result on the day. This will indicate if further action is required to support the health and wellbeing of the athlete.

A Clinical Director may make a recommendation or referral:

- Their G.P(Family Dr) or Practice Nurse
- A Podiatrist for foot care
- An Audiologist for hearing care
- An Optometrist for vision care and fitting of glasses, or
- A Dentist for dental care

In some cases, the Clinical Director of the discipline may also ask them to make an **urgent** appointment or an **urgent referral** with any of the above

SONZ are required to report the actions (including no action) back to Special Olympics International as it is a requirement for some of our funding.

Based on the referral's ratios from the Hamilton games, out of over 900 expected visits to the Healthy Athletes programme this year we could expect:

	Referrals	Urgent referrals
Healthy Hearing	385	15
Opening Eyes	90	10
Fit Feet	300	20
Special Smiles	200	50

While “urgent” is the focus, we also need to ensure follow up on “referrals” are actioned as well, and to make sure that any referrals got to an appropriate person who could take the required action.

SONZ wants to make sure the athletes get the health care they need so they can be as healthy as possible to participate in sport and be active every day. We know that the ‘results’ from the screenings do not always get home and that accessing the appropriate health care after a screening may be difficult for some so this year, we

will also be trialling emailing any follow up needs to the athletes “registered” email address and possibly also texting.

After the games, SONZ will provide a list of any athletes referred for further treatment or advice to the athlete’s club alongside the clubs relevant Regional Sports Coordinator. This is designed to focus on getting the follow ups “followed up”. While all referrals are important, any “urgent” ones are even more so.

Reporting what action-if any- has been taken on any urgent referrals is required by Special Olympics International as part of the funding process, so any help you can provide is once again greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions regarding the Healthy Athletes Program, please contact the Healthy Athletes Manager at the games or email haps@specialolympics.org.nz

