

What is Project CONNECT?

Background

Australia is recognised as a world leader in the development of opportunities in sport for people with a disability. It was clear after the dust settled from the Sydney Paralympic Games in 2000 that sport for people with disability is progressing rapidly across the world and that Australia's place at the top is under threat.

Following the announcement of the Australian Government's policy document, *Backing Australia's Sporting Ability – A More Active Australia* in late 2001, the Australian Sports Commission began to examine what measures were required to ensure Australia remained at the forefront. Subsequently, Project CONNECT was launched in October 2002. CONNECT stands for **C**reating **O**pportunities **N**ationally through **N**etworks in **E**ducation, **C**lassification and **T**raining. Project CONNECT aims to provide national sports organisations with assistance in meeting the needs of people with a disability within their sport. Its two main focus areas are:

- Creating athlete pathways for people with a disability
- Breaking down the barriers within disability and non-disability specific sport structures for people with a disability.

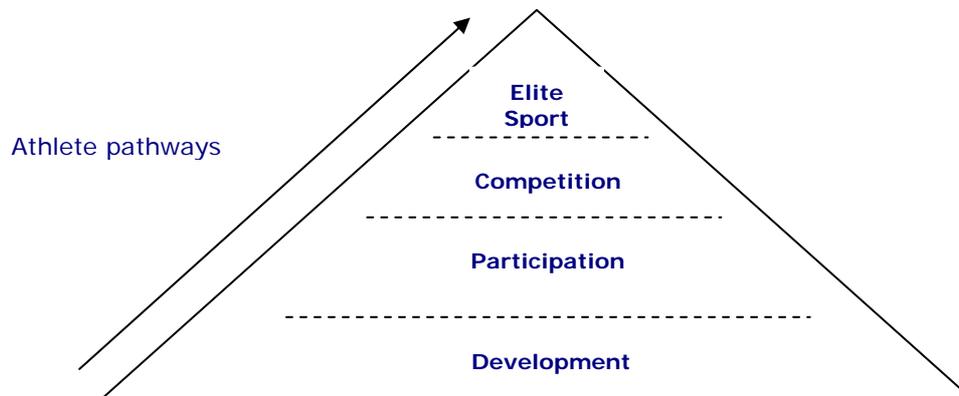
It will do this by forming partnerships at national, state and local levels to address a range of critical issues that impact on the participation of people with a disability. These issues are addressed in the National Sports Organisation's Disability Action Plan, which will form the basis of a range of support services provided through Project CONNECT.

The Disability Action Plan

The foundation of Project CONNECT is the Disability Action Plan. This document is negotiated between Project CONNECT and the national sporting organisation. Strategies agreed to in the Action Plan will outline the funding assistance provided direct to the national sporting organisation. The agreed outcomes, timeframes and evaluation methods. The basis of negotiations is one of cooperation and joint ownership. Both the national sporting organisation and Project CONNECT will make a commitment to ensure that outcomes are met in a timely manner. The Disability Action Plan will be unique to the national sporting organisation and may cover areas of work not covered through CONNECT but deemed important for the sport. On completion, the Action Plan will be registered with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Specific focus areas for Project CONNECT are related to the classic 'athlete pyramid' and the creation of pathways. The key focus areas are **development**, **participation** and **competition**. This creates a bottom up approach to sport and enables a sport to concentrate its efforts on developing the foundations for future growth up to the elite level. High performance sport for athletes with disabilities is generally well supported by many national sports organisations, often through

separate agreements that provide opportunities for elite competition. In developing a Disability Action Plan, a national sports organisation will need to ensure that strategies to develop their sport and create opportunities at all levels, compliment existing high performance programs.



Disability Standards

The Disability Action Plan is based on three levels of achievement, called *Standards*, covering the key focus areas outlined above. These Standards will indicate to the sport community the degree to which the national sporting organisation values the inclusion of people with a disability and the level of action it is taking to address issues of inclusion. They will also indicate to the community the degree to which the sport is meeting its obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. The three Standard levels are *Gold*, *Silver* and *Bronze*. It will be the goal of every Action Plan to achieve Gold Standard.

Expectations

In the development and assessment of the Action Plan, provision will be made to recognise that not all national sporting organisations are the same in terms of their size, resources and capacity. The majority of national sporting organisations are small voluntary organisations with no full-time administrative or executive function. Clearly, the negotiated aims will be different from these organisations to those that have professional staff. This should not prevent any national sporting organisation, regardless of its size, achieving Gold Standard.

Publicity and Public Relations

An important aspect of Project CONNECT is the publicity and positive public relations generated from the implementation of the Action Plan and the achievement of standards. Launches, public announcements, brochures, posters and other communication methods will be incorporated into the Action Plan strategies. This will send a very public message that sport is proactive and welcoming for people with a disability. Assistance will be provided to participating national sporting organisations to ensure that positive messages are being sent out into the sport community.

More information

A series of fact sheets are available describing the various aspects of Project CONNECT. These fact sheets are:

[Sp_disabilities/Project CONNECT/Fact Sheets/Final copies](#)

- 1 What is Project CONNECT?
- 2 Disability Action Plans
- 3 Disability Standards for Sport
- 4 Development
- 5 Participation
- 6 Competition
- 7 Guidelines for non-targeted sports
- 8 How to get involved

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