

Safe Sport

Addressing Abuse and Harassment



A high-angle, black and white photograph of several runners on a track. The runners are silhouetted against a light background, and their shadows are cast on the track surface. The track has white lane markings. The overall composition is dynamic and focused on movement.

VIASPORT'S COMMITMENT TO SAFE SPORT

Guiding Principles

viaSport seeks to carry out the Safe Sport program objectives by incorporating and evaluating its performance on the following guiding principles:

- Prioritize the building and implementation of evidence-based solutions that support people to respond effectively to incidences of abuse and harassment.
- Putting people at the centre and demonstrating empathy for all people's lived realities
- Bringing together people across sectors, especially those most affected to expand impact
- Listening, establishing continuous dialogue, responding, and amplifying findings
- Intentionally sharing tools, resources and learnings every step of the way

Safe Sport in British Columbia



Through the dedicated efforts of viaSport and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, British Columbia is mobilizing around safe sport to eradicate abuse and harassment. This comprehensive approach is among the first of its kind in Canada, and will focus on providing education and policy resources, building accountability frameworks and leading a culture change process to establish healthy relationships while minimizing risk.

For years, sport organizations at all levels have created well-meaning anti-abuse policies, working with limited awareness of the full scope of the problem. According to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 84 percent of Canadian youth aged three to 17 participate in sports, and 2 - 8 percent of these minor-age athletes are victims of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is more commonly perpetrated against girls than boys, and elite young

athletes are affected more often than those competing in lower-levels. Ninety-eight percent of sport environment offenders were coaches, teachers, or instructors, which shows that sport is at risk of attracting coaches or volunteers who may seek to take advantage of opportunities to abuse children.

Understanding that this is a systemic issue, viaSport is currently developing long-term solutions to confront and eradicate abuse and harassment in sport. Ethnographic research is one component of viaSport's overall Safe Sport Program, which is constructing a process to build capacity and support system-wide implementation of safe sport principles in B.C., in harmony with the Red Deer Declaration for the Prevention of Harassment, Abuse and Discrimination.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE SAFE SPORT PROGRAM

1. To increase awareness of the conditions that make sport safe and to deepen the understanding of the challenges faced by Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) to successfully implement Safe Sport policy and program recommendations.
2. To identify and collaboratively build evidence-based solutions with PSOs and relevant partners.
3. To co-develop with government and other stake-holders system level recommendations that are expert-informed and in harmony with the Red Deer Declaration and Federal Provincial Territorial Working Group on Safety, Integrity, and Ethics in Sport.

WHY DID WE TAKE THIS APPROACH?

1. To deepen the understanding of the issues in order to use evidence-based decision-making.
2. To create sustainable solutions that consider new ideas, are informed by stakeholders, and increase capacity of organizations.

WHY WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

This research, preceded by two years of viaSport safe sport initiatives, is part of a multi-step process to mobilize, build collective leadership and to implement solutions for the province.

In order to implement system wide sustainable solutions, viaSport sought to first learn more about the culture that has hindered movement around safe sport, the ways in which Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) are responding, and other contextual considerations that impact an organization's ability and willingness to move toward safer sport environments.

HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

Between February and April 2019, a third-party researcher conducted 17 ethnographic interviews, all but one with representatives of Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) in British Columbia.

Interviews were guided by a set of core questions and also allowed for additional insights to be shared. The guiding questions were:

What characterizes the formal and informal cultures of PSOs, particularly with respect to safe sport?

What is the broader context in which PSOs are operating?

What kinds of practices are they doing now and hoping to do in future with respect to safe sport?

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

1.

Attitudes towards safe sport

- Some people feel that until a publicized incident of abuse occurs there is no urgency for organizations to act.
- People's individual goals around participation in sport deeply affects how they behave.
- Since inclusion, diversity and abuse are culturally interrelated, addressing discrimination on any level will impact the others.
- People are motivated to build positive sport experiences but lack the skills and a clear path to act.
- Definitions of good coaching differ greatly between individuals.

2.

Characterizing the sport system

- A culture of distrust and a rigid sector structure undermines organizations' abilities to work toward solutions collaboratively.
- The interpersonal, close-knit nature of sport can create conditions that challenge objectivity - but it's also one of sport's greatest strengths.
- Creating safer sport requires involvement from all levels across the system - frontline individuals, LSOs, PSOs, NSOs, and more.
- PSOs lack direct lines of communication with athletes and parents resulting in challenges to receiving and responding to safe sport concerns.
- The perceived scarcity of volunteers and coaches affects decision making and behaviour.

3.

Responding to sexual harassment and abuse

- Unclear understanding of the issue and the expectations around unsafe behaviour limits people's motivation to act.
- Policy is necessary, but alone is not sufficient for people to act.
- People struggle to identify and respond to unsafe sport practices in the day-to-day when they aren't clearly criminal in nature.
- Organizations are seeking sector collaboration and support from experts to fill their safe sport skills gaps.

Where will viaSport go next?

The content of this report shared the perspectives of 17 individuals on safe sport, their sport contexts, and the opportunities and challenges inherent within them. This ethnographic data, in combination with existing research, is informing a collaborative approach with the sector to develop long term solutions.

Research, consultation and solution building activities include:

- Developing a Safe Sport Theory of Change for B.C. to define long-term goals and identify the conditions that must be present in order to reach those goals.
- Creating a Safe Sport Roadmap to help stakeholders translate opportunities into action.
- Conducting solution design sessions, consulting with stakeholders and experts in sport, business, child protection, law, and government to inform implementation and testing of safe sport strategies within active PSOs.
- Co-developing system level solutions that are expert-informed and in harmony with the Red Deer Declaration and Federal Provincial Territorial Working Group on Safety, Integrity, and Ethics with provincial stakeholders.

Future reports published by viaSport will share the learnings that emerge during these next steps.

QUESTIONS?

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