

SPORTSCAPE 2023: SAFE SPORT SUMMIT REPORT

December 19, 2023

OVERVIEW

SportScape 2023, held on October 20, was an engagement opportunity for sport leaders from viaSport Designated Sports Organizations to discuss how to advance safety in sport - specifically, to provide input on developing a centralized independent complaint system to address maltreatment in sport in BC.

It was a full-day, in-person event with working sessions conducted in pairs and table groups in one large ballroom.

PARTICIPANTS

Leaders of designated sport organizations were invited, including CEOs/Executive Directors, Board members, and staff who are involved in handling complaints. There were 109 attendees representing 48 designated sport organizations.

METHODS

All feedback from the working sessions was captured using a web-based application called Mentimeter (Menti). Menti is often used for events, conferences, and team-building opportunities to facilitate anonymous input. The goal was to enable everyone in a large group to contribute their own thoughts, so that we could hear directly from as many people as possible. When people typed a comment into Menti, it was displayed in real time anonymously on the projection screens in the room so people could see and build off of topics from other respondents.

Additionally, the links to the Menti sessions were provided to all invitees after SportScape, so that attendees could add any other thoughts and others who could not attend the day could contribute their ideas. Data submitted through these links was added to the original data set and included in the analysis.

Throughout the day, working sessions were facilitated by President of Now What Facilitation, Nadia Kyba.

The sessions focused on:

- envisioning the impact of a future centralized complaints system in BC
- identifying specific considerations for implementation
- outlining priorities and needs of sport organizations

Responses to each question were summarized into a word or short phrase (a "code"). Codes emerged from the responses themselves, and were not created in advance. Codes within each question were then grouped into as many larger categories as made sense, and these were called "themes". Some themes include only two codes, and some include many. Themes were created until all of the codes were assigned to a category that made sense.

This report presents the themes identified from the Menti data, and will be used alongside other information to develop recommendations for a centralized independent complaints system for maltreatment in sport within BC.

WHY CREATE A CENTRALIZED INDEPENDENT COMPLAINTS SYSTEM FOR MALTREATMENT IN SPORT IN BC?

The first working session was framed as a visioning exercise, to determine the potential impacts a centralized complaints system would have on the people working in the sector as well as on the people who take part in sport. A series of questions were asked in order to approach the idea from multiple perspectives. The codes and themes that emerged during the data analysis were consistent across the different questions, and so a single set of themes can be used to summarize this session.

Themes:

1. Efficiency
2. Knowledge
3. Participants feel secure
4. Professional Service

The theme that emerged most often was that a central complaints system would provide efficiency for the sport organizations, specifically in the areas of time, financial resources, and communications. Many people identified that reducing the time spent by each organization on code of conduct complaints could allow their staff and volunteers to spend more of their time on delivering programs and growing their sport instead of mitigating conflict. People also commented that a central system could create financial efficiency, which they felt could reduce the strain on their resources. Additionally, results showed a desire for efficiency of communication about a new complaints system, with direct communication to communities within the sport sector and simple and easy-to-share messaging that is consistent across all sports.

The second prominent theme that emerged was that a central complaints system could help improve the knowledge of everyone in sport. Respondents emphasized that clear education of participants and transparency about the complaints process itself could help improve the knowledge of how to raise or address concerns. Consistent definitions of key terms such as "safe sport" and "maltreatment" would help people understand behavioural expectations, which could result in individuals being held responsible for their actions. People expressed that within sports organizations there

would be heightened awareness of complaints, facilitated by improved data about the types of complaints being made. Responses also highlighted the necessity for cross-sport sanctions integrated into a comprehensive database to ensure accountability. This aspect of the complaint process was recognized as pivotal in enhancing the system's transparency. Increased transparency was also seen to be a key factor in improving psychological safety, by helping people understand the steps they would go through if they submitted a complaint.

The third theme that emerged from imagining a future centralized complaints system was that participants would feel secure. Elements that people felt would contribute to this sense of security included cultural safety considerations in the intake and processing of complaints, psychological safety through reduced fear associated with reporting, and increased trust in an independent third-party complaint mechanism. It was indicated that increased trust could help decrease volunteer attrition and improved staff retention. Additionally, the participants indicated that they imagined that there would be a notable shift in sports culture, healthier relationships with clubs and an increased willingness to embrace collaborative decision-making processes.

The fourth identified theme, professional service, refers to the level and type of training that the people administering a centralized complaints system would have. Currently, Executive Directors/CEOs, Board Members, and other staff are being asked to administer complaints processes without necessarily having adequate training to do so, they added. This can be a factor that affects people's trust in any decisions or outcomes of complaints processes. If a professional organization with trained case managers, mediators, investigators, and arbitrators was in place people may trust the process more and be more comfortable reporting concerns. Trauma-informed practices could be applied uniformly and consistently, increasing the psychological safety for all parties involved in a dispute. Restorative justice approaches could be built into the complaint system and be made available as an option. Consistency in jurisdictional alignment was also deemed imperative. Mental health of participants could be supported through a professional referral process.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING A CENTRALIZED COMPLAINTS SYSTEM

This session focused on the specific challenges the organizations may face in the implementation of a centralized complaints system, so that these factors can be considered in the design of the system. The key areas explored were communications, policy, and club level implementation. The final question was free-form to allow participants to add any additional thoughts.

What do we need to consider in communication with members?

Themes:

1. Clarity of messaging and process
2. Reaching the audience(s)
3. Diversity of participants

People recommended keeping communication about a new complaint system simple, clear, and concise. They raised the need to explain why we're communicating with the sport participants, and also suggested that we wait until the system is in place before starting to communicate about it to avoid confusion. It was strongly recommended by participants that we be very clear about what the new independent complaint system is, how it works, and what services it includes or doesn't include. The system will need to be transparent about how it will maintain the confidentiality of people involved in a dispute, as well as the potential consequences of maliciously filing a false report. Sport participants will need clear information about what the prohibited behaviours are, what should be reported, and how to report.

It is important to sports organizations that any communications about a new complaints system reach the target audiences. Information needs to be relevant to sport members in the role(s) that they hold. For example, members need clear information to understand where they can go raise a concern and what the process would be. Welcoming and inclusive language will need to be a priority so that people feel that the central complaints system is a place they can bring their concerns. Providing information in different languages and accessible formats could help reach a wider audience. Communications will need to be done frequently and on an ongoing basis, as new people come into sport all of the time. People recommended using infographics or visual imagery, using storytelling, and posting information in sport and recreation facilities as well as direct human interaction and positive role modelling. They would like communication templates to help them adapt communications for their members, and would find orientation materials for parents and athletes useful. The key takeaway in this theme was to "meet people where they are" in their understanding.

In terms of crafting the communications messages, a consistent theme was the need to recognize that there are diverse and unique cultures and backgrounds among sport participants in BC. Not only are cultural elements specific to each sport, but they are also specific to each person who participates in sport. Communications need to consider different religious and cultural beliefs, language, and individual experiences in a way that incorporates cultural safety practices. Each individual has a different starting

point of understanding about safety in sport, appropriate behaviours, and complaints processes. The tone of messaging will need to avoid “scary” language, and connection to mental health support resources should be included.

What do we need to consider for policy alignment?

Themes:

1. Efficiency
2. Education and training
3. Policy Development and Implementation
4. Alignment

Sports organizations acknowledged that there is the potential to create efficiency in the system through consistent policies that are easy to adopt, aligned with the national system and other necessary regulations. Given the limitations in organizational capacity, particularly at club level, ease and efficiency of implementation need to be considered when developing any policies and procedures for the new independent complaint system. A template policy was recommended that could be easily adopted without additional work by volunteer board members. A clear timeline for when the service will be available will help organizations plan for the workload involved in implementation. Organizations expressed the importance of acknowledging that each sport and organization has its own needs tied to factors like membership size, staffing and financial resources that all need to be considered when developing the new system.

A strong need for education and training around policies and procedures was identified as a theme, acknowledging the importance of communicating policies to the people they affect. People recommended developing a centralized training or education platform that could include an infographic and clear explanation of the complaints process, how complaints at different levels of severity are handled, and who is considered to be a “member” of sport. Within these educational components, responses highlighted the need to address language and cultural barriers to ensure participants understand the concepts.

There were a number of areas organizations raised that are linked to policy development and implementation for a new complaint system. The one mentioned most frequently was the desire for the costs to be covered. The costs of processing and managing complaints according to policy are escalating and this is creating financial pressure within sports organizations. Collaborating on a central system was seen as a way to reduce financial and human resource strain. People also mentioned the value of a central system working with legal experts to develop a set of policies and procedures for the designated organizations that address all of the necessary provincial and national jurisdictional regulations, such as WorkSafe BC, Abuse-Free Sport, and Human Rights law. Collaboration with insurance providers was also suggested for the policy development process. Overall, organizations would like the new complaints system to do the work on developing policies and procedures, and to provide a package that will be easy to adopt and implement at club and provincial level.

“Alignment” as a theme included a number of areas that will need to be considered in the policies and procedures for the new complaint system. These should create processes that make a smooth connection to the Abuse-Free Sport process, to workplace regulations, to municipalities, and to other regulatory bodies. They will need to address critical questions like “Who does what?” and give a clear understanding of the role played by each organization in the process.

What do we need to consider for implementation at the club level?

Themes:

1. Simplicity
2. Understanding
3. Participants feel secure
4. Challenges

People expressed that the key to successful implementation at club level is to make the system and the adoption of it as simple as possible. The system will need to be easy to navigate and easy for everyone to understand.

To help make it simple and easy to understand, there was strong support for a centralized training or education hub. Everyone involved in sport will need to clearly understand the complaints process: what types of issues they can bring to it; what behaviours are prohibited by the code of conduct; and what types of issues they can resolve themselves. If they’re considering filing a complaint, they need to know what the process looks like, what will happen with the data, who will be informed of the complaint, and what resources are available to them (i.e. legal aid, mental health support). The system itself will need to take into consideration the maturity of the organizations and their capacity and need for support implementing sanctions or recommendations.

Organizations again highlighted the importance that participants feel secure, that trauma-informed practice is used, that cultural safety is maintained, and opportunities for feedback are available. They want their members to feel empowered and supported by fellow members. They indicated that members must be held accountable for their actions to cultivate a sense of safety. If this is reflected in the system, more people will feel supported.

When the system is being developed, it will need to consider that clubs have different types of challenges: governance structures; sizes and types, and; that the term “member” does not have a consistent meaning across the sport system. The limited capacity of many clubs will need to be considered when developing timelines for implementation of a new complaint system, as it will take more time and support to adopt the new structure at club level than it will at the provincial level. Small budgets, limited human resources, and reliance on volunteers make clubs particularly vulnerable to the costs of maltreatment complaints. The request for funding to be allocated to cover the cost of handling complaints at the club and provincial level was emphasized again.

What Else?

Themes:

1. Efficiency
2. Knowledge
3. Psychological Considerations
4. Service Specifics

Participants at SportScape were given an opportunity to add comments about anything else they thought was relevant to the implementation of a new complaint system for BC. Many responses reinforced points made above, such as creating efficiencies and improving knowledge and understanding of appropriate behaviours and complaints reporting. As these were addressed in the sections above, we have included here only new topics that arose.

Psychological considerations for everyone involved in the complaints process emerged as a theme. People want their participants to feel safe both in their everyday sport environment and when they are involved in a complaint process. The new system will need to consider how it creates safety for marginalized communities, as well as for respondents to complaints. One option that was suggested was the inclusion of a restorative justice approach within the services offered by the new complaint system. This could help support healing from harm, repairing relationships within sport, and could help create cultural safety for Indigenous participants.

Another theme raised by participants was the desire for knowledge and understanding of a clear and consistent definition of "safe sport" that all sports organizations could adopt. This would help people who participate in multiple sports understand what it is and why it is important.

The final new topic that emerged in this session was the importance of clearly defining who would this system will service and when, and whether or not it should be mandatory for designated organizations.

CURRENT SYSTEM STRENGTHS

The objective of the final working session was to identify the strengths of the existing systems and the priorities of the organizations if a central complaints system is introduced in a phased approach. This information can be used to help us to maintain what's working well, as well as to plan the transition to a central system.

What is working well right now for your organization with complaints management?

Themes:

1. Process
2. Awareness
3. Participant safety
4. External support
5. Opportunities for collaboration
6. Internal systems

Some organizations feel that their current complaint handling process is working well, and that it is efficiently communicated to their community. Some stated that they have few complaints. Others feel that management of minor issues is being done well, and that the speed at which complaints are handled internally is good. Having complaints submitted in writing is working well for some organizations. Other participants mentioned that increasing the independence of their complaints process through hiring an independent third party has been beneficial.

In some sports organizations they feel that there is good awareness and understanding of their complaints process. Organizations benefit from strong alignment between jurisdictions – particularly their NSO - and a central hub for training and education. Organizations also mention that physical safety concerns are being handled well at the moment.

In organizations where people feel their complaint system is working well, they notice that cultural safety is improved, people trust the system, and there is open communication. Some people mentioned that the viaSport mediation service and conflict management training have helped them improve their conflict resolution skills and processes.

Participants mentioned that external support contributed to their complaint system working well at the moment. This included support from the national sports organization, legal experts, viaSport, and their insurance company. They also mentioned that they appreciated the collaboration with and support of their peers in other designated sports organizations at SportScape and would like more opportunities to work together and support each other in the future.

What works well at the moment internally within sports organization are trauma-informed systems, an efficient complaint screening and triage process, good documentation and tracking of complaints, and appointing specific staff to manage complaints. All of these factors are supported by strong and effective policies and procedures.

If a phased approach to starting a central complaint system is used, what is the minimum we could start with?

Themes:

1. Complaint intake and triage
2. Training for sports organizations
3. Classification of complaints
4. Key success factors
5. Unphased approach

The most frequent response to this question was to prioritize the setup of a complaint intake and triage process. Establishing a central place for all complaints to be sent to was seen to be an immediate improvement in efficiency and independence in the system. People suggested that a secure online portal for reporting complaints would be a helpful first step.

The next most frequent response was to focus on training of staff within the designated sport system about the complaint system once it's functional, so that they knew about the new process and how it will work. Making sure key people at club and provincial level have a good understanding was seen to be a high priority.

There were a couple of suggestions about how to phase in the new complaint system, using classification, either level of severity of the complaint or level of the system to limit admissible complaints at first. People suggested limiting the process to the most serious cases as a first step. Other people suggested piloting the new system with either just the provincial level of sport, or just in a single region.

Regardless of which cases are accepted initially, a few key success factors were identified. Again, funding the system to remove the financial burden of complaint handling was seen as a high priority. Collaboration with the sports organizations throughout the setup and implementation of the system is important. Mental health support for people involved in the complaints process was identified as a priority to implement at the beginning of the new system.

There were a few responses recommending that a phased approach NOT be used, because every participant matters and because a phased approach would create an additional workload for the sports organizations.

What do Designated Sports Organizations need during this transition period?

Themes:

1. Financial assistance
2. Education and training
3. Access to support
4. Information

The most frequently identified need during the transition period to a new complaint system is funding. Insurance costs are rising, legal costs add up quickly, and with more awareness of safe sport issues more people are bringing their concerns to sports organizations.

People identified that they would like education and training for their staff and people working in their affiliated clubs, so that they understand the process and are informed enough to answer questions from their participants. They also would like to make sure they understand how to direct complaints to the new system, once it's in place. Educating the people working in the sport system will be an important component of implementation of the new complaint system.

The next type of support people identified was expertise, including legal, human resources, and governance. There were multiple requests for a single point of contact to discuss issues and questions with to help organizations navigate complaints. There were requests for cultural awareness training and support. Finally, people requested that survivors of maltreatment in sport be engaged in the development of the new complaint system.

The final theme that emerged was a desire for more information to be shared within the sector: evidence-based research, data and information. There is a desire to build processes, resources, and toolkits according to the existing evidence.

What are you optimistic about and grateful for in the future of safety in sport within your sport?

The responses to this question were single words or short phrases, displayed as a word cloud. In this format, words that were submitted most often were shown in larger letters in the centre of the image.

IMAGE 1. WORD CLOUD OF RESPONSES TO “WHAT ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC ABOUT AND GRATEFUL FOR IN THE FUTURE OF SAFETY IN SPORT?”



The most common responses were collaboration, progress, accessibility, clarity, action, alignment, solidarity, and change.

SUMMARY

There is strong support for a centralized independent complaint system for the designated sports organizations in BC. People believe it will reduce costs to the system and to their sport. They would value a professional, secure, trauma-informed service that is run centrally so that they can focus on delivering sport programs and growing their sport.

Having a central platform for complaints will help create consistent, easy-to-understand messaging for all types of participants about appropriate behaviours and complaint processes. People would appreciate a system that aligns with other complaint mechanisms within and outside of sport, and that is created with and for the sports organizations it will serve.

While much of the discussion focused on policies and procedures, participants at SportScape emphasized in their responses the importance of psychological safety, mental health, cultural safety, and including Indigenous people and other equity-deserving groups in the development of a central complaint system for BC. There was a notable focus on human-centered design principles that emerged. Providing a service that looks after the people who use it through mental health support and cultural awareness was a clear priority. Restorative justice was suggested as an approach that would support healing as well as complaint resolution, which is especially important in small sports and small communities.

As we move into the next implementation phase, it is encouraging to see the shared commitment to fostering safety in sport. There is a clear collective dedication to ensuring a safer and more inclusive sporting community for all.

APPENDIX A. LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED AT SPORTSCAPE

Badminton BC	ISPARC
Baseball BC	Triathlon BC
Basketball BC	Volleyball BC
BC Adaptive Snowsports	Whistler Sport Legacies
BC Alpine	
BC Artistic Swimming	
BC Athletics	
BC Blind Sport	
BC Diving	
BC Fencing	
BC Games Society	
BC Golf	
BC Hockey	
BC Rugby	
BC Sailing	
BC Snowboard	
BC Soccer	
BC Sport Cheer	
BC Ultimate	
BC Wheelchair Basketball	
BC Wheelchair Sports Association	
BC Wrestling	
Bowls BC	
Cross Country BC	
CSI Pacific	
Cycling BC	
Field Hockey BC	
Freestyle BC	
Gymnastics BC	
Horse Council BC	
Judo BC	
Karate BC	
PacificSport Fraser Valley	
PacificSport Interior	
PacificSport Okanagan	
PacificSport Vancouver Island	
PISE	
Ringette BC	
Rowing BC	
Special Olympics BC	
Speed Skating BC	
SportMed BC	
Squash BC	
Swim BC	
Tennis BC	