GET INVOLVED

Coaches

USA Swimming encourages people with disabilities to participate in the sport of swimming and facilitates their inclusion in USA Swimming programs through education and collaboration. We seek to involve people with disabilities in existing competitions and programs for all swimmers, rather than provide unique disability-only opportunities.

Coaches are the most important ingredient for the successful inclusion of swimmers with a disability. You are the face of USA Swimming with respect to welcoming and accepting the swimmer to the sport, and you encourage the swimmer to achieve a healthy lifestyle and competitive success through your efforts on the pool deck. We encourage you to use your expertise to promote inclusion by:

- Seeking out and advocating for swimmers with disabilities to be included within your program.
- Encourage the use of the published Parallel Time Standards for swimmers with a disability. [Time Standards (usaswimming.org)]
- Gaining an understanding of the officiating guidelines for swimmers with a disability as published in Article 105 of the USA Swimming rule book, and reviewing the materials provided under “Disability Top Resources”, “Resource and Recognition” on the USA Swimming DEI webpage.
- Taking the Children With Challenges™ course available through USA Swimming University in your membership account.
- Participating in, or reviewing USA Swimming DEI and Disability webinar offerings; upcoming webinar offerings and recordings of previous webinars can be located at [https://www.usaswimming.org/coaches-leaders/team-leaders/programs-services#webinars---presentations](https://www.usaswimming.org/coaches-leaders/team-leaders/programs-services#webinars---presentations)
- Contacting your Zone DEI Coordinator and/or LSC DEI or Disability Chair, or USA Swimming at support@usaswimming.org, for additional resources and support; Zone and LSC contact information can be found at [https://www.usaswimming.org/about/lsc-websites](https://www.usaswimming.org/about/lsc-websites).

USA Swimming Meets

Swimmers with disabilities are welcome in USA Swimming meets. Competition provides the swimmer with opportunities to assess progress toward goals, receive coaching and officiating in a meet environment, and socialize with friends.

Time Standards for Swimmers with a Disability

USA Swimming has created Parallel Time Standards for Swimmers with a Disability to qualify for LSC (Local Swimming Committee), Age Group Zone, and Zone Sectional Championships. These time standards are divided into three distinct ability groupings (P1, P2, P3) to provide equitable inclusion of swimmers with varying degrees of abilities. All LSC, Age Group Zone, and Zone Sectional Championship Meet Committees are encouraged to incorporate the Parallel Time Standards to allow equitable inclusion for swimmers with a disability.

To learn more about the ability groupings, and locate the Parallel Time Standards, visit the USA Swimming DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) webpage under “Disability Top Resources”, “Events and Times”, at [www.usaswimming.org/resource-center/diversity-equity-inclusion](https://www.usaswimming.org/resource-center/diversity-equity-inclusion).
• **Age-group competition:** In an age-group meet, swimmers are grouped by age (e.g., 10 & under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, and 17-18), gender (male, female), and skill level (e.g., A, B, C time standards). Given that "C" meets have no lower time standard, there is a place in age-group competition for every young swimmer, including those who have disabilities. Most LSCs (Local Swimming Committees) offer annual short course and long course age-group championships. The highest level of age-group competition is the Zone Championships, and most zones have created opportunities for participation by swimmers with disabilities.

• **Senior competition:** As swimmers become older, faster, and more serious about the sport, they progress to senior level meets. Separate events are conducted for males and females, but there are no age groups. Time standards specify the minimum qualifications for participation. In most parts of the country accommodations have been made to allow skilled swimmers with disabilities to enter senior meets regardless of ability to achieve the posted qualifying time standards. Most LSCs offer annual short course and long course senior championships. The next steps in the ladder toward international competitions are Zone Sectional meets and National Championships. The pinnacle of senior-level swimming is the Olympic Games.

• **Open-water swimming:** Open-water competitions are held in lakes, rivers, and oceans. senior-level events typically include the 5K, 10K, 15K, and 25K distances. Age-group events often focus on shorter distances. Some swimmers with disabilities, especially those with limited use of the lower body, enjoy open-water races because there are no turns.

**Disability-Specific Competitions**
USA Swimming does not offer disability-specific meets or disability-specific events within its programming system. Swimmers are not “classified” by disability for USA Swimming meets, and instead are ability-placed and provided the necessary accommodations to facilitate inclusion.

Many swimmers with a disability choose to participate in both inclusive (USA Swimming) and disability-specific (e.g., USA Deaf Swimming, U.S. Down Syndrome Swimming, U.S. Paralympics Swimming) programs. Swimmers, and their coaches, interested in disability-specific participation and competition opportunities should inquire with the disability-specific sports organization directly. Information on several disability-specific sports organizations can be found on USA Swimming’s DEI webpage under “Disability Top Resources”, “Competitive Opportunities” at [https://www.usaswimming.org/resource-center/diversity-equity-inclusion](https://www.usaswimming.org/resource-center/diversity-equity-inclusion).

Each disability-specific organization provides information and opportunities for coaches, such as continuing education, eligibility for disability-specific coaching opportunities, and criteria for trip lists and international events.

**Organizations and opportunities include, but are not limited to, the following:**

**Dwarf Athletic Association of America**
- Conducts an annual swimming competition at its National Games. To learn more about the Dwarf Athletic Association of America, visit [www.daaa.org](http://www.daaa.org).

**Special Olympics International**
- Swimmers with intellectual disabilities are welcomed into Special Olympic programs in all 50 states. Special Olympics Unified Sports Programs offers training and competition promoting inclusion and meaningful connection between swimmers with and without intellectual disabilities.
- Special Olympics International (SOI) conducts the quadrennial summer Special Olympics World Games in the years preceding the Olympic Games. Recent summer games were held in Athens 2011, Los Angeles 2015, Abu Dhabi 2019, with the next
games planned for Berlin 2023. Participating athletes must have an intellectual
disability, a cognitive delay, or closely related developmental disability that results in
functional limitations in both general learning and adaptive skills. Athletes are
classified/divisioned according to their previous times in competition. A full slate of
swimming events is offered. Special Olympics North America works with statewide
Special Olympics offices to select teams to represent the United States for the Special
Olympics World Games. To learn more about Special Olympics, visit
www.specialolympics.org.

USA Deaf Swimming
- Swimmers with hearing impairments. Swimmers with a hearing loss of at least 55
decibel pure tone average (PTA) in the better ear are eligible to compete within USA
Deaf Swimming sponsored competitions.
- The Comite’ International des Sports des Sourds (CISS) conducts the quadrennial
Deaflympics in the years following the Olympic Games. For example, recent summer
Deaflympics have been held in: Sofia, Bulgaria 2013, Samsun, Turkey 2017, and
Caxias do Sul, Brazil 2022. The primary events at the Deaflympics are 50-100-200-
400-800-1500 freestyle, 100-200 backstroke, 100-200 breaststroke, 100-200 butterfly,
200-400 IM, 4 x 100 and 4 x 200 freestyle relays, and 4 x 100 medley relay. The USA
Deaf Sports Federation and its subsidiary, USA Deaf Swimming, is responsible for
selecting teams to represent the United States for the Deaflympics and other
international competitions. To learn more about USA Deaf Swimming, visit
deeafswim.org.

USA Down Syndrome Swimming
- Selects a National Team for regional and World Championship competitions. To learn
more about USA Down Syndrome Swimming, visit
www.usadowns syndromeswimming.org

U.S. Paralympics Swimming
Para Swimmers with physical, visual, and intellectual impairments are divided into fourteen
(14) distinct sport classes based on a universal classification system. Swimmers with Physical
Impairments (PI) are divided into ten (10) sport classes, three (3) sport classes are provided
for swimmers with Visual Impairments (VI), and one sport class is reserved for swimmers with
Intellectual Impairments (II). The degree of activity limitation determines the assigned sport
class and is stroke specific.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) conducts the quadrennial summer Paralympic
Games in the same years as the Olympic Games. For example, recent summer games have
been held in London 2012, Rio 2016, and Tokyo 2020(1). The primary events at the
Paralympic Games for most classifications are 50-100-400 freestyle, 100 backstroke, 100
breaststroke, 100 butterfly, 200 IM, 4 x 100 freestyle relay, and 4 x 100 medley relay. Shorter
distances are offered in some events for swimmers in specific sport classes. A more
comprehensive set of events is offered at World Championships, and for the purposes of world
records and world rankings.

U.S. Paralympics Swimming is responsible for selecting teams to represent the United States
in international competitions. To learn more about U.S. Paralympics Swimming, visit
www.teamusa.org/usparaswimming.