

DRAGON BOAT CANADA

POLICY ON EQUITY AND ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

General

1. Dragon Boat Canada is committed to equity and access in the sport of dragon boat racing for persons with a disability.
2. Dragon Boat Canada recognizes its obligation to comply with human rights legislation in Canada, including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canada Human Rights Act, and applicable provincial Human Rights Codes. Dragon Boat Canada adopts the definition of disability as contained in these documents.
3. Dragon Boat Canada is committed to provide persons with a disability opportunities within which to participate in the programs and activities of Dragon Boat Canada, including participation in official competitions, coaching, officiating, volunteering, and leading. Persons with disabilities are encouraged to participate as athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, as well as become Board members and/or staff.
4. Dragon Boat Canada is receptive to establishing a racing class or classes for persons with a disability at official competitions, if there is demonstrated interest. Dragon Boat Canada encourages and invites athletes with disabilities or disability organizations to contact Dragon Boat Canada in this regard.
5. Dragon Boat Canada will consider the accommodation of persons with disabilities in the drafting of competition and racing rules.
6. Dragon boating is an activity with a unique combination of features that allows people the opportunity to overcome disabilities, and participate, train, compete alongside able-bodied people.
7. Specifically, a visual, hearing or lower limb disability does not prevent a person participating as an equal member of any crew. Other disabilities can be overcome with varying degrees of ease. For those who choose to take up the challenge, competitive dragon boat racing can provide an exciting and sociable activity.
8. Dragon boating's unique combination of features can make it easy to overcome the disabilities of participants.
 - the basic paddling action is simple and is easy to learn, particularly at a recreational level.
 - there are variety of audible, visual and sensory cues to help paddle in time
 - paddling is from a seated position
 - each paddler is in close reach of up to five other paddlers, who can coach and give assistance

- all steering and control of the boat is done by a steersperson.
- the steersperson's commands to the crew can be communicated in variety of ways
- it is easy to accommodate a variety of levels of capability within one boat – disabled and able-bodied can paddle together
- racing rules can, subject to considerations of safety and fairness, be modified to allow people with disabilities to compete

Visual impairment

9. Visual impairment offers little if any impediment to competing in dragon boat racing. The drum beat and motion of the boat provide excellent cues for timing.
10. Stepping into the boat for the first time is likely to be most unsettling part of a dragon boat outing. The paddler may well need guidance from a sighted person on the bank and perhaps someone else in the boat, to help them find their seat.
11. Negotiating the pontoon or jetty, and on the bank generally, can sometimes also be difficult. Again a sighted person can provide guidance.
12. Practical tips:
 - Tie spectacles onto a cord or strap, to avoid their loss if dropped into the water
 - Other crew members may need to provide guidance when loading and unloading the boat, on pontoons and on the bank generally
 - Close-at-hand fellow paddlers can help teach the correct paddling style
 - A guide dog may need to be looked after while its owner is on the water
13. Points to remember:
 - Visual impairment can range from the need to wear spectacles, to total blindness. Many visually impaired people still have limited vision, which they can use. Only 4% of visually impaired people are totally blind.

Hearing Impairment

14. Paddlers can follow time by watching those in front of them. The motion of the boat also gives a strong cue, and paddlers quickly learn, by the feel of the paddle in the water and the motion of the boat, when he or she is out of time.
15. Commands from the steersperson and starter are normally given verbally, so a paddler with a hearing impairment will need to be particularly alert to follow what the rest of the crew is doing. However this can quickly be learnt with experience and help from a supportive crew.

16. Practical tips

- The steersperson can tap the gunnel to provide an additional sensory cue to paddlers.
- Signals from the steersperson can be relayed to the crew visually by the drummer using hand or arm signals, to supplement verbal commands.
- Voice amplification systems can be used. These can be adapted to supplement or work with hearing aids.
- Hearing aids may not be waterproof, and may need to be sealed to avoid damage

Lower Limb Disability

17. Because dragon boating is carried out in an essentially seated position, disabilities affecting the legs, particularly below the knee, can have little effect on paddling ability. However the paddling force is transmitted to the boat through the legs, and so modification to the boat may be required.
18. An exception from normal racing rules is required from the Chief Official, as the use of straps is not permitted by able-bodied paddlers, on safety grounds. However racing rules specifically allow exceptions where they allow a person with a disability to participate. Due consideration must be given to safety and, for example, the use of quick release buckles and buoyancy aids are strongly recommended.
19. Practical tips
- Straps, such as those used in slalom and white water C1 canoes, may help a paddler keep his or her seat. These must have a quick release buckle.
 - A paddler who uses a wheel chair is likely to require assistance and consideration on the landing stage, rather than in the boat.
 - Not all artificial limbs are waterproof and buoyant.

Upper Limb Disability

20. Dragon boating relies on arm and upper body movement, so overcoming disabilities in these parts of the body may be challenging. The extent to which each individual is able to take part depends on their specific capability.
- Artificial arms and hands can be adapted to allow a paddle, possibly modified, to be gripped.
 - The paddle can be modified and straps used to make it easier to grip or hold.
21. An exception from normal racing rules may be required from race officials, as the modifications may exceed the specification of paddle allowed to able-bodied paddlers, on

grounds of fair competition.

Other Conditions

22. There are many other conditions, too numerous to be addressed in this Policy, which dragon boaters have been able to overcome to take part in their sport.
23. People are always advised to consult their doctor before starting any new athletic pursuit. In all cases, the crew manager and steersperson must be advised of any conditions that may affect their crew members, so that in the event of an emergency the appropriate treatment can be given as quickly as possible.

Asthma and lung conditions

24. Dragon boating is frequently raced as a 'middle distance' event, lasting 2 to 3 minutes, crossing the body's anaerobic/aerobic threshold. Paddlers will typically finish races feeling breathless. This can initiate asthmatic attacks in people prone to this. He or she should be prepared for this and possibly have prescribed medication, such as an inhaler, at hand in the boat. Treatment can be self-administered in the boat, if necessary with the assistance of another crew member, or evacuation with a rescue boat may become necessary.

Epilepsy

25. Epilepsy is unlikely to affect a person's participation in dragon boating directly, but an attack while in the boat could be difficult to manage. Ensure the steersperson is aware of the condition. Medication is normally effective at preventing epileptic fits, but each individual's condition is different, and could be exacerbated, for example, by a long day involving travel and unusual physical demands.
26. Should a crew member suffer an attack in the boat, the crew should brace the boat while those close at hand try to prevent the person suffering an injury. Do not stop the person moving, but support him or her, and use clothing to cushion their head. Maintain an open airway. If a rescue boat is in attendance it may be able to assist, but it may be easier not to attempt to lift the patient into it. The patient should recover within a few minutes, and typically will then want to rest quietly. Once the person has regained consciousness, they will usually know what further treatment is necessary. Further medical attention is not normally required, unless this is their first attack.
27. People with epilepsy are likely to be familiar with their condition, how it affects them and how best it should be managed. He or she should be encouraged to discuss this with their doctor, and with responsible members of the crew.