



A *Health Messenger* is a Special Olympics **athlete** who has been trained to serve as a health and wellness leader, educator, advocate and role model within their Special Olympics community or the community at large.

## Background

In order to create more effective public health programs, improve health systems and have community engagement supporting the health of people with intellectual disabilities (ID), people with ID must have leadership roles. The Health Messenger program is empowering athletes to: develop healthy lifestyles; influence other athletes to lead healthier lives; advocate within their communities for inclusion around health and wellness services, education and resources; and develop leaders to advocate for the health needs of people with ID.

Empowerment: Health Messengers are trained and confident in their ability to act as peer leaders and role models within their Special Olympics communities for fitness and preventative health programs.

Community Impact: Health Messengers lead activation within their broader communities and with their peers to raise awareness and influence other community members to be more inclusive of people with ID.

Leadership and Advocacy: Health Messengers catalyze and support external organizations to work toward making their services, programming, or policies more inclusive.

## Roles

Leaders have different gifts, talents, experiences and passions. Within the Health Messenger program, athletes who are trained will assess how they want to serve as a leader. They may feel suited to serve in one leadership capacity or multiple. The typical leadership roles Health Messengers take on include:

- Spokesperson
  - Athletes who serve as a spokesperson can speak on behalf of people with ID about the health and wellness needs and barriers faced. They attend meetings with health and fitness partners and influencers to speak and advocate on behalf of people with ID.
- Healthy Athletes Coordinator
  - Within Healthy Athletes events, Health Messengers can lead and be available throughout Healthy Athletes screenings to guide athletes through the screenings, recruit athletes to come to the screenings, serve as a peer educator at health education stations and assist with logistics of the screening.
- Healthy Habits Leader
  - Healthy Habits are health education stations at events led by Health Messengers. The Health Messengers can design and implement the event and/or stations.
- Health & Fitness Leader
  - A Health and Fitness leader is an athlete committed to promoting healthier lifestyles for athletes, unified partners, coaches and families through:
    - The creation of ongoing health and fitness education or activities either as part of a Special Olympics team or in parallel. Examples include: leading a fitness club, leading fitness activities as part of practices, teaching other athletes how to set personal health goals and helping them to achieve them; leading other health education sessions for SO athletes

For questions, please contact: Kristin Hughes Srouer ([khughes@specialolympics.org](mailto:khughes@specialolympics.org)) or [healthmessenger@specialolympics.org](mailto:healthmessenger@specialolympics.org)