

Youth Sports Information for the House Committee on Education and Workforce

Drafted by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) compiled the following information to support the House Committee on Education and Workforce ahead of the December 16th hearing, *Benched: The Crisis in American Youth Sports and Its Cost to Our Future*. ODPHP can provide additional information upon request or make connections to community-based organizations or witnesses, as needed.

Additional information can be found at odphp.health.gov:

- [National Youth Sports Strategy](#)
- [National Youth Sports Strategy Champions](#)
- [Healthy People PA-12](#)

What is the National Youth Sports Strategy?

- The National Youth Sports Strategy (NYSS) aims to unite U.S. youth sports culture around a shared vision: that one day, all youth will have the opportunity, motivation, and access to play sports.
- It is a federal roadmap with actionable ideas for parents, coaches, organizations, communities, and policymakers to support youth sports participation for all.
- It is based on research and best practices from the scientific community and successful youth sports programs across the United States.

What are National Youth Sports Strategy Champions?

- The [NYSS Champions partnership initiative](#) was launched in September 2020 and aims to connect and recognize organizations that support the vision of NYSS.
- The partnership includes almost 300 organizations that collectively serve over 90 million youth.
- NYSS Champions play an important role in increasing sports participation and supporting youth mental health through opportunities for physical activity, social connectedness, and building resilience across communities.

What are youth sports participation rates?

- Based on the most recent National Survey of Children's Health data from 2022-2023, 54.6% of children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 years participated in a sports team or took sports lessons after school or on weekends in the past 12 months.
- Youth sports participation is tracked through Healthy People, as [objective PA-12](#).
- There are also significant differences based on socioeconomic circumstances, for example:

- 72.4% of youth from higher income households (incomes of at least 400 percent of the federal poverty threshold) participated in sports compared 34.8% of youth from lower income households (less than 100 percent of the poverty threshold).
- Only 27.0% of youth from households with less than a high school education participated, compared to 69.1% of youth from households with a college degree or higher.

What factors influence sports participation?

- Increasing youth sports participation involves both getting youth to start playing and helping them to continue playing. There are a number of barriers that can keep youth from starting sports, including:
 - Lack of access to play spaces,
 - Cost, like participation fees and equipment,
 - Social factors, like whether youth can play with their friends,
 - Level of interest or knowledge of opportunities, and
 - Time and competing demands.
- Barriers to continued participation include:
 - Cost,
 - Lack of enjoyment,
 - Lack of physical literacy (the ability, confidence, and desire to be physically active for life),
 - Pressure from others,
 - Physical factors, such as lack of physical fitness,
 - Stress and burnout, and
 - Time constraints and other priorities.

What can organizations to do to lower costs?

- Costs can be mitigated through stipends, scholarships, fee waivers, or sponsorships.
- Organizations can:
 - Develop partnerships, such as those with local businesses, to provide financial support to teams (e.g., offering scholarships, sponsoring uniforms or equipment, supporting travel costs);
 - Explore public or private grants, which can support program costs or provide direct aid to families to enable their children to participate; and
 - Think creatively to support opportunities for more youth to participate (e.g., reduce field size or practice space to allow more games or practices to occur simultaneously, or pool resources from several sources to cover a larger group of program participants).

What is the resulting negative effect on children's long-term development if they do not participate in sports?

- By not participating in sports, many children are missing out on the benefits that sports participation and physical activity can provide.
- Sports participation and physical activity provide benefits for physical, mental, emotional, and social health.
 - Regular physical activity is critical for healthy development.
 - ♣ Youth who are regularly active have a better chance of a healthy adulthood.
 - ♣ For children and adolescents, regular physical activity can:
 - Improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, bone health, and cardiometabolic health;
 - Reduce the likelihood of developing chronic disease risk factors; and
 - Improve cognition and reduce the risk of depression.
 - Playing sports is one way youth can get the physical activity they need.
 - ♣ Sports also provide opportunities for youth to experience the connection between effort and success, and may enhance their academic, economic, social, and health prospects.
 - ♣ Benefits of youth sports participation include:
 - Higher levels of self-esteem and confidence in their abilities;
 - Reduced risk of suicide and suicidal thoughts and tendencies;
 - Improved life skills, such as goal setting, time management, and work ethic;
 - Opportunities to develop social and interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, leadership, and relationship building; and
 - Improved concentration, memory, school attendance, and academic performance.
- Sports participation can also lead to lifelong physical activity habits.
 - Adolescents who play sports are 8 times more likely to be physically active at age 24 than those who do not play sports.

How does Healthy People 2030 measure youth sports?

- Healthy People 2030 sets measurable national objectives to improve the health and well-being of all people.
- As part of implementation of the National Youth Sports Strategy, youth sports participation was added as a Healthy People 2030 objective (using data from the National Survey of Children's Health).
- Individuals and organizations can use the Healthy People youth sports objective to monitor national progress, set youth sports program targets, and access evidence-based resources.

What are broader economic and societal consequences for the nation?

- The Aspen Institute's Project Play developed the [63X30 initiative](#) to drive action toward the Healthy People target of getting 63 percent of youth involved in sports by 2030.
 - The Aspen Institute led an analysis¹ to see what the impact would be if we met that target and found that if we increased participation to 63%, there would be:
 - ♣ 2.3 million fewer children with overweight or obesity,
 - ♣ 23 billion dollars saved in medical costs, and
 - ♣ 1.4 million additional quality years of life.
- Research has shown that participating in sports and physical activity can lead to:
 - A decrease in direct, indirect, and personal health care costs (collectively, up to 28 billion dollars per year), and
 - A stronger long-term labor market.

What other background information may be helpful to the Committee?

- In September 2023, the Commission on the State of U.S. Olympics and Paralympics held a public hearing, *The Future of Olympic & Paralympic Sports in America*. The hearing included testimony from Tom Farrey (Aspen Institute), and other experts on trends in youth sports participation. HHS provided written testimony which was drafted by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and was included in the final report (see page 114). Find more information at: <https://www.csusop.org>:
 - [The Future of Olympic & Paralympic Sports in America Transcript](#)
 - [Modernizing Olympic, Paralympic, and Grassroots Sports in America](#)

¹ Martinez MF, Weatherwax C, Piercy K, Whitley MA, Bartsch SM, Heneghan J, Fox M, Bowers MT, Chin KL, Velmurugan K, Dibbs A, Smith AL, Pfeiffer KA, Farrey T, Tsintsifas A, Scannell SA, Lee BY. Benefits of Meeting the Healthy People 2030 Youth Sports Participation Target. *Am J Prev Med*. 2024 May;66(5):760-769. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2023.12.018. Epub 2024 Feb 27. PMID: 38416089; PMCID: PMC11034834. Press release describing study: <https://projectplay.org/news/2024/2/27/press-release-reaching-federal-youth-sport-participation-goal-could-save-us-billions-of-dollars>