

Providing best practice wellbeing support to athletes during classification

This fact sheet is intended for staff who provide support to athletes around Para-sport classification.

Classification experiences

Classification may bring up a range of emotions and feelings for athletes. In some cases, these may be more challenging experiences and may include feeling:

- anxious, nervous, or worried before classification;
- overwhelmed, embarrassed, anxious, or disempowered during classification due to the personal and deficit-based focus of classification, ie considers more what an athlete cannot do as a result of their impairment rather than their strengths; or
- upset, shocked, confused, or disappointed after classification if the outcome does not progress as hoped or expected.

By placing attention on positive wellbeing and providing support, we can assist athletes to achieve balance and process their experiences.

Strategies to assist positive wellbeing outcomes

For all athletes:

- Know and provide information to athletes about what to expect during classification;
- Encourage athletes to always take a support person to classification with them, irrespective of how certain the classification outcome may seem or the number of times an athlete has previously been classified;
- Encourage the athlete to ask questions during classification, give their best effort and comply with the requests of classifiers. It is ok to ask for a break or clarification during classification if needed;
- Educate athletes and the support person on their rights to Protest and Appeal decisions;
- Provide an opportunity to debrief after the classification. Be empathic, open and listen to experiences;
- Ensure athletes are aware of their Medical Review opportunities should their condition change over time;
- Consider exploring other ways for athletes to stay engaged in your sport or other sport options if classification outcomes are non-favourable or if the athlete is

found Not Eligible.

- Encourage athletes to reach out if they need help to work through their experiences. Talking to someone makes a difference; and
- Offer access to professional supports.

For athletes undergoing international classification:

- Explore and discuss the possible outcomes that might result from classification with all parties before the classification takes place;
- Ensure athletes have accessed provisional or national classification prior to progressing to international level to understand any risks. Seek support from PA for further Classification Risk Screening support;

Professional supports

The following professional supports may assist:

- Personal psychologist/counsellor/GP or other mental health professional
- Athlete Wellbeing and Engagement Manager and/or Member Protection Officers within the NSO/NSOD or SISSAS Para-Hub
- **AIS Mental Health Referral Network** (for AIS categorised athletes only).

<https://www.ais.gov.au/mhrn>

Phone +61 2 6214 1130 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm AET)

Email: mentalhealth@sportaus.gov.au

- **Beyond Blue**

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Phone: 1300 22 4636 (24 hours a day)

Online chat, forums, and email available

- **Lifeline**

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Phone: 13 11 14 (24 hours a day)

Online chat, text, and email also available