GET INVOLVED

Competition Opportunities

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.

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”, here.

- 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.

Competition Opportunities

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.

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 and annual swimming competition at its National Games. To learn more about the Dwarf Athletic Association of America, visit 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 www.deafswim.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.usadownsyndromeswimming.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.