

Research Title: Athletes with intellectual impairments and their support personnel: Understanding anti-doping policy, provision, and practice

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Tier: 3

Since the reintroduction of intellectually impaired (II) athletes into the Paralympics in 2012, there has been a rapid increase in the number of athletes entering the II elite sport pathway. In 2012, 200 II athletes had been classified, with 120 competing at the London Paralympic Games and by 2021, over 670 II athletes have been classified and 160 competed at the Tokyo Paralympics. However, while participation is increasing, no research has examined the understanding and experience of anti-doping policy, provision and practice for this demographic and their support personnel (e.g., coaches and families) or how anti-doping practitioners are adapting their provision and practice to meet the needs of II athletes. This is important given that anti-doping provision and practice can be inherently invasive and the fact that, by definition, II athletes present cognitive challenges that may impact their understanding to be compliant with anti-doping policy, which present distinct safeguarding issues. Our objectives are therefore to examine current knowledge, understanding, and experience of anti-doping policy, provision, and practice for II athletes, from two perspectives: athletes and their support personnel (e.g., parents, guardians, and coaches), and 2) practitioners delivering anti-doping provision and practice to athletes with II. From these data we will identify challenges for II athletes and their support personnel in adhering to anti-doping policy, if they feel appropriately safeguarded, and if anti-doping practitioners perceive any challenges in this area.

Our proposed research includes two phases over 18-months. In Phase 1 (months 1 to 12) we will use focus groups interviews with II athletes and their support personnel to understand knowledge of anti-doping policies, their experience of anti-doping provision and practice, and suggestions for improving anti-doping policy, provision and practice for II athletes. In Phase 2 (months 12 to 18), we will conduct semi-structured interviews with anti-doping practitioners and providers (e.g., doping control officers, educators, international federations) to gain an understanding of their knowledge of anti-doping policies, experience with conducting anti-doping provision and practice to II athlete, and explore opportunities for how provision and practice can be improved for II athletes.

Outcomes of the project will result in a compendium of case studies from II athletes, support personnel and anti-doping practitioners that highlight the benefits, challenges and issues faced with anti-doping policy, provision, and practice for II athletes. Recommendations for strengthening anti-doping policy, provision and practice for II athletes, their support personnel and anti-doping stakeholders will be suggested, with outputs from the project tailored to each stakeholder audience.