Participation in Special Olympics promotes healthy, active lives among a segment of individuals who are more likely to face obesity and related health problems than the general population. Not considered a “medically underserved” group by the federal government; people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have limited access to healthcare. Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® is the world’s largest public health program for people with intellectual disabilities (ID). Athletes are given the opportunity to participate in this initiative that identifies major health issues.

In Kansas, Healthy Athletes provides athletes with free screenings in 5 areas, typically in conjunction with state competitions. Screenings are provided by healthcare professionals who receive special training and volunteer their time and talents to benefit the athletes. These volunteers walk away with a first-hand understanding of the disparities faced by Special Olympics athletes. In addition, Healthy Athletes collects, analyzes and disseminates data on the health status of people with ID; and advocates for improved health policies and programs for this population.

Healthy Hearing
Certified audiologists supervise Healthy Hearing screenings, assess athlete hearing and report back to coaches and caregivers if any follow-up care is needed.

Health Promotion
Health Promotion focuses on educating athletes about healthy lifestyles and the facilitation of healthy choices. People with intellectual disabilities frequently have medical conditions such as heart disease, obesity and diabetes, and they tend to develop these conditions at earlier stages of life. Health Promotion focuses on nutrition and exercise, as well as bone health, smoking cessation and sun safety using interactive educational activities and motivational information to encourage behavior change.

Special Smiles
At a Special Smiles event, dental professionals provide oral screenings; oral health education & personal prevention products; and, individually fitted sports mouth guards if needed. Special Smiles refers athletes in need to potential sources of treatment and follow-up care.

Opening Eyes
A global partnership between Special Olympics and Lions Club International brings vision screenings to athletes worldwide. At Opening Eyes events, athletes receive extensive vision and eye health tests; prescription eyeglasses, if needed; prescription protective sports eyewear, if appropriate; and referral for follow-up care.

FUNFitness
FUNFitness provides fitness screening for athlete flexibility, functional strength, balance and aerobic condition. Physical therapy professionals educate athletes on components of good fitness programs for risk prevention and make recommendations for optimal function in sports training and competition.

Future Goals
• Ensure that 20% of all registered athletes attend Healthy Athletes at least once per year
• Combine all screenings into one health fair
• Offer the Fit Feet Program

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes continues to grow each year with help from a global network of volunteers. Get involved & make a difference in the lives of Special Olympic athletes and in your own life!

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People with intellectual disabilities have a 40% greater risk of preventable secondary health conditions than the general population.

A person with intellectual disabilities will have to contact, on average, 50 doctors before finding one who has specific training/experience in treating people with intellectual disabilities.

1/3 of Special Olympics athletes cannot see well and need new or different glasses. 6% have serious untreated eye diseases.

35% of athletes have obvious tooth decay, up to 50% have gum infections, and 15% require urgent care.

One in five Special Olympics athletes show evidence of osteoporosis or osteopenia (weak bones).

I am interested in learning more about:
(please check all that apply)

Volunteering:
☐ Day-Of Event Screening
☐ Clinical Director
☐ Other _____________

Programs:
☐ Special Smiles
☐ FUNFitness
☐ Healthy Hearing
☐ Opening Eyes
☐ Health Promotion

did you know?

“...can actually watch my friends swim now, and I love cheering them on.”
Kristina O’Neal