



## Pay Attention to Hypertension (PAth)

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### PROJECT SUMMARY

Cardiovascular disease refers to problems with the heart and blood vessels. When these are not working properly, it can lead to serious health issues like heart attacks or strokes. It is a leading cause of death and reduces quality of life. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are more likely to develop cardiovascular disease. They are also more likely to have unhealthy lifestyle habits and limited access to health services adapted to their needs.

The research team created the Pay Attention to Hypertension (PAth) program to help address this gap. PAth is a 6-month virtual program designed to improve heart health in athletes at risk. Nurses led the program, providing education on checking blood pressure and building healthy habits. In total, 94 athletes and 32 nurses participated.

#### This project had two goals:

1. To explore how the PAth program affected blood pressure, lifestyle habits, and health-related empowerment in athletes with IDD in Special Olympics Quebec (SOQ).
2. To understand novice nurses' experiences and readiness to work with individuals with IDD in the PAth setting.

After the program, athletes were satisfied with their experience. They better understood how to manage high blood pressure and felt more in control of their health. They appreciated tools like health passports, and the clear, supportive way nurses shared information. Nurses also reported stronger confidence in working with individuals with IDD. They used a strength-based approach and showed strong communication skills. The program also increased nurses' motivation to work in this area.

#### Conclusion

This project offers a model for future programs supporting heart health in people with IDD. While there were no major changes in blood pressure or in meeting physical activity and screen time goals, athletes gained skills and confidence in managing their health. The six-week program may have been too short to show larger health changes. Future efforts could include in-person sessions, physical activity, and peer support to boost impact.

### KEY MESSAGES

**More access to health promotion services:** We need to provide individuals with IDDs access to health promotion services that are adapted to their needs.

**Equipping healthcare providers:** We need to provide healthcare providers with more tools and support to increase their confidence in working with individuals with IDDs.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the PAth program, please contact PI Dr. Andraea Van Hulst [andraea.vanhulst@mcgill.ca](mailto:andraea.vanhulst@mcgill.ca)