

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SPECIAL OLYMPICS TEAM CANADA OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED BY GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

*First Ever Special Olympics House of Commons Recognition Ceremony
Prime Minister, Minister of Sport & Persons with Disabilities & MP reception
High School Pep Rally & Unified Basketball Game*

OTTAWA -- (November 29, 2017) – A delegation of Canada’s Special Olympics “Team Canada” members, consisting of **104 athletes, 35 mission staff and coaches**, was officially recognized today on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The delegation included **Jamie Salé**, Special Olympics honorary coach and **Marian Coulson**, Special Olympics Team Canada Chef de Mission.

The team travelled to Ottawa to celebrate its achievements at the **2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games** held in Austria in March 2017. The day started with a celebratory pep rally at **Notre Dame High School** and a unified basketball game with the high school students followed by the formal recognition ceremony by the Government of Canada and a reception with the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, on Parliament Hill (photos available).

The high school pep rally was presided over by The **Hon. Kent Hehr**, MP, Calgary Centre & Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities.

“These Special Olympics Team Canada athletes are a true inspiration,” said **Minister Hehr**. “It is a privilege to honour them for their performance at the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games. I would like to congratulate them and thank them for representing Canada on the world stage.”

Official recognition by the Government of Canada in the House of Commons is reserved for special guests, including Canada’s Olympians and Paralympians, who were also honoured by Canada’s Members of Parliament in for their achievements following Rio 2016.

“This is a very exciting day for Special Olympics Canada and for all Canadians with an intellectual disability,” said **Sharon Bollenbach, Chief Executive Officer, Special Olympics Canada**. “We are honoured to be officially recognized in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister of Canada, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Ministers, MPs, Senators and staff.”

The Government of Canada is a generous supporter of Special Olympics Canada. Government funding has been designated to both grassroots programs and competitions in communities across Canada as well as national initiatives that support Pan-Canadian growth and development and Canada's participation on the world stage.

The impact of the incremental funding is far reaching and has changed the face of Special Olympics in Canada. More athletes with an intellectual disability are actively participating in more sports, in more communities across the country, with the support of more committed volunteers. Special Olympics Canada's National Partner, Bain & Co., conducted a study that revealed that for every **\$1 invested in Special Olympics Canada community sport programs there is \$7 of Social Return on Investment** through improved athlete health and employment.

"We are grateful to the government of Canada for its generous and on-going financial contribution to Special Olympics in Canada," said **Bollenbach**. "We thank the government of Canada for officially recognizing Special Olympics and Special Olympics Team Canada and for supporting our shared vision of 'sport for all'."

Special Olympics Canada is the sole organization providing a comprehensive playground to podium sport experience for Canadians of all ages with an intellectual disability. The World Games are only one aspect of the Special Olympics movement. Special Olympics Canada delivers grassroots programming in communities across Canada to over 45,000 athletes ranging in age from the age of two to adulthood. These programs are supported by more than 21,500 dedicated volunteers including more than 16,000 trained coaches who volunteer their time, skills and talents to support individuals with an intellectual disability. Special Olympics is a catalyst for social change. Its programs:

- Instill confidence, self-esteem and other life skills in athletes.
- Contribute to healthier athletes with life-long physical fitness habits.
- Change attitudes and create a more inclusive society.
- Strengthen communities.

TEAM CANADA BACKGROUND:

The 108 athletes who participated in the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Austria in March 2017 worked extremely hard to get there. At the 2017 World Winter Games, Special Olympics Team Canada athletes competed in six different sports, including: alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, figure skating, floor hockey, snowshoeing and speed skating.

These athletes qualified for the Games through their performances at Special Olympics Canada 2016 Winter Games in Corner Brook, NF after advancing from regional and provincial competitions. The team trained hard in their home programs with the support of volunteer training coaches as part of a national team training program that provides a formalized approach to training and preparing for World Games competition. Special Olympics Canada is now in its summer sport cycle and this past summer athletes qualified at their provincial/territorial Summer Games to advance to the Special Olympics Canada 2018 Bowling Championships in PEI and the Special Olympics Canada 2018 Summer Games in NS. Qualifying athletes from the 2018 National Games and Bowling Championships will travel to the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Abu Dhabi in 2019.

ABOUT SPECIAL OLYMPICS CANADA

With over 800,000 individuals with an intellectual disability in Canada, Special Olympics Canada is the only organization in Canada to provide grassroots sport programs and competition opportunities, from the local level to the world level, for people with intellectual disabilities. The World Games are only one aspect of the Special Olympics movement, along with grassroots programming delivered in communities across Canada. Established in 1969, the Canadian chapter of this international movement is dedicated to enriching the lives of Canadians with an intellectual disability through sport. Operating out of sport clubs in 12 provincial and territorial Chapters, this grassroots movement reaches beyond the sphere of sport to empower individuals, change attitudes and build communities. From two-year-olds to mature adults, more than 45,000 athletes with an intellectual disability are registered in Special Olympics year-round programs across Canada. They are supported by more than 21,500 volunteers, including more than 16,000 trained coaches. In 2018, the Special Olympics movement will celebrate 50 years.

For more information, visit www.TeamCanada.SpecialOlympics.ca or follow us on Facebook and Twitter (@SpecialOCanada) or through our official Games hashtag #SOTeamCanada17 or #ÉquipeOSCanada17.

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