



VOLLEYBALLBC

SAFE SPORT ACTION PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2022-2024

Leading in safe sport
practices & fostering a
safe environment



Introduction

Sport has the power to positively change lives and build communities - but it can only do this when the experience places physical, social, and emotional well-being at the very core. Over the past years, it has become evident that the sport system does not always do this. The pursuit of excellence and desire to win can be at the detriment of an individual's safety and well-being with devastating and long lasting consequences.

We want to be clear that safety is of utmost importance to Volleyball BC and that we strive to ensure that all participants receive a safe and positive volleyball experience in British Columbia. Abuse, maltreatment, and unsafe practices have no place in our volleyball community.

Our dedication to safety is embedded in our **2021-2024 Strategic Plan** where our mission is to lead enjoyable and safe volleyball experiences. The importance of safety is reflected throughout our Vision, Mission, Goals, Values, and Key Initiatives.

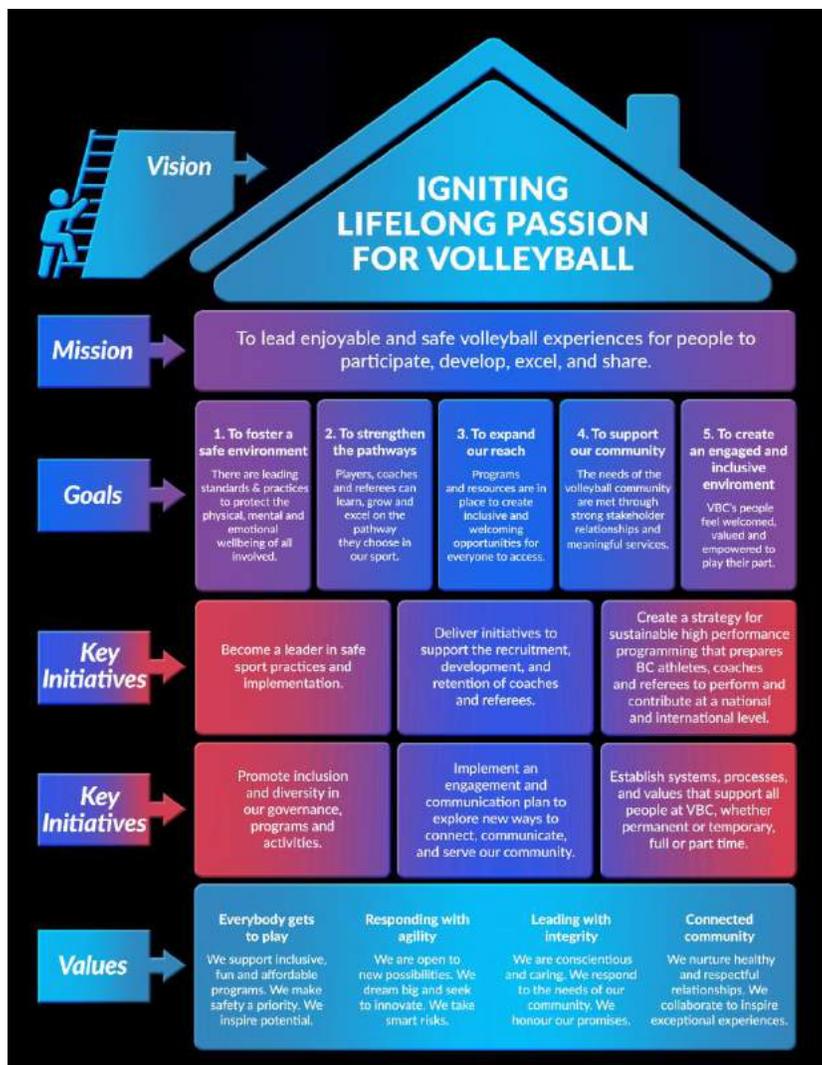
What is Safe Sport?

“Safe Sport” is a term that is much used in sport and in the media but what does it actually mean? The Coaching Association of Canada defines Safe Sport as *“Our collective responsibility to create, foster and preserve sport environments that ensure positive, healthy and fulfilling experiences for all individuals. A safe sport environment is one in which all sport stakeholders recognize and report acts of maltreatment and prioritize the welfare, safety and rights of every person at all times.”* (2020).

Volleyball BC endorses this definition of Safe Sport.

For the purposes of this Action Plan, we address the issues and actions needed to promote safe sport in volleyball across 4 different aspects of safety and well-being:

1. Concussion
2. Physical Injury
3. Abuse & Maltreatment
4. Mental Health



From May to December 2021, we embarked on a series of steps to assess best practice, identify issues and prioritise actions for change. These included:

- Creating a Safe Sport Working Group with representatives from across the sport
- Surveying our membership about their experiences
- Conducting focus groups with Team BC athletes
- Reviewing best practice and assessing priorities in our sport

This Safe Sport Action Plan is a culmination of all of these steps and was adopted by the VBC Board in March 2022.

What did our members say about safety?

The good news is that our members generally feel (very) safe participating in volleyball

Across all respondent groups, there was positive agreement to the statement “I feel safe participating in volleyball” with a ranking of 4 or 5. Youth and Adult Players were most positive with 90-91% agreeing/strongly agreeing with the statement (ranking 4 or 5). This speaks very positively to the player experience.

“For myself, as an adult participating only in recreational volleyball, I feel safe. I also feel that I create a safe environment for my athletes to train in.”

“I have solid relationships with my teammates and coaches, so when I play volleyball, I feel like I am in a safe environment.”

“In my experience, coaches and players are always so supportive and encouraging. I always feel safe when playing volleyball and look forward to it”

“I think there's always a small risk while playing volleyball, because there's a chance I could get hurt. But, I rarely worry about it.”

A number of participants to our survey expressed their appreciation that we were taking the time to ask about safety in volleyball.

“Wow - thanks for surveying. It's good to know how committed VBC is to supporting participants and upholding high standards for the integrity of the sport”

During the Team BC Safe Sport sessions, athletes recognised the hard work of coaches, organisers and clubs in meeting athlete needs in areas of safety:

“Coaches and adults within the sport scene are very good.”

“I would say that the community and sportsmanship to help athletes grow has been quite successful in the sport of volleyball.”

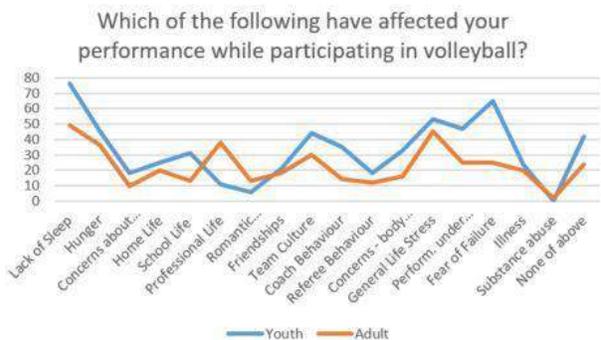
There is a strong relationship between well-being and safety that we need to protect in order to preserve what our members enjoy about playing volleyball.

Our members listed the top 3 reasons that they participate in volleyball as:

1. **Having fun**
2. **Social connection**
3. **Achieving my goals for personal development**

However, it is clear from our research that stressors for physical and mental well-being often impact our members’ performance and well-being when they are participating in volleyball:

The top factors affecting Players’ performances in volleyball were **lack of sleep** and **general life stress**. Youth players also highlighted **fear of failure** while Adult players were impacted by their **professional life**. Coaches and Referees also ranked **general life stress**, **lack of sleep** and **professional life** as the top 3 factors affecting their participation in volleyball. In addition, over 75% of respondents said that they had experienced at least one of the well-being “stressors” that we listed in the survey. The top factors listed were **physical fatigue** and **mental exhaustion**. Youth players also listed **increased anxiety** and **negative feelings about their body**. Coaches and referees listed **mental exhaustion**, **physical fatigue**, and **irritability** as the top 3 factors that they experienced. A challenge for us, therefore, is to ask whether we can do anything to address these stressors and to ensure that the experience of playing volleyball is not contributing.



Physical injury is perceived as the biggest risk to individual safety by all members apart from referees

Over **80% Players** in the survey have experienced an injury during participation in volleyball.

The most common injuries are to the **ankle, shoulder or arm.**

Over **60% Coaches** in the survey have experienced an injury during participation in volleyball.

Although Referees were least likely to be injured, **25%** of them sustained an injury.

Concussion was also a concern, particularly among male players.

Only **4-6%** of respondents said they had received a concussion or head injury.

57% of male players identified physical injury and concussion/brain injury as the top risk which was about 10% higher than female players.

In our Safe Sport sessions with Team BC, male and female athletes identified **physical injury prevention and recovery** as the most pressing area for youth volleyball. They also identified this topic as one they would like to learn more about in order to have the safest and most fulfilling quality sport experience.

Alarmingly, many respondents also felt that 5 behaviours linked to Abuse and Maltreatment were an issue in volleyball.



This was the top safety problem cited by players, coaches, referees and club directors and whether male or female.

Coaches, Referees & Club Directors were more likely to say this was an issue than with Players (76-79% v 52-58%).

Males were slightly more likely to say this was a problem than Females.

65% of club directors felt that negative focus on body weight/image was an issue, albeit a small one.

Nearly 50% of female respondents said that negative focus on body image was not a problem at all in volleyball compared with only 39% of males.

Both these issues were identified by 53% of Adult Players and 43% of Youth Players.

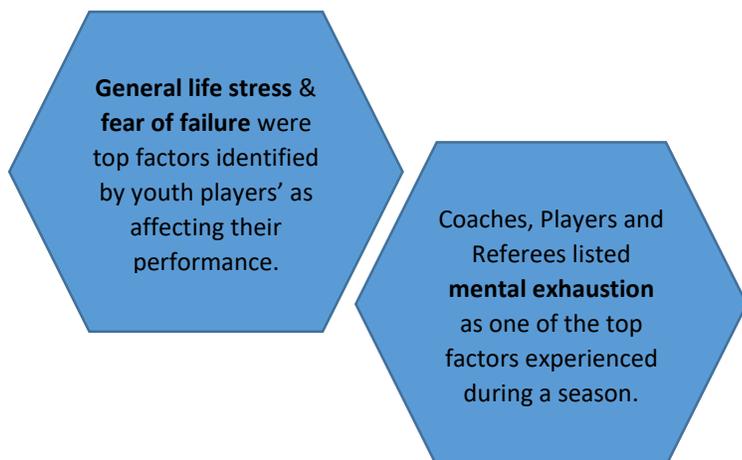
However, this rises to 51-66% of Club Directors, Coaches and Referees who identified them both as a problem.

Referees overwhelmingly selected verbal abuse, bullying and harassment as the biggest risk to their safety in volleyball.

41-44% of Adult and Youth Players stated that physically harming behaviour is an issue. This compares with 58-59% of Coaches and Club Directors, suggesting a growing consciousness of over-training and excessive physical exercise.

Male respondents were much more likely to identify physically harming behaviour as an issue than female

Mental health and well-being is a rising area of attention among volleyball participants



How to focus on positive thoughts (staying positive, being positive, finishing positive)

Knowing what is too much for your body and mental health – understanding your limits and what reasonable.

Confidence and self worth: you are you, and no one else is

How to deal with the coach-athlete disagreements and team dynamics.

In our Safe Sport sessions with Team BC, male and female athletes identified **mental health** as the second most pressing area for youth volleyball.

Female Team BC athletes also identified mental health as the top safety area they would like to learn more about in order to have the safest and most fulfilling quality sport experience. Male athletes listed it second to physical injury.

The complexity of mental health considerations and concerns was illustrated in the discussions taking place during the Team BC safe sport sessions:

Most athletes haven't learned much about mental health or how to weed out negative thoughts.

Getting frustrated and being hard on yourself whenever you make a mistake as a youth volleyball athlete is a huge concern since the mental component in volleyball is so huge.

There are gaps in support and inconsistent awareness of safety resources among our members.

Even though Volleyball BC has a number of resources and mechanisms in place to protect and promote participant safety, it is clear that there is low awareness and that we are not currently meeting our members need for support:

Club Directors generally feel that they have resources, support and knowledge in all 4 areas of safety - concussion and head injury, physical injury, abuse and maltreatment, and mental health.

Coaches and Referees feel that they have the most amount of resources, support and knowledge around physical injury, closely followed by concussion and head injury. However, they indicate that mental health and abuse and maltreatment are the areas where they have the least resources and knowledge.

Most of our members are aware that we have a **Code of Conduct and Ethics** and a **Screening Policy** for positions of authority. Club Directors, Coaches and Referees were more likely to be aware than not of the **Rule of Two** and the **Volleyball BC Safe Sport webpage**. There was low awareness across all members of the **National Sport Helpline** or **Independent Third Party** for reporting safe sport incidences.

AN ATHLETES PERSPECTIVE WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN?

Learning about recovery: cool down, warm up, food, sleep, active recovery, rest.

The importance of fully recovering from an injury – knowing when to start and stop

More resources and support available to turn to – there is no talk on mental health.

Having someone else to talk to other than a coach who is confidential.

Having clear guidelines for abuse: physical mental, verbal, sexual abuse.

Knowing what is too much for your body and mental health – understanding your limits and what is reasonable.

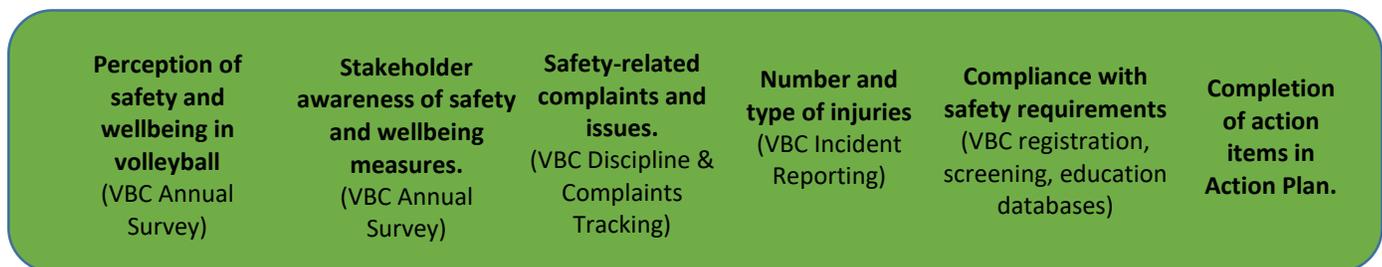
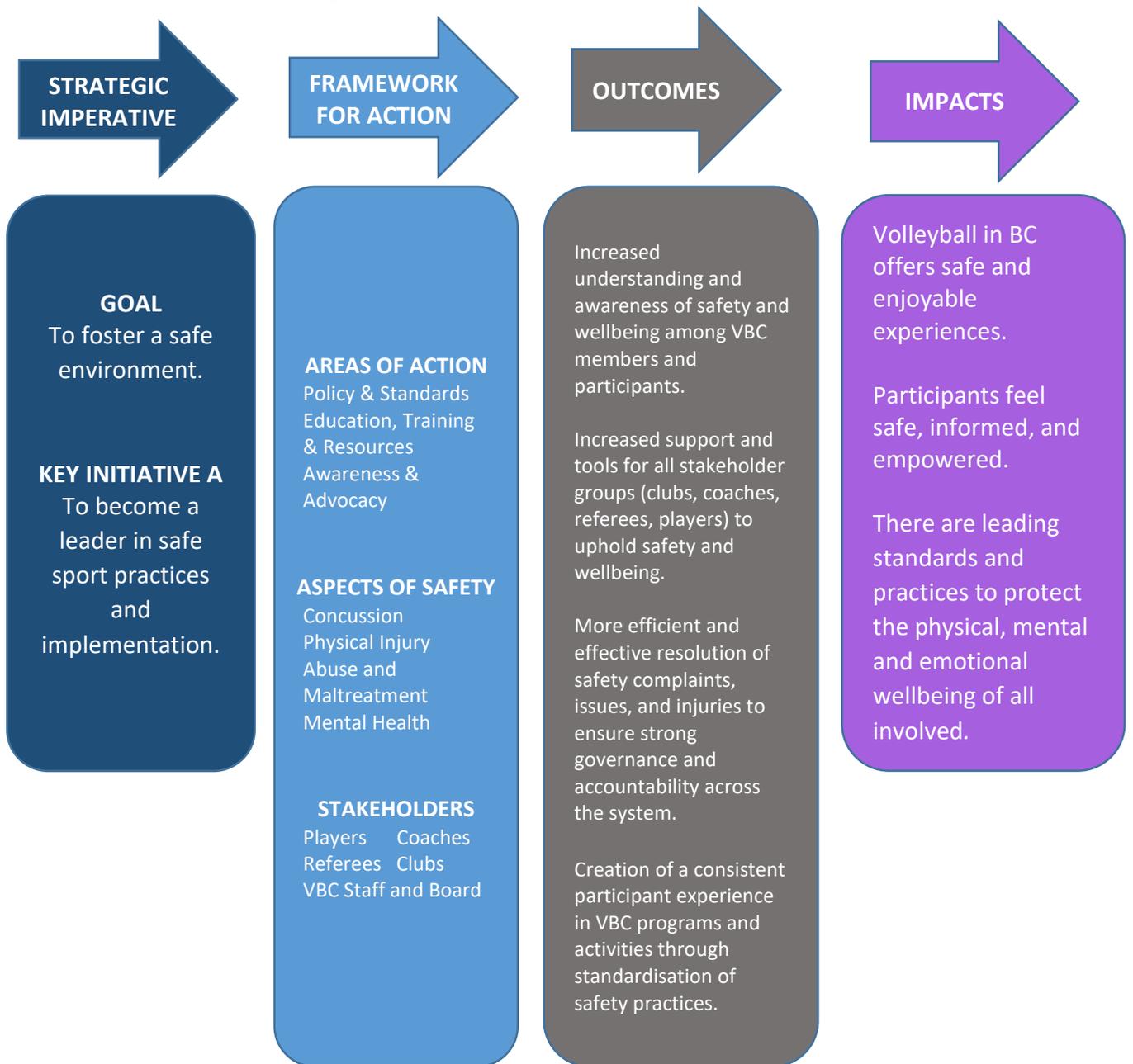
(A selection from Team BC Safe Sport Sessions)

Framework for Action

There is clearly room for improvement in safety and well-being in volleyball in BC. As many of our respondents highlighted, improving safety is complex, multi-faceted and involves cultural change and accountability within our sport. Effecting change and improving safety in volleyball requires all participants – players, coaches, referees, clubs – to be committed and accountable. While Volleyball BC is only one player within the system, we can play an important role because of our unique province-wide position. To most effectively leverage our role and resources, we developed a framework for action below that focuses on three key Areas of Action that Volleyball BC can lead:

		AREAS OF ACTION				
		POLICY & STANDARDS	EDUCATION, TRAINING & RESOURCES	AWARENESS & ADVOCACY		
ASPECTS OF SAFETY	PHYSICAL INJURY	SETTING AND UPHOLDING SAFETY STANDARDS Developing and communicating standards across all aspects of safety.	TRAINING AND EDUCATION Training and education that is tailored to the needs of each role and supports stakeholders where they feel they are under-resourced.	RAISING THE PROFILE OF SAFETY Promoting the importance of safety and the resources and tools in place so that all members know about them and how to identify safety issues.		
	CONCUSSION	CLEAR PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES Creating practical procedures and guidelines that can be implemented easily in all settings.	SUPPORTING A SAFE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT Continuously reviewing our physical environment and equipment needs.	BEING CLEAR ABOUT BOUNDARIES Understanding appropriate boundaries between all the different roles in our sport.		
	ABUSE & MALTREATMENT	Maintaining clear reporting mechanisms.	Promoting best practice in first aid, training, and resources to prevent injury.	Being clear about what is acceptable and what is not.		
	MENTAL HEALTH	ACCOUNTABILITY WHEN SAFETY IS NOT MET Enforcing standards and appropriate consequences when standards are not met.	EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT Providing a variety of tools and resources for all our members. Signposting to support services outside of our sport when necessary.	PROMOTING SELF-ADVOCACY Ensuring that all participants feel able to speak up, speak out and ask for what they need.		
		PLAYERS	COACHES	REFEREES	CLUBS & ORGANISATIONS	VOLLEYBALL BC
STAKEHOLDERS						

It is our firm belief that actions are required across the whole framework in order to effect meaningful change to participant safety and well-being:



KEY INDICATORS

1. Concussion

What we learned....

- Between 4-6% of our respondents said they had received a concussion or head injury while participating in volleyball which was relatively low compared with injury types.
- Coaches and Referees felt that they had the most amount of resources, support and knowledge about physical injury and concussion and head injury.
- **Concussion incidence and mechanism among youth volleyball players (May 2017)** - 57.1% of all concussions involved ball-to-head contact. Player-to-player contact and head-to-floor contact were less prevalent at 20.2% and 15.5%, respectively. In total, 61.6% of concussions occurred outside of competitive game play, in a more structured environment of practice or warm-up.
- **Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program (2011-2017)** - This program used hospital injury reporting to monitor the number and frequency of concussions in sport among children and youth. 8-11% of total volleyball injuries were Traumatic Brain Injuries of which 85-97% were concussions. (Note: The most common sports activity with concussions were hockey and rugby for males and ringette for females).

Action Plan

POLICY & STANDARDS	EDUCATION, TRAINING & RESOURCES	AWARENESS & ADVOCACY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Promote a standard definition of concussion with supplemental information regarding symptoms. √ Develop VBC Concussion Statement and Protocols. √ Clarify roles and responsibilities for recognizing and reporting concussion symptoms during volleyball activities. √ Integrate concussion policies, procedures and practices into all VBC programs and activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Embed concussion protocol into training of all VBC coaches. √ Develop a Club Guide to policies, procedures and best practice. √ Annual Review of Canadian Harmonized Sport Concussion Protocol Checklist. √ Develop tailored Concussion Guides and Education for specific member groups. √ Promote and further develop the Volleyball Canada Return to Sport Strategy. √ Identify opportunities and promote "training" and education for our players and parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Promote definition of concussion and the importance of the early detection of symptom. √ Create a designated area on VBC website which features concussion education, awareness and resources. √ Promote 7 steps of Concussion Management. √ Build a resource bank of all current concussion resources. √ Ensure consistent signage and visuals in place at all VBC events.

2. Physical Injury

What we learned....

- Physical injury was listed as the top risk perceived to individual safety by Players, Coaches, and Club Directors.
- Over 80% of respondents had experienced an injury during participation in volleyball. Most had experienced an ankle, shoulder or arm injury. Referees were the least likely to be injured.
- Coaches and Referees felt that they had the most amount of resources, support and knowledge about physical injury and concussion and head injury.
- **Information from Active and Safe website (BCIRPU):**
 - Injury rates for volleyball are 1-10 injuries for every 1000 hours of play.
 - Sprains and strain are the most common injuries in volleyball.
 - Most common mechanism for injury is contact with another, most often when a player lands on another player’s foot.
 - Risk factors for injury: previous injury, match v training, higher duration and intensity of training, male.

Action Plan

POLICY & STANDARDS	EDUCATION, TRAINING & RESOURCES	AWARENESS & ADVOCACY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Establish clear explanations of physical injury in volleyball. √ Complete further analysis of physical safety in volleyball using recommended assessment tools. √ Identify and implement ways to more rigorously capture data on physical injury at VBC activities. √ Develop VBC policies, protocols and procedures for physical injury prevention and management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Embed physical injury protocols and procedures into onboarding of VBC coaches. √ Support clubs in establishing protocols for injury prevention and management. √ Develop tailored Physical Injury Guides for specific members. √ Develop pre-season preparedness guide for participants. √ Facilitate access to additional training courses for our members. √ Identify appropriate training for VBC staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Develop a communications plan to promote physical injury awareness, prevention and management. √ Create a designated area on website which features physical injury awareness √ Place visual reminders at all VBC events √ Develop and share specific injury information for different ages / stages to all participant groups and gender variances.

3. Abuse and Maltreatment

What we learned....

- 63% of respondents said that psychologically/emotionally harming behaviours are a problem and 50% said that a negative focus on body image and weight is a problem. 41-44% of Adult and Youth Players stated that behaviour that is physically harming is an issue, 49% felt that bullying was a problem and 44% felt that discriminatory remarks or behaviour are an issue.
- Male respondents were slightly more likely to say all 5 behaviours associated with Abuse and Maltreatment are an issue in our sport.
- Coaches, Club Directors, and Referees rated all 5 behaviours as more of a significant issue than Adult and Youth Players. Referees overwhelmingly selected verbal abuse, bullying and harassment as the biggest safety risk to their individual safety.
- Coaches and Referees indicated that mental health and abuse and maltreatment are the areas where they have the least resources, support and knowledge.

Action Plan

POLICY & STANDARDS	EDUCATION, TRAINING & RESOURCES	AWARENESS & ADVOCACY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Establish meaningful and clear definitions of abuse, maltreatment and appropriate/inappropriate behaviour. √ Define and communicate the roles, and support of all participants in eliminating abuse and maltreatment. √ Increase awareness and understanding of the Volleyball BC Code of Conduct and Ethics. √ Develop and promote policies to encourage a shared understanding of appropriate behaviours and issue resolution. √ Maintain clear, effective, and confidential reporting and resolution mechanisms. √ Review the governance, relationships, and structures within the volleyball system to identify risks and opportunities. √ Create additional and tailored standards, policies, and resources for different members within the volleyball system. √ Educate and promote holistic development and standards for each age and stage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Embed safe sport training and education into all Volleyball BC programs and activities. √ Develop and launch a Safe Sport Handbook for volleyball. √ Support and monitor completion of safe sport requirements by Positions In Authority. √ Promote and support positive and appropriate coaching standards and behaviour. √ Educate and promote holistic development and standards for each age and stage in volleyball. √ Identify specific training and resources for referees to recognise and address abuse and maltreatment. √ Create specific resources for parents to support their understanding and role in promoting safe sport. √ Develop club-specific toolkit to support implementation of safe sport practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Develop and implement a communications plan to increase awareness of safe sport and resources. √ Create an online resource hub with information, support and resources on abuse and maltreatment. √ Deliver a youth-focused campaign for awareness and education around abuse and maltreatment. √ Create tailored campaigns to target specific behaviours and/or groups in volleyball. √ Promote holistic development and standards for each age and stage in volleyball.

4. Mental Health

What we learned....

- Fear of Failure and General Life Stress negatively impact Youth and Adult Players, Coaches and Referees, Males and Females. Mental Exhaustion was the top factor listed by all respondents as being experienced during a volleyball season.
- Concerns about Body Appearance was rated significantly higher by female than by male participants.
- Coaches and Referees indicated that mental health and abuse and maltreatment are the areas where they have the least resources, support and knowledge.
- In our Athlete Focus Groups, female athletes said they would like to learn more about Mental Health and Wellbeing. This area was also mentioned most frequently as the area in which athletes felt volleyball is not meeting athlete needs or needs improvements.
- Mental Health is a broad and complex term which was highlighted by the multiple different aspects that participants talked about. Further work is needed to better understand how we can better support and resource this area.

Action Plan

POLICY & STANDARDS	EDUCATION, TRAINING & RESOURCES	AWARENESS & ADVOCACY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Establish a position statement with clear definitions of mental health and well-being in volleyball. √ Research further mental health and well-being issues and needs of participants, particularly for males. √ Develop and promote policies and procedures to encourage a shared understanding of mental well-being and support for individuals. √ Create tailored standards, policies, and resources for different members within the volleyball system. √ Educate and communicate appropriate mental / emotional / social development for each age and stage in volleyball. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Produce a Guide to Mental Health and Well-being in volleyball. √ Acknowledge and provide support for the top 5 issues impacting well-being in volleyball. √ Support coaches to champion mental health and well-being in their teams and themselves. √ Embed awareness and resources about mental health and well-being into all Volleyball BC programs and activities. √ Create and deliver a targeted campaign for positive body image and acceptance. √ Identify specific training and resources for referees to recognise and address mental health and well-being. √ Create specific resources for parents to support their role in promoting positive mental health and well-being. √ Develop a club-specific toolkit to support positive mental health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Develop and implement an annual communications plan to increase awareness of mental health and sport. √ Create an online resource hub with information, support and resources on mental health and well-being. √ Deliver a youth-focused campaign on mental health and well-being in volleyball. √ Create tailored campaigns to target specific mental health concerns and/or groups in volleyball. √ Promote mental, social and emotional development at each age and stage in volleyball.

Measuring Impact

This Safe Sport Action Plan outlines some ambitious initiatives that will be rolled out from 2022-2024. How will we measure the impact of this work and know whether we have been successful in achieving the changes we want to see? Safety and well-being are complex and difficult to measure. Here are our commitments to monitoring and evaluation:

- We have identified Key Performance Indicators (see page 6) that we will monitor annually.
- We are committed to working with our partners to share and listen to feedback.
- The Safe Sport Working Group will continue to provide leadership and oversight of the Plan.
- The Board will receive regular staff reports to ensure that we are on track.
- A full annual review of the Action Plan will be conducted.
- Volleyball BC will share our progress annually with our members and the wider volleyball community

Safety and well-being in volleyball is a journey and not a destination. We will continually strive to ensure that every participant has an experience that is positive for their physical, emotional, and mental well-being. This Action Plan marks the start of a new phase of our journey. We look forward to working with all our stakeholders towards the delivery of safe and enjoyable volleyball in British Columbia.

Acknowledgements & Appreciation

- Our deepest gratitude to the time, energy, and invaluable input of the Safe Sport Working Group: Keeva Kehler (VBC Board), Carol Hofer, Jeff Gogol, Mike Wilkinshaw, Brent Hall, Liz Cordonier, Liz Yoon, Dave Wildman, Teo Ardanaz, Shon Sim, and Stephen Orteza.
- Thank you to the Sport Information Resource Centre for the Safe Sport Community Activation Grant that allowed us to carry out research into our community. Our appreciation to Dr. Shaunna Taylor who skilfully facilitated focus groups with Team BC Select athletes as part of this.
- We gratefully acknowledge the support and leadership of our Board in committing to making our sport safe.
- Finally, thank you to all the athletes, coaches, referees, club directors, and parents who took the time to complete our survey and provide your input into this Action Plan. We hope that you see in here the changes that you wish for in our sport.

Staff Support: Emma Gibbons & Rosalynn Campbell
January 2022