

Introduction

Online

Change Inspires Change: A Report on the 8th International Working Group on Women and Sport 2022 World Conference

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The International Working Group (IWG) on Women and Sport is the world's largest network dedicated to advancing gender equity and equality in sport, physical education, and physical activity.

Established in 1994, the IWG advocates and runs programs globally year-round. It developed and remains guardian of the Brighton plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration, which now has the commitment of nearly 600 signatories worldwide ([Brighton Declaration | IWGIWG \(iwgwomenandsport.org\)](http://iwgwomenandsport.org)).

Each of the eight conferences to date - in Brighton, England, 1994, in Windhoek, Namibia, 1998, in Montreal, 2002, in Kumamoto, Japan, 2006, in Sydney, Australia, 2010, in Helsinki, Finland, 2014, in Gaborone, Botswana, 2018, and most recently, in Auckland, Aotearoa-New Zealand, 2022 - have produced bold initiatives and significant Declarations.

Signatories of the Brighton plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration, with its “overriding aim to develop a sporting culture that enables and values the full involvement of women in every aspect of sport and physical activity”, include international and regional governmental organizations or coalitions, international multisport organizations, international physical education organizations and forums, international and regional women and sport groups, international sport federations, and national organizations. Signatories within Canada are the Department of Canadian Heritage, Sport Canada, Canadian Women & Sport (formerly CAAWS), Commonwealth Sport Canada, the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta, and Ringette Canada.

Presenters in Auckland included three of Canada's leading gender equality advocates – Diane Culver, Penny Werthner, and Guylaine Demers – each of whom has a strong connection to the Journal. In this article, they capture the powerful spirit of the conference and confirm that the next generation of women leaders is ready, willing, capable, and unstoppable. - Sheila Robertson, *Journal* Editor

The views expressed in the articles of the Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching are those of the authors and do not reflect the policies of the Coaching Association of Canada.

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By Diane Culver, Penny Werthner, and Guylaine Demers

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A selection of participants in the IWG World Conference enjoyed a special ceremony of greetings and well wishes presented by the Māori hosts at the Ōrākei marae. (IWG Photo/IWG organizing committee)

The 8th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport ended recently in Auckland, New Zealand, and was the largest in the organization’s 30-year history and the biggest sport conference ever staged in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Over the four days of the conference, more than 220 sessions were delivered by nearly 500 international presenters.

IWG is the world’s largest network dedicated to advancing sport by empowering women and girls. We, the authors, highlight our experiences at the conference and its key moments, particularly in relation to women and coaching. The table below documents the history of the eight IWG conferences to date.

Date	Location	Theme	Countries	Participants	Legacy
5 - 8 May 1994	Brighton, United Kingdom	"The Challenge of Change"	83	282	Brighton Declaration
19 - 22 May 1998	Windhoek, Namibia	"Reaching out for Change"	74	400	Windhoek Call for Action
16 - 19 May 2002	Montreal, Canada	"Investing in Change"	97	550	Montreal Toolkit / Montreal Communiqué
11-14 May 2006	Kumamoto, Japan	"Participating in Change"	100	700	Kumamoto Commitment to Collaboration
20 - 23 May 2010	Sydney, Australia	"Play Think Change"	60	500	Sydney Scoreboard
12-15 June 2014	Helsinki, Finland	"Lead the change, Be the change."	100	800	Brighton Plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration on Women and Sport
17-20 May 2018	Gaborone, Botswana	"Determine the future – Be part of the change. "	81	920	"The Big 5" : Media, Accountability, Representation, Research to Practice, Communication
14-17 November 2022	Auckland, New Zealand	"Change inspires change."	60	1000 in person 400 online	Insight Hub , a legacy for sharing resources. Resource Hub – <i>Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching</i> . Coaching Association of Canada’s Mentorship Model
July 2026	Birmingham, UK				

The IWG is aligned with the *17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*. From its inception, it has been driven by the Brighton Declaration and, since 2014, has included the Brighton Plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration. The original declaration was conceived as “a global treaty that has become a road map to support the ongoing development of a more fair and equitable system of sport and physical activity, fully inclusive of women and girls.” The 2014 declaration was adapted to reflect the evolving landscape of sport, in particular around international policy.

Uniquely, for this 8th edition of IWG, Māori ways of being and knowing were threaded throughout the conference, with a strong recognition of other Indigenous peoples from around the world. Canada’s Indigenous peoples were represented by 18 young women from nine provinces and two territories. They came from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and were supported by the Aboriginal Sport Circle.

The overall conference theme of Change Inspires Change was organized under five main themes:

Leadership: The Mother of all Stars - Empowering women to lead systems change

Social Change: The Winds of the Sky - Championing social movements and experiences

Active Lives: The Rains of Change - Enabling the enjoyment of active lives

High Performance: The Promise of Prosperity - Supporting women to excel at the highest global levels

Visibility and Voice: The Successful Harvest - Growing the value and influence of women and girls

These themes were created by an international group of women who worked together for over two years. Over that time, seven “lenses” evolved and were designed to guide the conference’s discussions: Indigeneity; Technology, Data, and Innovation; Health and Wellbeing; Systems, Resources, and Investment; Environmental Sustainability; Human Rights; and Integrity.

This article focuses on the women in coaching and sport leadership content and on several presentations and workshops.

Day 1: *Landing* - Connect with one another and the themes and lenses of the conference, as well as New Zealand, and build awareness and knowledge.

First up was a panel discussion on leadership in coaching entitled *Leadership in Coaching: What it takes to create a sport system where women coaches can flourish*. The facilitator was Michelle De Highden, the High Performance Coach Development Senior Lead at the Australian Institute of Sport. The participants were Noeline Taurua, head coach of New Zealand's netball team, Afzan Mahadi, director of the National Coaching Academy Malaysia, and John Bales of Canada, who is president of the International Council for Coaching Excellence.

Noeline described her pathway and experience in becoming a national coach while being a mother of five children. Afzan described the Academy's Women Can Coach program. John spoke of the importance of supporting women coaches in their professional development while working to change the sport system through effective policies.

Lorraine Lafrenière, the CEO of the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) and Isabelle Cayer, CAC's Director, Sport Safety, presented on the CAC's new Support through Sport program, an e-learning series of four modules, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, a research-based initiative led by Dr. Gretchen Kerr at the University of Toronto's Safe Sport Lab. The series focuses on understanding and addressing gender-based violence in sport, teen dating violence, bystander empowerment and modeling healthy relationships.

Addressing and preventing teen dating violence and gender-based violence is a key Government of Canada priority in advancing gender+ equality with sport an avenue in which a coach's role and influence is integral to supporting sport participants. Canada's E-Alliance ([E-Alliance \(ealliance.ca\)](http://E-Alliance(ealliance.ca))) has also supported research on gender-based violence in sport and has revealed how it impacts women in sport at a rate of 6.8 times more than men.

CAC also co-presented with Lee Ann Osei, founder of the Black Canadian Coaches Association on the High Performance Women in Coaching Program and the Black Female Coach Mentorship Program, through a pre-recorded "Lightning Talk" presentation that was incorporated into the IWG program.

A series of workshops followed which updated data on the representation of women coaches in the Olympic and Paralympic movement.¹

¹ Women's sport foundation has released a research report on Women in the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic games: https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/articles_and_report/women-in-the-2020-olympic-and-paralympic-games/

Day 2: Wonderment – Innovation and influence. What is new and existing? What tools and resources can we share?

The focus was on leadership within sport organizations and how to ensure equity within those organizations. Various initiatives from around the world were presented with inclusion and diversity in sport leadership as focal point. Importantly, the women presenting came from diverse backgrounds and included Indigenous women, women of colour, and Next Gen women coaches.

Other sessions discussed ways to accelerate progress in our post-pandemic world, including how to help sport and physical activity for women recovering from the effects of COVID-19.

The Fostering excellence and equality in women's high performance coaching: Developing a strong policy foundation workshop was presented by John, Afzan, Guylaine Demers from Laval University, and Penny Werthner of the University of Calgary (see About the Authors below).

Participants completed a self-assessment of their organization's policies relating to women in coaching, investigated gaps in their current programs and policies, and formulated an action plan. The self-assessment was based on the Gender Equity in Coaching Self-Assessment Tool (CAC and Canadian Women in Sport; CWS GE self-assessment tool). The panelists stressed that having a policy is only one part of the solution; an action plan that includes accountability measures and data is equally critical.

Te Hāpaitanga - The act of elevating, lifting, and empowering. A women's coach initiative workshop was presented by Lyn Gunson and colleagues from Sport New Zealand.

Lyn, a highly accomplished netball coach, spoke of an 18-month program comprising five two-and-a-half-day residential sessions, using a Te Ao Māori Lens - Te Ao Māori denotes the Māori World - and brings together women coaches to engage in reflection and analysis of themselves and their coaching practice.

The coaches are selected through a rigorous interview process and the national sport organizations (NSOs) are also interviewed to ascertain their understanding of the importance of support for the women throughout their coaching careers. Indeed, the program leaders have ongoing conversations with the NSO sponsors throughout the program to ensure they are providing the required support. Each coach is also mentored by a practice mentor and an NSO sponsor. A professional development scholarship is available to assist the women should they need financial support to care for their family. The mentors observe the women coaching at least 10 times over the 18 months and are accessible for meeting as needed.

The first cohort is now complete (with COVID-19 interruptions), and the second cohort is halfway through the program. Through quantitative and qualitative evaluation of cohort 1, the program has proven to be of benefit. For example, according to the findings, 100% of the women coaches moved to more senior roles with more responsibility; 100% showed evidence of personal and professional growth, and 93% either had increased responsibility, were offered a newly formed national role, and contested or won a national high performance coaching position. The qualitative results noted increases in confidence, self-awareness, impact, coaching skills for high performance athletes, resourcefulness to plan for high performance coaching demands, and connectedness and engagement with the high performance context.

A virtual presentation, entitled Mentoring and its role in supporting women as high-performance coaches, was delivered by Linda Low, a British sport consultant working out of the United States. Based on a program developed by England's Women's Sport Leadership Academy for High Performance Coaches (WSLA) and the University of Hertfordshire, Linda presented a toolkit to support women in high performance coaching roles.

Day 3: Meaning – Taking stock, reflecting, exploring, and finding solutions.

A workshop on developing the *Next generation of women high performance coaches* was led by Masa Ito, lead coach developer for Japan's Level 3 program, coach development consultant Gene Schembri of Australia, Lucy Faulkner, joint program director of the WSLA, John Bales, and Michelle De Highden. Three case studies were presented:

- WISH – Women in Sport High Performance Pathway, an initiative of the University of Hertfordshire and the International Olympic Committee
- Japan Women's Elite Coach Development program
- Gymnastics Australia NextGen Women's Coach Acceleration Program

The participants worked in small groups to develop an action plan in their own environment that included four steps:

(1) *Analysis*. Clear identification of the problem the program is intended to address, and the evidence base to determine the significance of the problem

(2) *Goal setting*. Answering why is it important to make progress on this issue, and what the critical success factors, purpose, and objectives are

(3) *Action*. The steps needed to be taken, and who should be involved

(4) *Evaluation*. How to determine the value and impact of the program

Prior to lunch on Day 3, the conference organizers created a wonderful opportunity to experience Auckland and learn through a series of inspiring *walk-and-talk sessions*, two of which are described below.

First Nations Indigenous Workshop: On the Ōrākei marae (meeting grounds – the focal point of a Māori community), Indigenous women were given the opportunity to discuss, collaborate, and compile actions on a Kaupapa (cause). These actions then read back to the full conference during the closing session. A Canadian Indigenous participant said it was a powerful session in which, for the first time in her life, she felt that she was not only in a safe space, but she was in a space where she belonged.

Developing the Women in Coaching Support Network: For this walk-and-talk, about 35 attendees walked 15 minutes from the Aotea Centre, the conference site, to the sport sciences building at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), passing by the architecturally beautiful Auckland Art Gallery and through Mount Albert Park. At AUT, the attendees decided on four main topics for group discussion:

1. women in coaching pathways and learning
2. transitioning from coaching at the development level to high performance
3. barriers facing women coaches
4. coaching roles

These small group discussions allowed the participants to articulate specific issues they face and get ideas and feedback from the group. For example, in discussing the second topic, a rugby coach from a South Pacific island stated that even when she placed athletes from her U18 team on the national team year after year, she was never able to move into a higher level of coaching. A coach developer suggested that pairing women coaching at the developmental level with high performance coaches at national tournaments would be a way for these women coaches to 'break through'. Another suggestion was that NSOs need to send the person in charge of coach development to the regions and pay attention to women coaches who have produced good players, and who could be selected to participate in national team camps.

Day 4: Launching – Build collective courage to create change. Establish a legacy and launch.

Here the focus was on the future. Twelve young women from across the world appeared on the main stage to introduce themselves and declare their call to action, in both their native language and English. These voices were inspiring and showed that one does not need decades of experience to understand and speak to the important issues facing girls and women in sport.

It is a reminder to all of us that we must always allow the youngest generations to have their voice.

The final keynote was delivered by Arizona Leger, a remarkable 26-year-old woman of Māori, Samoan, Tongan, and Fijian descent. If the organizing committee wanted to inspire the next generation of leaders of women and girls in sport and physical activity, they picked the right speaker. Arizona grew up with the sport of rugby and is now an emerging director on the board of the Counties Manukau Rugby Union board. She was also a content and communications specialist for the Women's Rugby World Cup 2022 which was held in Auckland.

Arizona spoke about the influence of her family, and especially her grandmother and mother, who always told her, "You've got this!". She said that her passion is creating opportunities for wāhine (women) in sport. Her parting message was, in line with the Māori ethos, "We walk backwards into the future": "The actions we take today impact the ancestor we become tomorrow. Be brave, back yourself, and believe in the next generation".

She left conference goers with this question: "What type of ancestor do you want to be remembered as? Don't just say it, be it!"

The three of us were incredibly inspired by listening to and engaging with women who are working hard to make sport equitable in countries around the world. We were excited to share our research and tools, including Canadian Women in Sport, the CAC, and the E-Alliance with so many women from across the globe, and in particular the courageous women from countries with far fewer resources and who face much greater challenges than we in Canada. Calls to action presented by the young women from around the globe inspire us to be mindful of truly supporting the next generation of women leaders who clearly demonstrated their desire to make a difference.

About the Authors

Diane Culver is a full professor at the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa in sport pedagogy and psychology. She was a senior coaching consultant for the CAC before entering academia in July 2007. Her research interests are coaching and coach development, social learning theory, and women in sport leadership. Her previous working experience includes coaching for the Canadian national, and New Zealand Olympic ski teams. She consults with athletes and coaches and often uses social learning spaces to build learning capability in various sport networks and communities of practice.

Penny Werthner, PhD, is a professor in the Faculty of Kinesiology and interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic) at the University of Calgary. Her research is in the area of life-long learning from a pedagogical perspective, particularly in the area of high performance coaches; women and sport; and the use of heart rate variability biofeedback and neurofeedback for

optimal performance in high performance sport. She is a former Olympic athlete in athletics and is considered one of Canada's most distinguished practitioners in the field of sport psychology. She has worked with Canadian coaches and athletes over the span of 13 summer and winter Olympic Games, from the 1988 winter Olympic Games in Calgary to the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo. Dr. Werthner currently serves on the editorial board for the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*, as well as being a reviewer for several journals.

Guylaine Demers, a full professor at Laval University, has promoted gender equality in sport for most of her life. Over the years, she has become the go-to leader, researcher, and advocate on issues of women's education and gender equity in Quebec and Canadian sport. Dr. Demers is a recipient of the IOC Women and Sport award for the Americas which acknowledged her tremendous contribution to the advancement of women in sport. Appointed co-director of the first Canadian centre for research on gender equity in sport in 2020, she is now taking on her new challenge: directing the first Quebec research lab for the advancement of women in sport, the lab PROFEMS.