

Collaborative Approaches to Supporting Healthy Communities with the CoASTaL lab at Cape Breton University

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The Community Active Sport Training and Learning (CoASTaL) lab at Cape Breton University consists of faculty, students, and community members who meet regularly to discuss innovative research and community action projects on sport and physical activity in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (and beyond). Members of the CoASTaL lab share a common passion for investigating how sport and physical activity can contribute to experiences of holistic health. Through our work, we highlight ways that widespread social inequities shape who governs, coaches, participates in, and consumes sport, and are particularly interested in the ways these challenges influence rural communities. Initiatives being developed by lab members cover a wide range of topics and contexts with participants who are engaging in varied physical cultures (e.g., curling, dance, swimming, skiing, hockey, hiking, yoga). Importantly, research and action projects led by members of the CoASTaL lab explore barriers and opportunities that present themselves for diverse communities who are (and are not) participating in different recreational physical activities and elite sporting pursuits, and findings shared address the complex challenges being faced by individuals who both facilitate and participate in these activities.

In this panel presentation, lab members share insights into the benefits of working collaboratively in a lab setting and share details of their current projects. Panelists will provide insights into the innovative approaches they engage when working with diverse populations to improve overall holistic health through an exploration of equitable, inclusive, and accessible physical activity and sport. Projects discussed in this session will address social, cultural, natural, political, historical, and environmental factors contributing to, and in some cases preventing, experiences of holistic health and topics will include athlete mental health, inclusive coaching, structural change in sport organizations, community building, alternative movement practices, and climate change. In addition to providing details related to individual projects, the group will discuss the benefits of meeting regularly to support and encourage holistic health initiatives in community and will describe future directions that are inspiring the continued evolution of the CoASTaL lab. Through ongoing collaboration, complementarity, collegiality, and connection to community, the applied research in the CoASTaL lab contributes to holistic active healthy living in rural Cape Breton and provides a model for interdisciplinary health research that makes a difference.