

Hello – My name is Danny Cox and I live and work in Eau Claire Wisconsin. I have been participating in Special Olympics Wisconsin for 10 years. The first sport I played was basketball and I am still going strong at age 40. I consider my involvement in Special Olympics as one of the most important things I do to keep myself healthy and connected to my community.

When I was born, I was diagnosed with a hole in my heart and a cleft palate. I had surgery on both before the age of four. At a young age, I was also diagnosed with asthma, and within the last ten years, I have had hearing loss, and I now wear glasses.

There are several things I have to do to manage and treat my health issues in order to stay well. Thankfully, Special Olympics is there for me. It keeps me physically fit through sports but that's not all. Their Healthy Athletes programs provide me with regular free health screenings for my eyes, hearing and blood pressure. And their leadership programs have even helped me with my social and emotional wellbeing..

In sports, I participate year-round in Special Olympics track, bocce, bowling and basketball. From December to April each year, I practice basketball for 90 minutes twice a week. This activity keeps me off the couch so I am physically fit and healthy.

During state competitions is when I go through the Healthy Athlete program receive an updated prescription plus free glasses and sports goggles. When I go through the Healthy Hearing program, they check my hearing and let me know if I need to update my hearing aids. They also take my blood pressure and alert me if I need to see my doctor. And this is all at no cost to me or any other athlete.

In addition to my sports competitions and practices, I have also attended Special Olympics workshops to become an Athlete Health Leader. During these workshops, we learn about the Fit 5 program – 5 glasses of water a day, 5 fruits and vegetables a day and physical activity 5 days a week. Because of this workshop, I have now been charting my steps with the goal of getting 10,000 every day. To help me do this, I walk at the mall twice a week. I have also cut way down on how much soda I drink. Finally, after attending this workshop in Manitowoc, I brought it back to my local program in Menomonie and asked 15 of

my teammates and friends to participate. Now we can all support each other in our health goals.

My leadership roles and friendships I have formed, keep me socially and emotionally active, which is just as important to my health as physical activity. I recently learned that being isolated could have the same negative health affects as having diabetes or smoking. Between my work and my Special Olympics activities, I do not have time to be lonely.

Because of my heart issues, I go to the Mayo clinic every year to see if the slight leak in my heart chamber has gotten any worse. When I was there, I told them about my involvement in Special Olympics. Their response was that I am much more active than most of their clients and that staying so physically fit is helping my heart stay healthy. SOWI research data also proves that being involved in Special Olympics means that I have fewer health claims. Since I am on Medicare and Medicaid, this not only saves me money, it saves the government money, which means it benefits everyone.

One of the reasons I love being an athlete health leader is that it allows me to share my story, just like I am with you today. And I get to have new experiences every time I share my story. I had to take an airplane to get here. This is the first time that I have been in an airplane, which is a big deal for me.

But it was very important for me to take this opportunity to fly out here and speak at Hill Day. I hope that as a legislator, you will keep financially supporting Special Olympics programming. It has helped so many athletes just like me but data shows that for every athlete in Special Olympics, there are 13 more on the sidelines. Government funds allow Special Olympics to reach more people with their services, which will make more individuals with ID healthier, which ultimately saves the government money and benefits all your constituents.