

Montana Swimming Updated Outreach Membership Policy Effective September 2021

Outreach memberships are offered to qualifying low income and/or disability athletes in Montana Swimming. A year-round outreach membership in Montana Swimming is \$7.00. The application must be submitted each year with the qualifying documents attached and submitted to the Montana Swimming Membership/Registration Chair.

For low income families to qualify for outreach membership you must provide one of the following documents with your application: Federal free or reduced hot lunch program, 1040 tax form, Food Stamps (SNAP) program, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), TANF, WIC, foster children, participation in Head Start, Medicaid, Medicare, Healthy Montana Kids Plus, Healthy Montana Kids, homeless, runaway, migrant, is a member of the club on a reduced or free scholarship, or their income is within the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Cases not falling under these circumstances may be appealed to the General Chair.

Outreach membership registration is also available to athletes who have a disability as recognized under the USA Swimming rules, Article 105. Any athlete with a disability applying for outreach membership must also be registered as a disability athlete.

Clubs/Teams/Unattached individuals must include each year a letter to the Montana Swimming Membership/Registration Chair verifying the athlete is disabled as recognized under USA Swimming rules Article 105. Medical paperwork does not have to be submitted.

Disability is defined as a permanent physical or cognitive disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Disability athlete registration categories include:

- Legally blind or visually impaired,
- Deaf or hard of hearing,
- Physical disabilities (such as amputation, dwarfism, cerebral palsy, spinal injury, mobility impairment, limb deficiency, wheelchair bound with high functioning upper body, non-ambulatory (wheelchair bound), limited use of all four extremities), and
- Intellectual/Cognitive disability (such as severe learning disorders, Down Syndrome, autism spectrum disorder).

Disability athlete may register to compete as:

- P1 athletes -- Non-ambulatory (wheelchair-bound), limited use of all four extremities.

- P2 athletes -- Ambulatory with assistance: includes dwarfism, multiple limb deficiency, wheelchair-bound with high functioning upper body.
- P3 athletes – Ambulatory without significant assistance: includes single-limb deficiencies, blind/vision impaired; deaf/hearing impaired; intellectual, cognitive, and developmental impairments (including autism spectrum disorder and Down Syndrome); and other.

Rationale for the Montana Swimming outreach membership criteria:

Many Montana families struggle financially. We would like to encourage swimmers to join our teams and one way we can do that is by offering an outreach membership that encourages low-income families to be involved in swimming. Expanding the outreach definition allows qualified swimmers who are home schooled and those who attend religious schools to participate in the program.

Many families are ashamed of their financial status and are reluctant to come forward asking for assistance. Families are much more likely to do so if the proof of outreach membership is handled by the club. The club will keep the information confidential.

Every day families struggle to make ends meet due to the harsh economic time in which we currently live. According to the Bureau of Labor statistics, the number of unemployed persons was 9.3 million. Many people don't have the discretionary income that they once had for extracurricular activities due to an unforeseen job loss that has adversely impacted income in a negative way. Outreach membership plays a vital role in bridging the gap. A Montana Swimming outreach membership offers qualified individuals the opportunity to become a Montana Swimming year-round athlete member at a reduced fee. Many families in Montana live at or below the poverty levels. This is one way Montana Swimming can make a positive difference in a swimmer's life. We encourage clubs to offer scholarships to assist low-income families to participate in swimming.

Allowing disability athletes to qualify for an outreach membership enhances opportunities for disabled athletes in our LSC. Some families of disability athletes have increased financial needs. Not all families may choose to apply for an outreach membership.