



Carolina Hockey

(Carolina Amateur Hockey Association)

Strategic Plan

(Updated April 2025)



Carolina Amateur Hockey Association

The Carolina Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA/Carolina Hockey) is the official USA Hockey affiliate serving North Carolina and South Carolina. Carolina Hockey is dedicated to promoting and developing amateur hockey across both states. Since its formation in 2000, CAHA's mission has been to encourage, foster, and promote the growth of the sport, encompassing youth, adult, girls', women's, high school, sled, disabled, college, and all other forms of hockey affiliated with USA Hockey.

Vision

Carolina Hockey is the leading force in cultivating a vibrant and diverse hockey community in the Carolinas, inspiring athletes and fans by setting standards of excellence, building character, and creating lifelong opportunities for engagement in the sport. Our long-term vision includes developing an approach that results in "Hockey for Life". This includes a robust offering of grass roots, house, disabled, youth, and adult hockey to establish the Carolinas as a place where "Hockey is for Everyone".

Mission

To promote the growth, development, and enjoyment of amateur hockey across the Carolinas, providing inclusive, high-quality programs that foster fair play, teamwork, and personal excellence for players of all ages and skill levels. We are committed to fostering internal growth within the Carolinas, promoting healthy competition within our affiliate, and creating "Hockey Players for Life".

Guiding Principles for the Affiliate

- CAHA will provide proactive and transformative leadership to help our sport prosper and grow. We communicate and collaborate with our partners including communities, Associations, coaches, players, officials, and volunteers.
- All hockey programs should provide a safe, positive and inclusive environment for players and families regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. Simply put, hockey is for everyone.
- Hockey programs should be age and skill appropriate for all players and account for everyone's physical, emotional and cognitive development.
- The development of players, coaches, officials, and parents as role models for creating a safe, positive, and inclusive environment is paramount
- We collaborate with the communities, organizations, and other affiliates to deliver the best hockey experience possible.

Strategic Priorities

Carolina Hockey chooses to prioritize and fund our efforts in 5 strategic areas to achieve our vision.

- 1) **Honor The Game** – create an environment for players and families where they experience fun, physical fitness, life lessons, inclusion, and competition. Encourage behaviors that honor the game and hold everyone in the game accountable for these behaviors. Currently the culture is male-dominated, winning is the priority, parent and player bad behavior, lack of inclusiveness, injuries, mental health.
- 2) **Hockey For Life** – address “churn” where large numbers of players quit after 10U due to costs, pressures to win, “not good enough”. Build House programs. Systemic approach to 8U/10U – delay the rush and/or availability of travel hockey. If we get players to 14U they are much more likely to play Hockey For Life. Why do we consistently deliver growth, but retention is an issue. Structure of youth hockey drives up cost (50+ games for 10U travel teams), slows development and negatively impacts mental health.
- 3) **Coaching Education** – coaches are the #1 reason kids stay or leave the game. Positive coaching, focusing on fun and development, balance between winning and development, keep kids in the game, treat players with respect.
- 4) **Hockey is for Everyone** – barriers include cost, marketing the sport, previous experience of diverse families, culture of the sport.
- 5) **Player Safety** – ensure that players are the top priority and provide an environment that is safe, physical and mental health are prioritized, and respect is expected by everyone in the game.

Measures of Success

- Meet or exceed national growth and retention rates across all ages.
- Meet or exceed national growth and retention across non-traditional populations: Girls/Women, Adaptive, Ethnic Groups
- Meet or exceed national growth and retention rates across all certification levels of officials
- Representation at Nationals Tier I and Tier II Girls. For Tier II and High School teams that move past the preliminary round.
- Meet or exceed national averages for growth in number of coaches, female coaches, and average coach certification levels.
- Improve Parent and Coach Satisfaction Rating each year

Action Steps

The action steps will be determined by each Committee as they focus on our strategies to deliver our vision.

Culture of Hockey

Committees involved: Youth, Discipline, DEI, Player Safety, Officials

- Parent Survey
- Review discipline procedures to ensure accountability
- Developing officials
- Expand Jamborees, Festivals, Regional House events
- Focus on House Hockey as a priority for growth & development

Hockey For Life

Committees involved: Adult, Youth

- Address retention and how we structure youth hockey (8U, 10U, early separation of players, travel). Typically, if players play until 14/15, they eventually play adult hockey.
- Programs to grow Adult hockey

Coaching Development

Committees involved: Youth, Coaching Development

- Use USA Hockey resources for Association coaching development
- Communicate concepts more effectively via Coaching Symposium
- Get USA Hockey approval for more courses for supplemental learning
- Female Coach Mentoring Program

Hockey is For Everyone

- Committees involved: Girls/Women, Disabled, Youth, DEI
- Marketing & Social Media to expand awareness of our sport and Hockey is for Everyone
- Girl's Hockey clinics and THFF to start programs in different rinks
- Develop strategy to address inclusion and attract more non-traditional communities
























Player Safety

Committees involved: Player Safety, SafeSport, Youth, Discipline

- Investment in SafeSport investigations
- Communication with parents
- Review discipline for player safety opportunities
- Equipment availability to improve safety – neck guards, Bleed kits, First Aid kits
- Review concussion awareness and reporting process

A review and analysis of factors in the CAHA affiliate that impact the growth and development of hockey across the affiliate.

SWOT Analysis (Affiliate-Wide)

STRENGTHS (Internal)	WEAKNESSES (Internal)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Established Presence: CAHA is a well-recognized affiliate of USA Hockey, providing credibility and a solid foundation for growth.  Strong Organizational Leadership: Some experienced board members and committee chairs  Focus on Development: Existing focus on player and coaching development, including partnerships with Positive Coaching Alliance.  Diverse Program Offerings: CAHA provides a range of programs from recreational to Tier I and Tier II competitive hockey, disabled, adult, warrior.  Financial Stability: The association is financially responsible and actively pursues grants to fund development programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Communication and alignment with Associations is inconsistent and there isn't a "let's all do what's right for hockey in the Carolinas" mindset  "We've always done it this way" resistance to change  Disparity in size of programs and geography: Hockey participation is stronger in suburban areas, with rural areas underrepresented, creating a challenge for equitable growth.  Adult approach to youth hockey: approach to 6U-10U is too competitive, too many games, too expensive, hinders development  Competition Gaps: There are gaps in competitiveness between lower and higher-tier programs, particularly at Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels. Meaning that there is a wide gap in top to bottom AAA teams and AA teams?  Volunteer Reliance: Heavy reliance on volunteers for coaching and administration creates potential burnout and continuity risks.  Communication Challenges: Limited use of communication tools (e.g., newsletter just started, website was dormant for 2 years) make it harder to reach and engage the CAHA community effectively
OPPORTUNITIES (External)	THREATS (External)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Coach Development: USA Hockey Coaching Education, partnerships with The Coaches Site and Ice Hockey Systems, and strong coaching leadership in the affiliate. There is a significant opportunity to recruit and retain female coaches, ensuring long-term sustainability.  Internal Competition Growth: By building House programs and player development at the younger ages, we will foster competition within the affiliate at lower levels. CAHA can strengthen the pipeline of players ready to compete at Tier I and Tier II levels.  Partnerships and Grants: CAHA can leverage grants and partnerships (like Positive Coaching Alliance) to reduce costs and increase programming.  Growing Interest in Girls' Hockey: National trends indicate growing participation in girls' hockey, providing a key growth area for CAHA.  Technology and Communication Tools: Investing in communication tools (social media, website improvements, newsletters) can enhance member engagement and transparency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Competing Sports and Activities: Hockey competes with other youth sports and extracurricular activities, especially in areas with less hockey culture.  Rising Costs: The cost of equipment, ice time, and travel may limit access for some families, particularly in lower-income areas.  Lack of Ice – slow to no growth in the availability of ice – no new rinks and any new ones are non-municipal rinks.  Retention of Coaches and Players: Without a clear development pathway, CAHA risks losing players and coaches to other affiliates or organizations.  Changing USA Hockey Regulations: Shifting rules and guidelines from USA Hockey could impact program delivery and certification requirements.... particularly Tier I  Post-COVID Participation Trends: Youth sports are still adjusting to post-COVID participation levels, creating uncertainty in future growth rates.