



## A Step aHead Hockey Program

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**ATHLETICO**  
PHYSICAL THERAPY

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Three years ago, four local organizations came together to address concussions in youth hockey players. Through the generosity of the Chicago Blackhawks, AHAI, Athletico, and NorthShore University HealthSystem and the dedication and hard work of a number of people within these organizations, the “A Step aHead” program was developed. The aim of this program was two-fold: provide free baseline neurocognitive testing to AHAI members and educate the hockey community as a whole on concussion prevention, assessment and treatment.

Free ImPACT computerized testing was first made available in 2011 and then again in 2012 but the program also strongly focused on education. For this reason, brochures providing extensive information about concussion signs/symptoms, assessment and treatment options were made available for all AHAI members. Each AHAI coach was provided with enough brochures for every player on their team. Additionally, coaches were given laminated cards and clipboards with the signs and symptoms of concussion so they could better detect possible concussions in their players. Coaches were required to attend an educational presentation on concussions and given information on additional educational resources. Parents and athletes were also given a presentation on concussions at the 2011 and 2012 AHAI “College Night” gatherings. To increase awareness of the program, posters were placed in local hockey rinks, emails and newsletters were sent to AHAI members, and public service announcements by Eddie Olczyk were placed on each organizations’ websites, played at the United Center during Blackhawk games, and even aired on Comcast Sports between periods.

Despite all of our efforts, we have found that many of you did not know about the A Step aHead program and we wondered why. We wanted to know how we could improve both the awareness of and participation in the program. So we asked you to tell us what we could do better and you responded! More than 1,200 people completed our survey and we thank you for taking the time to respond. We wanted to provide some information about your responses and address some of the concerns. Unfortunately, there are some changes to the program that we are unable to accommodate but we listened carefully to your feedback and will incorporate many of your great suggestions.

Some of the comments:

1. **Scheduling issues**- A few reported that they attempted to make an appointment but were not called back. That is something we will make sure to address!
2. **“I thought it was for only those who felt their child had symptoms of concussion”**- Then we need to do a better job explaining the purpose of baseline (or pre-injury testing) to AHAI parents. Baseline testing is done in the beginning of the season, prior to an injury to assess the child’s normal functioning. It is then used to compare to any post-injury testing.
3. **“Discouraged by coaches”**- This was the response that was most distressing to us. We certainly hope this is an isolated incident and encourage any parent to let AHAI know if this occurs in your team.
4. **“Too young, didn't qualify”**- This is the most frequent question/complaint that we receive. The ImPACT test is recommended for ages 12 and up. Given that checking begins at age 13 for AHAI members, the decision to offer free baseline testing starting at age 13 was made by the committee. A pediatric version of ImPACT (ages 5-11) is not yet commercially available.

5. **“Keep forgetting to get it done”**- We can all appreciate how busy parents and athletes are these days so we will continue to send you gentle reminders and try to provide convenient locations for you.
6. **“Our sports med doc did it”**- Great! The program was offered because baseline testing is not widely available for club sports. If athletes can be tested at their school or through other programs, that works too.
7. **“Would be very helpful if he could be given the test at the rink!”**- Unfortunately, a valid baseline requires a quiet environment with limited distractions and good internet access. This cannot be done in an ice rink so Athletico generously offered their clinic sites for testing locations.
8. **“No locations nearby”**- We have added new Athletico locations to our program this year and hope to offer additional testing opportunities downstate.
9. **“His team was not included”**- All AHAI members, ages 13-18, may take advantage of the free baseline testing
10. **“My athlete has not taken an impact to the head”**- That’s good news but baseline testing is designed to be completed prior to an injury.
11. **“As a goalie, my son’s risk is less”**- It is true that hockey goalies do have a lower incidence of concussions but they can be injured too.

We will continue to listen to your feedback and adjust the A Step aHead program to best meet the needs of the youth hockey community. If you have any additional concerns, please contact AHAI for further assistance. Our singular goal is to keep our young athletes safe while they enjoy the wonderful game of hockey.

All survey respondents were entered to win a signed Blackhawks jersey. And the winner is.... Jon Smoter. Congratulations and thanks for your entry!