Over time, institutions face pressures, scandals, and/or upheaval which can result in change, defensive strategies, or repair work (Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Trank & Washington, 2009). In the case of youth sport, many governing bodies have been slow to make changes despite the perceived need to address declining participation rates, lack of enjoyment, and sub-optimal elite level success (Legg, Snelgrove, & Wood, 2016). In Canada, youth sport policy and programming are shaped by the values imbedded in the Canadian Sport Policy (CSP) and the Long-Term Athlete Development model (LTAD). Following the direction established by the CSP and LTAD, National Sport Organizations (NSOs) establish their own Long-term Player Development model (LTPD) and programming.

The purpose of this study is to explore how one NSO (i.e., Hockey Canada) successfully changed the traditional way of delivering its sport programming in the face of significant resistance in parts of the country (Strashin, 2017). Specifically, guided by its LTPD model, Hockey Canada mandated the nationwide adoption of modified ice surfaces and fewer players per game for 5 to 8 year old participants starting in the 2017-18 season. This change altered the conventional way of playing lengthwise on an ice rink to widthwise segments (i.e., cross-ice, half-ice) and was consistent with the LTAD’s focus on skill development. Previously, this way of playing was a non-mandatory recommendation made by Hockey Canada for over 30 years, which had been adopted sporadically across the country (Wigfield & Snelgrove, 2019).

As institutionalized practices are maintained by regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars (Scott, 2001), one or more of these pillars must be disrupted for change to occur. Guided by an instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 1995) we draw upon theories of deinstitutionalization, which describe the process of change from pressures to change to the institutionalization of a new practice (Dacin & Dacin, 2008; Oliver, 1992). This study aims to contribute to the literature on institutional change in sport by identifying mechanisms used by a governing association to disrupt one or more institutional pillars and change an institutionalized practice (Lu & Heinze, 2019; Washington & Patterson, 2011). Additionally, we seek to identify the temporal sequence of the mechanisms employed (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012; Wolfe, 1994) and how the unique aspects of the youth sport system in Canada shaped the use of specific mechanisms (Riehl, Snelgrove, & Edwards, 2019). Practical implications from this research include guidance to assist change agents seeking to alter institutionalized practices to be consistent with a newly developed sport policy or development model.

Data have been extracted from organizational documents and promotional materials, and supplemented with media reports. Data collection via interviews with Hockey Canada and regional associations is ongoing. Documents and interviews are being analyzed using deductive and inductive coding to facilitate the development of theory (Stake, 1995), maintaining the sequential order of the mechanisms used to support temporal analysis (Caren & Panofsky, 2005). Findings and implications for theory and practice will be presented.