

# **Promoting, Developing, and Sustaining Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity in British Columbia for Aboriginal Youth**

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**Promoting, Developing, and Sustaining Sports, Recreation, and  
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# Promoting, Developing, and Sustaining Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity in British Columbia for Aboriginal Youth

## Executive Summary

The opportunities to participate in sports, recreation and physical activity have a significant positive impact on the physical health, and mental and emotional wellness of Aboriginal youth in British Columbia. Physical activity is a valuable form of primary disease prevention of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and other diseases that are caused in part by a sedentary lifestyle.

In March 2008, BC Aboriginal youth developed a declaration that served as a call to action, highlighting the importance of sports and recreation within their communities. In addition, over 350 of these youth responded to the first ever Aboriginal youth physical activity survey that provided important new research data.

In support of the declaration, the *Aboriginal Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity Partners Council* was further defined. This Council has developed a five pillars approach aimed at implementing core strategies for supporting BC Aboriginal sports, recreation, and physical activity initiatives.

It is recommended that specific sport and recreation policies be enacted to ensure equal access to sport and recreation programs for Aboriginal youth of all levels, ages, abilities and genders.

# Promoting, Developing, and Sustaining Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity in British Columbia for Aboriginal Youth

## Introduction

Sports, recreation, and physical activity are important tools for the primary prevention of diseases. This paper illustrates how physical activity programs have both a positive impact on mental wellness, and on improving the social indicators of health. Aboriginal people, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, of BC request support to develop sport, recreation, and physical activity programs to assist in preventing disease and improving mental wellness.

In 1977, Roger Adolph authored *The Report on the Delivery of Training and Recreation Services to Indian People in British Columbia*. This report included a survey of recreation programs in BC First Nation (Indian) communities and recommendations for leadership skill development. In thirty years little has changed, with the same observations being made today relating to the delivery of recreation services. For example (Adolph, 1977, p.4):

- most Indian Bands are located in rural areas away from available facilities
- the number and variety of recreation facilities are minimal
- off-reserve recreational facilities are used extensively by the non-Indian population and the cost for their use is considerable
- the ability/inability to pay due to personal and local government income determines potential use of such facilities
- local income to pay for full-time recreation co-coordinators and workers is small indeed, ( Band funded and short term government grants)

Adolph's report also indicated that the tax-paying potential for the First Nation population is low, and consequently, Native communities are not subsidized equally. It was recommended in this report that "community education facilities should be open for recreational use without charge, the cost being born by municipal and provincial revenue sources" (p. 8). Adolph (1977) also cited the Fields' and Stanbury's reports that states "...discrimination exists in allocating program dollars and services to native people whether it be in the field of education, housing, economic development, capital expenditures or recreation" (1977, p.5). Both authors argue that provincial and federal government funding is lacking in programs and services for Native people, which is made apparent if comparisons are made between recreation facilities in municipalities and Native communities. In addition, due to the average low incomes within the Indian population, fundraising is "...limited by available income and much fund-raising is already exhausted" (Adolph, 1977, p.5). It is recommended in this report that "...Provincial and Federal agencies assume the costs of such programs" (p.8). Similarly to today, in 1977, it was found that most recreation coordinators were volunteers. Creating recreation coordinator positions in Aboriginal communities would assist the development of ongoing programs as well as create employment opportunities. At the time of Adolph's survey leadership training was a major interest. It was recommended that educational institutions meet community needs by providing training services for recreation coordinators.

The 1977 report observed that the majority of the recreation activities undertaken by First Nations people were team oriented sports within the approximate age group of 15 to 35 years old. Sports were surveyed throughout BC and recognized in this 1977 report as follows: basketball (132 teams), soccer

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(118 teams), softball (103 teams), ice hockey (31 teams), lacrosse (14 teams) and floor hockey (17 teams). Women and girls were recognized in the survey through their participation in basketball, soccer, and softball in senior women, junior women or girl's teams. This report provided valuable information, and recommendations that remain pertinent today.

In the 2006 Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) Provincial Survey, 44.1% of Métis youth respondents, aged 15 to 29, stated that their health was an important issue to them (Data Source: 2006 MNBC Provincial Survey). In August 2008, Métis Nation British Columbia used a portion of their Métis ActNow money for a provincial youth gathering, focusing on hiking, jigging, swimming, volleyball and other organized sports and cultural activities. The remainder of the Métis Youth ActNow money will be offered in grants to all 37 Métis Chartered Communities. The youth representatives of those communities can then use the training received at the provincial gathering to benefit the youth in their home community by encouraging participation in physical activity and organized sport. Evaluations of both of these activities involving Métis Youth will be available by March 2010.

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*In general, the 1977 survey observed that most of the recreation activities by First Nation people were mainly team oriented sports within the approximate age group of 15 to 35 years old.*

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A questionnaire was developed to gain feedback directly from BC Aboriginal youth. The questionnaire (see Appendix C) asked respondents to name the types of sports, recreation and physical activities that youth were involved in, and to identify what types of barriers were preventing them from participating. This questionnaire was circulated and collected at the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) Aboriginal Youth "Gathering our Voices 2008" conference on March 17th, 2008, by Dr. Rosalin Hanna, First Nations Health Society (FNHS) Physical Activity Specialist. The findings of this survey are included in this report in the following pages.

At the Gathering Our Voices 2008 conference Aboriginal youth developed a BC Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity declaration. Aboriginal Sports and Recreation in BC, BCAAFC, Cowichan 2008 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), and FNHS were the partner agencies that lent support to the development of the declaration. It was our position to assist Aboriginal youth in developing their own declaration designed to promote, develop, and sustain sports, recreation, and physical activity in British Columbia. This declaration will be used to guide and form coherent BC sport and recreation policy with specific and tangible outcomes for Aboriginal youth. Métis Nation British Columbia is now also involved with the partnering agencies now called the Aboriginal Sports, Recreation and Physical Activity Partners Council. This council developed five pillars to assist in the implementation of core strategies to promote sports, recreation, and physical activity in Aboriginal communities. The five pillars are being drafted to outline core strategies to support the youth's declaration for a call to action. Overall, Aboriginal Sports and Recreation Association of BC is the organization acting as the voice and advocate for Aboriginal youth and people of BC in sports, recreation and physical activity.

This paper argues that while accessibility is an issue, there are further barriers for Aboriginal people participating in physical activities. The survey data reveals what the sports, recreation and physical activity interests are, and what are some of the deeply embedded social issues as contributing factors that prevent participation for Aboriginal Youth.

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## Aboriginal Sports and Recreation in BC

In order to promote, develop, and sustain sports and recreation for all Aboriginal people in British Columbia, it is essential to start with an acknowledgement of the work done by the Aboriginal Sports and Recreation Association of BC (ASRA). ASRA is the only recognized multi-sport umbrella organization that provides leadership, guidance and support for BC Aboriginal people through opportunities in sport, physical activities and recreation (ASRA, 2007). For nearly twenty years ASRA has provided much-needed opportunities for Aboriginal people to adopt healthy, active and addiction-free lifestyles. Through the delivery of successful sports and recreation programs, both Aboriginal coaches and athletes have experienced development, networking and support.

ASRA has highlighted 17 sports in their “Athletes in Action” programs. This is significantly less than the 47 sports that are available through Sports BC’s 64 provincial sport organizations. ASRA’s lack of resources makes it difficult to reach and develop Aboriginal athletes and coaches in all sports organized in BC. This lack of resources also makes it difficult to deliver sporting and recreation opportunities that are gender specific, or are modified to accommodate elderly or disabled participants. To develop sports, recreation and physical activities in BC for Aboriginal people of all ages, abilities and genders (male, female, and two-spirited) sport policy needs to be developed and properly resourced in order to bring about tangible outcomes. A review of applicable BC provincial sports policy follows.

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*The Aboriginal community also faces increased challenges to access programs due to variety of social, economical, and health issues.*

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### Aboriginal Sports Policy

While the BC policy on sport and physical activity can be applied in a general manner to Aboriginal sport and physical activity development, there are statements that directly target the Aboriginal population. “Aboriginal” is cited 12 times within the BC sport policy (2007). Below are some of these mentions.

*Sport and physical activity offer vehicles to address inequities in access. This policy also will seek to improve the sport and physical activity systems to remove barriers to participation and achievement – particularly in respect to the unique and pressing social and health interests of Aboriginal communities (p.3).*

*The Aboriginal youth population is growing 1.4 times faster than the non-Aboriginal population. This increase will have implications on the socio economic development of British Columbia – particularly in terms of prevalent afflictions in Aboriginal communities (e.g. higher than average suicide rates, substance abuse, diabetes and unemployment) (p.3).*

*Our sport and physical activity system will be proactive and encourage and provide equitable access to a broader cross section of British Columbians, particularly for disenfranchised groups, including women, Aboriginal persons, persons with a disability, persons with limited or low incomes, as well as ethnic and cultural minorities (p. 10).*

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*The same principles that apply to inclusiveness in sport and physical activity for all objectives should also apply to opportunities to achieve – that is, all segments of our population (e.g. Aboriginal persons, women, persons with a disability, isolated communities, multicultural persons) should have opportunities to achieve to their highest potential (p. 12).*

*The Province respects the positive role that sport and physical activity plays in health, social and economic aspects of community and individual life. The Province supports equal opportunity and access to sport and physical activity for all British Columbians and recognizes that the sport and physical activity system should be proactive to redress inequities, particularly for the Aboriginal community, women, persons with a disability, persons with limited or low income, and at-risk youth. This support for gender equity, equal access and opportunity applies to all levels along the continuum, from participatory to high performance involvement in sport and physical activity and to objectives and policy statements outlined in this policy (p. 17).*

*Support for equal opportunity and access for Aboriginal sport and physical activity will not result in the establishment of a parallel system, but rather will recognize and encourage integrated sport development opportunities for a historically disenfranchised population (p.17).*

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*Our sport and physical activity system will ensure that Aboriginal people engaged in physical activity and sport in British Columbia have access to a complete range of choices and opportunities and have equity as participants, competitors and leaders.*

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There is one section in BC's policy on sports and physical activity that targets the Aboriginal population, which states the following:

### *Aboriginal Sport and Physical Activity*

*Our sport and physical activity system will ensure that Aboriginal people engaged in physical activity and sport in British Columbia have access to a complete range of choices and opportunities and have equity as participants, competitors and leaders. At the same time, this system will support and complement the autonomy of the Aboriginal community in respect to culture, management and leadership while fostering appropriate integration with the B.C. sport delivery system (p.11).*

As well, the province lists specifically that it is a part of their role to:

*Coordinate and/or work with other governments (municipal, Aboriginal, provincial, federal and international) and their ministries and agencies in support of B.C.'s sport and physical activity goals (p.22)*

The Province's role is to ensure that the sport and physical activity environment supports the emotional, social and physical health of the population and promotes the best quality of life possible for individuals and communities.

Both the provincial and national policies support access to sports and physical activities for Aboriginal people. Both levels of government have specific policies and targets aimed at developing Aboriginal sports and physical activities in partnership with individuals and communities. Within the Federal-

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Provincial/Territorial Priorities for Collaborative Action 2002–2005 (Canadian Heritage, 2002), the chapter on “Enhanced Participation” provides the following action item:

*Undertake initiatives to increase the opportunities in coaching, officiating, and volunteer leadership for women, persons with a disability, Aboriginal peoples, and visible minorities. Compile existing information on coaching and barriers in order to develop baseline data for each target group (2002-2003). Establish targets, indicators, and federal provincial/territorial actions to increase coaching opportunities for each target group (2003-2004).*

The Sport Canada’s Policy on Aboriginal Peoples’ Participation (2005) captures the majority of general statements on the promotion of sports and recreation programs within Aboriginal communities as well as an endorsement of the development and sustainability of these programs. The following Enhanced Excellence section can be found in Sport Canada’s Policy on Aboriginal Peoples’ Participation (p.7):

*Sport Canada will strive to create an environment that welcomes an increasing number of qualified Aboriginal athletes, coaches and officials who reach National Sport Organization national team or high performance levels. This work will be guided by the belief that:*

*Access to, and support for, quality and meaningful training, developmental and competitive opportunities are essential for the continued success and development of Aboriginal athletes, coaches and officials.*

The Canadian National Aboriginal Sports Policy requires some clarification in this section of policy. For example, the statement “create an environment” is problematic. Environment is a combination of the external physical, social and cultural conditions that affect and influence the nature of an individual or community. This in turn affects the growth, development, and survival of the Aboriginal athlete and coach. Unfortunately, this welcoming environment has not been provided for Aboriginal participants in all mainstream sports, specifically within national organizations or Sports Canada programs that are outside of sports covered by Aboriginal sports organizations. There are numerous sports affiliated with Sports BC that may have Aboriginal athletes whose cultural needs are not being met. Along with challenges due to social determinants of health and lack of mentorship from Aboriginal leaders, all factors work to create a less than welcoming environment for Aboriginal participants.

The statement “increasing number” cannot be examined for there are neither comprehensive National or Provincial statistics available, nor an inventory of national level athletes, coaches, or officials for Aboriginal people. Therefore, it is impossible to measure the increase in numbers of First Nations, Métis or Inuit coaches and athletes at every level, for every sport.

The statement, “Access to, and support” is a resounding call for action. As noted in Adolph (1977), accessibility is still a challenge to communities due to the lack of funding for facilities, travel, and equipment specifically for Aboriginal People. There is also a disappointing lack of support for women sports mentors. They have not been identified and therefore cannot be connected with high

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performance women and girls in sport. The lack of committees for Aboriginal women within Aboriginal and mainstream sport organizations echoes this problem.

The statement, “quality and meaningful training” needs to include a reference to being culturally sensitive, gender balanced and responsive to those with disabilities.

Regarding the statement “developmental and competitive opportunities,” there is a need for seasonal provincial games for Aboriginal people that offer sports that are Indigenous, gender balanced and inclusive of all ages and abilities. There needs to be a way to identify Aboriginal people in mainstream provincial and national games, in order to create opportunities for the athletes to access training, and support to excel.

These are some of the key areas that require immediate development to increase Aboriginal participation in sport. In particular, it is important to understand what a “welcoming environment” in sport means for Aboriginal people, and then work to create an inclusive culture. It is important to collect and publicize quantitative data about Aboriginal sport participation, especially data on national level athletes, coaches, and officials. This data will provide important baseline measures to show what opportunities the Aboriginal people have access to and are taking, as well as changes in participation rates over time. Furthermore, identifying Aboriginal people in sports will promote positive mentors in the Aboriginal community. It is also important to consider that Aboriginal women are also mothers or caregivers, and are an integral part of the family support system because of their care-giving roles, they place a very high value on family and youth. Aboriginal women therefore require different but equally important supports to stay involved and succeed in sport.

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*There is a need to create more culturally sensitive supports for Aboriginal youth in sport, especially for leaders, and not just recreate the same supports that are already available in the mainstream.*

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There are strengths in the existing sport system, but they need to be enhanced for, envisioned by, and reshaped to meet the needs of Aboriginal people who are often the front line workers, volunteers, and fund raisers in community sport and recreation.

To build on the national policy Sport Canada has developed recommendations for the Federal – Provincial territories (F-PT) to develop policies in Provinces. According to these recommendations, a BC Aboriginal Sport, Recreation, and Physical Activity policy needs to be developed to support change in BC Aboriginal communities. In June 2006 News release, from the *Conference of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation* the Ministers stated that there is “the need to increase the participation of Aboriginal Canadians in sport programs including the meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal people in the Canada Games”. The increase of Aboriginal participation in National games cannot be accomplished unless there is an increase in qualifying athletes through provincial games, such as BC Summer or Winter games. There needs to be a change in Canada Games policy that allows for Aboriginal athletes to qualify through NAIG or other Aboriginal games. As well, the athletes who are participating in mainstream sports outside of the sports supported by ASRA need to be identified. At the same conference the Ministers stated that there needs to be a data-collection strategy developed “to measure participation of Aboriginal populations in sport”.

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In Communiqué, *Federal-Provincial-Territorial Governments to Boost Aboriginal Participation in Sport*, dated May 22, 2008, the Ministers underscored important role for developing Aboriginal sport through coach development. As well it is proposed that a new program will be piloted through the development of a Canada Games Aboriginal Coach Apprenticeship Program for the 2009 Canada Summer Games and the 2011 Canada Winter Games. The goal of the program is to support the development of Aboriginal apprentice coaches for 2009 and 2011 National Games and help build coaching capacity within Aboriginal communities. This initiative needs to be also developed further on a provincial level and needs to be broadened to all sports that are of interest to potential Aboriginal coaches, and inclusive of traditional games. For example, National Coaching Certification program (NCCP) to expand current programs such as, orienteering, archery, wrestling, athletics (running), canoe/kayak (to include longboat) certificates to have Aboriginal content for potential Aboriginal coaches. The expansion of the NCCP to include Aboriginal content within the mainstream certificates will broaden and develop the current programs for potential Aboriginal coaches. Therefore, if the National initiative must be tied into provincial coaching initiatives and include Aboriginal traditional sports perspective and coaching needs. These initiatives also need to be delivered through ASRA and not the mainstream sports where Aboriginal athletes and coaches have not been identified.

Furthermore, the development of fitness and general physical activity is not currently a part of ASRA's programs of delivery. For example, aerobics, yoga, fitness walking programs, and so on, for Aboriginal participants, or fitness leader programs, are not being delivered by a provincial Aboriginal association due to the lack of resources. To develop Aboriginal fitness programming work positions, programs, and supportive funding must be increased to ASRA. Policies based on a declaration of rights to develop these programs and services are necessary. It is also important to recognize that mass infrastructures need to be created as well.

### **Aboriginal Declaration**

In June 2000, Maskwachees Declaration was written at a Federal-Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Fitness and Recreation, Alberta. The Declaration was created to outline the barriers that Aboriginal and Indigenous people face accessing or participating in sports and recreation (see Appendix A). The Declaration was endorsed with an emphasis on the sustainability of such programs in alignment with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the recommendations from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples dealing with recreation, sport and active living. As stated in the Report, "for Aboriginal youth who are abusing alcohol and drugs ... sustained pursuit of challenging sports and recreational activities might provide the change of focus that is needed" (1996).

There needs to be coherent policies for Aboriginal youth, with clear goals and priorities. The policies can be developed similarly to the Maskwachees Declaration and include strengths and challenges, a background, and a declaration. An Aboriginal sports, recreation, and physical activity policy for BC youth must be developed in BC, matched with sports and physical activity funding – and it must be started by 2009.

## **BC Aboriginal Population and Youth**

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There is a strong representation of Aboriginal people in BC. According to Statistics Canada (2006), there are 196,075 Aboriginal people in British Columbia representing 5% of the total provincial population. There are 59,445 Métis people and 129,508 First Nations people identified in BC. Aboriginal people in BC make up 17% of the total Canadian Aboriginal population. There are 198 First Nation communities in BC, which represents one-third of all First Nations communities in Canada. The Aboriginal population of Vancouver is 40,310. This number accounts for 21% of the overall Aboriginal population in BC but only represents 2% of the city's overall population. In contrast, the aboriginal population of Prince Rupert makes up 35% of the city's overall population. Métis primarily live in urban centers with a population of 15, 075 living in Vancouver.

It is also important to recognize that while the overall senior population in Canada has doubled since 1996, Aboriginal Elders still only represent 5% of the Aboriginal population. It is important for communities and youth to have Elders involved in games and activities. Elders can act as leaders and assist in the revitalization of traditional games, sports, and activities. This will assist in bridging the gap between the generations, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and enhancing cultural experiences. Moreover, sport provides opportunities for community members to develop social ties and bonds through participation sporting activities.

Aboriginal children and youth under the age of 24 make up 48% of Aboriginal people. This is significantly higher than in the non-Aboriginal population. This means that approximately half of the Aboriginal population in Vancouver is made up of youth and children. There are nearly twice as many Aboriginal children aged 9 and under than in the non-Aboriginal population.

Unfortunately, 42% of Aboriginal children aged 14 years and under do not live with both parents. There are more barriers to participation in sports in lone-parent households, due to limits on time and resources, which makes it difficult for lone-parents to transport children and youth to sports activities. As well, there are concerns for greater increase of substance abuse, a 2003 poll of Aboriginal children and youth in BC indicated that children and youth who reported less family connectedness were more likely to use substances (Van Der Woerd, *et al.*, 2005 as in BC Coroners, 2008). Aboriginal youth and children desperately require more community and family support. In comparison, over 82% of non-Aboriginal children live with both parents.

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*Aboriginal youth and children desperately require more community and family support.*

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In addition, Aboriginal families are more likely to have moved from a different community. Relocating causes instability and creates challenges to developing relationships within teams as well as with coaches and physical activity leaders. Therefore, it is important that Aboriginal programs network between communities to help develop cohesive relationships within sports, recreation, and physical activities.

### Youth Declaration

The BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) hosted a provincial "Gathering our Voices 2008" conference for Aboriginal youth from March 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>. Three workshops were held to facilitate the development of a declaration by youth; with the Maskwachee amended declaration (see Appendix B) providing a reference guide. The Maskwachee declaration was adapted according to feedback

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received at a workshop entitled “True Sport in the Community 2005 National Symposium” that was hosted by Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA). The amended Declaration was used as a background tool at the “Gathering Our Voices: 2008 Provincial Aboriginal Youth Conference” workshops to develop the BC Aboriginal Youth Declaration on Sports and Recreation declaration that follows.

The BC Aboriginal youth at the Gathering Our Voices 2008 conference created their declaration. This new declaration was read out loud at the end of the conference, and the youth were asked to stand if they supported this declaration. Everyone in the room rose to their feet in a demonstration of their unified support. The BC youth declaration is as follows.

### **BC Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Declaration**

We Declare that:

We, the Aboriginal youth of British Columbia are committed to improving the health and lives of all Aboriginal people through Aboriginal and mainstream sports, recreation, and traditional physical activities within our communities.

We, as Aboriginal people, hold dignity, survival, and well being as the foundation of our culture and we have the inherent right to live healthy and active lives.

We are a strong, healthy, and resilient people that are connected to our lands and culture through the teachings and wisdom of our elders.

We will:

Improve the health of our People, reduce the number of suicides amongst our youth, and strengthen our families and communities through increased sports, recreation, and physical activity.

Counter the inequality that exists in our society in the areas of health, violence, addictions, racism, and poverty by increasing our health and strength through sports, recreation, and physical activity.

Play our traditional Aboriginal sports and recreational activities and nurture our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Create more opportunities for our youth to participate in healthy and fun activities.

Call to Action:

We call on the Federal and Provincial Governments to work with the Aboriginal youth of British Columbia to implement the spirit of this declaration.

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We call on our First Nation Governments to lead the way in building a healthier future for Aboriginal youth by making sports, recreation, and physical activity a priority.

We call on all governments and Aboriginal organizations to work together to support and implement the spirit of this Declaration.

We call on ourselves, the Aboriginal youth of BC, to implement this Declaration, to strengthen our Nations, and to create a healthier future for our People.

### **The Opportunity for Positive Change**

The March 2008 BC Aboriginal Youth declaration can now be used to form new Aboriginal Sport policy for youth in BC with coherent and specific outcomes. The development of this declaration is significant to the Aboriginal community of BC for it is an acknowledgement of the importance of sport and recreation within these communities. To further gather information about Aboriginal youth, a questionnaire by the First Nations Health Society (FNHS) was distributed at the conference. The survey was completed by the youth participants of the conference.

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*The First Nations Health Society (FNHS) has begun to compile a database of groups and individuals (health professionals, recreation coordinators, and community members) of all ages involved in Sports, Recreation, Fitness, and Physical Activity at all levels.*

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The Youth Sports, Recreation, Fitness, Physical Activity Questionnaire was used to gather anonymous information and can be found in Appendix C. The FNHS has begun to compile a database of groups and individuals (health professionals, recreation coordinators, and community members) of all ages involved in sports, recreation, fitness and physical activity at all levels. The information provided through this survey is being used to assist the FNHS in the development of programs and services for BC First Nations communities. These programs are being developed in conjunction with First Nations ActNow and the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative.

Of the approximately 700 youth who attended the Gathering Our Voices 2008 conference 359 gave their consent for FNHS to use the information provided in this report. This information will be presented generally as no personal information was collected in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

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### **The Survey**

The first question in the survey asked participants which Aboriginal nation or community they claimed membership in. The question was broken into First Nations, Métis or Inuit categories. In total there were 64 First Nation and Métis communities identified. Only three youth chose not to answer this question.

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The youth were then asked which sports they participated in. The 17 sports supported by ASRA were listed and an option for “other” was included. The following table presents the data that was collected in this question:

Sport	Participate (Number)
Archery	52
Athletics	129
Badminton	107
Baseball	122
Basketball	<b>185</b>
Boxing	47
Canoe Racing	48
Hockey	122
Golf	79
Lacrosse	44
Rifle Shooting	53
Soccer	<b>178</b>
Softball	112
Swimming	<b>186</b>
Tae kwon do	17
Volleyball	139
Wrestling	52
Other	8

The most popular sport identified was swimming with 186 participants, followed closely by basketball with 185 participants and soccer with 175 Participants. Over 50% of the youth respondents reported participating in swimming and/or basketball.

The next question asked youth if they participated in recreational activities. The following is a list of activities the youth identified.

- Basketball
- Canoeing
- Dancing
- Dirt biking
- Dog Sledding
- Exercising to videos/Aerobics
- Fishing
- Hiking
- Hockey
- Hunting
- Kayaking
- Lacrosse
- Outdoor activities
- P.E. (physical education class)
- Pow Wow Dancing
- Rugby
- Running
- Sailing
- Snowboarding
- Snowmobiling
- Soccer
- Swimming
- Volleyball
- Walking

Out of the 24 recreational activities listed, 13 of the activities could be considered traditional activities. Canoeing, dog sledding, hiking, kayaking, running, swimming, and walking all are traditional ways of commuting. Pow wow dancing and lacrosse are traditional activities tied to community festivities and intercommunity challenges. Other activities identified were fishing and hunting, both of which are traditional physical occupations as well as methods of subsistence. According to the BC First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (2002-2003), 54% of First Nations adults and 42% of First Nations youth participate in fishing. Moreover, 32% of First Nations adults and 19% of First Nations youth participate in hunting and trapping.

Note: Jigging was not listed as a choice for recreational activity but would have fallen into the traditional activity category.

Next, the youth were asked what fitness activities they were involved in. The following list is a summary of their responses:

- Aerobics
- Aqua fitness
- Dog sledding
- Floor hockey
- Hunting
- Karate
- Meditation
- Native Dancing
- P.E. (Physical Education)
- Pilates
- Running
- Skating
- Skipping
- Softball
- Skating
- Swimming
- Tai Chi
- Track & Field
- Walking
- Weight training
- Yoga

Within the fitness category some new physical activities that were not listed under recreation are listed, such as, aerobics, aqua fitness, meditation, Pilates, weight training, and yoga. Aerobics, aqua fitness, Pilates, and yoga are all group classes that require a fitness leader. Weight training requires an instructor to design and supervise a safe youth-specific program. Tai Chi and meditation could be performed in a group setting with a trained leader, or self led by an individual. Group classes need a large indoor space such as an empty classroom, fitness centre or gymnasium.

When the youth were asked if they were physically active at work or play the following new activities were identified:

- Aboriginal Games
- Baby sitting
- Biking
- Camping
- Chopping and Hauling Wood
- Construction
- Rollerblading
- School
- Crabbing
- Cultural Activities
- Dance
- Farming
- Fire fighting
- Fishing
- Fixing houses
- Shopping
- Trapping
- Gardening/ Yard work
- House work
- Mill work
- Mover
- Ranch Work
- Waitress
- Walking dogs

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These youth responses provided 20 new fitness activities that had not been considered before. Fishing, hunting, and dancing were maintained in this category as they can be considered both work and recreational activities. The activities listed give us insight in what Aboriginal youth define as physical activity. It is important to note that most of the new activities listed above are performed outdoors. During cold wet BC winters, outdoor activities require extra outerwear, requiring participants to have a dry change of clothes available after participating in these activities. This can cause problems, for example, if a person only owns one pair of running shoes and these are needed to attend work or school. The providing of sportswear to sporting participants may improve participation in sporting activities.

When asked if there were sports, recreation, fitness or physical activities in which youth participated in the past, but no longer participate in, 240 youth responded affirmatively. These activities no longer participated in are listed below:

- Soccer
- Football
- P.E.
- Wrestling
- Baseball
- Karate
- Sailing
- Curling
- Weight lifting
- Gymnastics
- Softball
- Hockey
- Basketball
- Running
- Badminton
- Pilates
- Canoe/Canoe racing
- Volleyball
- Hunting
- Snowboarding
- Lacrosse
- Boxing Hiking
- Tae kwon do
- Rugby
- Dance
- Cadets
- Swimming
- Track & Field

When asked why they stopped participating in the activities, the youth provided the following reasons:

- No time
- I like other sports better
- Had an accident
- Injuries
- Loss of interest
- Facilities were shut down/closed
- Got involved in another sport
- Age (too old)
- Lack of money, could not afford equipment or fees or travel
- Lack of travel/rides to practices and/or games
- Too busy with school, work, children, and /or family
- Moved out of area
- Not available in the area they live in
- Not good enough, low self esteem
- Graduated
- Season was over
- Program only took place for one year
- Not enough kids to form a team to play
- Had children
- Health problems
- School mark
- Missed too many practices

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- Too unfit to play

Out of the 23 items identified as reasons for discontinuing participation in the activities, four items were tied to physical health. These were: unfit to play, health problems, injury, and had an accident. Many of the other challenges noted were due to the structure of the program or guidelines to participation. For example: missed too many practices, school marks, program took place once a year, graduated, not available in the area they live on, and age. The other main challenges identified were: lack of resources, lack of travel/rides to practices and/or games, facilities shut down, lack of money, could not afford equipment or fees or travel, and no time for a variety of reasons.

A 60% majority of youth responded that they would like to try a new sport, recreation, fitness or physical activity. Below is a list of sports, recreational, fitness or physical activities that they identified:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dance</li> <li>• Kick boxing</li> <li>• Tennis</li> <li>• Lacrosse</li> <li>• Working out</li> <li>• Hang gliding</li> <li>• Snowboarding</li> <li>• Hockey</li> <li>• Bungee jumping</li> <li>• Football</li> <li>• Rowing</li> <li>• Hunting</li> <li>• Boxing</li> <li>• Yoga</li> <li>• Gun range</li> <li>• Ultimate Fighting</li> <li>• Basketball</li> <li>• Extreme sports</li> <li>• Mountain Climbing</li> <li>• Archery</li> <li>• Tae kwon do</li> <li>• Rugby</li> <li>• Rifle shooting</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Martial Arts</li> <li>• Canoeing</li> <li>• Surfing</li> <li>• Paintball</li> <li>• Softball</li> <li>• Soccer</li> <li>• Sky diving</li> <li>• Golf</li> <li>• Fitness gym</li> <li>• Gymnastics</li> <li>• Rock climbing</li> <li>• Tai Chi</li> <li>• Sun Run</li> <li>• Dance</li> <li>• Curling</li> <li>• Wrestling</li> <li>• Dragon boating</li> <li>• Skiing</li> <li>• Sailing</li> <li>• Badminton</li> </ul> |
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*It is important to note here that the Aboriginal youth who already participate in sports, for example, soccer and basketball, could be sport leaders*

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There seems to be a heavy emphasis on contact sports. Activities such as football, boxing, UFC (ultimate fighting challenge), rugby, kick boxing, tae kwon do, martial arts, and wrestling represent 8 out of the 43 activities listed. Included in the extreme activities category mentioned are hang gliding, bungee jumping, rock climbing, or extreme sports. The majority of the listed activities have already been listed in the other responses. This indicates involvement by Aboriginal youth. It is important to note here, that the Aboriginal youth who already participate in sports, for example soccer and basketball, could be sport leaders for youth who expressed a desire to try these sports themselves.

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When asked what has prevented them from trying the above mentioned sports and activities, youth provided the following reasons:

- Not in my area
- Time, no time, too busy
- Prefer another sport
- Equipment
- Injuries
- Lack of lakes/resources
- Not available/accessible in my town
- No experience
- Cost
- Lack of funding, players, coaches
- Summertime only
- Money
- Age, too old or underage
- Dealing with personal problems
- Didn't feel I had enough skill
- Attend alternative school, not offered
- Slightly afraid of heights
- Environment
- Don't know enough about it
- Worry of getting injured
- Low self esteem/self conscious
- School (homework, marks, classes)
- Transportation, no ride
- No support
- Club shut down
- Health problems
- No motivation

The barriers to participation in these activities are mainly due to a lack of resources. A shortage of equipment, funding, players, coaches, programs, clubs, venues and transportation has worked to lower Aboriginal youth participation in sports, recreation and fitness activities. Other barriers appear to be more personal and related to self-conception and self-worth. For example, some youth report being too old, having low self esteem, being self conscious, having no experience, dealing with personal problems, worrying about getting injured, having no motivation, and not feeling supported. These responses highlight how Aboriginal youth are aware that their self concepts could prevent them from participating in sports. These personal barriers are tied to internal perceptions and should be further explored. As well, participation in physical activity must be promoted to be more than just sports that can be competitive. Non-competitive and low intensity recreational activities must also be promoted to reduce barriers that are related to feeling inadequate. Aboriginal youth need be intrinsically motivated by re-enforcing the personal benefits for health and wellness by being more active.

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*A shortage of equipment, funding, players, coaches, programs, clubs, venues, and transportation has worked to lower Aboriginal youth participation in sports, recreation and fitness activities.*

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Another way to improve intrinsic motivation is to provide educational opportunities on the benefits of being physically active. When the youth were asked about their educational background, the majority of respondents answered:

- 9 youth reported having an educational background of elementary school
- 212 youth reported having an educational background of high school
- 16 youth reported having an educational background of post-secondary college or university

This information shows that the majority of youth who responded had completed, or was still enrolled in, high school. It would be interesting to ask how many youth attend or attended a First Nations

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school. As well, it would be valuable to ask in the next questionnaire how many youth are involved as an athlete or coach at school.

Of the youth respondents, 54 reported being employed in the health, sports, recreation, or fitness field. Below is a list of the job titles provided by the respondents:

- Recreation Coordinator
- Assistant Sports Captain
- Musher, dog handler
- Skills link programmer
- Camp Councilor
- Coach
- Sports instructor
- Counselor
- Volunteer
- Yoga instructor
- Outreach worker
- Coordinator

It would be beneficial to provide Aboriginal youth with information about occupations in the sports and fitness field. Youth could be provided with literature that outlines possible career opportunities such as sports media (photography or journalism), marketing and corporate sales, health and fitness personnel (personal trainer, kinesiologist, physiotherapist, physician), and sports facility management.

When asked about accessibility to the internet, 78% of the youth responded that they did have access. While this number is promising, it means that 22% of the youth respondents reported not having access to the internet. Youth without internet access are therefore dependent upon newsletters, newspapers, books, and community events to access information about sports, recreation, and fitness as well as information about events, activities, and employment or educational opportunities. This is a large concern, as it puts limits on Aboriginal youth participation due to a lack of information about events and programs.

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*By supporting the youth's voice and their call to action, which was documented in the above declaration, we are required to restore traditional ways of life by supporting physically activity, improve accessibility, and diminish barriers.*

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The youth who responded to the questionnaire were between the ages of 11 and 26 with the majority of the respondent were in their teens.

Of the respondents, 25 youth identified as having a physical disability. Some disabilities identified were eye injuries, hearing problems and variety of complications due to various diseases. The most common noted physical disabilities were injuries of bone joints in the knee and back. A few youth listed being overweight as a physical disability.

It is important to recognize that the feedback provided by the survey is general and may not reflect the view points of all Aboriginal youth in BC. However, it provides a large sample of responses, and provides valuable insight and information that will be useful in future dialogue and the development of programs for Aboriginal youth.

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*Aboriginal youth are aware that their self concepts can prevent them from participating in sports. These personal barriers are tied to internal perceptions and should be further explored.*

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By heeding this call to action, we are responding to the voices of Aboriginal youth in BC. The declaration calls for a restoration of traditional ways of life

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by supporting physical activity, improving accessibility, and diminishing barriers.

Implementing programs, developing leaders, and increasing resources for facilities, equipment, travel and staff is the first step to improving accessibility. Supporting Aboriginal youth in sports, recreational, fitness and physical activities must take a more holistic path. Youth must have their emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical needs met if they are to create lasting, sustainable changes. Health encompasses more than just the physical realm. Many of the barriers to sport, recreation and fitness participation identified by the youth were linked to issues of low self esteem and poor mental health. It follows then that in order for youth to gain the support they need to begin or sustain participation in physical activity, be it team or individually based, they must also have good mental, spiritual and emotional health.

Sports, recreation and physical activity are known to have a positive impact on mental wellness and depression. High levels of depression could be linked to suicide if not managed or identified. Therefore sport, recreation and physical activity has a crucial role to play in the healing of Aboriginal communities. As stated by Dr. Nancy Cochrane, a Vancouver School Board psychologist, “the constant, underlying marginalization of Indigenous peoples is felt by Indigenous youth every day in school settings, as these social stereotypes have infiltrated a large number of teacher, peer, and administrator values. Thus, despite the fact that residential schools are no longer actively oppressing the Indigenous people of Canada, it appears that their legacy of cultural oppression is still living on through alternative means in society. This, in turn, affects the motivation and inclusion of Aboriginal students in sports and physical activity programs in public schools, as well as their vulnerability to become involved in anti-social activities” (2008).

### **Suicide in Communities**

Suicide in BC First Nations communities is a terrible tragedy. The loss of any member of a community and the impact it has on family and community members is devastating on many levels, especially emotionally and spiritually. Research shows that female Aboriginal children and youth are 7.5 times more likely to die by suicide than their non-Aboriginal cohorts. Similarly, male Aboriginal children and youth are five times more likely to die by suicide than non-Aboriginal children and youth (White & Jodoin, 2007, as in BC Coroners Service, 2008). According to the 2006 MNBC Provincial Survey, 23.7% of respondents knew a Métis youth who had committed suicide and 16.6% of all respondents reported having contemplated or attempted suicide themselves (Data Source: 2006 Métis Nation British Columbia Provincial Survey).

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*Suicide was the leading cause of death for First Nations youth between 10 and 19 years.*

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There are as many reasons why suicide occurs and as many ways to prevent it. Relationships with health professionals, traditional mentors, and positive leaders in the community provide support for individuals who may be considering or have attempted suicide. These relationships can be enhanced and developed through social programs such as sports, recreation, fitness, play, and traditional activities. Suicide may be prevented if a suicidal person is referred to a medical professional, counsellor or Elder for support, treatment and care. This said it can be difficult to pick up on the cues that a person may be suicidal. The BC Coroners Service (2008), 81 child and youth suicide cases that occurred between January 1, 2003, and December 31, 2007, Aboriginal children and youth were more likely than

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non-Aboriginal children and youth to have experienced a stressful event in the 24 hours prior to death (75 per cent compared to 50 per cent). If this person is not involved in social activities in which they can be observed being stressed and questioned if they may be thinking of suicide, it is much more difficult to connect them with the support and help they desperately need. In the BC Coroners report, Of the 66 closed cases 12 were Aboriginal and only 2 children lived with both biological parents and 4 were not enrolled in school (2008). This highlights the need for role models and leadership to be developed outside of school, and the need for non-parent leaders to develop programs. Economic challenges were experienced by 42 per cent of the Aboriginal children and youth compared to 15 percent of the non-Aboriginal youth and children, including financial dependence on income assistance, homelessness, loss of employment (by child, youth, or parent/caregiver), and loss of family income due to substance use. Seven of the 12 Aboriginal children and youth (58 per cent) had experienced significant school challenges, such as learning challenges, chronic absenteeism, disciplinary action and bullying (both as victims and as perpetrators) (2008). Cultural awareness of challenges that exist in Aboriginal communities is vital to improve safety and support in Aboriginal communities. Building healthy relationships is also crucial to suicide prevention. Relationship building can happen through engagement in sports, recreation and traditional physical activities. It has been noted by Chandler and Lalonde that First Nations communities who have preserved their culture and achieved three or more measures of success in community development have lower rates of youth suicide, and in many cases no youth suicides at all (1998). Therefore it is important to note that

Furthermore, the physical activities themselves have a positive impact on anxiety, stress, and depression. There is a positive relationship between exercise and improved mental health. Physical fitness serves as a buffer against life's stressors. Individuals who exercise regularly and maintain a high level of physical fitness are less susceptible to the negative effects of stress. The general psychological benefits of chronic and acute exercise are (Cox, 1994, p. 356-358):

- exercise can be associated with reduced anxiety
- exercise can be associated with a decreased level of mild to moderate depression
- long term exercise is usually associated with reductions in neuroticism and anxiety
- exercise may be an adjunct to the professional treatment of severe depression
- exercise can result in the reduction of various stress indices
- exercise can have beneficial emotional effects across all ages and both genders

It is important that Aboriginal athletes learn about the benefits of their sports programs. The specific effects of chronic and acute exercises on depression and anxiety are (Cox, 1994, p. 361):

- acute and chronic exercise effectively reduces depression
- the greatest decrease in depression occurs with subjects requiring psychological care
- exercise is associated with a reduction of both trait and state depression
- exercise effectively reduces depression in mentally healthy subjects as well as those undergoing psychiatric treatment
- all modes of exercise (anaerobic and aerobic) are effective in reducing depression
- length of exercise program (weeks) and number of sessions (per week) is related to amount of decrease in depression
- exercise is more effective than relaxation and enjoyable activities in reducing depression

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- exercise combined with psychotherapy is more effective than exercise alone in reducing depression

A cause-and-effect relationship between physical activity and positive mental health exists. There are many hypotheses on why this relationship exists. Here are a few (Cox, 1994, p.363-364):

- exercise encourages and generates positive thoughts and feelings that serve to counteract negative mood states such as depression, anxiety, and confusion
- social interaction associated with exercising with friends and colleagues is pleasurable and has the net effect of improving mental health
- exercise affords an opportunity for individuals to be distracted from their worries and frustrations
- there is an increased secretion of chemicals that serve as neurotransmitters which is related to improved mental health. (Studies have shown that depressed individuals often suffer a decrement in the secretion of various amines such as norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine)
- exercise is associated with brain production of chemicals that have a "morphine-like" effect on the exerciser, resulting in pain reduction and general euphoria

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*A cause-and-effect relationship between physical activity and positive mental health exists.*

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Currently, a consultation document is being completed for the First Nations Health Society called "BC Region Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention" (2008 draft). Information was and is being gathered through community consultations as well as a review of the suicide prevention resources presently available. It was found that "in terms of what key areas were identified as being significant to healing the wounds of suicideation, Family, Faith, Safety, Culture, Spirit, Arts, The Land, Community, and Sports all hold significance in the First Nations of British Columbia"(p.3). Sports, recreation activities and exercise programs were listed as things that assist in community initiatives aimed at preventing suicide. When asked what other activities are useful in the prevention of suicide, community members listed inter-band events and gatherings such as sporting events, camps, fun days and plays.

It is important to recognize that mainstream physical activities are normally considered to be sports, recreation and fitness. However, in the Aboriginal community, many physical activities are seen as being cultural. For example, dance, canoeing, hiking, and fishing are seen as traditional cultural activities. Therefore, a community may request the development of cultural activities that may also be considered the development of sport and recreation activities.

One of the regions in the FNHS consultation document recommended sport programming that included more soccer, baseball, swimming and basketball tournaments. They also recommended bringing other athletes to the isolated communities, having open gym nights, and sport camps to build social support for communities and to assist in suicide prevention.

Overall, "what works essentially is building relationships between youth, adults and elders, between older and younger youth, between youth of different communities, and between youth and their cultural identity through a wide range of sports, recreation, and cultural activities (examples given include: Warriors Camps, Natural Changes, circles with youth and elders, recreation, sports

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*"what works essentially is building relationships between youth, adults and elders, between older and younger youth, between youth of different communities, and between youth and their cultural identity through a wide range of sports, recreation, and cultural activities*

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tournaments, youth field trips, canoe pulling, drumming, singing, basketball, soccer, swimming, Counter Attack, Girls' Groups)" (p.23). "It was also found that programs target individual youth but have no provision for involving their families.... There is both a lack of community resources to help those at medium or low risk of suicide and a lack of awareness about the resources that do exist, within and external to communities" (p. 24).

The importance of sports activities in communities whether it is playing on a community soccer team or swimming, has a positive effect on health and social issues. Some of the Aboriginal people's social dilemmas and health concerns are (Health Canada, 2005):

- higher number of cases of AIDS/HIV, total Aids cases climbed from 1.0% in 1990 to 7.2% in 2001
- rate of tuberculosis is eight to ten times greater with First Nations people than the Canadian population
- greater number of teenage pregnancies, the birth rate for females between the ages of ten to fourteen was nine times higher than the average for the same age group
- more alcohol related problems
- higher percentage of diabetes
- significantly higher amount of suicide, females aged 15 to 24, and 25 to 39 years old has approximately eight, and five times higher, respectively, than the Canadian rates
- greater amount of people living in poverty, only 56.9% of homes were considered adequate shelter

### **Health Issues in Communities**

Obesity is on the rise in Canada. Obesity increases the risk factor for type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Obesity is thought to be a result of reduction of physical activity and the intake of high-calorie foods. Sports or recreation could be used to develop community interaction around physical activities that can have direct outcomes from positive behaviours with immediate benefits to the individual's social, emotional, and spiritual nature.

A study by Hanley, Harris, Gittelsohn, Wolever, Saksvig & Zinman (2007) found that 445 Native Canadian children between the ages of 2 to 19 years of age were significantly more overweight in comparison to the non-native population subjects in a National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Children 10-19 years of age who watched 5 or more hours of television per day were 2.5 times at greater risk of being overweight. As the amount of fitness increased in children, the rate of overweight children decreased. Therefore, to reduce weight in children and youth more time needs to be set aside for physical activities and less time for sedentary play.

Sports, recreation and physical activities have a direct impact on health issues that are a product of sedentary lifestyles. The psychology of sport and sports and tactics to improve motivation and adherence to participate in sports can also be utilized to develop skills to succeed in other aspects of life, such as school and career, leading to improved mental health.

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The main focus of this paper has been youth; however participation in sports offers health and social benefits to Aboriginal people of all ages and genders. Sports or recreation activities are often seen to be for children or teenagers as something to be involved in for fun, to be with friends, or to occupy them when school is out. Sports are a physical activity that should be available for all ages and both genders. Furthermore, knowledge of the benefits of sports for improving an individual's health and decreasing a community's social dilemmas could be emphasized to communities to promote awareness of sports benefits.

It is noted in the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS, 2002-2003) that 40% of First Nations adults were active for 5 hours a week; however, women were more sedentary than men. As well, 44% of adults 55 years of age or older were physically active only for 2 hours or less per week. Therefore, women and Elders seem to be the least active people in the community. It is important when developing sport programs that they are created with these two groups in mind as well. By participating in sports, both women and Elders can become physically active. This can have an inspirational impact on the family and community. As well, female youth do not participate in sports or outdoors activities as much as their male counterparts. Overall, a quarter of all First Nations youth do not participate in sports or any after school physical exercise programs according to the RHS survey. Therefore, the development of sports needs to include the family and the broad spectrum of all ages.

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*It is important to recognize here that knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of Aboriginal people are culturally different from the rest of the population due to our traditional origins and relationship with the land.*

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It is important to recognize here that knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of Aboriginal people are culturally different from the rest of the population due to our traditional origins and relationship with the land. Health problems also need to be framed similar to other social problems among Aboriginal people with the inclusion of broader contextual factors such as (Demas, 1993):

- social issues, for example: racism
- economic status, for example: poverty
- cultural values, for example: feasting
- historical traumas, for example: disempowerment
- political stressors, for example: access to health care

Overall, there are many things to consider when developing sports, recreation and physical activities in communities. There are a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic barriers that prevent participation in community activities. However, there are many health and holistic benefits to supporting culturally sensitive programs. To support BC Aboriginal youth in developing such programs the Aboriginal Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity Partners Council was formed with the following guiding principles:

- First Nations (on and off reserve) and Métis cultures are an integral part of BC's history, culture, and heritage. A long-term plan will contribute to the BC Aboriginal Sport Hall of Fame.
- There is increasing evidence of strong correlations between participation in sport, recreation, and physical activity and improved health outcomes.

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- Barriers to participation and access to physical activity and recreation opportunities are compounded by a lack of financial resources and transportation.
- Aboriginal peoples have significant traditional knowledge and cultural teachings of play, recreation, games and sports and holistic approaches to personal development.
- First Nations (on/off reserve and status/non-status), Métis, and Inuit, including Aboriginal women, experience unique living conditions and social realities. Aboriginal people hold dignity, survival, and wellbeing as the foundation of our culture and maintain the inherent right to live healthy and active lives.
- Aboriginal protocol must be respected when consulting or promoting federal and provincial policies and program development.
- First Nations (on and off reserve) and Métis peoples in British Columbia live in a complex environment and geography.
- First Nations (on and off reserve) and Métis people with disabilities have unique challenges that must be recognized in planning and processes.

The BC Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Declaration calls on leaders to respond collectively to their needs and to establish youth sport, recreation, and physical activity as a provincial priority. Increasing Aboriginal peoples' participation in sport is enhanced by working with Aboriginal sport leaders and through continued partnerships with various stakeholders to achieve objectives of common interest.

The development partners council, and the BC Aboriginal youth declaration with its calls for action inspired the development of five pillars to implement change. The five pillars are aligned with core strategies and outcomes and will be presented to key provincial stakeholders for support and involvement in making positive change. The First Nations Leadership Council has expressed their support for this initiative.

## **Conclusion**

Sports had a significant role in the Aboriginal community before colonization. "Historical trauma has removed many Indigenous people from their traditional values and beliefs. The maintenance of these values and beliefs is critical to good health" (Lavallee, 2006). Traditional games were instrumental in bringing communities together in respectful, healthy and reverent ways to build relationships.

Overall, there are numerous challenges to access sports because of community or facility locations, lack of coaching and support staff, and financial costs for programs and equipment. The current Aboriginal sports programs need to be supported to cover all urban or rural regions in British Columbia by having Aboriginal representatives allocated to specific zones to build relationships with coaches, athletes, and the community.

The barriers that inhibit Aboriginal people of all ages and genders from participating in sports have a negative impact on holistic health and wellness in urban and rural areas. The higher than normal presence of diseases and social issues within the communities is evidence that there are inadequate primary prevention activities, such as sports and recreation programs, being implemented.

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BC Aboriginal youth have provided feedback and valuable information about their participation and barriers to participate in sports, recreation and physical activity. The Aboriginal Youth Declaration with a “Call to Action” has been supported by the provincial agencies within the Partner’s council and there has been an appeal to the provincial stakeholders to increase support for Aboriginal Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity.

To ensure that action occurs it is recommended that the BC Sports policy section titled “Aboriginal Sport and Physical Activity” proposal be matched up with a system of delivery to foster “access to a complete range of choices and opportunities and have equity as stated:

*Our sport and physical activity system will ensure Aboriginal people engaged in physical activity and sport in British Columbia have access to a complete range of choices and opportunities and have equity as participants, competitors and leaders. At the same time, this system will support and complement the autonomy of the Aboriginal community in respect to culture, management and leadership while fostering appropriate integration with the B.C. sport delivery system (p.11).*

It is necessary to increase accessibility for Aboriginal boys and girls, men and women of all ages to sports or recreation equipment, facilities, and safe transportation. Mentors and leaders must have greater access to coaching programs, continuing education in institutes of higher learning, and opportunities to pursue certificates in recreation, fitness, physical education, or human kinetics. An increase in the number of full-time paid positions for sports coaches, recreation leaders, and programmers in Aboriginal Communities is also recommended for change to occur. These positions are as significant to the development of a community as that of teachers, counselors, and other community service providers.

There are more barriers for Aboriginal people compared to non-Aboriginals for full benefits of sports or recreation, especially in rural communities due to low socioeconomic status that affects inability to pay registration fees, travel expenses, coaching, programs, equipment, and nutritious food. There is also a great margin for improvement in health and social issues for Aboriginal and participation in sports and recreational activities would benefit communities as a strategy for primary prevention to chronic disease and strengthen a community’s social support.

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# Promoting, Developing, and Sustaining Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity in British Columbia for Aboriginal Youth

## Appendix A

### Maskwachees Declaration

Federal-Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Fitness and Recreation June, 2000.

#### Preamble

We, the delegates of the National Recreation Roundtable on Aboriginal/ Indigenous Peoples, held in Hobemma, Alberta, (Maskwachees) in February 2000, are deeply committed to improving the health, wellness, cultural survival and quality of life of Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples, through physical activity, physical education, sport and recreation.

We affirm that the holistic concepts of Aboriginal cultures, given by the Creator and taught by the Elders, promote balance through the integration of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth of the individual.

We recognize that many social issues including poverty; health concerns such as type II diabetes, heart disease, and fetal alcohol syndrome; rates of incarceration; substance abuse; harassment and racism; and a sedentary lifestyle have contributed to poor health and a low quality of life for many Aboriginal/Indigenous People.

We recognize Canada's endorsement of Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the recommendations from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples dealing with recreation, sport and active living.

#### Strengths and Challenges

We are supported by these strengths:

- a willingness to respect partners and to work together with a readiness to learn and lend;
- a commitment by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial governments to reduce inactivity among Canadians by 10% by 2003;
- a growing number of effective programs, policies and practices;
- infrastructure development in the sport and recreation sector;
- a physically active Aboriginal/Indigenous traditional lifestyle; and
- international documents/statements that recognize the importance of physical activity, physical education, sport and recreation.

We are challenged by:

- the fact that Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population;
- the need to support, invite, integrate and use the knowledge of Elders in program design and delivery;
- the lack of priority in allocation of adequate financial and human resources for recreation and sport;
- the complexity of the infrastructure independent rather than interdependent;
- the need to enhance communication and accountability between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sport and recreation organizations and governments;
- the need for quality community based programs and services and the creation and renewal of sport and recreation facilities;

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- a learned attitude of helplessness and “who cares?” held by many;
- the lack of clear initiatives for capacity building at the community level;
- the need for more leaders and positive role models;
- the need to recognize success and celebrate participation;
- the need to ensure quality physical education in schools;
- the need to ensure recreation and sport are positive experiences; and
- the need to create, pursue and implement system-wide change that will result in more flexible, creative, and responsive policies and practices.

### Rationale

Traditional Lifestyles and Active Living, including physical education, physical activity, sport, recreation and related cultural activity:

- offer preventive strategies that are much more powerful and cost effective than reactive treatment strategies;
- provide personal development for success in life: for example, mutual respect, honesty, teamwork, healthy work ethic, dealing with conflict, fair play, self-esteem, pride and confidence;
- provide inclusive opportunities for all ages and cultures to interact and to develop respect for each other;
- provide inclusive opportunities for leadership development and role modeling;
- provide opportunities for positive relationships and partnership building;
- increase activity levels across the life span to improve quality of life, enhance mental health, and help reduce the incidence of osteoporosis, some types of cancer, and conditions such as heart disease, type II diabetes and obesity;
- provide opportunities for developing a spiritual foundation of the individual, incorporating traditional values; and
- provide opportunities for the family unit, including parents, to be involved in the development of children, youth and communities.

We Declare that:

Sustainable commitment and investment in active living, physical activity, physical education, recreation and sport are essential to promote health and address social issues facing Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples in communities across Canada.

And therefore, we call on all governments, non-governmental organizations, communities and individuals to endorse this Declaration.

# Promoting, Developing, and Sustaining Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity in British Columbia for Aboriginal Youth

## Appendix B

### Maskwachees Declaration Amended

The following Maskwachees declaration was amended by Dr. Rosalin Hanna according to feedback received at a workshop entitled “True Sport in the Community 2005 National Symposium” that was hosted by Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA).

#### Preamble

We, the youth participants of the Gathering Our Voices: 2008 Provincial Aboriginal Youth Conference, held in Victoria British Columbia, in March 2008, are extremely committed to improving the health, wellness, cultural identity, and quality of life of Aboriginal youth, through the participation in physical activity, physical education, sport and recreation programs and events.

We affirm that the holistic concepts of Aboriginal cultures, given by the Creator and taught by the Elders, promote balance through the integration of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth of the individual.

We recognize that many social issues including poverty; health concerns such as type II diabetes, heart disease, and fetal alcohol syndrome; rates of incarceration; substance abuse; harassment and racism; and a sedentary lifestyle have contributed to poor health and a low quality of life for many Aboriginal youth.

We recognize Canada's endorsement of Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”. As well as, the recommendations from the Report of the Royal Commission On Aboriginal Peoples (1996), specifically volume 4, that deals with youth, whole health, empowerment, and with recreation, sport and active living.

#### Strengths and Challenges

We are supported by these strengths:

- a willingness to respect partnerships that are two way and to work together with a readiness to learn and lend;
- a growing number of effective programs, policies and practices that are coherent;
- infrastructure development in the sport and recreation sector;
- a physically active Aboriginal traditional lifestyle; and
- National documents/statements that recognize the importance of physical activity, physical education, sport and recreation for youth.

We are challenged by:

- the fact that Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population;
- the need to support, invite, integrate and use the knowledge of Elders in program design and delivery;
- the lack of priority in allocation of adequate financial and human resources for recreation and sport;

## **Promoting, Developing, and Sustaining Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activity in British Columbia for Aboriginal Youth**

- the complexity of working together
- the need to enhance two way communication, responsibility, and accountability between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sport and recreation organizations and governments;
- the need for quality community based programs and services, and the renewal and creation of sport and recreation facilities;
- a learned attitude of helplessness and "who cares?" held by many;
- the lack of clear initiatives for capacity building and sustainability at the community level;
- the need for more healthy leaders and positive role models;
- the need to recognize and celebrate success stories of individuals and communities;
- the need to ensure quality physical education in school curriculum;
- the need to include traditional Aboriginal sports and games in physical education school curriculum and programs;
- the need for physical education teachers to work more closely with community recreation leaders;
- the need to ensure sports, recreation and physical activity experiences are positive; and
- the need to create, pursue and implement system-wide changes that will result in more flexible, creative, and responsive policies and practices.

### **Rationale**

Traditional Lifestyles and Active Living, including physical education, physical activity, sport, recreation and related cultural activity:

- offer proactive strategies that include prevention, treatment and new initiatives that are more powerful and cost effective than reactive strategies.
- provide opportunities for personal development
- provide inclusive opportunities for all ages and cultures to interact and to develop relationships and respect for each other;
- provide inclusive opportunities for the development of youth leadership and mentoring;
- provide opportunities for positive relationships, teamwork, and partnership building;
- increase activity levels across the life span to improve quality of life, enhance mental health, and help reduce the risk of incidence of some diseases, such as osteoporosis, some types of cancer, and conditions such as heart disease, type II diabetes and obesity;
- provide opportunities for developing a spiritual foundation of the individual, incorporating traditional values; and
- provide opportunities for the family, including parents, to be involved in the development of children, youth and communities.

### **We Declare that:**

Sustainable commitment and investment in sports, recreation, physical education, and physical activity are essential to promote whole health and address social issues facing Aboriginal youth in communities across Canada.

And therefore, we call on all governments, non-governmental organizations, communities and individuals to endorse this Declaration.

**Promoting, Developing, and Sustaining Sports, Recreation, and  
Physical Activity in British Columbia for Aboriginal Youth  
Appendix C**



**First Nations Health Society**

**Youth Sports, Recreation, Fitness, Physical Activity Questionnaire**

The First Nations Health Society (FNHS) has begun to compile a database of groups and individuals (health professionals, recreation coordinators, and community members) of all ages involved in Sports, Recreation, Fitness, and Physical Activity at all levels. The information that you will provide will assist us in developing programs services for your community.

Aboriginal Nation and Community / Nation membership (First Nations, Métis or Inuit, and location):

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*This is completely confidential, and we do not have your name or contact information.*

Do you consent for FNHS to use the information to create summary reports for research? Yes /  
No (please circle one)

Do you participate in **sports**? (please circle one answer)

Archery	Yes / No
Athletics	Yes / No
Badminton	Yes / No
Baseball	Yes / No
Basketball	Yes / No
Boxing	Yes / No
Canoe Racing	Yes / No
Hockey	Yes / No
Golf	Yes / No
Lacrosse	Yes / No
Rifle Shooting	Yes / No
Soccer	Yes / No
Softball	Yes / No
Swimming	Yes / No
Taekwondo	Yes / No
Volleyball	Yes / No
Wrestling	Yes / No

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Other Yes / No Type (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you participate in **recreation**? (please circle one answer)

Yes / No Type (s): \_\_\_\_\_  
(i.e. running, canoeing, hiking, etc)

Do you participate in **fitness**?

Yes / No Type (s): \_\_\_\_\_  
(yoga, weight training, aqua fitness, etc.)

Are you **physical active** at work or play?

Yes / No Type (s): \_\_\_\_\_  
(i.e. construction, fishing, farming and hunting)

Is there a sports, recreation, fitness, or physical activity that you **have participated** in but do not participate in no longer?

Yes / No Type (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you stop? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there a sports, recreation, fitness, or physical activity that you would like to try?

Yes / No Type (s): \_\_\_\_\_

What has prevented you from trying you? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Educational Background: (grade, education related to health, sports, fitness, or recreation): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you work in the health, sports, recreation, or fitness field?

Yes / No (please circle one), and if yes what is your job title? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Organization? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have access to the Internet? Yes / No (please circle one)

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: Male / Female / Two-spirited (please circle one)

Do you have a physical disability: Yes / No (please circle one)

If yes, kind? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire!

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions

All my Relations, Dr. Rosalin Hanna  
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First Nations Health Society, 1200-100 Park Royal South  
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