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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
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Aboriginal Affairs and
Northern Development Canada

Affaires autochtones et
Développement du Nord Canada

Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport¹

Canadian Heritage

Context

Why a Policy Now?

Over the past decade, a great deal of work has been done by Aboriginal Peoples to develop and run sport and recreation programs for Aboriginal Peoples; notably, the establishment of the Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC), the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), and provincial and territorial Aboriginal sport governing bodies. During this time, Canadian Heritage (Sport Canada) has consistently moved towards a value-based approach to sport including support for Aboriginal Peoples. In 2002, federal, provincial and territorial governments, endorsed the *Canadian Sport Policy* that acknowledges the existence of barriers to sport participation for Aboriginal Peoples and has as a goal to increase access and equity in sport. In 2003, the federal government modernized its sport legislation with the passing of the *Physical Activity and Sport Act*. This Act confirmed the Government of Canada's policy regarding the full and fair participation of all persons in sport and mandated the federal Minister responsible for sport to facilitate the participation of under-represented groups in the Canadian sport system.

The Government of Canada has undertaken a number of steps and commitments to bring meaningful and lasting change in the relationship with Aboriginal Peoples and has situated Aboriginal issues in the upper echelon of federal policy and program priorities. As set out in the last two Speeches from the Throne, the priority is to work with Aboriginal Peoples so that they can participate fully in national life as well as share in Canada's prosperity.

The creation of the Cabinet Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat at the Privy Council Office, as well as the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable, underline this commitment. A renewed relationship with Aboriginal Peoples can only be built upon a realization of the uniqueness of Aboriginal cultures and a recognition and awareness of the contribution of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

While Sport Canada has increasingly worked in partnership with Aboriginal Peoples in support of their sport development efforts, a policy on the participation of Aboriginal Peoples in sport further confirms and clarifies Sport Canada's intentions in Aboriginal sport development.

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The Canadian Sport Policy

The *Canadian Sport Policy* seeks to improve the sport experience of *all Canadians* by helping to ensure the harmonious and effective functioning, and transparency of their sport system. The vision of the *Canadian Sport Policy* is to create a dynamic and leading-edge sport environment that enables all Canadians to experience and enjoy involvement in sport to the extent of their abilities and interests and, for increasing numbers, to perform consistently and successfully at the highest competitive levels. *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* aims to ensure that the vision of the *Canadian Sport Policy* is inclusive; that it has the power to enhance the experience of — and access to — sport for all, including Aboriginal Peoples living in Canada. Implicit is the recognition that enhancing the sport experience for Aboriginal Peoples will only strengthen the value base of Canada's sport system and the quality of life of all people in Canada.

Accordingly, *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* will be guided by the principles outlined in the *Canadian Sport Policy*:

- Sport is athlete/participant-centered
- Sport promotes leadership
- Sport is based on equity and access
- Sport is focused on development
- Sport champions excellence
- Sport serves the public interest

Further, *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* will contribute to the *Canadian Sport Policy* by focusing on the following goals for Aboriginal Peoples in sport:

- Enhanced Participation
- Enhanced Excellence
- Enhanced Capacity
- Enhanced Interaction

The definitions of key terms used throughout the policy are found in Appendix A.

Scope

The Government of Canada's investment in sport is grounded in strong logic. Growing evidence demonstrates that participation in sport has tremendous benefits to Canadians. For example, in 1997, statistics suggested "that a 3% increase in sport and recreation participation could save Canadian taxpayers \$41 million in annual health care costs."²

Sport, as a tool for social development, has the ability to engage citizens and communities, surmount social barriers and contribute to building a healthier, more cohesive society. Sport builds pride in our nation through the performance of our athletes. Additionally, sport enriches Canada's cultural life by promoting Canadian values, including diversity.

² Sport BC. *Benefits of Sport and Recreation*. <http://www.sport.bc.ca/downloads/FACTSHEET.pdf>.

Sport Canada is committed to a sport system in Canada that consists of a variety of components necessary to promote the full participation of all peoples living in Canada. An inclusive sport system serving a diverse population will, by necessity, include organizations, programs and events that serve distinct populations. A sport system will also have core organizations that, for reasons such as governing a sport, maximizing economies of scale, and avoiding unnecessary duplication, will serve the general population.

Sport Canada will encourage cooperation and collaboration between and among organizations serving distinct populations and those serving the general population to ensure the goals of the *Canadian Sport Policy* are achieved and that opportunities for the full and active participation in all aspects of sport, from the playground to the podium, are available to all people living in Canada.

Sport Canada recognizes the power of sport to improve the lives of Aboriginal Peoples. Indeed, sport has long been recognized by Aboriginal Peoples across Canada as a means to combat some of the negative factors affecting Aboriginal communities, in particular those affecting their youth.³ In advancing the impact of sport as a social driver, this policy recognizes that Sport Canada is only one partner in a vast network of stakeholders—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, governmental and non-governmental—at the community level through to the inter-national level. There are also larger social and economic issues that contribute to inequity in sport. Nevertheless, Sport Canada will demonstrate leadership and influence by working collaboratively with other federal government departments, other governments, non-governmental organizations and Aboriginal Peoples to maximize sport's impact on the lives of Aboriginal Peoples.

Sport Canada is committed to *contributing*, through sport, to the health, wellness, cultural identity and quality of life of Aboriginal Peoples. Therefore, its policy on Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport endorses the *Maskwachees Declaration* (Appendix B). Further, Sport Canada is committed to advancing the objectives of the *Physical Activity and Sport Act* enacted in 2003 and which outlines new measures to reflect and strengthen the Government of Canada's current role in sport. Its objectives include, among others, facilitating the participation of under-represented groups in the Canadian sport system, including women, persons with a disability, visible minorities, and Aboriginal Peoples.

Sport and Aboriginal Peoples

Games, play—and more recently, sport—have always played an important role in Aboriginal cultures, as traditional Aboriginal lifestyles were very physically active. Many sports and games related to survival and the holistic development of individuals, families and communities, and they centered on important principles within their belief systems and cultural values. The holistic approach of Aboriginal Peoples emphasizes the development of the whole person, balancing the physical, mental, emotional, cultural, and spiritual aspects of life.

3 Winther, N., Nazer-Bloom, L. & Petch, V. (1995). *A comprehensive overview of Development, the North American Indigenous Games and Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies*. pg 2.

In addition, this traditional Aboriginal perspective does not distinguish between sport, recreation, and physical activity; all of these activities are intertwined and integral to personal and community well being.

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada have worked diligently to highlight the values inherent to Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport, and to bring the major barriers to participation to the attention of both government and the Canadian sport system. This policy recognizes that this movement will continue to make an impact on the healthy, active lifestyles of Aboriginal Peoples. However, in view of achieving significant, long-term social change through broad-based participation of Aboriginal Peoples in sport, a new, stronger collaboration among Aboriginal Peoples, the Canadian sport community and all levels of government is required. Appendix C provides an historical overview of federal involvement in Aboriginal sport.

Sport and the Socio-economic issues specific to Aboriginal Peoples

In 1998, "*Sport in Canada: Everybody's Business*" ('The Mills Report'), in addressing the state of Aboriginal Peoples and sport, stated that:

...“Aboriginal people have a poverty rate comparable to that found in developing countries, an unemployment rate among adults of almost 25%, a poorly educated population and a dramatic suicide rate, which among 10–19 year olds is more than 5 times higher than that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. [...] Forty- four percent of Aboriginal people smoke daily, 61% report problems with alcohol abuse and 48% report problems with drug abuse.”⁴

Aboriginal People in Canada experience a profound disparity in health status. For example, Canada is reacting to a crisis in the general population of Type II diabetes, yet the prevalence in First Nations communities is significantly higher. For instance, the prevalence among Canadian women 55–64 years of age is 5.4% but among First Nations women in the same age bracket the prevalence is a staggering 34.1%.⁵ Today's Aboriginal youth—one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population— are challenged by rising rates of illness, such as Type II diabetes, heart disease, and fetal alcohol syndrome, and suffer from higher rates of incarceration, substance abuse, suicide, racism, and a sedentary lifestyle.

Accordingly, the Mills Report highlighted the positive role played by sport and recreation in strengthening the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of Aboriginal life. Aboriginal sport leaders from across Canada have also identified youth sport and recreation “as one of the primary means for community wellness: as preventative medicine for the social dilemma that Aboriginal youth face.”⁶

⁴ Mills, Dennis (1998:87). *Sport in Canada: Leadership, Partnership and Accountability—Everybody's Business*, 6th Report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

⁵ Young, T.K. et al. and FNIRHS Steering Committee and Canadian data from the NPHS, 1994–95.

⁶ Aboriginal Sport Circle (1998) *Aboriginal Sport Development: The role of Coaching Development, the North American Indigenous Games and Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies*.

To be effective and meaningful, a policy on Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport must recognize the socio-economic issues specific to Aboriginal Peoples as well as the opportunities for social change through sport. See Appendix D for additional demographic information on Aboriginal Peoples.

Barriers to Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport

An immediate priority for the full participation of Aboriginal Peoples in sport is to reduce the number of widely recognized barriers to participation:

Awareness: There is a general lack of awareness, understanding and information among Aboriginal Peoples about the benefits of being active in sport and the health risks associated with inactivity.

Economic circumstance: The majority of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada face economic difficulties, and many families simply cannot afford the cost of registration fees, equipment and competition travel associated with sport.

Cultural insensitivity: Sport must provide a positive and welcoming environment to attract and maintain its participants. Programs and activities that are insensitive to the cultures and traditions of Aboriginal Peoples discourage their participation.

Coaching capacity: Aboriginal participation in sport is hindered by a lack of Aboriginal coaches and coaches who are sensitive to Aboriginal cultures. Aboriginal coaching development is hindered by the lack of access to coaching certification courses and appropriate training materials.

Distance: A significant number of Aboriginal communities are situated in remote locations with relatively small populations. The economics and logistics of travel to access programs, facilities, expertise and equipment are barriers to Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport.

Jurisdiction: The debate over government responsibility for financially supporting the delivery of sport programs in Aboriginal communities and in urban Aboriginal centres affects the potential investment in sport for Aboriginal Peoples. The silo structure of governments can frustrate community access to programs and services as well as individual departments seeking horizontal cooperation on issues that cross a variety of departmental mandates.

Racism: Racism is an ongoing problem in Canadian society manifesting itself in sport practice as it does in all socio-cultural practices. Racism is a socially constructed idea that alienates many Aboriginal Peoples by causing fear, anxiety and distrust, ultimately serving as a barrier to their full participation in Canadian society, including sport.

Sport infrastructure: Aboriginal communities (on-reserve) across Canada do not have adequate sport or recreation infrastructure. Capital projects such as schools, roads and housing take precedence over sport or recreation facilities. This lack of facilities limits community access to daily recreation or physical activity programs, including sport.

Guiding Principles

A policy on sport participation, which addresses the unique circumstances of Aboriginal Peoples, must reflect a holistic approach, advance sport as a vehicle for social change, and respect the diversity of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples. Accordingly, Sport Canada will respect the following principles:

1. Aboriginal cultures are an integral part of Canada's culture and heritage.
2. There is increasing evidence of strong correlations between cultural continuity and other factors that affect the quality of life of Aboriginal Peoples. Some of these factors include sport, language revitalization, community cultural activities, and bilingual education.
3. Aboriginal Peoples have significant traditional knowledge and cultural teachings of play, games and sport.
4. First Nations (on/off reserve and status/non-status), Inuit and Métis, including Aboriginal women, experience unique living conditions and social realities.
5. Aboriginal protocol must be respected when consulting or promoting federal sport policies and program developments to Aboriginal Peoples.
6. Aboriginal Peoples in Canada live in a complex environment and geography. Challenges exist in transportation and provision of competition and training opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples living in remote locations.
7. Increasing Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport is enhanced by working with Aboriginal sport leaders and through continued partnerships to achieve objectives of common interest.
8. The sport continuum includes participation in activities from the playground to the podium. Sport is a popular means to be physically active, especially among youth.
9. Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport is a strong, viable and integral component of Canadian sport that should be recognized and valued by all Canadians.
10. An Aboriginal sport delivery system exists and it is important to work with the ASC, its national body, to identify and address the areas of priority to advance Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport.

Vision

The vision of the *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* is for an enhanced Canadian sport system that is inclusive of, and adaptive to, Aboriginal Peoples in which barriers to Aboriginal participation, at all levels and across all contexts, are continually reduced and sport's potential to drive socio-economic change in Aboriginal communities is fully realized.

Policy Statements

The following statements apply to the policies and programs of Sport Canada.

Enhanced Participation

Sport Canada is committed to involving a significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal Peoples in quality sport activities at all levels and in all forms of participation. This work will be guided by the belief that:

1. Aboriginal Peoples must have equitable access to programs, services, resources and infrastructure to fully participate in the Canadian sport system and to increase opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples participation in sport;
2. Programs, services and resources must recognize the unique needs of all Aboriginal populations, including youth, girls and women and persons with a disability;
3. Activities involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and uniquely Aboriginal activities can both play a positive role in enhancing the sport participation of Aboriginal Peoples. It may be more appropriate for Aboriginal athletes, coaches and officials to be enrolled in programs specifically intended for Aboriginal Peoples for skill, social, cultural and/ or sport development reasons;
4. The NAIG, the Arctic Winter Games, and other similar events provide competitive opportunities for Aboriginal athletes in an environment that reflects Aboriginal cultures, values and lifestyles. They offer Aboriginal Peoples an opportunity to share their cultural values with the broader Canadian public and internationally. Participation in these Games enhances the development and delivery of sport programs to Aboriginal Peoples from the community to national levels;
5. Increasing the participation of Aboriginal youth in all forms of sport will help them address social and economic challenges and provide constructive and optimistic prospects for their development.

Enhanced Excellence

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:

1. 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.

Enhanced Capacity

Sport Canada will strive to enhance the capacity of individuals, communities and organizations in support of Aboriginal sport in Canada. This work will be guided by the belief that:

1. The needs of Aboriginal Peoples in sport must be identified, promoted and supported in policies and programs that are developed in consultation with the Aboriginal sport community;
2. Aboriginal communities need appropriate facilities and resources to provide quality, sustained, and culturally appropriate sport programs to their members;
3. There is a need to increase the number and the capacity of Aboriginal leaders (i.e., coaches, officials, administrators, and volunteers) to strengthen sport within Aboriginal communities and to provide athletes and sport leaders as role models for youth;
4. Coaching and coaching development are important for the continued growth of Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport. It is crucial that current and potential coaches of Aboriginal athletes have equitable access to programs and resources to help develop and perfect their skills. Aboriginal coaching materials positively contribute to enhancing coaching in Canadian sport;
5. Research, data collection and progress evaluation are essential to increasing participation and excellence in sport for Aboriginal Peoples;
6. All levels of program delivery must be culturally sensitive, flexible and adaptive to the diverse needs of Aboriginal populations.

Enhanced Interaction

Sport Canada will strive to develop and strengthen cooperation and collaboration in sport amongst governments, Aboriginal Peoples, sport organizations and interested stakeholders. This work will be guided by the belief that:

1. Enhancing Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport can make significant contributions to advancing the Government of Canada's objectives. Building stronger relations with other federal departments to identify and collectively address shared objectives through sport will maximize results;
2. Enhancing Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport can make significant contributions to advancing the objectives of Provincial/Territorial and Aboriginal governments. Stronger relations among all Federal and Provincial/Territorial government departments and Aboriginal governments in support of Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport will maximize individual efforts to the benefit of Aboriginal Peoples;
3. National Sport Organizations, Provincial/Territorial Sport Organizations, Multisport Service Organizations and governments can play a key leadership role in developing new and stronger partnerships and programs with the Aboriginal sport community and other stakeholders to increase the participation of Aboriginal Peoples in sport;
4. Supporting the full participation of Aboriginal Peoples in sport demonstrates Canada's values, celebrates Canadian culture, and exhibits to the world our commitment to human rights.

Implementation

Sport Canada will develop and implement an Action Plan for the Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport. The Aboriginal sport community, provincial and territorial governments, federal government departments, national sport organizations, and multisport service organizations need to be fully engaged to successfully implement the Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport.

Conclusion

As the federal government Branch responsible for sport, Sport Canada supports the achievement of excellence and the development of the Canadian sport system to strengthen the unique contribution that sport makes to Canadian identity, culture and society. Sport Canada recognizes that, for the goals of the *Canadian Sport Policy* to be achieved, the specific values, barriers and realities of Aboriginal Peoples need to be identified and addressed. This policy aims to drive the actions necessary to create and maintain an inclusive Canadian sport system that supports Aboriginal participation in sport from playground to podium.

Appendix A

Definitions

Aboriginal Peoples

The term Aboriginal Peoples in a constitutional context, the *Constitution Act, 1982*, defines the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada as including Indians, Inuit and Metis.

Aboriginal Sport

Aboriginal sport refers to all nature of sport delivered, for the most part, by and for Aboriginal Peoples by Aboriginal organizations at the local, regional, provincial/territorial and national level.

Access

Access in the sporting environment is the freedom or ability to obtain or make use of sport programming and facilities. Access for Aboriginal Peoples has been hindered by poverty, the lack of culturally sensitive programs, and the lack of facilities in remote areas.

Equitable Access

Equitable access, in this policy, refers to equal opportunity for Aboriginal Peoples to participate in sport at the level they choose. There may still exist discrepancies in sport services for individuals living in geographically remote areas or in economically disadvantaged situations.

Equity

Equity refers to an environment that accepts the principles and practices of fair and appropriate allocation of resources and opportunities for all people in Canada. Equity takes into account different needs and circumstances. It means providing appropriate opportunity for all people to succeed. Equity can be achieved by ensuring full access to the tools of information, programs and services.

Inclusion

Inclusion refers to the process of viewing all individuals as equal members of society in all aspects of daily living. This term can also be a value. "It is a way of thinking that accepts diversity, and recognizes the uniqueness of each individual as a valued member of society."⁷

⁷ *National Aboriginal Disabilities and Literacy Action Conference Report* (1995), Prepared for Human Resources Canada. <http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/disabl15/intro-e.html#define>.

Sport System

Sport system refers to sports played by people of all nationalities and which have recognized sport organizations that guide them. These sports have extensive competitive opportunities at the national and international levels. In Canada, this would include organized sport organizations ranging from local sport clubs and leagues and provincial/territorial sport organizations (e.g., Canoe Ontario) to National Sport Federations (e.g., Athletics Canada), Multi- sport Service Organizations (e.g., Coaching Association of Canada) and National Sport Centres.

Sport Development

Sport development can be described as a set of processes, policies and interventions that are designed to enhance sport to achieve an increase in performance and participation and the quality of the sport experience.

Youth

For the purposes of this policy, youth refers to individuals 24 years of age and under.

Appendix B

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;
- 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.

Appendix C

Historical Overview of Federal Involvement in Aboriginal Peoples' Participation In Sport

The Government of Canada has been involved in sport for Aboriginal Peoples since the late 1960s. However, in 1972 the federal government became formally involved in Aboriginal sport on a wide- spread basis through the Native Sport and Recreation Program, managed by Fitness and Amateur Sport (now Sport Canada). The early federal focus was on increasing Aboriginal Peoples' participation in competitive mainstream sport. With federal funding, Aboriginal Peoples throughout Canada fostered the development of an all-Aboriginal sport system, which included primarily mainstream sports like basketball and hockey.

In 1977, a review of the Native Sport and Recreation program administered by Fitness and Amateur Sport raised concerns about the "cultural" nature of supported activities.⁸ Aboriginal sport leaders had established a National Native Sport and Recreation Advisory Council, housed at the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations), to organize competitive opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples at the regional, national and inter- national levels of sport. In 1981, Fitness and Amateur Sport published *A Challenge to the Nation: Fitness and Amateur Sport in the 80s*, which emphasized the pursuit of excellence in amateur sport as a federal focus, moving away from recreation, which was considered the responsibility of provinces and municipalities.⁹ The report did not identify Aboriginal Peoples as a targeted group and funding for the Native Sport and Recreation Program was discontinued as a result of the shift in policy directions.¹⁰

In the late 1980s, there was a growing interest in the Aboriginal community to create an Aboriginal Secretariat that would take responsibility for advancing Aboriginal sport in Canada. At the same time, the NAIG were being developed through a grassroots movement. The inaugural Games were held in Edmonton in 1990. The support demonstrated for these two movements encouraged the Government of Canada to act.

In 1992, the Minister's Task Force released a report titled, *Sport: The Way Ahead*, which identified the needs of Aboriginal Peoples and supported the creation of an Aboriginal Secretariat.¹¹ This led to the establishment of the Aboriginal Sport Circle, incorporated under the Society Act in 1995.¹²

The Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC) is Canada's national voice for Aboriginal sport and recreation, which brings together interests of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Established in 1995, the ASC was created through a national consensus-building process, in

8 Paraschak, V. (1995) *The Native Sport and Recreation Program, 1972–1981: Patterns of Resistance, Patterns of Reproduction*. *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*. Volume 26 (2): 1–18. pg. 5.

9 Fitness and Amateur Sport (1981). *A Challenge to the Nation: fitness and amateur sport in the 80s*.

10 Paraschak, V. (1995) *The Native Sport and Recreation Program, 1972–1981: Patterns of Resistance, Patterns of Reproduction*. *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*. Volume 26 (2): 1–18. pg. 11.

11 Minister's Task Force on Federal Sport Policy. (1992) *Sport: the Way Ahead*.

12 Paraschak, V. (2002). "Get Into the Mainstream": *Aboriginal Sport in Canada, 1967–2002*. (Unpublished paper).

response to the need for more accessible and equitable sport and recreation opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples. The ASC is a collective of 14 Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies and is supported in its mandate by the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. The ASC is the primary advocate for Aboriginal sport and serves as the domestic custodian for the NAIG.

The ASC promotes increased participation of Aboriginal Peoples in sport through the development and delivery of holistic, culturally based programs.

It seeks strategic partnerships with governments and mainstream sport organizations to bring much needed expertise to Aboriginal communities. The ASC focuses on three primary needs: athlete development, coaching development and recognition of excellence. The ASC is funded primarily by the Government of Canada through Sport Canada.¹³

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) mentioned sport in five of its 400 recommendations.¹⁴ Sport was seen as a way to bridge the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, to build capacity in communities, to promote education, and to advance culture. As a result of the information provided by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the 1995 meeting of the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers responsible for fitness, recreation and sport recommended that the focus be placed on the physical activity needs of the Aboriginal community. At the 1997 Ministers' meeting, the ASC presented a paper on the barriers to sport for Aboriginal Peoples and the Ministers resolved to address these issues.

In February 2000, the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Fitness and Recreation hosted the National Recreation Roundtable on Aboriginal/ Indigenous Peoples, resulting in the creation of the *Maskwachees Declaration* and the tabling of the Roundtable Final Report outlining strategies and initiatives to help implement the Declaration. Other government reports on sport in Canada, including *Sport in Canada: Everyone's Business* (the report of the Standing committee on Canadian Heritage, Sub-Committee on the Study of Sport in Canada), have all supported increased equity in the Canadian sport system to advance Aboriginal sport.¹⁵

The Government of Canada has responded directly through its funding of the Aboriginal Sport Circle, the North American Indigenous Games, and the Arctic Winter Games.

The NAIG provide Aboriginal youth from Canada and the United States of America (USA) an opportunity to showcase their heritage, history and culture through a variety of sport and cultural events. "This two-week celebration demonstrates unity among Indigenous Peoples from all regions and cultures across Canada and the USA through

13 Aboriginal Sport Circle. (www.aboriginalsportcircle.ca).

14 Government of Canada (1996). *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services Canada.

15 Government of Canada (1998). *Sport in Canada: Leadership, Partnership and Accountability—Everybody's Business*, 6th Report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

friendly competition in sport and cultural events and helps to promote the holistic concepts of physical, mental, cultural, and spiritual growth of individuals.”¹⁶

The growth and development of the NAIG have been a success story for Aboriginal sport in Canada. The first games were held in Edmonton in 1990 where 3,000 Aboriginal athletes from across Canada and the United States of America participated. The 1993 Games in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, involved 4,400 sport participants who competed on behalf of the Indigenous peoples of their province, territory or state. In addition to the sporting events, the 1993 NAIG included a cultural festival that attracted several hundred cultural performers from across Canada and the USA. These Games also witnessed the birth of the NAIG Council as the permanent governing structure for the NAIG. The 1995 Games held in Blaine, Minnesota, marked the first time the NAIG has been held in the USA. According to sport participation levels the 1995 Games were the largest to date with approximately 8,000 competitors. In 1997, Victoria, British Columbia, played host to the NAIG. These Games drew participation from 26 teams (9 provinces/territories and 17 states). In total, 5,000 took part in the sport competition and over 3,000 in the cultural festival. At the 2002 Games in Winnipeg, 5,500 athletes were involved in 18 sport events, and approximately 2,500 artists participated in related cultural events.¹⁷

The federal government has contributed to every Arctic Winter Games since their inception in 1970. The Arctic Winter Games promote Canada's leadership in the circumpolar community of nations, preserve native traditions in sport and culture and encourage sport system development. Canadian Heritage (Sport Canada) supports the Arctic Winter Games as a strategic focus event and recognizes Arctic sports and Dene games as traditional games. This circumpolar competition attracts 1,600 young athletes from Canada, the USA, Greenland and two Russian provinces Magadam and Tyumen.

¹⁶ 2002 North American Indigenous Games. (www.2002naig.ca).

¹⁷ Aboriginal Sport Circle. (www.aboriginalsportcircle.ca).

Appendix D

Demographic Information

According to the 2001 Census, Aboriginal Peoples now make up 3.3% of Canada's population, compared with 2.7% five years earlier. Of the 3.3% of the total Canadian population who self-identify as Aboriginal in Canada, 62% are North American Indian, 30% are Metis and 5% are Inuit. About 3% identified with more than one Aboriginal group or declared that they were Status Indians or band members who did not identify as being Aboriginal. A total of 976,305 people across Canada identified themselves as Aboriginal; this represents an increase of 22.2% from the 1996 Census, in which 799,010 people across the country reported Aboriginal identity. By comparison, the general Canadian population grew by only 4.7% between 1996 and 2001.

The 2001 Census also revealed that the Aboriginal population is much younger than the general Canadian population. Half of the Aboriginal population are 24 years of age and under compared to approximately 32% of the general Canadian population. One-third of the Aboriginal population are 14 years of age and under compared to 18.3% of the general Canadian population.

Proportionally, more Aboriginal children live in lone-parent families, both on reserves and in urban areas. "In urban areas, 46% of Aboriginal children live in lone-parent families compared with 17% of non-Aboriginal children. Amongst the Aboriginal groups, Inuit children were the most likely to live in a two-parent family. Lone-parent families are more likely to live in low-income situations and children in lone-parent families have higher incidences of behavioural and emotional problems. Involvement in sport activities can be beneficial to children in those situations, by increasing self-esteem and reducing behavioural problems."¹⁸

There has been an increase in the percentage of Aboriginal Peoples living in urban areas and a decline in the proportion living on-reserve. According to the 2001 Census, almost one-half (49%) who identified themselves as Aboriginal lived in urban areas, while those who lived on reserve and other settlements declined to 31%.

The average income for Aboriginal Peoples is much lower than for non-Aboriginals, both in urban and rural areas. According to the latest available data from the 1996 census, 44% of Aboriginal Peoples living off-reserve in Canada's provinces were below Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off, including 60% of children under the age of 6. The national average was 20% for the entire population, and 25% for children under the age of 6.

"Educational attainment is lower among Aboriginal Peoples, as compared to the general Canadian population, but the gap has been decreasing over the past twenty years. The proportion of Aboriginal Peoples with a high school diploma increased from 21% in 1996 to 23% in 2001, while the share of those with post-secondary qualifications increased from 33% to 38% in the same time period."¹⁹

18 Minister's Task Force on Federal Sport Policy. (1992) *Sport: the Way Ahead*.

19 Paraschak, V. (2002). "Get Into the Mainstream": *Aboriginal Sport in Canada, 1967-2002*. (Unpublished paper).

Despite these improvements, the 2001 Census found that 43% of Aboriginal Peoples had not completed high school compared to 15% of the general population. Only 6% of the Aboriginal population had completed a university degree compared to 26% of the general population.

Unemployment continues to be higher in the Aboriginal population. In 2001, the overall unemployment rate for Aboriginal Peoples was 19.1%. The unemployment rate for non-Aboriginal population was 7.1% in 2001. According to the 2001 Census, the average income in the year 2000 for Aboriginal people on-reserve (\$14,044) and off-reserve (\$20,020) remained considerably lower than for the general Canadian population (\$30,023).

There has been an increasing interest in traditional knowledge among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Traditional games are one aspect of traditional knowledge that can be used to promote and increase the use of Aboriginal languages, especially among youth. Overall, the 2001 Census data suggests a continuing decline in knowledge of Aboriginal languages and also a decline for those reporting an Aboriginal mother tongue—first language learned at home—(26% in 1996 and 20% in 2001). However, not all Aboriginal languages showed a decline in the number of people with knowledge of an Aboriginal language or those reporting an Aboriginal mother tongue as evident in the increase of speakers for Dene and Inuktitut languages.