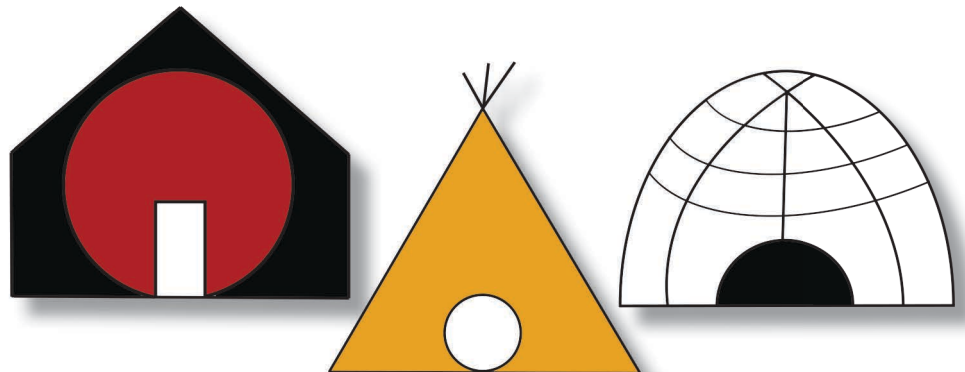




# Aboriginal Head Start Principles and Guidelines

BC Edition : February 2018





## **Aboriginal Head Start Principles and Guidelines: BC Edition**

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The original text is taken from the document called *Aboriginal Head Start Urban and Northern Initiative Principles and Guidelines: Revised Edition*, prepared in October 1998.

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With gratitude and admiration, we honour the Visionaries  
who put into words their inspired hopes and dreams  
for Aboriginal children and families in Canada –  
the authors of the original *AHS Principles and Guidelines*.

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# FOREWORD

## A Message from AHSABC

The original *AHSUNC Principles and Guidelines* were compiled in 1996 by a dedicated group of individuals striving to provide Indigenous children and families with more opportunities for educational success and holistic growth.

In 1998, through a collaboration between the National Aboriginal Head Start Council and Health Canada representatives, it was revised into the inspiring document that has provided the foundation and guided AHSUNC programs for the past 20 years.

While acknowledging the continued value of this document, we also recognized the need for **updating the few incidences of outdated information** in the original text to reflect the changes that have occurred over the years. **Otherwise, no changes were made to the content.**

We have designed a user-friendly format that is technologically up-to-date in order to make the *AHS Principles and Guidelines: BC Edition* more accessible to all those who work in AHS programs, and to accommodate new users' understanding of our founding principles as well as design, operation and evaluation standards.

We hope that this BC Edition becomes a widely-used tool in AHS practice and inspires other Indigenous Early Learning groups who are striving to support holistic, community-led programming for children and families.

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

Since 1995 the federal government has funded Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) in Canada. In 2018, the province of British Columbia supported the expansion of AHS programs with funding under the Canada-British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement consistent with the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

# INTRODUCTION

## What is Aboriginal Head Start?

The Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) Program created in 1995 is a national **community**-based early intervention program. Indigenous community organizations design and deliver holistic programs to enhance the spiritual, emotional, physical and social well-being of Indigenous children aged 0-6 and their families while supporting their parents and **guardians** as their primary teachers.

## Who attends AHS?

The program targets three distinct groups of Indigenous people living in urban and northern communities: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. In recent years, the program reach has ranged from 4600-4800 children annually at 134 sites across Canada.

AHSUNC sites typically provide programs for Indigenous children (aged 3-5 years) focused on six program components: Indigenous culture and language; education and school readiness; health promotion; nutrition; social support; and parental involvement. These are intended to work holistically to support Indigenous children's early childhood development and well-being, and prepare them for a successful transition to school.

## How are AHS programs designed?

AHSUNC is based on a grassroots, bottom-up approach, where the sites and communities have control over the design in order to best reflect their local culture and needs.

The AHSUNC **Projects** are free of charge to participants and are typically centre-based preschool programs, running between September and June. Some sites additionally offer summer programs and/or child care for infants and toddlers.

Preschools are licensed by their provincial/territorial jurisdiction and maintain the correct number of certified Early Childhood Educators and ratios of teachers to children. Educators provide structured early childhood development activities, as well as nutritious snacks and/or daily meals to the children.

In addition to centre-based programming, there are a number of other models used within the AHSUNC programs. Some sites offer a home visiting component, whereby project staff visit families in their homes, providing information and support to parents, and educational activities for children. Others include workshops and skill development sessions for parents, joint parent and child workshops and special cultural events and activities for families.

## Why is AHS needed?

The 2017 national evaluation of AHSUNC found that there is a continued need for culturally appropriate and holistic early childhood education programming in off-reserve urban and Northern communities.

The AHSUNC program is necessary for four key reasons:

1. the increase in Indigenous people in Canada living off-reserve;
2. as protection against poor socioeconomic effects;
3. the importance of early childhood development on future education success;
4. the need for culturally appropriate and holistic programming that better meets the specific needs of Indigenous children.

## Who benefits from Aboriginal Head Start?

The benefits of AHS for Indigenous children and families has been well documented. Independent research has shown that the program not only provides children with a 'head start' in life, but is also a 'family wellness' program that holistically impacts staff, families and communities across the country.

As AHS grows in reach and effectiveness, it provides even greater opportunities for healing the effects of Residential Schools and empowering Indigenous people from an early age.





# HISTORY of AHS

## A. Aboriginal Head Start Initiative Announced - 1995

On May 29, 1995, the Honourable Diane Marleau, Minister of Health, announced the launch of the Aboriginal Head Start Initiative. Minister Marleau indicated that the initiative fulfills the government's commitment, as stated in the Red Book, *Creating Opportunity*, to develop an early intervention program for Aboriginal children and their families who live in urban centres and large northern communities, in consultation with Aboriginal groups in Canada.

As stated by Minister Marleau, working in collaboration with existing services and facilities, the Aboriginal Head Start Initiative is designed to build on **Aboriginal people's** ideas, interests and commitment to positive change. **The ultimate goal of the initiative is to help parents and children build a better future for themselves while being supported by community partners.** She added that, "Early intervention at a preschool age gives children good self-esteem, a desire for learning and opportunities to develop fully as young people."

Aboriginal Head Start directly involves parents and the community in the design and implementation of preschool projects. **Projects** include the promotion of cultures and languages, education, health, nutrition counselling and improved social supports.

Aboriginal Head Start is designed for Aboriginal families living in urban and large northern communities. In the initial four year pilot phase from 1995-96 to 1998-99, \$83.7 million has been invested in about one hundred projects across the country.

Aboriginal Head Start is distinctive because of the extent of consultation conducted with urban and northern Aboriginal communities in developing Aboriginal Head Start goals and principles. Aboriginal people in 25 urban and northern centres in all provinces and territories were consulted during the design of the initiative. Funding for this initiative was provided in the February 1995 Federal Budget.

## B. Purpose of the Principles and Guidelines

The Aboriginal Head Start Initiative Principles and Guidelines have been developed to provide the basic fundamentals for the initiative. These have been designed so that Aboriginal Head Start Projects will strive to achieve excellence while meeting or exceeding relevant, applicable provincial and territorial child care and preschool **standards** and regulations.

Regionally and locally developed projects will follow the National Principles and Guidelines to **ensure** program quality and consistency. This allows for the celebration of the diverse Aboriginal communities and their cultures across Canada, while simultaneously providing children with a similar experience that will encourage children to take initiative in learning and foster their desire for lifelong learning.

This document is designed so that Projects may follow the **guidelines** and develop strategic plans and work plans including goals and objectives that are specific to each community and Project. **The guidelines are intended to be broad enough to allow for community diversity and, at the same time, be specific enough so Projects can implement the guidelines.**

**It is understood that some guidelines may not be met due to challenges of remoteness.** For example, some communities do not have immediate access to health care professionals. In these communities, you are asked to consider the intent of the guideline and to strive to fulfill its intent. For example, children's physical health needs can be addressed by having medical professionals visit.

**Where this is not possible, you are asked to look for alternatives to address those needs.**

## How the Principles and Guidelines were Established

The National Aboriginal Head Start Committee (NAHSC) provided direction to the Health Canada National Office to manage the revision of the Principles and Guidelines that were developed and approved in December 1996.

The revision process was developed and implemented in consultation with the NAHSC Principles and Guidelines subcommittee and the NAHSC.

A Health Canada Program Officer facilitated discussion groups, in partnership with regionally-based Health Canada Program Managers and Consultants in each region.

A revision workbook was designed, based on regional discussion sessions, to examine the relationship between Projects and Sponsors; Parental Involvement; Children with Special Needs; Provincial/Territorial Licensing and Criminal Record Checks; and all other guidelines.

The workbook was distributed to all Projects and Program Consultants and 60 were returned. The discussion sessions and workbooks are important resources which were used in the revision.

The revised *Principles and Guidelines (1998)* have been written to clarify key issues, respond to questions and elaborate on certain guidelines. They are intended to contribute to Project development and management throughout the life of the initiative.

They should be a key resource that is reviewed for strategic planning and the development of policies and procedures.

## C. The Need for Aboriginal Head Start

Consultation sessions on the design of AHS took place in 25 cities and towns, including all the provincial and territorial capitals. Urban centres and northern communities of various sizes were visited to ensure a broad base of consultation. Representatives of approximately 300 organizations across Canada, including provincial/territorial governments and Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) organizations, participated in consultation sessions in each province and territory.

In addition to these face-to-face consultation sessions, 400 discussion papers were distributed to Aboriginal organizations throughout Canada. Written responses were received from more than 40 of the organizations.

As a result of these consultations, there was broad support in urban and northern communities for the general outlines of the program design. The design includes local Aboriginal control, parental involvement, a philosophy of early intervention and a program design consistent with local Aboriginal cultures and values.

## Research

Research on the effects of early intervention programs further reinforces community support for the development of an Aboriginal Head Start Program.

Research indicates that:

- a) Effective early intervention programs for children provide for the needs of the whole child, for the needs of the family through support services, and for the involvement of parents, who are the child's first and most influential teachers.
- b) Early intervention preschool programs benefit parents as well. Many parents report improved relationships with their children, greater life satisfaction and psychological well-being, resulting from the supportive social networks that many preschool community-based programs offer.

- c) There is a critical relationship between family economic circumstances and child mental and physical health. Children living in poverty are at higher risk for illness, psychological problems and death than children who do not.
- d) The area in which “whole-child” early intervention programs have had most lasting impact is in physical health and well-being. Long-term studies have found that children who have participated in American Head Start, have better health, immunization rates and nutrition as well as greater social and emotional stability than their peers who did not participate in the program.
- e) The presence of a Head Start-like early intervention program for children enhances a community’s capacity to meet local needs in health care and education. Researchers have found that linking families with local services is often much more successful than creating new services or delivery mechanisms.
- f) Successful community intervention programs on behalf of children often achieve best results through compatibility with educational initiatives. Good coordination with the educational system is therefore important to community programming.

Early intervention program research, along with the need and desire expressed by Aboriginal communities for a program that will meet the needs of their children, underlies the development of the Aboriginal Head Start Initiative. The following document addresses the principles, goals, objectives and guidelines of the program.



# PROGRAM CONTEXT

## A. Statement of Beliefs and Values about Children

While First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have distinct cultures and languages, they also share common beliefs, values and histories. It is with this in mind that the *Statement of Beliefs and Values about Children* was written.

### *We believe...*

That children are a gift from the Creator.

That our children have a right to live proudly as Aboriginal people in the lands of their ancestors.

That children have a right to learn their respective Aboriginal language(s) and histories, and adults have a responsibility to pass on the instructions that the Creator gave in the beginning of time as are reflected in our languages, cultural beliefs and cultural practices.

That each child is part of what makes a community whole.

That it is essential for children to develop meaningful relationships with Elders, the carriers of knowledge and history.

That children, under the guidance of Elders, will learn to love learning throughout their life.

That adults are community role models who are to teach children how to live a good life.

That children deserve opportunities to gain knowledge and experience of how to live a good life.

That children acquire knowledge by watching, listening and doing, and adults are responsible for encouraging and guiding them in all those activities.

That children, through being loved, valued and encouraged, will gain the courage, the strength and the wisdom to use the power of a good mind and spirit in all that they do.

That children have a right to enjoy the opportunities that education offers.

That children have a right to live in healthy, self-determining communities that are free of violence.

## B. Scope of the Initiative

### Introduction

First Nations, Métis and Inuit values, traditions and approaches to early intervention programs for children will shape the Aboriginal Head Start Initiative as it evolves. Communities need a holistic approach that will focus on Aboriginal preschool children and include: culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support programming and parental involvement.

For any Aboriginal Head Start **Project** to be effective, it will have to complement and be coordinated with other services directed at children and families in order to achieve the goals and objectives of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

Within communities, the range of services for children and families can include family healing support, health services, child welfare and early intervention programs. At the community level, these work together in a flexible way to meet the needs of children and families.

The focus of this initiative is on direct service to children and families. As such the development of Aboriginal Head Start projects through this initiative must meet child, family and community needs. Aboriginal Head Start projects, therefore, need to establish relationships with related community programs while recognizing that communities can also shape their projects to meet families' social and economic goals.

Where services to Aboriginal children and families are lacking in the community, the AHS projects may begin to fill the gap in services to Aboriginal children and families.

The Aboriginal Head Start Initiative must not only be diverse and flexible enough to meet the range of needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit families, but also focus on providing programs that promote and protect Aboriginal languages and cultures.

The Aboriginal Head Start Initiative must be structured to ensure the development of locally controlled projects. In doing so, Aboriginal Head Start projects will reflect the uniqueness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and cultures, as they strive to instill in children and parents, a sense of pride and confidence, a desire to learn, parenting skills, opportunities for positive social and emotional development and improved family relationships.

## Standards

Aboriginal Head Start projects must:

- a) have Aboriginal involvement in the planning, design, operation and evaluation;
- b) include ways of involving parents or primary caregivers in all aspects of the project;
- c) be non-profit in nature;
- d) be located in an urban area or large Northern community; and
- e) include an 'in-kind' contribution of goods and services from the local community, such as voluntary services, equipment, children's books or toys.

In addition, every Aboriginal Head Start project, when operating fully, will address the following elements:

- activities and experiences that are developmentally appropriate for the Aboriginal children participating;
- outreach support to parents of these Aboriginal children;
- support for younger Aboriginal children preparing to enter a preschool;
- support for Aboriginal participants to use the health, education, social and other services that are provided within the community;
- parental involvement and support; and
- community service coordination, such as the coordination of services for Aboriginal children and their families in the local community to maximize the benefits to participants.

Projects may be based at a centre or at a home, or the project may operate out of both.





# PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

## A. Mission Statement and Overall Mandate

**First Nations, Métis and Inuit people recognize children as their nations' most valuable resource.** Thus, the Aboriginal Head Start Initiative will provide comprehensive experiences for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children up to six years of age and their families, with primary emphasis on preschoolers, 3-5 years of age.

The program will be based on caring, creativity and pride following from the knowledge of their traditional community beliefs, within a holistic and safe environment.

The primary goal of this initiative is to demonstrate that locally controlled and designed early intervention strategies can provide Aboriginal preschool children in urban and northern settings with a positive sense of themselves, a desire for learning and opportunities to develop fully and successfully as young people.

## B. Principles

Aboriginal Head Start will:

1. support the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical growth of each Aboriginal child;
2. support and encourage each Aboriginal child to enjoy lifelong learning;
3. support parents and guardians as the primary teachers and caregivers of their children;
4. **empower** parents to play a major part in planning, developing, operating and evaluating the project;
5. recognize and support the role of the extended family in teaching and caring for Aboriginal children;
6. include the broader Aboriginal community as part of the project throughout all of its stages, from planning to evaluation;
7. make sure the project works with and is supported by other community programs and services;
8. make sure the resources are used in the best way possible in order to produce measurable and positive outcomes for Aboriginal children, their parents, families and communities.

# PROGRAM GUIDELINES

## Program Components

Each **Project** will focus on Aboriginal preschool children and will include the following six components:

### 1. Culture and Language

The purpose of the Culture and Language component is to provide children with a positive sense of themselves as Aboriginal children and to build on the children's knowledge of their Aboriginal languages and experience of culture in their communities. More specifically, Projects will enhance the process of cultural and language revival and retention, with the ultimate goal that, where possible, children will aspire to learn their respective languages and participate in their communities' cultures after AHS.

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) encourage thoughtfulness and reflection about how to ensure that this is a comfortable place for **Aboriginal people** to be who they are;
- b) demonstrate an understanding of, respect for and responsiveness to Aboriginal cultures and languages;
- c) focus on the Aboriginal cultures and languages of the children attending the Project;
- d) create an environment in which children, families, employees and volunteers participate in relevant and significant activities on a daily basis;
- e) provide opportunities for Elders, **Knowledge Keepers**, traditional people and cultural people to participate;
- f) provide opportunities for children, families and communities to enhance their knowledge of their respective Aboriginal culture(s) and language(s);
- g) apply Aboriginal cultural values and beliefs to all aspects of daily programming, program governance and administration.

## 2. Education

The purpose of the Education Component is to support and encourage each Aboriginal child to enjoy lifelong learning. More specifically, the Projects will encourage each child to take initiative in learning and provide each child with enjoyable opportunities to learn. This will be done in a manner which is appropriate to both the age and stage of development of the child. The ultimate goal is to engage children in the possibility of learning so that they carry forth the enthusiasm, self-esteem and initiative to learn in the future.

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) focus on early childhood development, including physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual and social development;
- b) foster a desire for *lifelong learning* in the child;
- c) offer learning and growing opportunities in the following areas:
  - physical well-being and appropriate motor development
  - emotional health and a positive approach to new experiences
  - social knowledge and competence
  - language skills
  - general knowledge and cognitive skills
  - spiritual well-being
- d) provide the child with a learning environment and varied experiences which will contribute to his/her physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual and social development;
- e) foster connection with kindergarten programs to prepare children, families and schools for future learning together.

### 3. Health Promotion

The purpose of the Health Promotion Component is to empower parents, guardians, caregivers and those involved with AHS to increase control over and improve their health. More specifically, the Project will encourage practices for self care, working together to address health concerns, and the creation of formal and informal social support networks. The ultimate goal is for those involved with AHS to take actions that contribute to holistic health.

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) support parents' awareness of provincial *standards* for immunizations, in cooperation with local health service providers;
- b) ensure that qualified health professionals visit on a regular basis;
- c) ensure that the appropriate physical, vision and hearing assessments are done following registration and, in more remote communities, when arrangements are made for qualified personnel to do the assessments:
  - assist parents in ensuring that these assessments are done where required;
  - assist parents to arrange for medical treatment where required;
- d) teach, model and encourage good dental hygiene in the program:
  - (may) assist parents to arrange for dental examinations for the children;
- e) access the assistance of Elders (for traditional healing circles and/or ceremonies), psychiatrists, psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists and other specialists, if needed to meet the needs of each child;
- f) develop and undertake either indoor or outdoor activities and games which include both children and staff to promote development of gross motor skills and participation in an active lifestyle;
- g) encourage parents to participate in activities that will promote a healthy and active lifestyle.

## 4. Nutrition

The purpose of the Nutrition Component is to ensure that children are provided with food which will help meet their nutritional needs, and to educate staff and parents about the relationship of nutrition to children's ability to learn, physical development and mental development. Mealtimes provide opportunities for sharing, teaching and socializing. The ultimate goal is to empower children and parents to develop or enhance nutritional eating habits that will be maintained following the children's AHS experience.

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) provide children with the essential nutrients they require to grow, develop and be active;
- b) feed children appropriately for the period of time each day that they are at the Project;
- c) meet the children's nutritional needs and respect children's family and local traditions and customs;
- d) provide children and parents with opportunities to learn about and further develop nutritious and healthy eating habits.

## 5. Social Support

The purpose of the Social Support Component is to ensure that the families are made aware of resources and community services available to impact their quality of life. The Project will assist the families to access resources and community services. This may mean that the Project will work in cooperation with the service providers. The ultimate goal of this component is to empower parents to access assistance and services which will support them to be active participants in their children's lives and AHS.

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) identify the need for and facilitate the provision of social support to Aboriginal children and their families. Methods of social support could include:
  - providing referrals
  - implementing family needs assessments
  - utilizing community outreach programs
  - providing community resource information
  - providing emergency assistance information
  - providing crisis intervention information
- b) develop a list of collaborative service providers, e.g. local, regional, provincial and national organizations, groups and individuals;
- c) involve local service providers in projects which could include:
  - Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) projects
  - Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) projects
  - Aboriginal or other child and family services
  - crisis centres
  - drug and alcohol treatment centres
  - friendship centres
  - health centres or hospitals
  - Métis organizations
  - Aboriginal housing
  - Aboriginal women's centres
  - parent resource centres
  - toy lending libraries
  - schools

## 6. Parental and Family Involvement

The purpose of the Parental and Family Involvement Component is to support the parents' and family's role as children's primary teachers. The parents and family will be acknowledged as contributors to the program through involvement with a **Parent Body** or participation in and/or contribution to classroom activities. This component provides the opportunity to empower parents to bring forth gifts and further develop as role models for children and in their communities.

The ultimate goal is for parents and caregivers to complete the program being more confident, and assertive and having a deeper understanding of their children than when they began the program.

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) be managed in such a way that parents have a meaningful experience in the planning, development, operation and evaluation of the program;
- b) provide an opportunity for the extended family, particularly Elders, cultural teachers and traditional people, to participate in teaching and caring for children;
- c) provide and communicate about opportunities to participate;
- d) encourage and empower parents to participate;
- e) not make a child's registration and participation dependent on one or both parents' participation.



# PROGRAM GUIDELINES:

## Accountability and Management

### 1. Accountability

The purpose of this section is to provide guidance so that **Projects** will demonstrate that they did what they said they would do, both to their community and to Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and/or other AHS funding sources.

This section is of particular interest to **Sponsor**/Project Board of Directors, Sponsor Executive Directors, Parent Bodies, Project Directors and Project Staff.

Accountability means that those dealing with the Project ensure that the children, families, parents/guardians and staff are treated fairly, that decisions will not be influenced by private or personal considerations and that the Project will be delivered efficiently and economically.

By signing a **Contribution Agreement** with PHAC and/or other AHS funding sources, a project Sponsor agrees to ensure that an Aboriginal Head Start Project is designed, operated and evaluated according to the AHS Principles and Guidelines.

A Sponsor agrees to spend the funds on the activities required and necessary to operate an Aboriginal Head Start project in accordance with these Principles and Guidelines.

The **purpose** of being accountable is to demonstrate to the community that you are acting in the best interests of the children, families and community. Aboriginal children should receive the most significant and profound benefit from AHS. This will maintain community confidence and government confidence in the ability to deliver AHS.

Accountability will be achieved in the following ways:



## A. Management Structures

1. Establishing management structures with community and Project representation;
2. Ensuring that management structures oversee the Project management including the reporting of expenditures;
3. Examples of management structures include:
  - Board of Directors (required)
  - **Parent Body**, e.g. Parent Council
  - Elders Council
  - finance committee
  - employee selection/hiring committee
  - personnel committee
  - project review committee
  - curriculum development committee
  - long term planning committee
4. Some committees may be combined, e.g. personnel/ hiring/ finance.

## B. Mechanisms

1. Developing mechanisms or ways of ensuring that a project is accountable including:
  - developing formalized Codes of Conduct and Codes of Ethics for employees, Boards of Directors and committees;
  - developing and establishing Conflict of Interest guidelines and policies;
  - developing and implementing a Policies and Procedures manual;
  - monthly reporting and communication between Sponsor, AHS Director and Parent Body in analyzing budgets, planning from budgets and analyzing financial reports.

## C. Reporting

1. Reporting informally on project activities to the community.  
Examples of how to do this include:
  - holding regular AHS meetings and consultation processes on Project matters;
  - communication through newsletters;
  - Sponsor/Project hosting informal question/answer periods with parents;
  - strategic planning sessions to meet children's individual needs and Project needs.
2. Reporting on project activities to government by:
  - maintaining current financial records in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, *standards*, practices and methods;
  - submitting financial reports to Government/Funder as stated in Contribution Agreements;
  - completing and submitting narrative activity reports as required.

## D. Evaluating

1. Ensuring that the Project is independently evaluated by:
  - developing locally specific evaluation criteria;
  - incorporating appropriate reviews of all aspects of programming;
  - participating in the national program evaluation.

## 2. Program Design and Management

**Each project is locally designed and managed.** Funding will be provided directly to eligible local Aboriginal organizations.

### A. Sponsor and Parent Body

- a) Each AHS Project will organize a **Parent Body**. The **Sponsor** and the Parent Body will work together to enrich the program and provide maximum benefit for the children.
- b) The Sponsor and the Parent Body will develop and implement together a work plan that includes goals, objectives, human and financial resources and training requirements for a Project.
- c) The Sponsor and the Parent Body will assume joint responsibility for ensuring that the work plan is implemented.
- d) The Sponsor and the Parent Body *may* transfer the Project to the Parent Body, as follows:
  - In order for a transfer process to begin, the Parent Body must incorporate as a non-profit organization;
  - The Contribution Agreement will describe the process to transfer their Project to a Parent Body within a specified time frame;
  - The Sponsor and the Parent Body will review the Contribution Agreement with AHS Funder (Public Health Agency of Canada) prior to signing;
  - In order for the transfer to be binding, the existing Contribution Agreement with the Sponsor must be terminated or amended and a new or amended Contribution Agreement must be signed simultaneously between AHS Funder (PHAC) and the newly **incorporated** Parent Body.

## B. Program Reach

Aboriginal Head Start Projects will:

- a) initiate local public awareness activities, e.g. open houses, inviting political representatives and officials to visit and encouraging local media coverage of achievements;
- b) establish and implement outreach processes to ensure that eligible children are enrolled;
- c) NOT require families to become a member or pay membership fees to their organization or the sponsoring organization as a condition for children to attend;
- d) ensure that the children who will most benefit from and who most need the program are eligible;
  - develop and implement criteria to ensure that children who will most benefit from the program receive first priority to attend.

### 3. Health and Safety

Aboriginal Head Start Projects will:

- a) follow applicable child care or preschool legislation or day care licensing regulations in their respective province or territory. Refer to provincial/territorial child care, preschool or day care licensing regulations;
- b) provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for children and families;
- c) follow program safety standards, comparable to existing provincial, territorial and municipal standards and regulations for child care facilities applying to:
  - public buildings
  - construction and maintenance
  - fire inspection and regularly scheduled fire drills iv handicap accessibility
  - equipment and materials
  - transportation (child car seats, front seats with airbags)
  - day care licensing, where appropriate
- d) employ staff and volunteers trained in First Aid and CPR;
- e) model healthy lifestyles by:
  - encouraging staff to live or take steps to live by the *AHS Statement of Beliefs and Values about Children*;
  - encouraging staff to explore further what it means to live “holistically” and take appropriate actions, e.g., quitting smoking, exercising regularly, improving eating habits;
  - encouraging staff to enthusiastically participate in Project activities;
  - requiring that staff neither drink alcohol, nor take drugs, nor be under the influence while at the Project site or at a Project sponsored or related activity.
- f) forbid smoking on project sites or during AHS sponsored or related activities with children in attendance.

## 4. Community Based and Holistic

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) reflect the Aboriginal values, cultures and practices of the Project's **community**;
- b) integrate Elders, cultural teachers, knowledge keepers, traditional and knowledgeable people in the design, development and delivery of the Project;
- c) use a holistic approach to develop children's social, physical, intellectual, mental, creative, emotional and spiritual well-being.

## 5. Children with Special Needs

Each child is a gift to their community and is present in a community to teach that community something. The child is, therefore, to be viewed as someone to learn from rather than as a person presenting a problem to be managed. For example, gifted children are also *Children with Special Needs*.

A primary source of information regarding a child's needs comes from the child's parents/ guardians/ caregivers.

### Assessment of Needs

Assessment is a formal or informal means of examining what children require so that Projects may plan activities, adjust activities, modify the facility, seek additional human resources, financial resources, medical or other expertise in order to meet the educational, physical, spiritual, emotional and mental needs of the child.

- a) Aboriginal Head Start projects will gather any available information regarding a child's needs and development during the intake process.
- b) A protocol will be developed for addressing the needs of children and parent participants/volunteers with infectious diseases or conditions like HIV-AIDS.
- c) Each project will develop policies and procedures for addressing the needs of Children with Special Needs.

### Policies and Procedures

The policies and procedures will address the following:

1. informal assessments (developmental screenings) of all children to help parents determine if their child requires supports in addition to the resources currently available at the Project;
2. if the developmental screening indicates additional needs or further assessment of the child's needs in specific areas of the child's development, the Project will research, recommend and support the family in accessing appropriate resources;

3. possible resource options will be provided for the child and family to receive ongoing support, e.g., speech and language therapy;
4. the option of engaging the expertise of Elders, cultural people and traditional healers will be supported;
5. if it is determined through the assessment process that specialized services are required to meet the needs of the child, permission from the parent/guardian will be sought to incorporate the expertise of specialized resources into the AHS project;
6. the Project will partner with and educate the family and AHS community service providers regarding the child's needs and will develop an action plan to meet the needs;
7. the descriptors, e.g. learning disabilities, etc., referred to in the definition shall not be used as labels for individual children. Children's strengths and needs must be the basis for developing appropriate programs and descriptors should be used only as necessary for administrative purposes related to funding and data collection.

## Special Circumstances

If the Project finds that the current facility and human resources are unable to effectively provide a child with a safe environment and experiences for development and growth, the Project may request that the child attend an alternate program until such time as the child's needs may be met by the Project. For example:

- an additional staff person with specialized training may need to be hired
- changes to the facility may need to be made.



## 6. Recognition of Cultural Diversity

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) promote cultural appreciation by providing opportunities for children and families to learn about various Aboriginal languages and cultures;
- b) encourage parents and families to explore their culture and heritage in order to promote children's self-esteem and identity;
- c) recognize and respect the differences within Aboriginal cultures;
- d) encourage respect for the values, cultures and traditions of all people.

## 7. Programming

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) be developed by local Aboriginal communities;
- b) provide Aboriginal children with appropriate curriculum and resource materials and activities that focus on their spiritual, emotional, social, intellectual and physical development;
- c) provide opportunities for children and parents to become more empowered through their involvement with Aboriginal Head Start.

## 8. Human Resources Management

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) define needs for staff qualifications and how to best to meet those needs;
- b) establish and implement fair and open hiring practices;
- c) require and check character and qualification references for all potential Project employees, board members and volunteers.

### Criminal Record Check

1. Require that all project employees and volunteers obtain a **Criminal Record Check** (see definition of **volunteer**).
2. The employee or volunteer will provide a current, original of criminal record information that has been obtained from the local police station or RCMP.
3. The original of criminal record information will be placed in the employee's or volunteer's confidential personnel file.
4. **Parent participants** are not required to undergo a criminal record check.

Ensure that each applicant's criminal record check, character and qualification references are reviewed according to the following criteria. The safety of the children will be the most important consideration in the review.

Consider whether the applicant **has been convicted** of:

- offences relating to the abuse of children or women;
- offences that are violent in nature;
- drug-related offences;
- other offences which the Project believes would make an applicant unsuitable for working in an AHS Project, e.g. a bookkeeper or financial officer who has been convicted of fraud.

### Consider the **timing of any convictions**:

- Projects will carefully assess the behaviour that an applicant is demonstrating today.
- For example, a person who was convicted of a series of petty crimes related to alcohol use many years (e.g. twenty years) ago, has not had any convictions since that time and is known in the community as someone following a path that is reflected in the *AHS Statement of Beliefs and Values about Children* **could be considered** for employment.
- Someone who was convicted of a crime like dangerous driving last year **could NOT be considered** for employment. The likelihood is that such an individual has other issues to come to terms with that would make them an unsuitable employee or volunteer for AHS.
- Find out whether the applicant has a history of behaviour that includes violence.
- Find out whether the applicant has a history of behaviour that is contradictory to the *AHS Statement of Beliefs and Values about Children*.
- Ensure that driver applicants obtain a *Driver's Abstract* which the Project will review.

## Probationary Period

Require that newly hired employees and newly appointed volunteers undergo a **probationary period**, as follows:

1. At least the first three months for which a person is hired as an employee or granted status as a volunteer will be a probationary period.
2. The purpose of the probationary period is, in part, to allow time for the processing of a request for a criminal record check. This will be specified in a letter of offer and/or employment contract.
3. Each applicant will apply for a criminal record check at the same time that application to work/volunteer is made.
4. Proof of application to the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) for a criminal record check will be presented at an employment or volunteer interview.

5. The employee or volunteer will produce a current original of criminal record information upon receipt from the local police station or RCMP.
6. Require that all staff and volunteers produce an updated Criminal Record Check once per year. This requirement will be reflected in each employee's and volunteer's letter of agreement or employment contract.

## Hiring Policies

- Require a fair hiring policy as approved by the community.
- Promote local hiring.
- Ensure that preference is given to Aboriginal people for staffing.
- Fill the positions with qualified people in cases where a shortage of qualified Aboriginal staff members exists;
- Place emphasis on training of Aboriginal candidates.

## Recruiting and Training Volunteers

- a) Encourage staff and **volunteers** to participate in ongoing professional and personal development, including language and culture.
- b) Ensure that trained early childhood development professionals are involved in the planning of staffing and subsequent staff requirements.
- c) Ensure that all people involved in projects have experience in working with Aboriginal people and/or have taken cultural awareness training, and/or are willing to be involved in cultural programming.
- d) Reflect this guideline and all of its subsections in the personnel policy or similar document.
- e) Reflect the indicated subsections of this guideline in employment contracts and volunteer letters of agreement.

## 9. Child : Staff Ratios

- Child:staff ratios will meet or exceed the minimum requirements outlined in provincial/ territorial legislation.
- The child:staff ratios may be adjusted accordingly as additional staff and resource teachers are employed to work with Children with Special Needs

## 10. Partnerships

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- link with and enter into partnerships with other programs and services, if they fit into the goals of the AHS *mandate*.

## 11. Sponsorships

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- neither accept sponsorship nor develop partnerships that promote the products or names of tobacco or alcohol companies;
- submit applications for sponsorship from other companies to the National Aboriginal Head Start Committee for review.

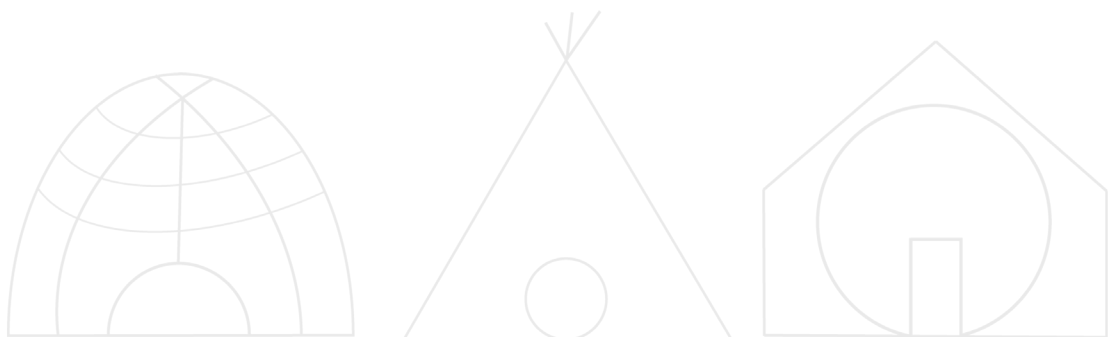
## 12. Confidentiality

Aboriginal Head Start projects will:

- a) ensure that Project staff, board members, Elders and volunteers keep information acquired during their involvement in the program confidential;

Examples of information to be kept confidential include:

1. child welfare related, e.g., number of foster homes in which a child has resided
  2. human resource/personnel related, e.g. resumes, performance reviews, school grades, employment competition results
  3. criminal record checks, e.g., information about any convictions which would not prohibit a person from being an AHS employee or volunteer
- b) obtain written permission from parents/legal guardians prior to releasing information regarding their child(ren) to outside agencies or parties, including permission for online or print publication of photos;
  - c) share information with appropriate outside agencies or parties in the province or territory of residence only when legally required;
  - d) lock and store all confidential information, e.g., personnel files, children's files in a secure place and provide access only to appropriate staff members.



# Glossary of Terms

## **Aboriginal**

The term Aboriginal people refers to the indigenous inhabitants of Canada when we want to refer in a general manner to Inuit, First Nations and Métis people, without regard to their separate origins and identities.

(Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 1, Looking Forward, Looking Back).

## **Children with Special Needs**

- a) Children who face barriers to normal development and functioning in one or more of the following areas of development: physical, social, emotional, communication, intellectual, behavioural;
- b) Children who have increased vulnerability to environmental and non-environmental stresses, including those related to family, social, economic and cultural circumstances;
- c) Children who require supports in addition to those provided by a classroom teacher. Many children have not had their needs formally assessed. Children who have been assessed could have the following exceptionalities:

For example:

- cognitive impairments
- emotional impairments
- learning disabilities
- physical disabilities and/or other health impairments
- speech impairments or communication disorders
- sensory impairments - vision, hearing
- multiple disabilities
- giftedness

(Ontario Ministry of Community & Social Services and Nova Scotia Special Education Policy Manual)

**community**

A body of people unified by common interests, usually living in a specific locality. The common interest is providing children three to five years of age with an Aboriginal Head Start experience so that they take initiative in learning throughout their lives. *The urban AHS community, which may change with each new enrollment year, includes members from many different cultural backgrounds.*

**Contribution Agreement**

A financing arrangement between AHS Funder (e.g., PHAC) and a Sponsor in which the AHS Funder undertakes to finance eligible expenditures associated with the Aboriginal Head Start Initiative.

**Criminal Record Check**

A criminal record or police record is a record of a person's criminal history, generally used by potential employers, lenders, and others to assess his or her trustworthiness.

**Drivers Abstract**

A person's driving record. This may be obtained from your respective provincial/territorial ministry responsible for transportation.

**empower**

To make able; make (someone) stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights.

**enrich**

To make richer in quality and value

**ensure**

To make certain e.g., when you are ensuring that something happens, you may complete the task or request that someone else complete the task. You are responsible for whether or not the task is complete.

**guardian**

A person who has in law or in fact the custody or control of a child (Criminal Code of Canada).

**guideline**

A criterion directing action.



**incorporated**

Forming a legal corporation; for example, a board of directors is an incorporated body.

**Knowledge Keepers**

Those who have received and share traditional knowledge to provide vision and guidance regarding cultural and territorial protocol, customs and values; these may be Elders, Healers, Cultural Teachers or others.

**lifelong learning**

It is the ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. Therefore, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development, but also self-sustainability, as well as competitiveness and employability.

**mandate**

An official command or instruction by an authority.

**Parent Body**

A group of parents who have a common function, e.g., a Parent Council. The purpose of the Parent Body is to allow the parents of children in the Project to participate in the Project governance. The Parent Body will include parents of children currently participating in the program.

- Parents, guardians or caregivers of children registered in the program will determine who the members of the Parent Body will be.
- A Project could also have parents whose children have graduated from AHS and other community members on the Parent Body.

**parent participant**

A parent, caregiver, guardian, extended family member or adult in a community who is regarded as a caregiver who participates in an AHS project

- this person **neither directs nor delivers** a part of the program
- this person is never left alone with a child or children other than his/her own without a staff person present.

**principle**

A fundamental truth or law as the basis of reasoning or action.

**probationary period**

A process or period of testing the character or abilities of a person in a certain role, especially of a new employee or volunteer.

**Project**

A general term referring to an Aboriginal Head Start project in a community.

**Sponsor**

The legally incorporated non-profit organization, band council, divisional board or local educational board that signs the Contribution Agreement.

- The Sponsor is responsible for ensuring that the service, Aboriginal Head Start, is delivered and for reporting regularly to Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and/or other AHS Funders.
- The Sponsor is referred to as the “Recipient” in the Contribution Agreement.

**standard(s)**

The degree of excellence required for a particular purpose.

**volunteer**

A parent, caregiver, guardian, extended family member or adult in a community who is regarded as a caregiver who directs and/or delivers some aspect of the program on a volunteer basis, e.g., classroom volunteer, cook/kitchen assistant, Board of Director member, Parent Body member, Policy Circle member or member of a governing body for an AHS Project.



