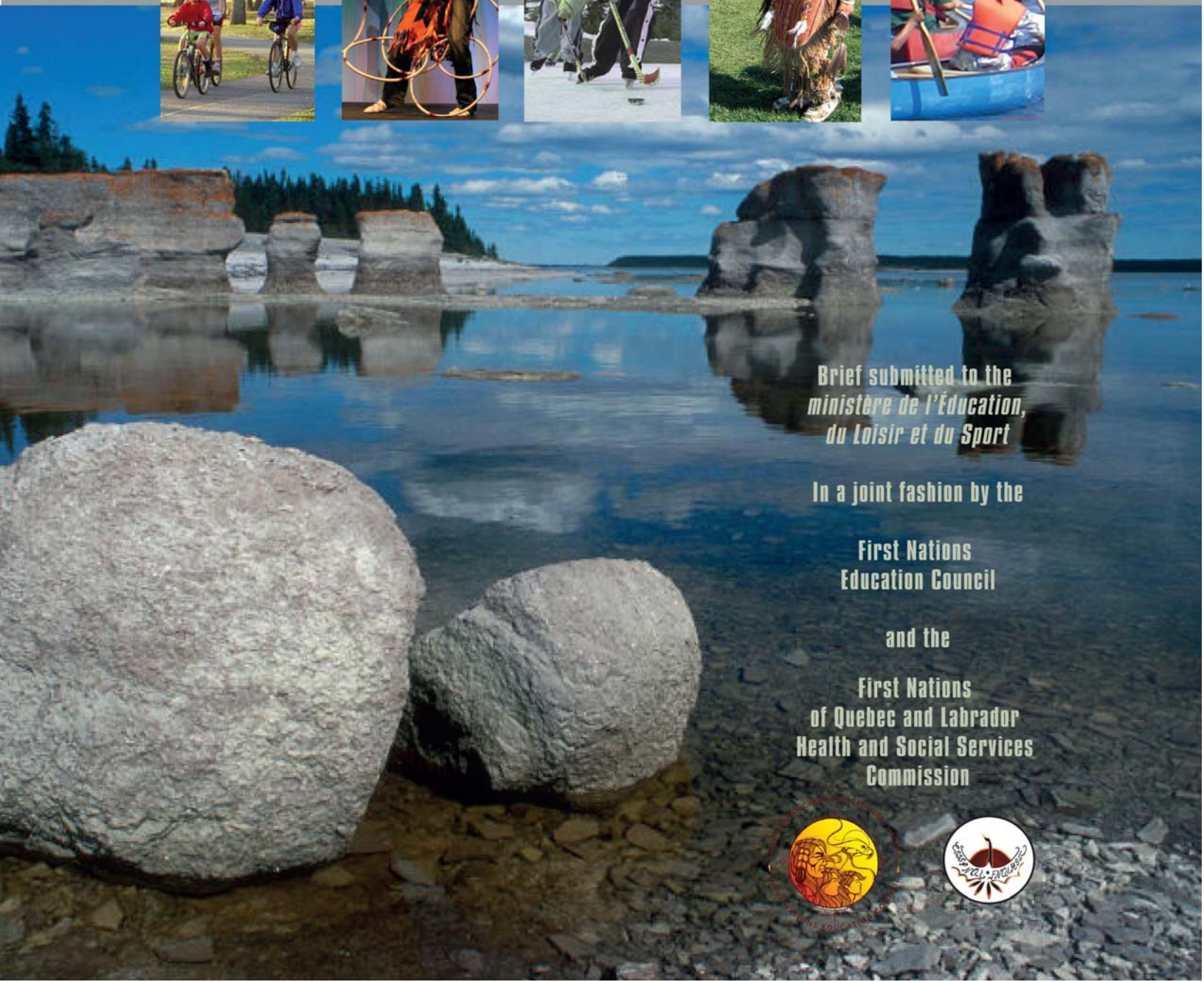


# SPORTS, RECREATIONAL AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG FIRST NATIONS

## Between Tradition and Performance



Brief submitted to the  
*ministère de l'Éducation,  
du Loisir et du Sport*

In a joint fashion by the

**First Nations  
Education Council**

and the

**First Nations  
of Quebec and Labrador  
Health and Social Services  
Commission**



*Joint brief by the*

First Nations Education Council (FNEC)

and the

First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission  
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# SPORTS, RECREATIONAL AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG FIRST NATIONS

## Between Tradition and Performance

**1** Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

**2** In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognise and protect the exercise of these rights.

Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

### Introduction

During a meeting of the First Nations Health Directors' Network, that was held on November 19, 2013, representatives of the *ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* (MELS) presented the green paper of the Government of Quebec entitled *Le goût et le plaisir de bouger: vers une politique nationale du sport, du loisir et de l'activité physique* (unofficial translation: The desire and pleasure of being active, towards a national policy for sports, recreational and physical activity).

At this meeting, the Assistant Deputy Minister, Mr. Luc Fournier, invited the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) to present a brief before the adoption of the national policy scheduled for March 2014.

In order to properly illustrate the connections between the adoption of healthy lifestyles, education, culture and health, the FNQLHSSC joined forces with the First Nations Education Council (FNEC) to prepare this brief.



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### Description of the organisations

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) is a non-profit organisation responsible for supporting the efforts of the First Nations of Quebec in the planning and development of culturally-appropriate health and social services programs. Its mission is to promote the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of First Nations and Inuit individuals, families and communities in addition to ensuring their well-being. Since its creation in 1994, it has also sought to promote access to comprehensive health programs and services tailored to First Nations and designed by organisations that are recognised and sanctioned by the local authorities, while ensuring that local culture and autonomy are respected.

The First Nations Education Council (FNEC) was founded in 1985. This organisation was created by and for First Nations and it represents 22 communities from eight Nations in Quebec. Its main mission is to defend the interests of the First Nations communities in such a way as to improve the educational services offered to all First Nations students. The FNEC's ultimate goal is for First Nations education to be completely under First Nations jurisdiction as part of their inherent right to self-government, as stipulated in Article 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.<sup>1</sup>

The FNEC and the FNQLHSSC conducted consultations on the need and relevance of improving funding and support for the First Nations community-based sports and recreational programs. These consultations revealed that there are enormous gaps in the sports and recreational services offered to First Nations compared to those offered outside the Aboriginal communities. Both organisations are convinced that this situation must be improved in order to contribute to general well-being and counter school drop-out.

The brief begins with the presentation of a summary overview of the situation of the First Nations of Quebec.<sup>2</sup> It aims to foster understanding of the significant differences that exist between First Nations and non-Aboriginal people in terms

<sup>1</sup> <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-16.html>

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the Cree, Naskapi and Inuit Nations.

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of their historical, identity-based, social, socio-economic and political context. Section 2 provides complementary explanations on the characteristics of the First Nations by commenting on each of the nine orientations that are grouped under the four stakes of the green paper of the Government of Quebec. They are followed by recommendations, which purpose is to foster significant improvements to the current situation of First Nations.

## 1. Summary overview of the situation

### 1.1 Socio-demographic data

This brief presents a portion of the needs of the 31 communities of Quebec stemming from eight Nations for a total of 68 428 First Nations members.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the socio-demographic profile of the population of Quebec, the youth make up a high percentage of the First Nations population. Indeed, young people under 18 years of age make up 34% of the First Nations population of Quebec, while 60% of the population are adults aged 18 to 64 and 6% of the population is over the age of 65.<sup>4</sup>

The context of First Nations family life represents a considerable obstacle to the practicing of sports activities. From a socio-economic status perspective, note that just over 30% of the children and adolescents live in single-parent families. Moreover, more than half (54%) of the adults had an income lower than \$20 000 in 2007 according to the *First Nations Regional Health Survey* that was conducted by the FNQLHSSC in 2008. As for household income, more than a third (34%) earned less than \$20 000. Furthermore, less than half (45%) of the adults were employed, which is a similar percentage to the number of adults with a high school diploma. Also, 25% of the adults were experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity compared to 8% among the Quebec population. In addition, 31% of the adults living with children were also faced with food insecurity situations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> FNQLHSSC, *First Nations Regional Health Survey*, 2008

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



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### *1.2 Health conditions*

Several studies have established a connection between physical inactivity and the deterioration of a number of health conditions related to physical and mental well-being such as:

- ▷ Overweight or obesity;
- ▷ The development of chronic diseases such as hypertension or diabetes;
- ▷ Isolation, exclusion and depression;
- ▷ Etc.

The state of health of the First Nations population is a cause for concern and greatly justifies actions fostering the adoption of healthy lifestyles. The following is a general overview of First Nations health in a few numbers:

- ▷ More than half of First Nations ages 12 years and up are smokers; that is over twice the proportion of smokers in Quebec (23%);
- ▷ Obesity among First Nations adults has gone from 33% in 2002 to 41% in 2008; that is more than twice Quebec's rate of obesity;
- ▷ Three-quarters of the adults were overweight in 2008;
- ▷ Less than half of First Nations children have a healthy weight;
- ▷ Hypertension affects First Nations one and half times more (23%) than the Quebec population (15%);
- ▷ The proportion of diabetics among the First Nations population (18%) exceeds that of the Quebec population by 10%;
- ▷ One in four youth ages 15 to 24 years (25%) experienced suicidal thoughts during their lives and 16% of the youth in this age group had made a suicide attempt in the past;



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- ⇒ One in four youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years (25%) has had suicidal thoughts over the course of their lives and 16% of the youth in this age bracket have attempted suicide in the past;
- ⇒ Forty percent (40%) of respondents were drinking an excessive amount of alcohol at least once per month compared to 19% of Quebec's respondents;
- ⇒ Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the respondents ages 12 years and up had used drugs in 2007, which is more than three times the proportion observed among the population of Quebec ages 15 and up.

Among these conditions, the incidence of overweight, obesity, diabetes and mental health problems among First Nations populations shows how important it is to promote physical activity in addition to creating an environment conducive to the adoption of healthy lifestyles in the communities.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.3 Sports and recreational activities: current situation

Like in the other population groups, the level of physical activity diminishes with age among the First Nations of Quebec. A little more than one third (37%) of the children practice sports at least once per week (e.g. are part of a group, attend classes) while approximately half of them (51%) never participate in this type of extracurricular activity. Practicing an extracurricular activity is a little more common among adolescents (44% and 36%); it was observed that one in five (20%) consider themselves to be inactive.<sup>7</sup>

The practice of cultural recreational activities is also uncommon. Less than 10% of children and adolescents are part of a group or take classes in traditional singing, dancing or drumming at least once per week and a majority (80% to 85%) of them have never been part of such a group or taken these

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*



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types of classes.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.3.1 Sedentary lifestyle and way of life

The onset of the sedentary way of life has had a major impact on the lifestyles of First Nations. Although it has much in common with what the green paper refers to as a sedentary lifestyle, it is a phenomenon that takes on an entirely different dimension for First Nations.

The transition from semi-nomadic to sedentary communities, which is a very recent phenomenon for some communities, should be given special attention among First Nations. It is important to remember that First Nations were confined to small territories and, at one point or another in their history, they were prevented from freely accessing their traditional territory and its resources.

Moreover, greater access to the land goes hand in hand with the practice of traditional activities which, even if they are not perceived as hobbies or sports activities by First Nations, are rewarding activities that reinforce identity, promote activity and contribute to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. Access to the land also promotes economic development and job creation, and helps in the fight against poverty.

The sedentary way of life that was imposed on First Nations has also greatly influenced the economic development opportunities of the communities and has become one of the main causes of the high level of poverty among First Nations. Meanwhile, poverty is considered one of the social determinants with the greatest impact on health.

Currently, there are few agreements focused on the sharing of the revenues stemming from the exploitation of the land's resources. These types of agreements could generate funds that can be invested in infrastructure and projects that aim to promote sports as well as recreational and traditional activities in the communities.

The other aspect of the sedentary way of life that is retained in the green paper is the emergence of recreational activities requiring little physical effort, which creates an obstacle to achieving the goal of being more active. This

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aspect must not be neglected because, since the onset of the increased use of technology, First Nations, like the non-Aboriginal population, have not been immune to the appeal of these types of sedentary activities such as television, video games, social networks, etc.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the results of the *First Nations Regional Health Survey* indicate that nearly two out of five children (39.8%) watch television more than 90 minutes per day. Children ages 6 to 11 (42.1%) are more likely to watch television for more than 90 minutes per day than children ages 0 to 5 (35.4%).<sup>10</sup>

### 1.4 Federal-Provincial-Territorial Advisory Committee recommendation

The Federal-Provincial-Territorial Advisory Committee on Fitness and Recreation reached the following conclusions following a roundtable that was held in February 2000 in Hobbema, Alberta:<sup>11</sup>

*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,*

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<sup>9</sup> See the appended statistics on sedentary activities.

<sup>10</sup> FNQLHSSC, *First Nations Regional Health Survey*, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> <http://lin.ca/resources/maskwachees-declaration-advisory-committee-fitness-and-recreation-2000>



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*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.*

Finally, as a conclusion to its work, the Advisory Committee declared 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 (Maskwachee declaration, June 2000).*

The continuation of this summary overview and the complementary data related to the stakes and orientations of the green paper presented in the next section show that much remains to be done to make this position come to fruition.

### *1.5 Jurisdiction and distinct nations*

The existing rights of First Nations have recently been reaffirmed in the Canadian Constitution, by recent judgements and by international law. Moreover, the severe damages suffered as a result of sustained assimilation measures, such as confinement in reserves and Indian residential schools, make it so that even if First Nations aspire to fully expressing these rights, they are far from having access to the conditions necessary to benefit as they should.

In addition to asserting the rights of First Nations to be consulted, several articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirm the rights of First Nations to self-determination, indicate they are entitled to have access to the land's resources and be distinct, and that the States are responsible for adopting measures that make it possible for them to exercise these rights.<sup>12</sup> Finally, it is important to remember that, in 1985, the

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<sup>12</sup> The UNDRIP can be found at the following address: [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

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*Assemblée nationale du Québec* adopted a motion recognising that First Nations are distinct nations.

All First Nations are imbued with a well-founded conviction related to having rights and being able to express them. It is important that these rights are understood and respected. This is why government officials must be well-informed so that they can act knowingly in compliance with the official positions of their governments, Canadian law and international law before engaging in a process of negotiation, discussion or consultation with First Nations.

### 1.6 Current funding

The time we had to write this brief did not allow us to conduct a research in as thorough and comprehensive a fashion as we would have liked in regards to the various funding sources. Considering that this is an issue that is of paramount importance, a recommendation will be made to that effect.

#### 1.6.1 Health Canada - First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Quebec region

Since 2008, the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) has benefitted from the services of a physical activity specialist. This person's mandate is to support the First Nations and Inuit in the deployment of their physical activity programs. In addition, in recent years, Health Canada has provided non-recurring funding varying from \$170 000 to \$330 000 at the provincial level for the purpose of implementing community projects that the 52 communities can submit. This funding is taken from the funding envelope of the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative<sup>13</sup> since no other program provides funding for the implementation of sports activities.

#### 1.6.2 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)

AANDC sometimes funds occasional activities or special events such as the organisation of a tournament or a summer camp. However, regarding the

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/diseases-maladies/diabete/index-eng.php>.



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schools, the funding formula - for which obsolescence is a matter of consensus - anticipates no funding for sports or physical activities. This ministry has no specific funding program for this type of activity at the community level.

### 1.6.3 *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS)*

Since 2010, the MELS has had a bilateral agreement with the federal government. This non-recurring five-year agreement provides for the allocation of funding in the amount of \$50 000 for the deployment of community activities in two distinct areas, which are initiation to practicing sports and recreational activities to provide the opportunity to play sports for fun, health, social interaction and relaxation. The MELS has entrusted the administration of the envelope to the FNQLHSSC. With this funding, various projects were able to emerge from community or regional initiatives.

### 1.6.4 *Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones (SAA)*<sup>14</sup>

Following a three-year agreement (2009-2012) with the government of Quebec for a total of \$68 520 for the duration of the agreement, 19 communities were able to access funding to hire a coordinator at the community level through the financial support program for the hiring and monitoring of sports and recreation coordinators and community and civic involvement in various Aboriginal communities in Quebec. The activities organised by these community coordinators are quite diverse (e.g. canoe or rabaska days, rafting, volleyball and basketball clubs and sessions, forest expeditions, etc.).

The funding also stems from the *Secrétariat à la jeunesse* and the MELS. The program is in the process of being renewed and, according to the SAA, it is anticipated that approximately only ten communities will be able to benefit from the funding between 2013 and 2015.

### 1.6.5 *Québec en forme*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Information obtained from Viviane Denis-Ducharme, Advisor, *Direction générale des relations avec les Autochtones et des initiatives économiques*, SAA, ministère du Conseil exécutif

<sup>15</sup> Information obtained from Mathieu Vallet, *conseiller provincial à l'accompagnement auprès des communautés Premières Nations et Inuits*, Québec en forme.

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*Québec en forme* offers funding to the First Nations and Inuit through the *Communautés et partenaires des Premières Nations et Inuits engagés dans la promotion des saines habitudes de vie au Québec 2012-2013* program.

Twenty-three communities are currently supported, or in the process of being supported, as part of the development of action plans for the adoption of healthy lifestyles among those aged 0 to 17. In these situations, the local group only gathers partners from the Aboriginal community.

Eleven others are supported or in the process of being supported in the context of the diversity projects, which is to say that the local group is made up of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners that are generally brought together at the regional county municipality (RCM) level.

### 1.6.6 First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC)

In 2011, the Chiefs of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL) adopted a resolution designating the FNQLHSSC as the organisation responsible for the sports and recreation file. Indeed, the FNQLHSSC must anticipate the establishment of a follow-up committee that will be entrusted with the mandate to, among other things, analyse all the possible partnership avenues for the funding of activities in order to better meet the needs of First Nations. Its role will also be to develop a communication plan and foster a concerted approach between the partners.

In addition to managing the budget allocated by the MELS, the FNQLHSSC develops various projects and tools focused on the adoption of healthy lifestyles thanks to funding provided by Health Canada. These amounts have namely enabled the deployment of Kirano projects in several First Nations communities. Moreover, in collaboration with other partners, the FNQLHSSC actively works to inform the communities regarding the strategy focused on creating supportive environments that are conducive to healthy lifestyles.

The FNQLHSSC is also contributing to the organisation of the North American Indigenous Games in collaboration with various partners. Bringing together more than 4 500 Aboriginal youth of which over 300 come from Quebec, the Games are a unique opportunity to allow certain Aboriginal athletes to show-



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case their skills on the international stage. The transportation of these athletes to this event is partially funded by the Government of Quebec; First Nations communities must also contribute financially to offer this opportunity to their youth.

### 1.6.7 First Nations Education Council (FNEC)

The Inter-School Games are designed to encourage students who attend the FNEC-member schools to continue their education by allowing them to participate in a sporting event at the end of the school year.<sup>16</sup> This is a collaborative endeavour between the FNEC secretariat and the management and teachers of each school. Throughout the school year, the youth are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles by promoting physical activity, healthy nutrition and class attendance.

In June 2014, the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the FNEC Inter-School Games will be held at the PEPS of *Université Laval* in Québec City. When the Games were held for the first time in 2008, 130 athletes participated, while in 2014, some 700 youth are expected. The needs are increasing while the funding is very limited. The communities must cover the registration fees, which represent about 70% of the costs related to the organisation; to cover these costs, the communities often organise fundraising activities. Regarding other sources of funding, the FNEC uses sponsorships and has received some financial support from the MELS, the FNQLHSSC and Health Canada.

### 1.6.8 First Nations communities

According to a consultation among the FNEC-member communities that was conducted in 2008, just over two-thirds of the band councils were granting funding for specific projects from their operating budgets. We believe that this situation still reflects the reality of the communities. Some of them benefit from sponsorships for the holding of community-based or regional events.

This is the case for example for the First Nations Great Summer Gathering for which the host community is Mashteuiatsh. It includes cultural sharing activities, traditional sports competitions, musical performances, traditional and intertribal

<sup>16</sup> <http://inter-schoolgames.com/>



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dancing, traditional food sampling and spiritual ceremonies. Furthermore, the promotion of First Nations artists and artisans is a primary goal in the context of this traditional gathering. This event is funded by a dozen sponsors.

In addition, several partners from outside of the communities are also involved in the local groups. They contribute to better serving the Aboriginal on their territories.

Here are some of the projects funded by different agencies:

- ▷ Nunavik youth development program, driven by the Kativik Regional Government and Joe Juneau;
- ▷ Innu Meshkenu, driven by Dr. Stanley Vollant in collaboration with the *Université du Québec à Chicoutimi*;
- ▷ Local Recreation Coordinators Training Project, driven by the Kativik Regional Government.

## 2. Stakes and orientations of the green paper

This section presents the characteristics of First Nations according to the orientations and stakes of the green paper. The information is drawn mainly from the comments collected during the presentation of the green paper in the context of the First Nations Health Directors' Network meeting and three consultation reports.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.1 First stake of the green paper: Accessibility

*2.1.1 Orientation 1: From the beginning of their schooling, initiating all young people to the pleasures of practicing a wide range of physical, recreational and sports activities.*

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<sup>17</sup> Consultation on the needs of the First Nations in sports and recreation, Discussion paper, FNEC, December 2006; (2) Consultation report on sports and recreation in the communities, FNEC, March 2008; (3) Analysis of potential agents in sports, intended for the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, submitted by David Gill, with the contribution of the *Secrétariat des loisirs et des sports*, June 2011.



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Even before school age, that is to say as of early childhood, it is imperative that the environment in which children live be conducive to the practicing of activities that are appropriate to their ages and stages of development. Adequate stimulation through activities promotes the overall development of children while allowing for the adoption and eventually the maintenance of positive lifestyles.

The school curricula do not allow for covering many types of physical activities. Since the schools do not receive funding for sports and recreational activities, they cannot afford to provide an extracurricular activity program to offer a wider range of activities.

During the presentation of the green paper in Wendake on November 19, 2013, it was mentioned that, for many parents, the fees associated with registering their youth for activities are a major barrier. This reality also limits the provision of complementary activities into the curriculum outside of school hours.

Even if this approach is most commendable, it is very difficult for First Nations communities to implement it, especially since, in addition to these considerations, there are difficulties related to accessing the infrastructures as we shall examine below.

### *2.1.2 Orientation 2: Providing citizens with supportive environments that are conducive to the integration of various forms of physical activity into their lifestyles.*

According to a consultation conducted by the FNEC in 2008, the infrastructures that are most commonly found in the communities are the school gymnasium, a skating rink and a playground. Many infrastructures do not exist in a majority of the communities such as soccer fields, tennis courts, athletics tracks, arenas, multipurpose rooms, swimming pools and fitness centres.

During a recent meeting with the MELS, the Health Directors also raised the example of the high costs that the neighbouring municipalities charge to rent arenas and the communities' difficulties related to covering these costs. In addition to this issue is the isolation factor, which makes it difficult or even impossible to access the infrastructures of a neighbouring municipality.

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Regarding the capacity, equipment, compliance and safety of the existing infrastructures, the majority of the respondents declared that the conditions were unacceptable with respect to each of these components.<sup>18</sup> Since no infrastructure management system is sufficiently adequate to indicate in an objective manner what the gaps are in terms of safety compliance and renovation needs, it is impossible to provide an objective and accurate picture of the situation for all the communities.

The fact remains that many communities simply do not have the basic conditions to provide their citizens with environments that are conducive to the integration of various forms of physical activity on a daily basis.

### *2.1.3 Orientation 3: Adapting the available services to the needs and capacities of individuals, groups or communities that are experiencing special difficulties or limitations.*

Due to the fact that many First Nations communities are faced with serious economic problems, many families cannot afford the registration fees, equipment costs and travel expenses that are associated with participating in sporting events. The same applies to recreational activities that require a material investment.

The lack of adaptation of the available services is even more problematic for people with reduced capacity, a physical or a mental disability or special needs or for seniors. These vulnerable people should have access to appropriate measures that are equivalent to those that can be found across Quebec. These could be secured by signing service agreements with neighboring municipalities, for example.

### *2.1.4 Orientation 4: Providing technical, professional and financial support to high level and future elite athletes thereby allowing them to excel on the Canadian and International*

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<sup>18</sup> Analysis of potential agents in sports, intended for the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, submitted by David Gill, with the contribution of the *Secrétariat des loisirs et des sports*, June 2011



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### *sports stages.*

As part of the analysis of the agents that could be responsible for the sports and recreation file,<sup>19</sup> the responding organisations indicated that they gave equal importance to sports competition (high level) and recreational sports. However, they specified that these two areas are very different in terms of service management (human, financial, material resources, etc.).

In addition to the obvious lack of specialised coaches to support elite athletes, there are also problems related to accessing infrastructures that allow for practicing many disciplines, particularly for remote communities. One of the possible avenues emphasised by the First Nations Health Directors during their meeting with the MELS is registration to a federation that allows athletes and coaches to have access to adequate support; however, the high associated costs are once again a significant barrier.

It is therefore not surprising to see that First Nations are not very present, or even absent, in certain high-level disciplines. The athletes who compete in professional competition circuits are highly important role models for First Nations youth and should therefore be given special attention.

### *2.2 Second stake of the green paper: The quality of the experiences*

#### *2.2.1 Orientation 1: Offering quality support, adapted to the state and development of the person, which promotes both pleasure and personal fulfillment as well as the achievement of excellence.*

Quality and adapted support largely depends on the availability of trainers who are qualified to provide it. During the consultation conducted in 2008, the community youth identified the physical education teacher as the person who most motivates them to practice sports and recreational activities after school hours. This can be partly explained by the rarity of other community resources occupying a coaching function.

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<sup>19</sup> Analysis of potential agents in sports, intended for the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, submitted by David Gill, with the contribution of the *Secrétariat des loisirs et des sports*, June 2011.

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Currently, certification programs are poorly adapted for the purpose of training Aboriginal coaches and the teaching materials do not recognise the cultural characteristics of First Nations. In order to promote quality support adapted to the development of the person, it would be important to facilitate community access to a greater number of certified coaches and to allow the coaches themselves to benefit from professional support and training that is adapted to the realities of First Nations. In terms of wellness, more importance should be given to traditional activities and access to the territory should be encouraged, since these elements go hand-in-hand with the practicing of some of these activities.

According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the training of those in charge continues to be the main sports-related weakness among Aboriginal peoples... Indeed, there still aren't enough sports administrators, coaches, referees and recreation directors who are capable of meeting the special needs of Aboriginal communities.<sup>20</sup>

### *2.2.2 Orientation 2: Ensuring safe and ethical conditions that are respectful of people and their abilities.*

To achieve this objective, we must keep in mind the importance of having an infrastructure management system. It is also necessary to insist on the importance of helping communities to develop a policy for sport and recreation, and on the potential role that a regional First Nations organisation could play to assist them in this process by taking their realities into consideration. The importance of accessing the necessary resources remains essential for the creation and adoption of community policies in the area of safety as well as for the improvement of the environments and infrastructures that will reinforce safety and promote the practicing of sports and recreational activities.

### *2.3 Third stake of the green paper: Promotion*

#### *2.3.1 Orientation 1: Promoting the importance and benefits of practicing physical, recreational and sports activities on a regular basis among all citizens.*

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<sup>20</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), volume 4, p. 193.



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According to the 2008 consultation, a large majority of young people and adults living in First Nations communities believe that sports and recreational activities contribute to improving health, school attendance and social cohesion. This view rallies the population and should be disseminated in any campaign that promotes the benefits of physical activity.

The promotion of physical activity should be the subject of a promotion and awareness campaign; the same applies to the promotion of traditional activities fostering self-esteem. However, the communities are limited in terms of possibilities related to providing support for activities. In this sense, the Chiefs of the AFNQL have clearly indicated that they count on the regional First Nations organisations to help the communities receive funding from the governments and partners involved in sports and recreational activities.

As part of the same consultation, the youth also gave other examples of what could attract the non-student population to practicing sports and recreational activities. The majority attached great importance to the provision of free activities, rewards for participating volunteers, the organisation of internal and external competitions, improving infrastructure, establishing teams and encouraging young people to participate with their parents. They also mentioned that their motivation would be increased if they could participate in the organisation and management of the sporting activities.

### *2.3.2 Orientation 2: Promoting excellence and individual or collective success in sports that can motivate people to be more active and contribute to Quebec's international standing.*

Providing better support to First Nations athletes who excel is one of the ways that can help achieve this orientation. Fostering the creation of teams while using incentives such as participation in external events could contribute to the achievement of this goal among First Nations.

### *2.4 Fourth stake of the green paper: The concerted approach*

#### *2.4.1 Orientation 1: Ensuring that actions are coherent and based on a clear division of the roles and responsibilities of the*

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*players at the regional, national, and local levels.*

In 2008, the majority of the FNEC-member communities had no policy or program for sports and recreation. This situation has however improved since then, probably because a number of communities were able to hire a coordinator through a funding agreement with the *Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones* and also because the communities were able to take advantage of funding from *Québec en Forme*. However, it is important to note that the funding from *Québec en Forme* is planned until 2017 and that the communities have no guarantee regarding the funds that will subsequently be available.

Also during the consultation, the respondents indicated a desire to receive regional support focused on, among other things, the creation of an after-school program and the organisation of events such as inter-community meetings, inters-school tournaments, etc.

### 3. Recommendations

The following recommendations will require the involvement of different players. Indeed, a shared vision and mutual respect are the two essential conditions that will optimize the results related to improving the health of First Nations. The willingness of partners and access to adequate resources are key elements to making significant progress. The required actions must be taken while respecting First Nations culture.

#### 3.1 Recommendation 1

Regional organisations such as the FNEC and the FNQLHSSC have often stressed the importance of consulting with the First Nations that they represent as of the beginning of a process that could lead to the adoption of a law or policy that may concern them. We propose that a mechanism be established to ensure that the drafting of the national policy takes into account the stakes presented in our brief.

*We recommend that a meeting be held between representatives of the temporary monitoring committee coordinated by the FNQLHSSC, the person responsible for drafting the national policy*



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*and a representative of the MELS in order to ensure that the stakes presented in this brief are taken into consideration when the national policy is drafted. A specific section on First Nations could be included, as was done for the recent policy on homelessness by the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS).*

### 3.2 Recommendation 2

We believe that it is important for the national policy to mention professional training, which represents a major issue.

*We recommend that the resulting national policy or action plan emphasise the importance of ensuring that professional training adapted to First Nations culture and traditional activities is accessible to First Nations in order to address an important gap in terms of First Nations professionals in the area of sports and recreational activities (certified coaches, physical educators, etc.).*

### 3.3 Recommendation 3

We also believe that it is essential for the national policy to recognise the importance of traditional activities and access to the land.

*We recommend that the national policy mention the importance of land access as well as resource sharing and thereby recognise the role of the social determinants of health, which are closely connected to the practice of rewarding traditional activities.*

### 3.4 Recommendation 4

We also believe that it is essential for the national policy to recognise the importance for First Nations to have the necessary resources to implement an infrastructure management system.

*We recommend that the national policy recognise that the absence of an adequate community infrastructure management system is problematic, which, among other things, raises questions regarding the compliance and safety of their facilities. We therefore recom-*



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*mend that the MELS contribute to finding the support and resources needed to develop this aspect within the First Nations communities.*

### 3.5 Recommendation 5

It is imperative to ensure that First Nations youth ages 0 to 17 years are introduced to age-appropriate activities as well as the traditional and current way of life as of early childhood, and it is essential to ensure that they have access to these activities. We believe that it is essential that the needs of this population be reflected in the national policy.

*We recommend that the specific needs of children and adolescents be considered in the policy and that actions be planned in order to promote their optimal development.*

*For this purpose, the policy must take into consideration the adaptation of the living environments (school, child care services, community spaces, etc.) in order to render them conducive to physical activity. Culture and traditions should be considered in the application of any measure deriving from the national policy.*

*We also recommend that the policy indicate the importance that the funding formula for First Nations schools, which is a federal responsibility, be revised to take into account the needs of the First Nations from this perspective.*

### 3.6 Recommendation 6

During the implementation phase for the national policy, it will be essential to ensure that the actions are carried out in a concerted manner in order to maximise the benefits of the policy among First Nations.

*We recommend that the MELS collaborate with the monitoring committee set up by the FNQLHSSC, and more particularly, indicate and define all avenues of possible partnerships and funding to better meet the needs of First Nations.*

*Considering the adoption of a national policy by the Government of*



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*Quebec may contribute to closing the gaps in terms of the services available to First Nations compared to those available to the non-Aboriginal population of Quebec, and, to the extent that the federal government, which has a fiduciary responsibility, does not adapt its funding to address these gaps, we recommend:*

*That the Government of Quebec be sensitive to this reality and the need to reach out to the federal government to avoid further widening the gap between the services available to First Nations and those available to the non-Aboriginal population.*



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### Appendix:

#### Data from the 2008 First Nations Regional Health Survey

##### *Socio-demographic data:*

- ⇒ Youth under 18 years of age make up 34% of the First Nations population of Quebec, adults ages 18 to 64 account for 60%, and 6% of the population is over 65 years of age.
- ⇒ A little over 30% of the children and adolescents live in single-parent families.
- ⇒ Less than half of the adults have a high-school diploma.
- ⇒ Among those ages 12 to 17, 84% attend school. Among those ages 16-17 only, the proportion falls to 68%.
- ⇒ More than half (54%) of the adults received an individual income of less than \$20 000 in the year preceding the survey. In terms of household income, more than one third (34%) earned less than \$20 000.
- ⇒ Less than half (45%) of the adults are employed.
- ⇒ Thirty-one percent (31%) of adults living with children are living in a state of moderate or severe food insecurity.
- ⇒ Twenty-five percent (25%) of First Nations adults are living in a state of severe food insecurity compared to 8% of Quebec's general population.

##### *Physical activity and recreation*

- ⇒ It was observed that 30.2% of children play sports one to three times per week as part of a group or by taking classes, while 51.4% never exercise this type of extracurricular activity.
- ⇒ Eight out of ten children ages 6 to 11 (81.7%) are considered active, 13.6% are considered moderately active and 4.7% are considered inactive. The boys are more active than the girls.



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- ▷ Nearly two out of five children (39.8%) watch television more than 90 minutes per day and thirty-one percent (31.6%) spend more than 90 minutes per day playing video games.
- ▷ Seventy-three percent (73.4%) of the adolescents sometimes or always participate in the traditional or cultural activities of their communities.
- ▷ Among adolescents, 70.6% are active, 9.7% are moderately active and 19.7% are inactive. Adolescent boys are more active than adolescent girls.
- ▷ Forty-one percent (41.1%) of adolescents watch television for more than 90 minutes per day and more than one-third spend as much time on the computer.
- ▷ Almost half (49.4%) of the adults are active, 15.8% are moderately active and 34.8% are inactive. The men are more active than the women.
- ▷ Six out of ten adults (60.0%) spend between 60 and 90 minutes per day watching television, reading, playing bingo and video games or on the computer.

### *Lifestyles and chronic diseases*

- ▷ More than half (56%) of the respondents ages 12 and up are smokers; this is more than twice the proportion of smokers in Quebec (23%). A third of children ages 12 to 14 and half of those 15 to 17 are smokers.
- ▷ Obesity among First Nations adults increased from 33% in 2002 to 41% in 2008, which is twice more than among Quebec's general population. The percentage of adults who are overweight has increased from 67% in 2002 to 74% in 2008.
- ▷ Less than half of First Nations children have a healthy weight.
- ▷ The proportion of the diabetic population among First Nations (18%) exceeds that of the Quebec population by 10%.

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- ▷ Hypertension affects one and a half times more First Nations (23%) than the general population of Quebec (15%).

### *Mental health and addictions*

- ▷ Twenty-five percent of the adults have a high index of psychological distress, which is slightly higher than at the provincial level (23%).
- ▷ Among youth ages 15 to 24 , one in four (25%) have had suicidal thoughts during their lives and 16% have made a suicide attempt in the past.
- ▷ Forty percent of the respondents were drinking an excessive amount of alcohol at least once per month compared to 19% of Quebec's population.
- ▷ Thirty-seven percent of respondents ages 12 and up have used drugs in the year preceding the survey, which is more than three times the proportion encountered among the Quebec population ages 15 and up.

The largest proportions of drug users (over 50%) are found among youth ages 15 to 34.





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