



BACKGROUND

Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) is a federally-funded early intervention strategy for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and their families living in urban centres and large Northern communities. Aboriginal Head Start projects typically provide half-day preschool experiences that prepare young Aboriginal children for their school years by meeting their spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs.

Generally, AHS projects operate four days per week, with 30-40 children 3-5 years old, in morning and afternoon sessions in a structured pre-school environment. Aboriginal Head Start projects are run by locally managed Aboriginal non-profit organizations that see the parent/care giver as the natural advocate of the child.

Parents are directly involved in the management and operation of projects. Aboriginal Head Start projects help parents with the necessary skills to actively contribute to their child's healthy emotional/social development, increase their confidence as parents and improve family relationships.

Since the program was announced in May 1995 as a four-year pilot phase (1995-96 to 1998-99) with ongoing funding after the pilot phase, extensive project activity has taken place across Canada. This has resulted in the

selection of project sites and funded projects in eight provinces and all of the northern territories. There are ninety-nine (99) AHS sites from coast to coast to coast. In 1998, a major expansion of Aboriginal Head Start to First Nations communities on reserve begins.

Communities are committed to developing the best projects possible, in healthy environments with trained staff. Between 3,000 and 4,000 Aboriginal children participate in AHS projects each year. The program has generated significant excitement and commitment in urban and northern Aboriginal communities. Reports indicate that parents are very pleased with the progress that their children are making and with the opportunity to be involved with Aboriginal Head Start.

Health Canada regional offices work directly with projects to ensure program quality. There is also a unit at Health Canada in Ottawa that provides national coordination and leadership to the program.



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ABORIGINAL HEAD START INITIATIVE

