

Evaluation of the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities program ^[1]

Author: Public Health Agency of Canada

Source: Government of Canada

Format: Report

Publication Date: 1 Jun 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

Program profile

The Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) Program is an early childhood development program created in 1995. AHSUNC supports the spiritual, emotional, mental, physical and social wellbeing of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families in a holistic way through its six core components of Culture and Language, Education, Health Promotion, Nutrition, Social Support, and Parental and Family Involvement.

Between fiscal years 2016-17 and 2020-21, the AHSUNC Program spent an average of nearly \$36M annually from ongoing funds, mostly in contribution funding to the 133 local AHSUNC sites. Annually, AHSUNC serves around 4,200 to 4,300 young Indigenous children and their families living in off-reserve/off-territory and northern communities across Canada, from large urban areas to remote settlements. Sites are managed by local Indigenous organizations and governments. Guided by the six components, each site adapts their programming and services to local social and cultural contexts, needs, and capacity.

...

Recommendations

Evidence gathered for this evaluation clearly supported the following two priorities that are already being addressed by the Program:

- Create opportunities to reach more Indigenous children and their families in under-served and unserved urban and northern communities; and
- Address critical and long-standing staffing issues at AHSUNC sites, particularly on staff recruitment and retention.

These strategic priorities point to longstanding operational issues for the AHSUNC Program. NAHSC, AHSUNC regional organizations, and PHAC have started discussions on addressing these priorities, in light of new investments in Budget 2021 through the Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare (IELCC) Initiative that provides incremental funding increases for the AHSUNC Program over the next five years, beginning in 2022-23, totalling \$122.9 million.

The recent governance evolution of the AHSUNC Program also provides an opportunity to consider how to improve PHAC funding mechanisms, strengthen the relationship between PHAC and the local AHSUNC communities particularly to support self-determination, and promote community-led information sharing. These three areas are reflected in the recommendations below.

Recommendation 1: Address long-term issues to the Program's contribution agreement system to make funding more sustainable, accessible, and flexible for communities.

Within PHAC, efforts to improve the AHSUNC contribution agreement mechanisms started in 2017. However, the funding mechanisms are still perceived by recipients as complex and inefficient, given the multiple funding streams for the Program, and accompanying administrative burden of the individual contribution agreements. This significantly affects smaller funding recipient organizations, where AHSUNC site coordinators have many responsibilities. It should be considered that other tools and models exist for supporting Indigenous community-led programs through federal contribution programs. Solutions for AHSUNC sites will need to reflect varying regional realities and preferences.

Recommendation 2: Advance Indigenous self-determination of the AHSUNC Program.

Community members, government staff, and partners have recognized the National Aboriginal Head Start Council (NAHSC)'s role as a lead decision maker for the AHSUNC Program. There are further opportunities to support the NAHSC's capacity as a governance body, as well as to promote succession planning and leadership capacity for site staff. In addition, there is a desire for greater community and regional self-determination, particularly given the cultural and socioeconomic differences between communities and regions, including the nature of relationships between AHSUNC sites and provincial and territorial governments. These are particularly timely opportunities for

consideration, given the general alignment of the community-based model of the AHSUNC Program with the introduction of the IELCC Initiative and its principle of promoting Indigenous capacity to support and govern Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care.

Recommendation 3: Celebrate and build on the successes of the AHSUNC Program by supporting community-driven knowledge sharing and mobilization activities.

AHSUNC sites have been sharing best practices, ideas, and resources through regional and national AHSUNC networks, as well as training events for many years. These communication channels helped sites rapidly adapt their programming in response to the pandemic. However, knowledge sharing is hampered by a variety of barriers, including lack of time for staff and scheduling events across time zones, as well as language differences. Dedicated assistance for national and regional AHSUNC groups could further promote community-led knowledge sharing and mobilization activities.

Related link:

Evaluation of the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities Program at the Public Health Agency of Canada [3]

Region: Canada [4]

Tags: child development [5]

Indigenous families [6]

Source URL (modified on 29 May 2024): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/24/05/evaluation-aboriginal-head-start-urban-and-northern>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/24/05/evaluation-aboriginal-head-start-urban-and-northern> [2]

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/transparency/corporate-management-reporting/evaluation/aboriginal-head-start-urban-northern-communities-program.html> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/12/09/evaluation-aboriginal-head-start-urban-and-northern>

[4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-development> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9351>