Fostering Biimaadiziwin: A National Research Conference on Urban Aboriginal Peoples

Organizational Summary of Promising Practices, Lessons Learned and the Journey Forward

National Association of Friendship Centres
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OUR MISSION is to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in, Canadian Society; and which respect and strengthen the increasing emphasis on Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness.

Prepared with support from the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-status Indians of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
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Executive Summary
The Government of Canada recognizes three distinct Aboriginal populations, as designated in the Constitution Act, 1982: First Nations (Status and non-status Indians), Inuit and Métis. According to the 2006 Census, more than 1,170,000 people identified themselves as Aboriginal, representing nearly four per cent of Canada’s total population. In 2006, 54 per cent of Aboriginal people lived in Canada’s urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2008).

While research on Aboriginal Peoples has increased in recent years, there is still a lack of information about those who call urban centres home. This lack of information has led to gaps in policy and programs aimed at this population. In an effort to close this gap, the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) and the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-status Indians of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (OFI) co-led the creation of the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN) in 2007.

UAKN’s goal is to develop a durable research network that focuses attention on urban Aboriginal concerns and contributes to a better quality of life for Aboriginal people living in cities and towns. During the 2010-2011 fiscal year, in an effort to advance these goals, the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) with sponsorship from the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-status Indians of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (OFI) and with various government, university and community partners planned and hosted a conference entitled Fostering Biimaadiziwin: A National Research Conference on Urban Aboriginal Peoples. The word Biimaadiziwin translates to “living a good life” in the Ojibwe language.

The conference gathered over 300 community members, academics, community researchers, service providers and policy makers to engage in dialogue based on the presentation of real examples of how community members, researchers and policy-makers address the important issues faced by the urban Aboriginal population. Fostering Biimaadiziwin was unique in that it focused on the resilience and successes of urban Aboriginal people as captured by the innovative and positive work presented by more than 85 conference presenters.

Conference presentations covered a wide range of topics within pre-assigned streams and included those related to programming successes and challenges, research innovations and policy development. More specifically, presenters shared knowledge in areas including but not limited to educational and employment issues and success, family violence programming and research, health and wellbeing, early childhood development, cultural safety, youth research
and programming, knowledge development and mobilization, crime, justice, housing and self-determination.

This organizational summary does not examine the actual program outcomes or research findings presented. Rather, it looks at the processes employed by presenters in their efforts in the areas of research, program and service development and implementation, and policy development as they strive to achieve the “good life” for the urban Aboriginal population. Conference notes were the sole source of data, which was analyzed using an inductive method loosely based in grounded theory methodology. Through a memoing exercise themes and underlying concepts were identified and sorted under the categories of research, policy, and programs and services.

Prominent themes and concepts in the area of policy included but were not limited to concerns around a lack of consultation during the policy development process and a lack of capacity by Aboriginal individuals, communities, and organizations to participate in these processes. Discussions in this area also included concerns about self-determination and jurisdiction including the inherent jurisdiction held by Aboriginal Peoples.

Some of the concerns raised in the program and service category included but again were not limited to the capacity to deliver programming, the lack of equitable and sustainable funding. The need to deliver culturally relevant and safe programs and services and to ensure that these services are community and client drive were also reinforced.

Finally in the category of research, presenters and participants discussed the importance of community involvement in research, and the use of innovate methodologies that respect Aboriginal world-views. Other issues related to research ethics were also discussed including to data ownership and knowledge exchange were also discussed.

These findings and others informed several opportunities for learning and are reported as promising practices and lessons learned. Recommendations were formulated based on these promising practices and lessons learned. Some of these recommendations include the development of a process to discuss research ethics within an urban Aboriginal context and mechanisms for informing community based researchers, communities and organizations about the importance of ethical research. Other recommendations include the development of cultural competency tools that respect the diversity of Aboriginal cultures for use by organizations and agencies and the development of an integrated Urban Aboriginal policy framework. The recommendations have the potential to guide
and strengthen future work by the UAKN, the NAFC and other relevant parties in the areas of research, programs/services, and policy development and in turn can potentially improve or enhance the life chances of urban Aboriginal people across Canada.
Introduction
The Government of Canada recognizes three distinct Aboriginal populations, as designated in the Constitution Act, 1982: First Nations (Status and non-status Indians), Inuit and Métis. According to the 2006 Census, more than 1,170,000 people identified themselves as Aboriginal, representing nearly four per cent of Canada’s total population. Aboriginal people are currently Canada’s youngest and fastest growing population. In fact, between 1996 and 2006 the Aboriginal population increased 45 per cent compared to the rate of growth of the non-Aboriginal population, which saw a growth of eight per cent over the same period. In 2006, 54 per cent of Aboriginal people lived in Canada’s urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2008).

While research on Aboriginal Peoples has increased in recent years, there is still a lack of information about those who call urban centres home. This lack of information has led to gaps in policy in programs aimed at this population. In an effort to close this gap, the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) and the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-status Indians of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (OFI) co-led the creation of the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN) in 2007.

UAKN’s goal is to develop a durable research network that focuses attention on urban Aboriginal concerns and contributes to a better quality of life for Aboriginal people living in cities and towns. To accomplish this, the UAKN endeavors to:

- Fund high-quality, objective, policy-relevant research undertaken by research centres that bring together urban Aboriginal community, academic and government perspectives; and
- Engage government, academic and Aboriginal community
stakeholders in an ongoing dialogue on policy priorities and research needs.

During the 2010-2011 fiscal year, in an effort to advance these goals, the NAFC, with support from OFI and in partnership with various government, university and community partners planned and hosted a national research conference entitled *Fostering Biimaadiziwin: A National Research Conference on Urban Aboriginal Peoples*. The word *Biimaadiziwin* translates to “living a good life” in the Ojibwe language. The conference gathered over 300 community members, academics, community researchers, service providers and policy makers to engage in dialogue based on the presentation of real examples of how community members, researchers and policy-makers address the important issues faced by the urban Aboriginal population.

While many conferences lend themselves to deficit-based discussions, *Fostering Biimaadiziwin* was unique in that it focused primarily on the resilience and successes of urban Aboriginal people as captured by the innovative and positive work presented by more than 85 conference presenters. Conference presentations covered a wide range of topics within pre-assigned streams and included those related to programming successes and challenges, research innovations and policy development. More specifically, presenters shared knowledge in areas including but not limited to educational and employment issues and success, family violence programming and research, health and wellbeing, early childhood development, cultural safety, youth research and programming, knowledge development and mobilization, crime, justice, housing and self-determination.

This organizational summary does not examine the actual program outcomes or research findings presented. Rather, it looks at the processes employed by presenters in their efforts in the areas of research, program and service development and implementation, and policy development as they strive to achieve the “good life” for the urban Aboriginal population. Results uncovered several opportunities for learning and are reported as promising practices and lessons learned. Recommendations were formulated based on these promising practices and lessons learned. The recommendations have the potential to guide and

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The theme of living “Living Well Together” examines notions of biimaadiziwin – “living a good life” – to exemplify research and practice that honours the well-being and positive contributions of Aboriginal Peoples in urban settings.
strengthen future work by the UAKN, the NAFC and other relevant parties in research, programs/services, and policy development and in turn can potentially improve or enhance the life chances of urban Aboriginal people across Canada.

**Methodology**

This organizational summary was conducted using an inductive method of inquiry loosely based on a grounded theory methodology. Data used in the analysis derives from notes taken by student volunteers who attended each conference presentation. Notes captured presentation content and discussions that occurred during and after each presentation. The type of notes varied depending on the note-taker, some taken verbatim and others providing only presentation highlights.

**Limitations**

An initial review of the notes was undertaken to identify broad categories within the conference streams for examination. However, upon completion of this review, with consideration of other factors related to the conference itself, it was determined that several limitations prevented a meaningful analysis of the subject matter content of the presentations. These limitations include, but are not limited to:

- Most presentations were chosen through a structured review process developed and administered by a selection committee. Members of this committee included academic researchers and staff from the Office of the Federal Interlocutor (OFI) and the UAKN. While each of these individuals and the committee as a whole possess a wealth of expertise, it is unlikely they would have possessed the level of expertise required to adequately review and ensure the validity of presentations given the vast variety of subject matter.

  Moreover, while most presentations were subject to review, some presentation spots were reserved for sponsors, partners and national Aboriginal organizations. These presentations would be problematic if their subject matter content were to be included in the analysis because of their potentially subjective nature. Originally, it was decided these presentations would not be included in the analysis. They were, however, included as these presentations offered a great

“There is a lot of research about problems and not enough on the successes.”
A deal of valuable insight and other limitations prevented the analysis from being conducted as originally intended.

- The theme of the conference, “living well together,” was a conscious effort by organizers to move away from the social deficit model that has become the norm when discussing Aboriginal issues. While this effort is admirable, the conscious decision to only include strengths-based presentations would result in this report painting a false picture of the challenging realities faced by the urban Aboriginal population.

- The only source of data used in this analysis was notes taken during the conference. Presentation decks were not included. Some note-takers merely mentioned that presenters were reading from slides, without including content from the slides. Furthermore, notes were inconsistent, sometimes difficult to understand and lacked a lot of the context necessary to conduct a fair and legitimate analysis of the material.

- As with most conferences, timeframes allotted for presentations is often limited. Many of the conference presentations were limited to 10 to 20 minutes, thus many presenters were only able to provide snapshots of their work. The preparation of an analysis based on these snapshots would not be fair to presenters and may have resulted in inaccurate interpretation of the knowledge that they shared.

- Discussions that took place during and after presentations served as a relevant source of data for this analysis. However, comments made regarding specific matter cannot be validated.

- Presentations were provided on a variety of subjects. While many overlapped, most varied considerably in nature of content and therefore could not be compared in an analysis. Conducting such an analysis would have required the inclusion of research and information other than that presented at the conference. This task would have been too vast to accomplish in a manner that resulted in a significant or meaningful outcome, nor would it have been possible to complete given the time constraints assigned for the completion of this report.

- There are numerous issues faced by urban Aboriginal people. While the conference offered presentations on a wide variety of issues, it is unlikely that every issue affecting this population was addressed. Therefore, an analysis of only conference presentations and creating
recommendations based on the analysis would have resulted in potentially false prioritization of issues.

**Coding and Analysis**

Despite these limitations, the preliminary review of the conference notes did indicate that presentations and discussions offered a great deal of information regarding the processes undertaken and the challenges and successes faced by presenters in the course of their work. Dialogue that took place among presenters and participants during presentations also offered a rich source of data about these processes and ways of addressing challenges. With this in mind, a second line-by-line review of the notes was conducted and memos capturing key concepts were created. These memos were then sorted and grouped to identify emerging themes (see definitions of themes below). Memos were sorted again and arranged under the categories of research, policy, and programs and services. Some memos were crosscutting to more than one category and were thus included in each. It should also be mentioned that not all themes emerged in each overarching category. It should be noted that because this summary only used data arising from the notes it might not reflect all aspects of the work presented.

When the sorting process was complete, themes were reviewed and summarized and new memos were created. These new memos reflected various concepts within each theme. These concepts were then reviewed to identify ideas that were summarized and formulated into promising practices and lessons learned. These promising practices and lessons learned were used to inform the development of recommendations.

**Definition of Themes**

**Relationships:** includes the concepts of research relationships, inclusion, service provider – client relationships, and collaboration, including collaboration within organizations and agencies, engagement, partnerships and consultation.

**Capacity:** refers to concepts related to skills and skill development, funding, organizational resources including human resources, organizational capacity, student capacity, personal development and community development.

**Jurisdiction:** refers to the belief that Aboriginal Peoples have the right to self-determining and governing and in turn should have control over policies, programs and research. This theme also refers issues related to federal and
provincial government jurisdictions and between departments within the same jurisdiction.

**Ethics:** used to capture concepts related to research processes that had not been captured in other themes. However, these themes were also discussed within the context of ethics. Other concepts include, but are not limited to, informed consent; ethics review processes, data usage and sharing, and data ownership, control and stewardship.

**Methodologies:** refers to the processes undertaken for the purposes of conducting research.

**Communications:** includes concepts identified that related to knowledge translation, health promotion, the dissemination of research findings and knowledge mobilization.

**Policy**
The development and implementation of effective policy is key to addressing the deficits faced by many urban Aboriginal people. Ineffective policies and policies that do not consider the specific and unique needs of Aboriginal Peoples leads to gaps in among other things programs and services that should be assisting the improvement of life chances for this population. As one participant stated, “mainstream policies are still not considering the needs of Aboriginal people.” Several conference presentations and comments made by participants spoke to these issues.

**Relationships:** According to conference presenters and participants, there are several deficits that currently impact the effectiveness of Aboriginal policy in Canada. The analysis uncovered dissatisfaction about the policy development processes, citing gaps and issues related to a lack of consultation and inclusion in the development process. For example, one presenter expressed concerns about the way in which policies related to early childhood education had been developed in Ontario stating that there had been a lack of consultation that resulted in the failure to address the needs of preschool-aged Aboriginal children. Participants indicated that policy development requires that meaningful relationships be developed and

“**Youth** care that their voices be heard, and policies were being placed without the input of the youth. That caused more harm, which is why I like to hear from the youth.”
that policies should be developed from the ground up meaning that those who stood to be most affected by the policy should be included in its development. It was also suggested that policy development requires a ground up approach and that local and regional needs should be considered.

**Communications:** While discussion around issues related to communications and policy development some did indicate that there was a need to ensure that Aboriginal people were informed about policies. One presenter discussed the need to develop ways of communicating policies to community members that are relevant, culturally safe and accessible. It was also suggested that information about policies be translated in ways that do not intimidate or evoke fear.

**Capacity:** In addition to raising concerns about the lack of consultation, concerns were raised about the lack of capacity with respect to the development of policy. One participant expressed his frustration at the fact that he was often the only Aboriginal person at the policy table. He believed that his single voice at these tables was often not heard resulting in the development of ineffective policies. Moreover, it was discussed that there was a lack of Aboriginal representation within the public service at all levels of government and that Aboriginal human resource capacity was essential to ensuring that policies reflect the needs and realities of this population.

Concerns were raised about inadequate funding, the lack of equitable funding for urban Aboriginal initiatives and the lack of sustainable funding. Many indicated concerns about policies related to funding and reporting process. One presenter stated, “imagine what it is like to do proposals and statistics every year but there is only one year of funding. Year after year you get programs going only to have the funding gone the next year.”

**Culture:** It has long been acknowledge that Aboriginal worldviews differ from western worldviews. As one presenter described it, “the Aboriginal world view is based on our culture and language.” The presenters and participants raised concerns about the disconnect between indigenous processes and these ways of knowing and those currently being employed by policy makers. Furthermore, it was suggested that the statistics used by government when developing policies does not reflect these ways of knowing. As one presenter explained,

> “The reporting in what the numbers tell, bring the storytelling methodology and reporting to a policy environment.”

> “Many challenges we face are the result of policies and funding.”
“understanding Aboriginal communities isn’t based on statistics but relationships to people around us, the spirit world and each other.”

Finally, issues related to the cultural relevance and safety of policies was raised with some indicating that policies should be culturally relevant and safe. As one presenter explained, “cultural safety also acknowledges the powers of cultural symbols, practices and beliefs, the idea that we can also venture into [the] political realm and acknowledge individual based issues like self-esteem, self confidence, etc.” It was believed that the development of culturally relevant policies involves the recognition of the differences between Aboriginal groups.

**Jurisdiction:** Issues related to federal and provincial jurisdiction are almost always matters of discussion when developing policies concerning Aboriginal Peoples. A failure to adequately address these issues has resulted in actions taken against the state and has detrimentally affected Aboriginal people’s ability to exercise their inherent rights and access programs and services. Presenters and participants raised concerns about policy gaps created by a lack of cross-jurisdictional synergy. For example, one presenter described how social assistance policies have a negative impact regarding on and off reserve migration. In his province, those migrating from on-reserve to off-reserve lost benefits administered by their band immediately after leaving the reserve but did not qualify again for benefits until they had lived in the city for three months.

Discussions also arose about the jurisdictional issues that were created within levels of governments. Some cited that there was a need to close the policy gap by breaking down silos that existed between government departments. Doing so would help to close the policy and programming gap. However, it was also acknowledged that this was a difficult task to achieve. One presenter stated that, “because we all have our own agendas it is hard to keep up momentum and have integrated planning. Everyone has their own agendas.”

Finally, some presenters and participants raised issues related to the inherent jurisdiction held by Aboriginal Peoples. Those who commented cited that this jurisdiction was all encompassing and included jurisdiction over among other things programs and services. Moreover, it was suggested that failure to
acknowledge inherent jurisdiction interfered with the self-determination of Aboriginal Peoples.

**Promising Practices and Lessons Learned**

- Policies that respect the diversity among Aboriginal groups and have the flexibility to address regional needs and differences will have more favorable outcomes.
- Inclusion of those who will be affected by the policy at all stages of development is most effective. Also, inclusion of Elders and traditional knowledge holders is imperative.
- Policies are more effective when they are culturally relevant, safe and geared towards supporting the success of Aboriginal people.
- Inclusion of adequate and sustainable funding is key to successful policy outcomes.
- Policies that acknowledge inherent jurisdiction of Aboriginal people are a key to encouraging self-determination.
- Incorporation of cross-jurisdictional/sectorial participation will assist in alleviating current policy gaps.
- Respectful and meaningful consultation beginning at the earliest stages of policy development is required in the development of all policies.
- Policy needs that are identified and driven by “community” will be more successful in meeting the needs of urban Aboriginal people.

**Recommendations**

In considering these promising practices and lessons learned, along with others identified during the analysis, it is recommended that the NAFC and other relevant parties explore the development of a specific Urban Aboriginal Policy Framework. This framework should:

- Adopt a cross-sectorial, cross-jurisdictional approach.
- Engage in meaningful consultation with relevant parties including Elders, women and youth.
- Be culturally relevant and safe.
- Be respectful of inherent Aboriginal jurisdictions.
- Be flexible in its ability to address the diversity of Aboriginal groups and regional needs.

“Everything is integrated together and all our community and families are affected by the system.”
Programs/Services
Programs and services that meet the needs of Aboriginal people residing in urban centres are a necessary component of ensuring that Biimaadiziwin is attainable. Throughout the course of the conference, participants and presenters voiced a variety of concerns about program and service development and delivery.

Capacity: It is vital to ensure that individuals, communities and organizations have the necessary capacity to achieve success. Capacity, in its broadest sense, means ability and various factors can impact or undermine the capacity of individuals, organizations and communities. For example, an individual’s capacity to address addictions is impacted by their access to programs. Or, one’s capacity to maintain sustainable housing may be impacted by their social economic status. Similarly, the capacity of organizations and agencies to deliver programs and services may be impacted by a lack of resources or the skills of their employees. Several issues and concerns were raised during the course of the conference that is related to the notion of capacity. Among the issues discussed by presenters and participants were those related to various types of capacity.

One presenter indicated that there was a lack of skill capacity among some program and service providers. They noted that the complexity of issues faced by many Aboriginal people required programs and services be delivered by individuals with expansive levels of expertise. Unfortunately, it was noted that some providers lacked these levels of expertise.

Issues related to funding were also raised, including the need for sustainable funding and the difficulties associated with obtaining funding. One presenter noted that some organizations spend much of their time “chasing” funding by submitting multiple proposals with only minimal return on their efforts. It was also believed that while some communities may not prepared to deliver some programs that should not limit their eligibility for funding. Instead it was suggested that funders work with the community to prepare them for program or service delivery. As one presenter stated, “sometimes we deal with communities who are 10 years from where they need to be. We work with people at any point, that’s project development.”

Jurisdiction: As previously discussed jurisdictional issues can impact the delivery of programs and services and as a result urban Aboriginal peoples often fall through the cracks. In addition to discussing these issues to some extent participants also discussed how programming and service gaps exist within individual organizations and agencies. These can be seen as jurisdictional issues
because these gaps in programs may be the result of the siloed approach program development and funding within government. Presenters and participants thought a more integrated approach to programming would address these concerns. For example, one presenter explained that is often synergy between government departments. Some suggested that programs and services should employ a wrap-around approach where programs and services within organizations and agencies were integrated, thus ensuring they meet the needs of all clients. One presenter said, “the Friendship Centre offers a number of programs. These programs all work together to ensure the clients of the Centre get the best combination of services.” An example of this taking place was provided by a presenter who said, “[W]e started working with the women and then the women asked where are the men because we can’t solve this problem without the men. We need to restore community and a sense of identity together.”

**Culture:** All participants and presenters who commented emphasized the importance of ensuring programs and services are culturally relevant, safe and incorporate cultural components that foster a sense of identity. Presenters noted that in order for programs to be culturally safe, they should be delivered in a safe and welcoming environment and be respectful of the diversity of Aboriginal groups. As one presenter stated, “everything must begin with the culture, it must be at the centre.” Another stated, “you can read about culture but something changes when you participate.” Presenters also cautioned also against the use of a pan-Aboriginal approach. However, it was also acknowledged that this is a challenge. As one presenter said, “there can be a number of cultures and it’s difficult to make sure all of those are respected.” Another stated, “there has always been the struggle of what culture to promote. They are trying to stay away from pan-Indian, and promote everything.”

It was also recognized that Aboriginal organizations and agencies cannot serve the needs of all Aboriginal Peoples and there is a need to ensure mainstream agencies incorporate concepts of cultural safety into the programs and services they deliver. Some also said that by developing relationships with mainstream organizations and agencies and assisting them in achieving cultural competency, they would be more likely to adopt culturally competent and safe environments for those services.
**Communications:** Several presenters and participants discussed issues related to communications and the way programs are developed, promoted and delivered. Some thought that there is a need to promote programs more as some people were unaware that they even existed. Participants and presenters believed that programs and services should be developed in consultation with community.

Many also thought that services should be client driven, meaning they should “meet clients where they are.” One such example of how this can be found at Native Child and Family services of Toronto (NCFST), where services are grounded in the needs of the youth. They offer programming grounded in culture, delivered in a relaxed environment and driven by youth. Moreover, they provide services take a client-driven approach based on where the youth is “at.” While it was acknowledged that client-driven services require more time and effort, it was also noted that such services result in better outcomes for clients. As one presenter stated, “one thing we are emphasizing is the kind of results people expect won’t simply happen. It takes time to get there.”

**Promising Practices and Lessons Learned**
- Programs that are culturally safe, grounded in culture and focus on positive Aboriginal identity have the best chance of meeting needs.
- Client-driven services meeting “clients where they are at” are time consuming but have the best outcomes.
- Assistance to under-prepared communities by funders can result in a community’s ability to successfully deliver programs.
- Integrated services ensure that all client needs are met.
- Positive relationship development and promotion of cultural safety and competency among mainstream organizations and agencies can assist in filling program and service gaps.
- Ensuring that providers have appropriate training leads to better client outcomes.
- Sustainable funding will ensure the success of programs and services.
- Community participation in the development of programs and services are the most meaningful.

**Recommendations**
- The NAFC and/or other relevant parties explore ways of supporting organizations in developing community consultations processes related to the development and delivery of programs and services.
• The NAFC and/or other relevant parties support the development of relationships and promote the importance of cultural safety and competency among mainstream organizations and agencies by exploring existing promising practices and developing a tool for these organizations and agencies. Furthermore, this tool should be flexible to ensure that Aboriginal organizations and service providers can tailor it so that it reflects the diversity of Aboriginal groups in their areas.
• The NAFC explore opportunities to develop multi-year and sustainable funding programs.
• The NAFC explore the development of a tool to assist organizations and agencies in identifying program and service gaps.

Research
Research is a key component in ensuring the needs of urban Aboriginal people are met in a meaningful and effective manner. Research not only informs policy, it also provides the evidence required to identify program and service needs and obtain funding to deliver these programs and services. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on issues reflecting the urban Aboriginal population. Moreover, most research that does exist is largely deficit-based, focusing mainly on what is “wrong” instead of what is “right.”

The conference was an attempt to move away from a deficit-based approach. Rather, a conscious effort was made to highlight strengths-based research. As one presenter said, “our focus as researchers must be on solutions to these issues, and not just the issues themselves.” Presenters ranged from academic researchers and students presenting research that was partial fulfillment to degrees as community based researchers. A wide range of presentation topics provided a snapshot of just some of the innovative work being done across the country. Unfortunately discussions about specific subject matter contained in the presentations are beyond the scope of this report. This report only focuses on the processes taken to complete this valuable research. The analysis of these processes offers insight on promising practices employed by researchers.

Communications: One of the keys to conducting ethical research in any environment is respectful and open communication. Without it, participants and communities can be left feeling like they have been excluded and exploited. As one presenter explained, “Native communities are suspicious of research because there has been a lack of
community involvement." Another presenter said, “universities often come into a community and they ask to borrow kids for research. We need to ask what both organizations need to do the research properly.”

Perhaps the most prevalent concept to emerge from the analysis was the importance of relationships and collaboration in research and the importance of community driven research. This engagement enhances the quality and outcomes of research and ensures Aboriginal ways of knowing are respected and incorporated. In his keynote speech, Dr. Malcolm King said “in order to level the playing field, and really allow for synergy to bring together indigenous knowledge and western knowledge, we need to value community participation.” Dr. King explained “the communities have knowledge; they want to work with researchers in a respectful way, not as subjects but as full participants.”

Most presenters indicated they had engaged or collaborated with participants, groups, or organizations during the course of their research. For example, Our Health Counts is a community-based, participatory actions research project based on the principles of respect, capacity building, cultural relevance, representation, and sustainability and Aboriginal leadership. The project is a partnership with the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Métis Nation of Ontario, Ontario Native Women’s Association and Tungasuvvingat Inuit. Another example is the Canadian Aboriginal Aids Network (CAAN), who abides by principles of research collaboration by ensuring equitable participation by communities to ensure their voices are heard. CAAN also ensures those affected by their research are included on planning committees, including youth. These agreements, signed by researchers and members of the research team, ensure the use of collective decision-making in research and design, cultural codes of conduct and community protocols. What differed was the point at which this engagement and collaboration began and the level of involvement. Some presenters indicated they had engaged at the research planning stage. In some cases, they guided the development of the process and tools to be employed throughout the project. Another presenter indicated they had increased capacity by including an Aboriginal person on their board. There was little mention of communities identifying research need. Others mentioned they had developed special committees to help guide research. Some of these committees included Elders, members of the demographic to be studied, academics, community leaders, or a combination of these individuals.

Another concept that emerged from the conference notes was the importance of communication between research teams, research participants and partners. It
was discussed that knowledge resulting from research belonged to the communities. Also, sharing results with communities would ensure findings could lead to change. Presenters described various ways to share research findings such as at gatherings, community workshops and on the Internet.

**Capacity:** Presenters and participants also indicated that capacity development was a key component of conducting community-based research. Various types of capacity were mentioned. For example, some presenters spoke to importance of including community members as researchers and that providing proper training to these individuals was important. Others indicated that participating in research had the potential for healing, thus increasing individual or personal capacity. In reflecting on her own experiences in research, a youth said, “I was heavy into drinking and drugs, and I wanted to change….She [Tara] asked if I wanted to help out with the surveys and that got me out of the bad scene I was in. I enjoyed being there and having my voice heard.”

It should be noted that while it was not specifically discussed, several Aboriginal students or former students who presented shared research conducted during their academic career. This represents an increase in capacity among Aboriginal people to conduct research and an opportunity for communities to work with students to fulfill their research needs in a cost effective and mutually beneficial manner.

In relation to capacity, it was mentioned throughout the conference that many organizations and agencies were limited in terms of skills and resources. This lack of capacity can limit research opportunities. As one presenter put it, “we can’t meet basic populations’ needs because they don’t have the resources and they can’t find out what they need to make change.”

**Methodologies:** As the majority of presentations were research-based, most presenters provided at least a brief overview of the methodologies used during the course of their work. Several cited they used qualitative methodologies because they presented the best opportunity for community inclusion and change. Some presenters also indicated they used innovative methodologies such as photo voice and story telling because they were respectful of indigenous ways of knowing. It was noted, however, that qualitative
research often did not result in evidence acceptable by policy makers and program funders. To address this, one presenter was able to glean quantitative results from qualitative data collected over time. Other presenters indicated they took a mixed methodology approach by incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. For example, the Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (Tarp) is an extensive two-year community-based study that examined diverse Aboriginal Peoples in Toronto. The study used a mixed methodology to look at Aboriginal life in Toronto including a community survey, person narrative, case studies and photo voice techniques.

**Ethics:** The final theme that emerged was research ethics. Ethics are the foundation of all good research. They outline the way that research will be done and ensure respectful and trusting relationships between partners, research participants and the researcher. They also ensure data arising from research are appropriately stored and not misused. Ethical guidelines also outline the importance of informed consent, data sharing and ownership.

Various ethical concepts, such as capacity building, knowledge translation and relationship building, were discussed across various themes. These concepts play a vital role in ensuring ethical research. Some presenters described specific ethics processes they undertook, including the development of ethics committees to oversee and guide the research process. For example, TARP sought to have their own ethics reviews conducted by the Toronto Aboriginal Social Services Association (TASSA). TASSA also helped guide the research initiative.

Other presenters, whose research was partial fulfillment of their academic requirements or funded by agencies mandated to fund research, may not have discussed ethics specifically. However, it is implicit that their research was governed by formal guidelines such as the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) or Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) guidelines, both of which have specific guidelines for conducting research with Aboriginal Peoples. None discussed how these guidelines translated to the urban environment. For example, how did they define community and how did they work with leadership.

Finally, presenters and participants discussed issues related to data ownership and control. Some presenters and participants thought data ownership and or stewardship was an important part of self-determination. Some presenters indicated they had formal data-sharing agreements with research partners. For example, the Our Health Counts project was guided by a governing council, which
used the approach that data is only borrowed from communities that own the data. They implemented data-sharing agreements to make sure that all partners were aware of their roles and responsibilities. CAAN, on the other hand, follows OCAP when conducting research because “it challenges community and academic researchers to ensure ownership remains in the community.” While there was discussion of data-ownership and control in theory, no one discussed the capacity of communities to safely and ethically store this data. Nor was it debated who should have stewardship of the data if there were multiple communities, organizations, or governing bodies involved.

Promising Practices and Lessons Learned
• Participation in research can be transformative by assisting participants in their healing journeys.
• Student researchers can be a valuable resource for communities, organizations, and agencies that require evidence to support program development and implementation.
• Trusting research relationships grounded in partnership and collaboration are vital to ensuring ethical research.
• The inclusion of community members as researchers can develop valuable skills and develop personal capacity.
• Data ownership/stewardship is essential to self-determination.
• Research that utilizes mixed methodologies such as photo voice and storytelling capture rich data while respecting Aboriginal ways of knowing, and is therefore meaningful to participants.
• Committees can help guide research, particularly when projects are large in scope or take place over a long period of time.
• Ethical research ensures that communities and participants remain informed.
• Sharing research findings with communities/participants ensures results have the potential to lead to change.
• Committees can ensure that research is performed in an ethical manner.
• Research partnerships support self-determination.
• Active research networks can ensure current gaps in research are addressed.
• Informed communities and individuals are better prepared to participate in research.
• Community-driven research is the most meaningful and has a greater potential for bringing about change.
• Culturally competent and safe research is ethical research.
• Conferences such as this provide vital opportunities for knowledge sharing and networking and opportunities for collaboration. These activities can address the issues faced by urban Aboriginal people, which can lead to individual, community, organizational, and system change.

**Recommendations**

In considering these promising practices and lessons learned, along with others identified during the analysis, it is recommended that the UAKN and/or the NAFC undertake a process aimed at assessing the applicability of existing ethical research guidelines by:

• Conducting an examination of existing ethical research guidelines.
• Conducting a series of in-depth case studies using a sample of conference presentations to identify successes and challenges.
• Using knowledge obtained through these exercises to inform a think-tank whose goal would be to develop principles that support or enhance existing guidelines such as the Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP), TCPS and CIHR guidelines.

Findings that arise from these exercises can be used to inform the development of the following three deliverables:

• A foundational discussion paper highlighting promising practices in ethical research within urban environments.
• A guide for communities, potential research participants, organizations, and agencies. This guide should use plain language and include tools for community leaders, managers, boards of directors and service providers to identify organizational and community research needs. It should also inform individual community members about their rights and expectations before, during, and after the research process.
• A guide for researchers who wish to undertake research with urban Aboriginal populations.

In addition to the above recommendation, it is recommended that the UAKN continue to seek support and that options for expanding its network be explored. Considerations for this expansion should include, but not be limited to:

• The development of a network component that supports student researchers in the ongoing development of their research skills.
through networking, mentorship and training. This component should be used as a source to match students with potential research opportunities. Existing networks such as CIHR’s Network Environments for Aboriginal Research (NEAR) should be used to inform the development of this component.

• The current UAKN should ensure the inclusion of community members including youth, Elders and women in network processes and committees.

• Conduct an extensive scan of the literature to identify existing research gaps and that this scan be used to inform the development of a clearinghouse for urban Aboriginal knowledge by the UAKN. Doing so will ensure accessibility to information and inform future research. It will also prevent research duplication.

• That the UAKN continue to offer opportunities to researchers, communities, and policy makers to discuss existing and emerging issues that affect Urban Aboriginal people. These opportunities should include but not be limited to national conferences, think tanks, round-tables and networking sessions.

**Conclusion**

In March 2011, the NAFC hosted the Fostering Biimaadiziwin national research conference. This organizational summary has provided an overview of these proceedings as they relate to the processes undertaken by presenters in their efforts to complete the work presented. The results of this analysis, which were reported under the categories of research, policy and programs and services, highlighted many of the successes and challenges faced by the urban Aboriginal population and those who work on their behalf. Findings clearly indicate that there is dissatisfaction in the area of policy outcomes and development processes. Many participants and presenters voiced concerns about the lack of consultation and failure to acknowledge Aboriginal jurisdiction.

Presenters and participants also raised concerns about the state of programming and services targeting the urban Aboriginal population. These focused largely on issues related to the lack of adequate and sustainable funding and general capacity. Presenters and participants also discussed several positive and innovative activities that were taking in the areas of programming and services. These innovative activities are a true testimony of the passion and commitment of the staff, organizations, agencies and volunteers. Such activities include the provision of integrated and community-driven services that were culturally relevant and safe.
Finally, while there are still gaps in knowledge, these results show that inspiring and innovative research is being conducted with urban Aboriginal people. It is clear that most research was conducted using methodologies that acknowledge the need to work with Aboriginal Peoples in a respectful manner. It was also clear that researchers acknowledge Aboriginal ways of knowing, and have truly sought to hear research participants on their terms. However, there is still much work to be done, not only in specific subject areas, but also in process-oriented areas including ethics and community capacity.

This report also identified several recommendations. These recommendations offer the foundation for a road map that has the potential to close many of the gaps in research, policy and programs and services. Given NAFC’s many successes, including this conference, they are in the best position to lead the implementation of these recommendations. While the NAFC may not be considered a political organization, they do represent friendship centres, which are the primary program and service delivery mechanism for the urban Aboriginal population. As such, they have the duty to advocate for policies and programs that affect this population. This includes self-determined involvement in research and in policy development and implementation. They have the necessary infrastructures such as the UAKN and capacity and only require the financial resources to complete this work – work that will truly foster Biimaadiziwin!

“Including Elders is not an option.”
References