

# The Evolution of Federal Government Support for Native Sport and Recreation in Canada

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Numerous historical overviews have been completed on the federal Fitness and Amateur Sport (FAS) Directorate's role in providing sport and recreation opportunities for Canadians. The provision of FAS programs for particular groups of people within the Canadian population has, however, been largely ignored. This paper examines the historical evolution of programs for one such group-Canada's native people. Government records were utilized to identify patterns of FAS involvement in native sport and recreation services, in terms of three categories: type(s) of activities supported, rationale for government involvement, and the delivery system for these programs. The programs examined were the Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program (1967-1975), the Arctic Winter Games (1970-present), the Northern Games (1973-1980), and the Native Sport and Recreation Program (1972-1981). Identified patterns were situated within the context of larger federal initiatives both for sport, and for native people generally.

The 1970's were clearly the "golden age" of FAS funding for native sport. Prior to this decade there had been minimal dollars directed toward native sport and recreation by the Directorate. Subsequent to this decade, only one program has survived. The increasing focus on elite sport and fitness within FAS during the 1970's, combined with the recognition of a provincial mandate for recreation, decreased federal interest in the funding of native people by the 1980's. The emphasis on fiscal accountability further weakened the case for retaining native support, while poor federal-provincial relations removed the provinces as a potential lobbying force for retaining federal funding in the area. While issues fundamental to self-determination maintained the attention of native political leaders, the Directorate was able to quietly, but decisively extract themselves from three programs of support for native sport and recreation by 1981, without experiencing repercussions from native political leaders.