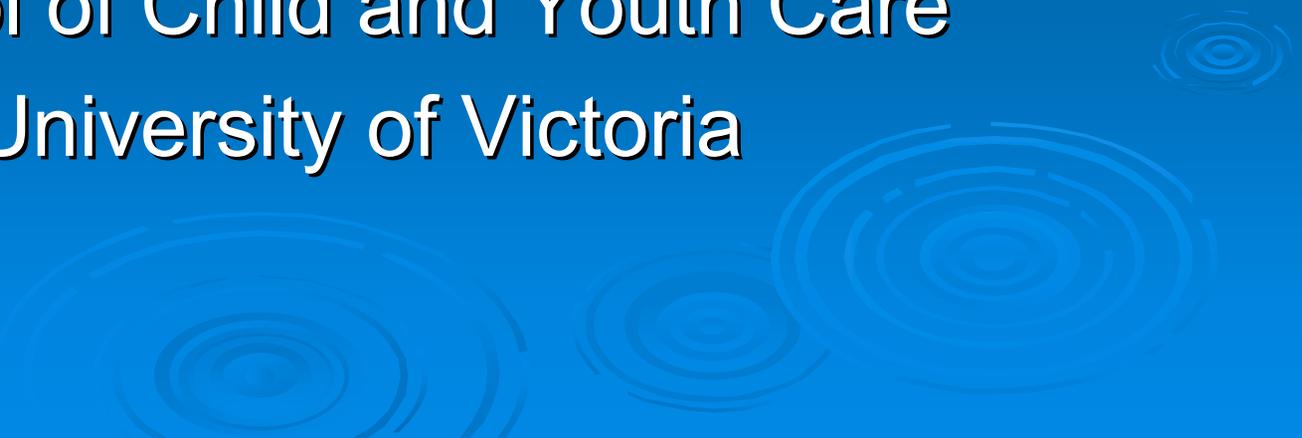# Aboriginal Early Childhood Development and Care

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- 700,000 First Nations & 50,000 Inuit
- 3% of Canadian population
- Avg. age 25.5 yrs :
  - 10 yrs. Younger than other Canadians
- Proportion under 5 yrs 70% greater
- 3% pop. Increase in 10 yrs.:
  - Double the rate for other Canadians
- 800 communities, 77% under 1000
  - Many isolated or remote

Source: Statistics Canada, 1998

➢ Long-standing disparities between Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal in overall health & access to health services

➢ Cumulative effects colonial abuses, persistent racism, & pervasive poverty show on nearly all indicators of health & social well-being

➢ For example:

- Lower life expectancies
- Higher chronic illnesses (diabetes, HIV, cardiac)
- Higher injury
- Higher poverty & unemployment
- Higher suicide & attempts
- 27% single parent families
- 40% single mothers earn less than $12,000/yr.

Aboriginal Children & Families in B.C.

➢ Higher birth rate

➢ More adolescent mothers

➢ 50% off-reserve children in single parent homes compared to 17% in general pop.

➢ Aboriginal children 7 times more likely to be in government care

➢ 40% of children in care are Aboriginal

➢ 52% Aboriginal children below poverty line

"Children are Our Future"

- Many strong socially cohesive communities in urban & especially rural settings
- Value children & support for young children & parents as key to community development
- Emphasis on preserving heritage language and indigenous knowledge of child development and family life
- Revitalization of elder roles / inter-generational
- transmission as key to cultural sustenance
- Enormous investments in strengthening capacity
- Promising practices to meet health & social goals

'Aboriginal ways' in child care and health services

➢ 82% of eligible First Nations & Inuit communities have or are in process of transferring responsibility for community health, primary health, & children's services

➢ Diversity among Aboriginal people about ways forward

➢ Agreement on improving developmental conditions for children

➢ Agreement on primacy of culture

➢ What are 'Aboriginal ways'?

➢ What are 'promising practices'?

Program of Research on Aboriginal ECD (AECD)

➢ Multi-funded, multi-component, multi-year

➢ Attention to Indigenous research ethics & protocols

➢ Community-university collaborations

➢ Focus on selected communities

➢ To yield some guidelines, learning points, & promising (not 'best'!) practices

➢ Mentoring Aboriginal researchers in community agencies & university

- 1998-2001: ECD training program evaluation
   'First Nations Partnership Programs'
- 2001-2003: HRDC funded project:
1. Determinants of successful transitions from training to practice in AECD
2. Incorporation of IK in AECD
3. Community & policy level determinants of program sustainability
4. Determinants and effects of parent involvement in AECD
5. Child health impacts of participation in AECD

Human Early Learning Partnership

➢ HELP (MCFD) funding:

1. Early language facilitation in AECD: Community priorities & strategies

2. Impacts of culturally focused AECD practices on children's self-concept

3. Impacts of AECD on parents' perception & reception of social support

4. Student thesis: Heritage language facilitation in AECD

SSHRC: Major Collaborative Research Initiative

- Consortium for Health, Intervention, Learning & Development (CHILD) Project
- Aboriginal Child Development
- Universal & culturally specific goals & practices
- IK – sources, preservation, continuation
- Culturally relevant indicators of child health & development
- Culturally appropriate assessment tools
- Articulation of responses to dominant culture research questions, human service models, & outcome evaluation

AECD as 'hub'

➢ Early Childhood Development & Care initiatives as central components of multi-sectoral service delivery

➢ Streamlined, culturally appropriate, geographically & financially accessible services

➢ Holistic approach to child development

➢ Laddered service system for support, prevention, early identification, referral, diagnosis & intervention

Documenting Promising Practices

➢ …AECD as 'hub'….

➢ Reciprocal program enhancement

➢ Enhanced social cohesion

➢ Network enhancement

➢ Streamlined administration

➢ Streamlined accountability processes

➢ Case management approach to child protection

➢ Principles & models for other communities seeking self-governance & for social policy