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Moving from vulnerability to vitality: Applying an Indigenous cultural vitality approach to influence the uptake of physical activity and wellness as Indigenous Peoples

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# Health & Fitness Journal of Canada

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## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

### 7th Annual National Indigenous Physical Activity & Wellness Conference Proceedings

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#### Abstract

The 7th Annual National Indigenous Physical Activity & Wellness Conference held on May 4th and 5th, 2019 in Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada. Leading Indigenous Elders and community leaders, academics, researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and knowledge users participated in this innovative conference dedicated to Indigenous physical activity, health, and wellness. This publication contains the peer reviewed abstracts from this conference. Further information can be found at <http://a-pacc.com/conference-announcement-2019>  
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Keywords: Indigenous Health, Indigenous Wellness, Physical Activity, Wellbeing

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#### Introduction

The current series of abstracts were recently presented at the 7th Annual National Indigenous Physical Activity & Wellness Conference held on May 4th and 5th, 2019 in Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada. Leading Indigenous Elders and community leaders, academics, researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and knowledge users participated in this innovative conference dedicated to Indigenous physical activity, health, and wellness. Further information and details about the conference can be found at <http://a-pacc.com/conference-announcement-2019>

The abstracts cover a variety of topics related to Indigenous health, wellness, sport, and recreation. The conference was organized by the Indigenous Physical Activity and Cultural Circle (IPACC), which

is a network for Indigenous people who are involved in Sports, Recreation, Fitness and Traditional Activities. The Vision of IPACC is to establish and expand relationships between individuals engaged in physical activity by improving access to resources, and promote exposure to health and wellness opportunities. The IPACC mission is to create a community of mentors, leaders, participants, and supporters who promote physical activity as a way to health and wellness. For further information please visit: <http://a-pacc.com/about>

**CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS  
MOVING FROM VULNERABILITY TO  
VITALITY: APPLYING AN INDIGENOUS  
CULTURAL VITALITY APPROACH TO  
INFLUENCE THE UPTAKE OF PHYSICAL  
ACTIVITY AND WELLNESS AS  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

*Paul Whitinui (School of Exercise Science,  
Physical and Health Education, Faculty of  
Education, University of Victoria, Canada)*

At last year's I-PACC conference hosted at the University of British Columbia, BC, Vancouver I shared how adopting an Indigenously-informed cultural vitality approach might help influence the uptake of physical activity and wellness as Indigenous people. The presentation included an in-depth literature review alongside a number of examples from both Canadian and New Zealand contexts that sport, fitness, recreation, health, community, and leisure lifestyle practitioners could well consider and adopt in their own unique settings. This year's paper will move the conversation forward from understanding what constitutes a cultural vitality approach to the key conditions that influence the uptake of physical activity and wellness as Indigenous peoples – individually, intergenerationally, tribally, as well as, Nation-to-Nation. Three key questions help to underpin the discussion and will include: 1. What does it mean to be culturally vital as Indigenous peoples? 2. What are the socio-cultural conditions that influence the uptake of physical activity and wellness as Indigenous peoples, and; 3. What examples individually, intergenerationally, tribally, as well as, Nation-to-Nation can we see currently taking place in Canada and NZ contexts that addresses the first two questions?

**INDIGENIZING HEALTH SCIENCES:  
DESIGNING AN INDIGENOUS  
UNDERGRADUATE COHORT IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA'S 4-YEAR  
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE OF  
KINESIOLOGY PROGRAM FOR FALL  
2020 – POLITICS, POSSIBILITIES AND  
PITFALLS**

*Paul Whitinui (School of Exercise Science,  
Physical and Health Education, Faculty of  
Education, University of Victoria, Canada)*

Evidence related to the on-going level of underachievement of Indigenous high school students taking the Sciences, alongside the under-representation of Indigenous students in the Sciences in post-secondary education across Canada is relatively well documented (Snively & Williams, 2016). Indeed, Indigenous 'stories' of understanding, experiencing, and feeling how the natural world relates to human movement, physical activity and wellness remains on the peripheral of many conventional Kinesiology programs, and bereft of Indigenous inquiry methods that are naturally occurring, w(holistically) interconnected, and culturally inquisitive. This lack of social and cultural concordance also appears rooted in the premise that Indigenous ways of knowing are not "sciencey enough". This presentation aims to examine the state of "cognitive dissonance" (Festinger, 1962) as well as "white fragility" (DiAngelo & Dyson, 2018) associated with where power lies, and the issues associated with the on-going power imbalances that impact on Indigenous peoples in the Sciences. Conversely, we now know that Indigenous students who successfully complete a Science degree, not only enjoy greater access to a variety of employment opportunities, they are also able to transfer and apply to do other

specialized Science-based programs if they so choose (Island Medical Health, personal communication, 2018). Presently, the University of Victoria 4-year Kinesiology degree only accepts a maximum of 60 students each year; chosen fundamentally on one's GPA. Of that number, very few if any, choose to self-identify as being Indigenous, due in part, to the lack of Indigenous students who are accepted into the program, as well as, the lack of Indigenous content taught. This presentation aims to share a number of key insights, challenges and learnings associated with attempts to develop space for an Indigenous undergraduate cohort (no. 20-25) in the Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology program to not only co-exist, but also to challenge the existing traditional Health Science conventions to be more inclusive of diversity, and to include Indigenous students. In the journey of creating the proposed Indigenous cohort it was acknowledged within the consultation process that the potential to make a difference in conventional post-secondary spaces definitely outweighs the politics and pitfalls of why we ought not to support the initiative moving forward. Finally, creating an institutional, systemic and interpersonal mind-shift that acknowledges and respects Indigenous students as already possessing prior and extensive knowledge, skills, understandings and experiences related to physical activity and wellness remains significantly under-stated and under-represented. This, and more, will be shared in the presentation.

### **AIR QUALITY AND MESSAGING WITHIN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

*Kai Kaufman (Cardiovascular Physiology and Rehabilitation Laboratory, University of British Columbia, Canada; Indigenous Studies in Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Canada; Physical Activity Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention Unit, Canada)*

Indigenous communities within the interior of British Columbia have experienced significant heat and air quality events over the past three years. The Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) issues alerts to warn the public of short-term health risks associated with varying air quality conditions. Sharing circles were facilitated within a rural Indigenous community to gain a greater understanding of the use and effectiveness of the AQHI messaging within the community. Community members provided feedback to facilitate air quality monitoring within Indigenous communities. Furthermore, community feedback led to key recommendations to incorporate culturally safe health messaging and educational resources.

### **EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF INDIGENOUS CULTURALLY-BASED LACROSSE PROGRAMMING**

*Brittany McBeath (School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen's University, Canada)*

**Rationale:** For Indigenous youth specifically, previous research has shown that greater engagement in their traditional culture leads to increased positive outcomes through strengthening their sense of identity (Gonzales, Knight, Birman, & Sirolli, 2003; Huriwai, 2002;

Lalonde, 2003; Zimmerman et al., 1998). The work of Nelson (2009) has indicated that little is known about how sport or physical activity influences the formation of identity for Indigenous youth, or how and whether these popular discourses impact on their identities and their everyday lives. Therefore, the perspectives of youth participating in a culturally relevant sporting experience are important to explore. The traditional Iroquois game of Lacrosse represents an ideal sport through which Indigenous knowledge, lost through the process of colonization, can be reclaimed and revitalized (Fisher, 2002). **Purpose:** To explore youth understandings and experiences of Indigenous culture in response to a culturally-relevant lacrosse workshop. **Participants:** Twenty-eight students from a Grade 7 class at an elementary school in rural North Eastern Ontario, where 25% of students self-identify as Indigenous (XX Public School, 2016). **Intervention:** The primary goal of the workshop was to provide a culturally-relevant experience for students through sport. The full-day lacrosse workshop included culturally relevant activities such as a storytelling activity on the history of lacrosse and a youth KAIROS Blanket Exercise was led by Brittany McBeath, an Indigenous student certified by Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre as a cultural safety training facilitator. **Methods and Analysis:** Following the intervention, the students participated in a talking circle. They were asked about the meaning of culture, the effects of learning about Indigenous culture in the context of Canada, and their experience participating in the culturally-based Lacrosse workshop. The talking circle was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed thematically using the protocol

outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). **Results and Implications:** Results of the pilot project indicate that there is a lack of understanding of the meaning of culture by students, though learning about this topic through sport is something they enjoyed and would like more of. **Next Steps:** Six workshops are planned to be delivered in May 2019. A mixed methods approach will be taken to systematically collect and analyze data. As these workshops and Lacrosse equipment are funded by the Canadian Tire Jumpstart Foundation, to meet their evaluation requirements, physical literacy will be measured according to the Long-Term Athlete Development Model using the Physical Literacy Assessment for Youth (PLAY) Tools. Participants' experiences will be captured using a talking circle, and a survey. Expected outcomes of the proposed project include increased physical literacy skills, a strengthened sense of cultural identity for Indigenous youth, and an increased understanding of Indigenous culture for their non-Indigenous peers. It is anticipated that results from the proposed project may be used to further advocate for culturally-based programming within the local school system.

### **INDIGENOUS SPORT SPACES: HONOURING STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER**

*Dominique McFalls (Department of Sport Science, Faculty of Science and Technology, Douglas College, Canada)*

These Sharing Circles will be run in accordance with traditional and local protocol. Elders will be invited to participate and advise on the protocol. They will be compensated for their

involvement. These Sharing Circles will offer a space for participants to honour the strengths and challenges of all-indigenous ("all-native") sport and physical activity spaces. Participants will be encouraged to share their experiences of all-native events/programs. Experiences of closed events/programs (e.g., those with ancestry restrictions) and open events/programs (e.g., those which are run by Bands/Nations primarily for indigenous people, but which do not restrict participation by ancestry) are welcome! By coming together, we hope to grow our collective knowledge on what is being offered, what works, and what doesn't. It is our hope that the knowledge we share will move us forward in providing the best sport and physical activity experiences.

### **MY WELLNESS JOURNEY: HEALTH AND WELLNESS KIT DEVELOPMENT, DEVELOPMENTAL ORIGINS OF HEALTH AND DISEASE (DOHAD) PROJECT**

*Rosalin Miles (Indigenous Studies in Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Canada; Physical Activity Promotion & Chronic Disease Prevention Unit, Canada; Indigenous Physical Activity & Cultural Circle, Canada)*

Indigenous Physical Activity & Cultural Circle empowers communities to pursue their vision of health and wellness. It is ideal that a journaling is used as a tool to support goal setting to attain health and wellness outcomes. However, colonial ways of goal setting are not appropriate methods to motivate and adhere to health and wellness goals, such as the SMART principle. Therefore, Indigenous Physical Activity & Cultural Circle (IPACC) hosted community sharing circles in urban and

rural settings and with feedback created the My Wellness Journey health kit, and the WE MASTER SELF goal setting tools for community and personal use.

### **ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES IN INDIGENOUS SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

*Tricia McGuire-Adams (Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, Canada), Bob Steadward (Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation, University of Alberta, Canada; The Steadward Centre, University of Alberta, Canada), Wilton Littlechild (Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, Canada), Danielle Peers (Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation, University of Alberta, Canada), & Linda Robinson (Fort McMurray First Nation, Alberta, Canada)*

We are in an immense era of regeneration of Indigenous ways of being in education, health, law, and sport etc. This growth has resulted in resounding changes in Indigenous-settler relations, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the North American Indigenous Games, and local sport and physical activity programs. While these changes are important, few discussions have addressed issues of accessibility and disability. The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives of accessibility, inclusion, and disability is particularly absent in sport and physical activity spaces. Indigenous perspectives on disability, especially from Indigenous peoples living with disabilities, is needed. For instance, Dion (2017) found that cultural understandings of disabilities within Indigenous contexts is not well known. Indigenous perspectives of disabilities differ than Western perspectives. For instance, a child born with a disability may have been deemed closer to the Spirit World, which conferred

special honour. This type of understanding is missing from the current literature and understandings of Indigenous disability (Lovern, 2017). Moreover, an intersectional approach that addresses colonialism, gender, age, disability, and Indigeneity is needed (Stienstra, 2018). Given these challenges, a group of community-driven researchers and community leaders (some of whom have lived experiences with disability) have come together to discuss Indigenous disability and accessibility issues. We acknowledge that more dialogue and conversations are needed to illuminate accessibility issues in Indigenous sport and physical activity spaces. Thus, in this presentation, we would like to create a coming together of community practitioners, leaders, and other researchers to dialogue about Indigenous disability and accessibility issues in sport and physical activity.

### **IMPACTS OF THE 2018 NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR WINTER GAMES ON YOUTH WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SPORT OF OLYMPIC WRESTLING WITH TEAM INDIGENOUS**

*Dustin Silvey (Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada)*

**Background:** The 2018 Newfoundland and Labrador Winter Games held in Deer Lake, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) were the first provincial games in Canada to have Team Indigenous as a region. This team gave Indigenous youth who otherwise may not have been able to attend the games the chance to participate and compete for their cultural home. Previous research has suggested that participation may lead to increases in

overall wellbeing as multisport events have been shown to increase a sense of community, identity, and can lead to increases in mental health. **Objective:** The objective of this study was to determine if youth who participated in the sport of wrestling at the 2018 NL Winter Games with Team Indigenous saw increases in their overall wellbeing, motivation to seek higher education, and levels of sport participation. **Methods:** Seven Indigenous youth ages 12--18 years of age took part in the 2018 NL Winter Games with Team Indigenous in the sport of wrestling. Each participant completed a survey that measured sport participation, competitive sport participation, physical health, lifestyle choices, and self-worth/self-perception. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical questions and mean, range, and standard deviation were calculated for continuous variables. Content analysis was used to look for themes in additional comments given. **Results:** Participants indicated that the 2018 NL Winter Games had a positive impact on their self-perception, self-confidence, diet, activity levels, healthy choices, and motivation to want to attain higher education. They also indicated that sport has guided them towards making healthier life choices. Participants stated that they would stay active after the games were completed, however the games did not have an influence on these decisions. **Conclusion:** Competing in multisport events can lead to increases in perceived wellbeing and motivation to attend higher education; however, more research examining participation in more sports and regions should be conducted.

### **POWWOW FITNESS**

*Dustin Stamp (Powwow Fitness, Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Canada)*

Powwow Fitness is a fitness class established around powwow dance and music. It combines the basic steps of dance along with strength building exercises and movements which most often involve body weight exercises. In the past, I facilitated a powwow practice class with youth and their parents, and it was during this time when I began incorporating warmups and stretches at the beginning of practice. Over time, the more fitness aspect of powwow dancing developed and evolved into Powwow Fitness.

When you come to my classes, which are welcoming to people of all fitness levels and walks of life, we begin class with a warmup and some dynamic stretching. We then get into faster paced, more intense workout exercises accompanied alongside powwow music and then the class ends with a full body stretch. Powwow fitness is intended to be welcoming for those of all ages and all level of fitness, however, it still provides all participants an opportunity to workout at a level that challenges them individually. This allows participants to make the class as hard as they would like, leaving totally exhausted or not even break a sweat. Most importantly, there are lots of modified versions of exercises to ensure there are no barriers for those whose exercise abilities are varied and again, the class is ultimately intended and made for everyone to be able to join. Powwow Fitness offers many benefits to all participants, regardless of age. Sadly, there are many indigenous people who suffer from diabetes, strokes, heart attacks and other common life-threatening illnesses that develop from unhealthy lifestyles. I

feel that many of these ailments are due to a lack of exercise and poor eating habits. A regular exercise regimen that also connects people to powwow dancing could help decrease the chances of detrimental health effects of unhealthy lifestyles. Powwow fitness helps build strength, endurance, coordination, and flexibility as you get both the physical exercise element of body weight movements as well as the chance to learn and practice the basic steps of powwow dancing. Along with the physical aspect, my fitness class also helps build a person's self-confidence and overall health by encouraging participants to continue to enjoy activities that increase physical activity, culture, and overall well-being in their lives.

### **THE TRAIN-THE-TRAINER PLATFORM: A NOVEL COMMUNITY-BASED AND INDIGENOUS-LED HEALTHY LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION MODEL**

*Henry P.H. Lai (Cardiovascular Physiology and Rehabilitation Laboratory, University of British Columbia, Canada;*

*Indigenous Studies in Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Canada; Physical Activity Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention Unit, Canada)*

Creating inclusive, novel, culturally appropriate, and sustainable prevention programs in Indigenous communities has been challenging, particularly in rural and remote regions. However, examples of success in health practice include the development of Train-the-Trainer models designed to enhance the ability of health professionals and other local health advocates eliciting health change within the community. We have recently created a Train-the-Trainer platform to empower

Indigenous community leaders to be the key advocates of health behaviour change within their own community. This platform is analogous to the successful programs used by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. In partnership with Indigenous communities, the focus of this approach is to train Indigenous community leaders to facilitate a community-based and Indigenous-led healthy lifestyle intervention designed specifically to improve healthy lifestyle behaviours (such as increasing physical activity participation and reducing sedentary activity time). This intervention model integrates an exercise-training regime (utilizing individualized exercise prescriptions) with the delivery of specialized learning modules (facilitated in sharing circles) to enhance effective behavioural change over the course of three months. The sharing circles integrate the latest advancements in motivational interviewing to enhance the participants' intrinsic motivation to meet their health and wellness goals. The novelty of this platform is its community-based and Indigenous-led design. This strengths-based platform includes the aspirations of Indigenous community leaders in the design and implementation of culturally relevant and safe approaches to improve health and wellness at the level of the community. As such, our Train-the-Trainer platform respects the experience, knowledge, and values of Indigenous leaders and their communities by integrating the traditional, cultural, and historical perspectives reflective of local teachings. The inclusion of Indigenous approaches and perspectives concerning Indigenous peoples and their health knowledges and traditions is a culturally appropriate strategy to examine healthy lifestyle behaviours and risk for

cardiometabolic disease and stroke at the community level. This research is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Provost (University of British Columbia), and the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (University of British Columbia).

### **COMMUNITY AND GRASS ROOTS HEALTH PROMOTION**

*Kacey Yellowbird (Samson Cree Nation, Canada; Samson Youth Sport and Development, Canada)*

***How to make it work in a tough environment:*** I am extremely passionate about working with youth and have created alternative projects to engage the grass-roots kids into a project designed to help them overcome fear, discouragement and help deter them from undesirable paths. I have lived here all my life and developed a special bond and rapport with the grass roots youth and nation members of my community and have learned to look past the negative. ***Reaching and Connecting with Grass Roots and Staying there - Hunting - It's history and relevance with today's youth:*** I am thankful I possess the gift of hunting, I use what I was taught by my late Grandfather and created the Community Freezer program 8 years ago by teaching and training youth and young men the art of hunting, skinning, cleaning, cutting and preparing meat for the less fortunate of Maskwacis while providing to cultural events, wakes, funerals, celebrations and feast. Hundreds of families have benefitted from this program over the past 8 years. The initiative is a food security program designed to feed the less privileged to combat hunger throughout the cold winter months. ***Educational Enticing with Health and Fitness:*** I

believe the answers lie within our nation, now is the time to make a difference with the youth. Considering they're a high portion of the population 87% under 30 years of age, planning today for tomorrow's youth is critical. By developing programs that are suitable to their health, their lifestyle, their home environment. To understand what they're thinking and what they want, they need only to be asked. They're perspective is different from the adult version; they've become accustomed too. They know what they want and have so many brilliant ideas to share. ***Gaining the Trust of Youth and Keeping it:*** One thing for sure is you cannot lie to youth; they can see through a lie and know who is for real and who isn't. It's one thing to gain their trust, but it's another to keep it. How I learned to work with youth who are deemed "hard, bad or hopeless" Changing this stigma. ***Leading by Example:*** Because I take my health and wellness very serious, I believe you must lead by example first. When youth see this, they will follow. I was once a scrawny, skinny kid while in high school, although I played sports, I went through my own awkwardness. I used that as a catalyst to change my persona and physical appearance. This was something I could control. Today I work out every day and focus on the educational component alongside fitness by making it fun and useful for youth, nation members and my staff which translated to healthy decision making.

### **FACING ADVERSITY IN SPORTS IN ORDER TO BE SUCCESSFUL**

*Kristopher Buffalo (Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada)*

The adversity that I have to face being a First Nations Athlete trying to make it in

the Western Society of Rodeo or in other terms White Rodeo. Shedding light of how much work was put into getting where I was, with not having any connections but having a goal in mind. No matter how great I know I am or can be I will never be a #1 pick or choice from many stock contractors or cowboys due to being a First Nations Cowboy and being from the reserve. This is from how the media portrays us as First Nations to be. Who got me started me off as a bullfighter was my uncle when I was helping him sort cows, one got loose and it started charging towards me and my uncle watched me from afar of how quick I was to get away from it that is when he then signed me up for my first bullfighting school. It wasn't something that took years to build myself up to get to where I am now, a lot of sacrifices and overcoming many obstacles. How my natural ability to connect with animals turned from a hobby into a career. How I am using my career and gifts to help youth in my community and all over giving them that sense of hop to get out of their comfort zones. I have been working with small children and youth since I was 18 right out of high school it was something I always felt I was good at and you don't see many young men doing this but it is something that makes me feel happy knowing I made a child smile that day or helped bring up their spirits. I strive to continue with this lifestyle when it fits in my work schedule to continue to inspire youth and first nations to just continue on with their goals to become a better version of themselves and break those barriers. I had to prove myself and will continue to prove myself in the bullfighting world and freestyle world.

### **INDIGENOUS                      EMPOWERMENT THROUGH FITNESS**

*Natasha Saddleback (Samson Cree Nation, Canada; Never Stop Apparel, Canada)*

Empowered by physical fitness, it soon became my way of life. I was given the confidence in other aspects of my life when I would set fitness goals and accomplish them. The discipline and strength that comes from training your physical body translates into your life goals outside the gym; whether they are physical, family and in business. My passion became motivating and helping others, I made it my life's mission and purpose, by gaining knowledge and experience in personal training. I facilitated a women's fitness program in my community, it was rewarding to see women build not only healthier bodies but greater confidence. I got to a physical level where I felt it was important to show other first nations physical health is the key to obtaining strength in other areas of life. I have now competed in many fitness events at provincial and national levels. I have established a strong representation in the fitness industry as a way to leverage First Nations. No matter how afraid you maybe to fail, don't live with the regret of not taking action.

### **Acknowledgements**

IPACC would like to acknowledge and recognize that the National Indigenous Physical Activity & Wellness conference is being held on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territory of the Maskwacis people. We would like to honour the Maskwacis, community, and recognize the use of their traditional territory for this event. This place has always been a place of learning for the Maskwacis, people, who for millennia have passed on their culture,

history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site. We greatly appreciate the support of the Ermineskin Junior Senior High School for providing the venue for the 7th Annual National Indigenous Physical Activity & Wellness Conference. This event that promotes the importance of physical activity within Indigenous communities would not have been possible without their commitment to supporting the voice for physical activity, exercise science, fitness, and exercise medicine.

### **Authors' Qualifications**

The authors' qualifications are as follows: Rosalin Miles BA, MHK, Ed.D., and is an active community member of Lytton First Nation. Tommy Yang BKIN. Shawn Hanna is an active community member of Lytton First Nation.

### **Reference**

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