

Foreword

Jerry White, Peter Dinsdale, and Dan Beavon

Introduction

The third triennial Aboriginal Policy Research Conference (APRC) was held from March 9–12, 2009, at the Westin Hotel in Ottawa, Ontario. This APRC, like those before it, brought researchers, policy-makers, and the Aboriginal community together to make connections, hear about leading research, and learn together. While focused on Canada, it also included indigenous peoples from around the world with more than twenty countries represented. Ultimately the goal of this conference is to facilitate better outcomes for Aboriginal people across the country and internationally. This conference is the largest of its kind in the world.

The conference goals were to promote interaction between the various actors in the Aboriginal policy field. Government representatives, researchers, academic institutions, Aboriginal organizations, and Aboriginal peoples all came together to present research, hear from others, and debate ideas. The APRC is structured to facilitate better policy development and the expansion of knowledge. The 2009 APRC accomplished all of this while providing an immediate forum and establishing foundations for ongoing deliberations to occur.

The Aboriginal Policy Research Conferences held in 2002 and 2006 planted the seeds for the success of the 2009 conference. In 2002, the Strategic Research Analysis Directorate of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the University of Western Ontario (UWO) held the initial APRC. The first conference established clearly that there was both a great demand and a need for a conference of this nature. Over 700 delegates attended, and the response of those participating was overwhelmingly positive. In 2006 the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) joined INAC and UWO as a co-chair to host the second APRC. While emulating many of the successful features of the 2002 conference, this conference expanded to include a greater emphasis on graduate students and more in-depth collaboration with the Aboriginal community. The revamped APRC was a tremendous success with over 1,300 participants attending. The 2006 conference also introduced international content with delegates from many countries attending. The United Nations used the conference to host one of its world consultations on Indigenous well-being indicators.

Each of these conferences provided for greater numbers of partners to participate and collaborative opportunities to take place. We, the conference organizers, have learned from our mistakes and our successes to make important advances

with each event. Our aim for the APRC has been to evolve without losing our initial focus and mandate.

As we moved into planning the 2009 APRC, we had hoped to build upon previous successes. The timing of the conference turned out not to be ideal. In late 2008, Canada was clearly entering a recessionary period of unknown duration and intensity. There was great concern about the direction of the economy during the late planning stages of our conference and during the key registration period. This clearly had an impact on the conference. There were those in the government and elsewhere that cautioned us and encouraged drastic cutbacks and even cancellation. We took the prudent path, rejecting calls for cancellation, and in the end decided to proceed with a leaner conference, placing the focus on research and dialogue while maintaining our commitment to infusing culture into the process. In the end, the APRC did not suffer from these actions and feedback has been very positive.

Foundations for the 2009 Aboriginal Policy Research Conference

As with previous conferences, the 2009 APRC was developed to address the need to have an Aboriginal policy-specific process that provided opportunity for dialogue on a wide range of public policy issues. As in past years, a great emphasis was placed on partnering with the Aboriginal community in a new way. The three co-chairs sought to find as many ways as possible to ensure that the broader Aboriginal community was truly involved and cooperated in the delivery of the conference. Three specific actions were taken. Firstly, Aboriginal researchers were invited through a call for proposals process to present their research. This action opened up the APRC to a whole range of public policy actors who did not previously have a natural way to fully participate in the conference. Secondly, the co-chairs invited national Aboriginal organizations to be members of the planning committee and to present their best research at the conference. This helped to ensure that the research priorities of the APRC were reflective of the research priorities of the Aboriginal community at large. Finally, the 2009 APRC ensured that Aboriginal people helped to organize, facilitate, and present all aspects of the conference. This extended from the co-chair position to using Aboriginal businesses and suppliers where they were available. In total, the 2009 APRC represented a best practice for interacting with the Aboriginal community in a truly cooperative and respectful manner.

In addition, this APRC also sought to ensure that a strong focus on the public policy process and its drivers was reflected in the conference. The 2009 APRC provided a forum to hear about leading research on the public challenges of the day. All of our partners—Aboriginal and government—were able to present their research, policy, and programming responses to these challenges. Each of the actors had an opportunity to engage with each other and build bridges to new

understanding. APRC 2009 was no different than past APR conferences, as many workshops on clean water, residential schools, and urbanization of Aboriginal people reflected the headlines of the day and ensured the conference was timely and relevant.

The conference demonstrated yet again that the original cross-cutting design remains relevant today. Stakeholders from across Canada and the world came together to interact. The structured dialogue that the APRC provides allowed for all public policy actors to work through some of the most challenging issues. The 2009 APRC provided an opportunity to learn lessons from past conferences and apply them. There were clearly some challenges to growing the conference in a difficult economic environment and remaining committed to its original vision and mandate. We believe that the 2009 APRC succeeded.

Aboriginal Policy Research Conference 2009

The goals for the 2009 Aboriginal Policy Research Conference were as follows:

- To expand our knowledge of Aboriginal issues
- To provide an important and neutral forum where these ideas and beliefs can be openly discussed and debated
- To integrate research from diverse themes
- To highlight research on Aboriginal gender issues
- To highlight research on urban Aboriginal issues
- To allow outstanding policy needs to shape the future research agenda

In pursuing these goals we sought to make some improvements upon past conferences. Three innovations took place at the 2009 conference. As previously mentioned, this APRC sought greater collaboration with national Aboriginal organizations. After the 2006 APRC, some organizations felt the conference could be strengthened with greater, more in-depth collaboration—and they were right. Organizations were brought on as partners and involved in planning and preparations for the conference. In addition, these organizations were provided with opportunities to present their research.

In addition, a greater international focus was present at the 2009 APRC. Many countries around the world are dealing with the same issues we face in Canada. A larger number of international delegates came to participate in the 2009 conference. Representatives from the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues also participated in our sessions.

Finally, we sought to deepen our commitment to and support of Aboriginal students at this year's conference. A new scholarship for Aboriginal graduate students, which will be delivered through the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, has been developed. The scholarship is named after Gail Valaskakis, a tremendous Aboriginal policy advocate who touched all who knew her. The Gail Valaskakis Memorial Aboriginal Policy Research Conference Bursary will

provide \$7,500 over three years to Aboriginal graduate students. It is a fitting tribute to a remarkable woman who was our friend and conference partner.

In addition, the NAFC reached out to the private sector to find resources to bring Aboriginal students from across Canada to attend the conference. After a call was sent out, over fifty youths were brought to Ottawa. Graduate students were also provided with the opportunity to participate this year; a specific call for papers was made to graduate students to present their research at the 2009 APRC. All ten graduate students that were selected in the cross-Canada competition won a scholarship from the conference!

The 2009 APRC also saw the first ever Cinema N' Chat series during which Aboriginal films and films about Aboriginal issues were shown with some commentary from the filmmakers or special guests. The films ran concurrent to the conference and allowed APRC attendees to explore this medium and learn from the films and their makers. This is one example of the variety of activities that take place during the conference to help facilitate dialogue; among the other activities were dozens of dance, music, singing, and art performances presented around the clock. We had visiting artists from several other countries performing at plenary sessions, evening socials, and in the hallways.

These new innovations were not the only improvements made at the 2009 conference. As in past years, two calls for papers were sent out for interested parties to present at the conference. A call for papers for the academic community was overseen by UWO. In addition, the NAFC conducted a second call for papers by Aboriginal communities wishing to present research at the conference. In the end, sixty academic and thirty Aboriginal community researchers were selected, and their work complemented our partner's papers.

The 2009 APRC also saw expanded partnerships. As previously discussed, a new category of Aboriginal organizations was brought on board as planning partners. In addition, we reached out to government organizations to become financial and planning sponsors. As a result, twenty government partners and twenty Aboriginal partners helped to make the conference a success. It should be noted that the 2009 APRC saw Ontario come on board as a funding and planning partner, the first province to do so. It is the co-chairs' hope that this type of partnership will be expanded at future conferences.

So how did we do? Despite some of the challenges we faced, the 2009 APRC was our most successful yet. Over 1,300 delegates attended the conference. Over 150 workshops and 459 research presentations were provided. Plenary sessions and pre-conference workshops added to the wide range of discussions that took place. Numbers are only part of the story—feedback from participants was enthusiastic concerning relevance, quality, and opportunity to make connections with others concerned with like issues.

Ultimately, it is the new knowledge and learning that come out of these discussions which will speak to the success of the 2009 APRC, and we believe that it is

the very structure of the APRC that will help to ensure its success. The workshops were developed in such a way as to encourage broad reflection on a host of areas and how they impact each other. Justice, social, economic development, health, governance, infrastructure, demographic, and urban issues, among others, are all part of the same story. We are chasing the answers to important questions, and as the conference unfolded we could see progress being made.

Building a Collaborative Environment

As in past years, at the 2009 APRC we sought to ensure the conference environment helped to support our goals. Elders opened each session. Drummers helped to set the overall tone and mood of the conference. Fiddlers, throat singers, and dancers demonstrated the vibrant First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures that thrive in Canada. These were not side events or additions to the conference, but critical pieces that helped to ground conversations and support our collective efforts.

Ultimately, all of these efforts are made to help ensure that we create a better policy and research environment. Policy-makers require solid, evidence-based research to make decisions. Policy-makers also need to ensure that decisions are being made in a collaborative way that addresses the articulated needs of communities. The 2009 APRC provided the policy/research nexus, in a supportive environment, for this collaboration to take place.

The next conference will be in 2012; we hope you will be involved.

Proceedings

The co-chairs have decided that we will continue our tradition of publishing the best papers from the conference in our book series, Aboriginal Policy Research. Volumes 6 through 10 of the series do not represent all of the work discussed at the conference, but a cross-section. The following section describes what is included in this volume of the series. Consider these proceedings our invitation to you to join us in the journey.

Introduction to Aboriginal Policy Research: Health and Well-Being

Jerry P. White, Julie Peters, Peter Dinsdale, and Dan Beavon

The 2009 Aboriginal Policy Research Conference focused on many topics, including the very important areas of health and general well-being. In addition to papers that focus on these areas, this volume also includes a few papers that take a special look at gender issues, as these are a very important part of well-being for Aboriginal peoples.

In **Chapter 1**, Christopher Adams looks at communities in his discussion of what affects well-being. He focuses on many community conditions such as housing, safe water, health services, and schools to see how they connect to the well-being of Aboriginal people in Manitoba in terms of personal health, family finances, and economic outlook. Furthermore, the chapter provides an assessment of how specific community conditions might be linked to mobility among Aboriginal people. The work is based on survey data from interviews with Aboriginal people residing in communities across Manitoba. The analysis gives us insight into how financial and personal well-being can be measured, understood, and used in policy development.

Agnes Black reports on an interview-based study she participated in that focused on awareness and evaluation of current interventions to encourage cervical cancer screening among Aboriginal women in **Chapter 2**. The impetus for looking at cervical cancer awareness and screening is that Aboriginal women in British Columbia have Pap rates considerably lower than the general population, estimated at close to 50% compared to 85% for all BC women. As well, mortality from cervical cancer is as much as six times higher among Aboriginal women compared with non-Aboriginal women in the province. Research on this serious problem is necessary in order to improve testing and outcomes for Aboriginal women in Canada. The policy purpose of this chapter is clear: to provide the British Columbia Cancer Agency's Cervical Cancer Screening Program with an evaluation of their cervical cancer screening interventions for Aboriginal women in British Columbia, and to make policy suggestions of value across Canada, and internationally, for improving how we can reach out to and partner with Indigenous women and their communities. This work will assist health agencies, says Black, "in choosing and tailoring future interventions to improve cervical cancer screening rates for Aboriginal women."

Rick Kotowich and Dr. Mike Fisher look at the problem of sexually transmitted infections and how the Saskatchewan and Alaska jurisdictions deal with

this problem in **Chapter 3**. They examine the policies and administration of the programs, including the role of the Aboriginal peoples themselves. They conclude that there are radically different approaches in place in each jurisdiction, and that each jurisdiction could learn some important lessons from the other.

Carol Herbert et al. from the University of Western Ontario and the Walpole Island First Nation present a paper that achieves two major purposes in **Chapter 4**. First, it is an explanation of how research ought to be done in partnership and collaboration with the community. Secondly, it introduces us to the study they conducted in partnership with one another to test two hypotheses: (1) “The St. Clair River has experienced historical and continuing chemical spills and atmospheric deposition of contaminants ...” and (2) community fear of these “chemical exposures can lead to unnecessary changes in traditional subsistence economies and cultural practices, diet and health status, and disease burden.” The chapter outlines two aspects of the study—an analysis of fish consumption and a biomonitoring study. The authors note the positives that come out of properly constructed partnerships, such as community databases and traditional knowledge capture and retention, while also outlining the extent of the problems faced by the Walpole Island community on the environmental front.

In **Chapter 5**, Capone, Spence, and White look at the relationship between language retention and community well-being. There have been many discussions over the past decade about whether the retention of a language base has an impact on measurable well-being. The aim of this study is to examine the correlation between Aboriginal language skills and well-being in ninety-five First Nations or reserve communities across Canada. They used data from the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey to create a community language skills score, and then looked at the relationship between that score and the Community Well-Being Index developed by the University of Western Ontario and the Indian Affairs Strategic Research Directorate. While the authors find a negative association, they are clear; they do not say that having a flourishing traditional language is a negative for communities. Rather, further research is needed to help isolate what is causing that relationship. They hope that shining a light on this issue will lead to uncovering the processes that impede well-being.

Chapter 6, by Christine Wekerle et al., compares Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth that are in the same city and being serviced by the same agencies. Their data came from randomly-selected active case files in three Child Protective Service agencies in a major Canadian city. They create a cross-sectional view of outcomes for youth in the system, and compare outcomes across and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and youth. They pay particular attention to suicidal ideation (i.e., had the youth considered suicide in the past twelve months). Their results indicate that Aboriginal youth in urban, non-Aboriginal-run child services units report significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation when compared to non-Aboriginal youth in the same system. This study has important policy implications concerning how to deliver child services.

Chapter 7 looks at adapting and developing educational best practices for practitioners providing Aboriginal tobacco cessation programs. The authors, Hillary Connolly et al., discuss the kind of community partnership and control issues that can be integrated into programs aimed at health issues like tobacco consumption. They also draw some interesting conclusions from their work to date that can be incorporated into future intervention strategies.

Robert Rattle develops a type of meta analysis that discusses the “impacts of global environmental trends on First Nations and Inuit well-being, giving special attention to elders and children” in **Chapter 8**. Perhaps the greatest policy implication of this review is that future global assessments and frameworks for health and risk will have to be developed in a culturally appropriate manner.

Josée G. Lavoie and Laverne Gervais co-author **Chapter 9**. Their work emerges from the understanding that we have a fragmented health-care system, which is further complicated by complex and sometimes confusing jurisdictional issues. The outcome is the lack of an integrated, coordinated, and effective health-care program for Aboriginal peoples. They are creating a dialogue around what a national Aboriginal health policy framework might look like. They call for the development of such a policy framework and identify some of the major barriers to its development, such as the division of jurisdictional responsibility between federal and provincial governments, and the rejection by Aboriginal peoples of pan-Aboriginal approaches to health-care policy.

Chapter 10 looks at issues in the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal health research participants. Victoria Nadalin et al. begin with the understanding that research practices in the past were often exploitative and culturally insensitive. Despite the history, there remains a need to recruit participants and seek answers to serious problems. These researchers walk us through the major factors involved in recruiting Aboriginal health participants and offer a good meta analysis of the best practices and approaches. This is an important issue because, as researchers, we have a responsibility to investigate, develop evidence, and influence policy. Even more importantly, though, we have to learn from the past and develop sensitive and participatory relations between researchers and communities.

Chapter 11 is a contribution from Spence and White. They use the current H1N1-09 pandemic to develop an argument that points to the need for economic and social development as a precursor for health and well-being. Historically, Indigenous people worldwide have been disproportionately affected by pandemics. The authors of this paper look at why. They approach the answer utilizing a social determinants of health model, concluding that the epidemiology of influenza gives us yet another example of the core problems facing Indigenous peoples.

Michelle Mann takes on the issue of teen First Nations mothers and the unstated paternity policy in **Chapter 12**. Mann argues that the two-parent rule with regard to Indian status contained in the *Indian Act* combined with the requirement of proof of paternity constitutes discrimination against unmarried First Nations

women and their children. The problem is laid out, and we come to see that there is a need for policy changes that would, through education, increase the levels of stated paternity and/or a move to a system in which mothers can declare registered Indian paternity when they have reason not to state paternity, such as when the pregnancy is the result of abuse, incest, or rape, or where the father denies paternity. It is for these women that Mann makes the strongest plea, stating that “Current paternity policy can have the effect of revictimizing the victim and even creating new victims—women with reason to unacknowledge the father or where the father is absent, and their children. It is an ongoing cause of oppression that impairs human dignity, one that inherently imposes an age-old value judgment on unmarried First Nations women and their children.”

In **Chapter 13**, Elizabeth Bastien introduces us to the Sisters In Spirit (SIS) initiative, which is a multi-year research, education, and policy initiative designed to investigate the disproportionately high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. The primary aims of the SIS are to increase public understanding about the violence that Aboriginal women face and how this leads to the disproportionate number of disappearances or deaths of Aboriginal women and girls, as well as to investigate the root causes of violence, and to identify measures that will increase the safety and well-being of Aboriginal women and girls. This paper presents initial SIS research results and identifies interim policy recommendations that have been developed as a result of the primary and secondary research undertaken through the initiative. Ideas for emerging policy issues are also introduced.

In **Chapter 14**, Sethi argues that, in Canada, current studies and public discussions on human trafficking are failing to acknowledge the issue of domestic trafficking, particularly in relation to Aboriginal populations. We are introduced to the fact that there is an “alarmingly high number of missing, murdered, and sexually exploited Aboriginal girls,” but, as Sethi points out, the issue is most often seen as a “prostitution” problem not an exploitation issue. The study links issues identified by grassroots community agencies dealing with the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls with the human trafficking literature. The paper also makes a series of far-reaching policy recommendations based on the findings, including building community capacity, reforming matrimonial property law, and addressing education to Aboriginal men.

In **Chapter 15**, Richmond and Big-Canoe analyze the existing academic literature on the social determinants of urban Aboriginal health. Their analysis is focused on examining four aspects of published studies: the Aboriginal identity population that is the focus of the research; the geographic region studied; whether social determinants of health are the focus of the study or merely used to contextualize other findings; and the methodology employed. This framework is used to identify the broad gaps in our understanding of the social determinants of urban Aboriginal peoples’ health and to point to areas for future research, such as the need for studies focused on smaller urban centres and research with the

Métis population. They also identify a need for greater theorizing about the social determinants of Aboriginal health in general. Citing the increasing urbanization of the Aboriginal population in Canada, Richmond and Big-Canoe argue that urban-focused research is vitally important to inform Aboriginal health policy and programming.