



GAMES TIME: ISWO LAUNCHES VIRTUAL GAMES FOR ALL AGES AND ABILITIES WITH A FOCUS ON FUN AND WELLNESS

Well Nation Virtual Games developed to engage Indigenous youth and families in Ontario, through inclusive and fun challenges, aimed at enhancing wellness during difficult times.

Mississauga, Ontario - March 1, 2021 – Indigenous Sport & Wellness Ontario (ISWO), the designated and officially recognized Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Body for the province, launched registration today for the 2021 Well Nation Virtual Games. A new event, inspired by Special Olympics Ontario and Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, the Games are intended to support Indigenous youth and families by enhancing wellness and raising spirits. The 2021 Well Nation Virtual Games are open to all Indigenous Peoples in the province of Ontario, and are inclusive for all ages, stages and abilities. The focus is on getting active, having fun and doing something together as a family or as a community, in a fun and COVID safe way.

“The Well Nation Virtual Games is an opportunity to bring people together, through a virtual environment, where they can have fun, destress and enjoy being active,” says Marc Laliberte, President of ISWO. “It’s been such a tough year – youth, families and communities are struggling to deal with the many implications of the COVID-19 pandemic – many of whom are already dealing with a myriad of other challenges. The Games provide an opportunity to come together, young and old, to just have fun and be part of something bigger than ourselves. Through the Virtual Games, youth can compete with their friends, families can play games together and communities can connect – even though that’s not physically possible at the moment. ISWO, like everyone else, has had to adapt and pivot during these times, and we’ve done everything from sourcing and delivering food items, hand sanitizer, personal hygiene products and masks; to donating and shipping sporting equipment; to providing funding for existing community programs; to hosting online programs including fitness, youth leadership; and much more. It’s been challenging, but also rewarding. We’ve been able to connect with so many communities and families, and it’s nice to know that we’re helping, even if it’s just a small contribution, it’s something.”

Registration for the 2021 Well Nation Virtual Games runs from March 1-14, with the actual Games taking place for ten days, from March 15-25. To register, simply visit virtualgames.iswo.ca and fill out the online registration form; once you’ve confirmed your account, you can add additional family members. There are three (3) age categories for the Games: ages 1-12; 13-19; and 20+. Families can register together, but each participant competes within their own age category. To compete, participants simply choose the activities they’re interested in, and upload a video or picture of them completing the activity to earn points; there are also a number of bonus challenges to earn additional points. For those with a competitive streak, leaderboards will showcase who’s in the lead for each age category overall. All 2021 Well Nation Virtual Games participants will receive a free prize pack, mailed to their door, which includes a Games branded t-shirt, a Team

Ontario pin and a hacky sack. Virtual Games participants have until 11:59 p.m. on March 25, to complete their activities and submit their pictures and videos for points.

ISWO will host a Closing Ceremony live on Facebook on Friday, March 26, at 12:00 noon (EST), to commemorate the event and announce the winners in each age category (five winners will be selected from each age category to win a traditional Indigenous games set, valued at \$60 and a \$50 Amazon gift card) and the six grand prize winners (who will each walk away with a \$500 Canadian Tire gift card).

With more than 900 participants in ISWO's Well Nation January Boot Camp program, the organization is expecting a large number of participants to take part in the 2021 Well Nation Virtual Games.

“Although ISWO is unable to provide in-person programming at the moment due to COVID-19 limitations, the organization is doing all that it can to support both individual and communal wellness through online programs and community-based funding opportunities,” says Mekwan Tulpin, High Performance and Sport Coordinator at ISWO. “As an avid multi-sport athlete, current sport leader of Team Ontario as well as former NAIG competitor, I understand the disappointment and frustration that many of our youth are facing with the cancellation of the 2020 NAIG and the 2020/21 NAHC. We've also become more stagnant in our day to day living. Youth need a positive outlet, and to feel like they are part of something again. It's time to reactivate that amongst each other, and we hope that the Virtual Games will help bring us all together in an uplifting way. Games and sport have always been central to our lives as Indigenous Peoples; movement is medicine and we need that more than ever right now – we just need to find some creative and safe ways to do it, until we can be together again in person.”

The 2021 Well Nation Virtual Games are funded by the Government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, and supported by Canadian Tire Jump Start.

For more information visit virtualgames.iswo.ca.

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Indigenous Sport & Wellness Ontario (ISWO) Quick Facts:

- ISWO is the designated Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Body (P/TASB) for the province of Ontario, funded through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport and Sport Canada.
- ISWO serves all Indigenous Peoples and communities across Ontario, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, living on and off-reserve, in rural and urban settings, encompassing more than 350,000 Indigenous Peoples in the province.
- ISWO promotes and creates opportunities for participation in sport and cultural activities that promote wellness and positive lifestyles for Indigenous Peoples across Ontario.
- ISWO is recognized by the Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC) and the North American Indigenous Games Council, and is the designated sport body for the development, selection and

management of Team Ontario, which participates in the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships and North American Indigenous Games.

For more information about ISWO, visit iswo.ca.

Acknowledgement

ISWO honours the traditional lands and homelands of all Indigenous Peoples and communities across the province of Ontario, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis living both on and off reserve, in rural and urban communities.

Contact Information:

Indigenous Sport & Wellness Ontario (ISWO)
Abidah Shirazi, Marketing and Communications

Abidah.Shirazi@iswo.ca