



## **IMPORTANT MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** All Hockey NL Members

**FROM:** Directors, Hockey NL

**DATE:** January 2, 2026

**SUBJECT: Elite Hockey Review**

Hockey NL commissioned an external committee in 2025 to review and study the current landscape of competitive hockey (Elite) within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Committee had a term of reference and were made up of individuals with diverse backgrounds.

The Committee completed surveys with key stakeholders including parents, coaches, administrators and officials, and researched the landscape across all regions and genders. Interviewed a number of individuals with relevant feedback.

We have received their final report, which is attached, and we are now currently reviewing the suggestions and recommendations with Hockey NL personnel including directors, council members, and staff.

We have not accepted any of the recommendations to date and are working diligently to determine what would be feasible within the report that would support improvements in our programs.

We like to publicly thank the Committee, the stakeholders and the members for their participation and attention to this important area of our organization.

Attachment

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Hockey Newfoundland and Labrador  
Elite Hockey Review Committee  
Report

Confidential

May 2025

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## INTRODUCTION

Hockey NL established a review committee to undertake the task of reviewing the current state of Elite Hockey in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Components of this review included, but were not limited to the operations, policies, procedures and other aspects of the program. The committee was tasked to provide guidance, assistance and expertise in the development and implementation of effective best practices for the organization in the area of Elite Hockey within the Hockey NL structure. The work of the committee established a variety of recommendations for consideration by Hockey NL and their Board of Directors.

The Elite Hockey Review Committee undertook various steps to collect feedback and input from members of Hockey NL including interviews, questionnaires, on-line surveys, review of documentation and other identified activities within the work plan. In addition to the initiatives which occurred within the Membership, the committee also looked at other provincial branches to analyze their Elite Hockey set up.

Members of the Elite Hockey Review Committee included:

- Trevor Murphy
- Karen Bursey
- Brian Casey
- Jocelyn Thibault
- Cherie Piper
- Stephanie Poirier

The committee was formed to review the following:

- Reviewing current Elite Hockey programming.
- Collecting feedback from stakeholders past and present.
- Assessing best practices for elite hockey programs.
- Examining the program's financial structure.
- Proposing improvements to policies and procedures.

This document is structured to identify key findings or observations of the Elite Hockey program and then providing to the Hockey NL Board of Directors recommendations that may be considered for the future.

## PROCEDURES & METHODS

- Reviewed various documents with respect to policies, regulations and other relevant information pertaining to Elite Hockey with Hockey NL
- Conducted Virtual Interviews with 26 people. These individuals come from a variety of backgrounds and have had different levels of involvement with hockey in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Carried out a survey which was requested to be emailed directly to all AAA program families in the minor and female divisions. The survey was also available via the Hockey NL website and social media channels to allow for anyone else within the HNL structure to provide feedback. There were 600 respondents to the survey.
- The committee received several written submissions from individuals with experience in the HNL Minor Hockey structure. Each of these submissions were reviewed by the committee.
- The committee requested information from each of the other provincial and territorial branches with Hockey Canada's structure with respect to their Elite Hockey programming. The information which was received was reviewed by the committee.

## CURRENT STATUS

Within Hockey Newfoundland and Labrador, the Elite Hockey Structure is comprised of the following divisions for the 2024-2025 season.

### **U13 AAA Minor**

- Eastern Hitmen
- Eastern Thunder
- Eastern Knights
- Tri Pen Osprey
- Central Ice Pak
- Western Kings

### **U13 AAA Female**

- Tri Pen Ice
- Central Ice Pak
- Western Warriors

Of note, there was not an Eastern representative in the U13 AAA league this past season. A decision was made to try a pilot program with the U13 AAA Eastern Players playing in the DJHL as a team.

### **U15 AAA Minor**

- Eastern Hitmen
- Eastern Thunder
- Eastern Knights
- Tri Pen Osprey
- Central IcePak
- Western Kings

### **U15 AAA Female**

- Eastern Ice Breakers
- Tri Pen Ice
- Central Ice Pak
- Western Warriors

### **U16 AAA Minor**

- Eastern Hitmen
- Eastern Thunder
- Tri Pen Osprey
- Central Impact
- Western Kings

### **U18 Major**

- East Coast Blizzard
- Pinnacle Growlers
- Tri Pen Osprey
- Central Impact
- Western Kings

### **U18 AAA Female**

- Eastern Ice Breakers
- Tri Pen Ice
- Central Ice Pak
- Western Warriors

Of note, there is a U15 AA League which is run as a part of the Don Johnson Hockey League which is hosted on the province's east coast. This U15 AA league consisted of 4 teams during the 2024-2025.

There is also an AA program running in Central Newfoundland which consists of teams from that region.

On the female side, the committee is of the understanding that there was no AA program during the 2024-2025 season.

The U13 AAA, U15 AAA and U16 AAA Divisions on the minor side are led by HNL's Minor Council, with a league executive and league administrator overseeing the operations of the league. The U18 Major Division is led by a league executive with oversight from HNL's Minor Council.

The U13 AAA, U15 AAA and U18 AAA Female Divisions are led by HNL's Female Council and there is an administrator which oversees the day-to-day operations of the program.

The DJHL is led by a league executive with a League Director who oversees the day-to-day operations of the program. HNL's Minor Council would have oversight on this league.

In addition to the leagues noted above, Hockey NL is also offering their High-Performance Program which consists of the Male U14, Male U15, Male U16 and Female U14, Female U16 and Female U18 streams.

The Male U14, Male U15, Female U14 and Female U16 programs consist of a spring evaluation, summer development camp and competition in October of each year at the Atlantic Challenge Cup. For the Male U16 program, players are identified during the season for attendance at a summer development camp and a team is chosen for the QMJHL Challenge. For the Female U18 program, players are identified during the season for a camp in December. From this camp and continued evaluation, a team is chosen for the Atlantic Challenge Cup in May.

#### LEAGUE COMPOSITION

Over the years, there has been much discussion with respect to the right number of teams at each of the levels of Elite Hockey in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. As expected, during the course of this review, we have heard many thoughts regarding the right number of teams, how zones are divided, geography challenges and so much more.

If we are truly committed to development, while at the same time creating a competitive environment for the players in our system, we must aim to find the correct balance. As we do this, let's remember that hockey is a late development sport and that we cannot dismiss players too early in their hockey journey so that they do not have the opportunity to develop and potentially turn into a high-level player. Finding the right mixture of competition, development, student-athlete life balance is not easy.

## Recommendations

- Minor Hockey U13 AAA and U15 AAA levels should remain with their current number of teams. The three teams in the Eastern Zone have allowed for more players to be involved with Elite Level programming where there is a greater number of players involved with the game. There should continue to be one team from Tri Pen, one team from Central and one team from Western. This number of teams have allowed for development to occur and player evaluation for future opportunities to remain. It has also created greater competition at this age group throughout the season.
- Female Hockey U13 AAA should add an additional team from the Eastern Zone. Adding an additional team at this age level will allow for more players to be exposed to this level of hockey as they continue their development journey. It also has the potential to add more consistency in competition for the league. The league would be comprised of 2 Eastern Teams, one team from Tri Pen, one team from Central and one team from Western. We must remember that these players are 11, 12 years old. They are early in their development and early in the competitive process. Provide an opportunity for more players to experience this level of hockey. Hockey is a late development sport – keep more players playing at the earlier age groups.
- U16 AAA should remain with their current number of teams but should consider becoming a U18 Minor AAA league. Still have a focus on 1<sup>st</sup> year players at this age group but allow for more players who are on the verge of U18 Major hockey to remain in the system and allow development to occur in preparation for a call up to the U18 Major programs.
- U15 AAA and U18 AAA Female should remain with their current number of teams. At the U18 AAA level, there have been three different winners over the past 3 years of the provincial championship and representatives at Atlantics. Programs in all areas of the province must look for ways to develop their programs and provide opportunities for their players to develop and improve throughout the season. In another section of this document, the committee will provide recommendations with respect to program expectations. The committee would like to see a team(s) in each region, but there needs to be an established program creating a pipeline of players which would keep each region competitive at this level and providing a quality experience for their players.
- U18 Major should remain with their current number of teams. However, the committee is suggesting that there is a possibility that the league could reduce from 5 to 4 teams in the near future. The committee would like to see a team(s) in each region, but there needs to be an established program creating a pipeline of players which would keep each region competitive at this level and providing a quality experience for their players.
- We do not think that every weekend of play needs to be a tournament format. Look at what option makes the most sense from a competitive, cost-effective, and development perspective. Example - Are there options to have more neighbouring regional play as to cut down on some travel?

- Consideration should be given for a full play-off format to determine provincial winners and Atlantic representatives, as opposed to weekend tournament style play.

## PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS

If teams are sincere about creating an Elite Hockey experience for their players and families, then there must be a reset on the overall expectations for high level programs in our province. There are some teams and programs who seem to be providing a true high-level program, while other programs are not. There could be many different reasons for the lack of consistency amongst programs, but if we want players and families to be choosing Hockey Newfoundland and Labrador programming, we need to determine what are the must haves for this level of hockey.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- All teams at the AAA level must register to be a part of Hockey Canada's Gold Medal Pathway Program. This program is a framework designed to develop high-performing coaches, staff and athletes. It focuses on maximizing the potential of emerging high performers through a consistent, deliberate development process.
- Hockey NL will create an "Elite Hockey Checklist" which will contain all of the things which will be expected of programs each season. This checklist will contain things such as skill development coach, goaltending coach, mental skills training, off ice training and much more. Hockey NL should instill an audit for these programs, or some type of review that will create some accountability to the programs which are being delivered.
- HNL and/or associations should determine a process whereby game and practice slots are set aside for pooled teams. Understanding that there are challenges for ice time in a lot of areas, AAA teams are in a tough spot once DOPs are selected and teams are chosen to find ice time at these later dates.
- Programs with geography challenges should be looking at billeting opportunities for their athletes. While we speak of expectations for the programs, there is also an expectation for players and families who are selected for these experiences to be available for all team activities. We are understanding of the travel demands due to geography in the province. Billeting may assist with attendance at team activities, finding a better balance between student-athlete life balance and allowing for programs to deliver on expectations.
- Understanding the geographical and other challenges, programs at the AAA level need to be looking for opportunities for their players and bring their programs to the next level. Exhibition games within their region against teams which would provide a competitive environment, Skills Camps / Development Sessions with qualified skills coaches are just some examples. Look at the best practices throughout the province and look to establish similar opportunities within each region.

- Create a defined Affiliate Player (AP) program across all teams, especially in regions with multiple teams. Having a defined set of guidelines will give direction to the teams, while at the same time, providing a clear picture for families as well. Things such as practice attendance, swag being offered, fees and more should be considered.
- If Fair Play is going to be a feature of these leagues, then proper mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that rules are being followed. It would be expected that coaches would follow these rules and ensure that development is at the forefront of their coaching. That being said, we understand that this does not always happen and there needs to be a process to track this and correct where and when needed. If rules are not going to be enforced properly, then rules should be adjusted.
- Determine what the overall objectives are for AAA programs and ensure that these objectives are communicated clearly to all involved. All decisions regarding these programs should be aligned to the overall objectives of the programs.

### DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

While Elite Hockey is a competitive environment, it must never be forgotten that these programs are development stepping stones for future hockey opportunities. While it is always nice to win a championship, the true measure of success as a program will be the number of players who are still playing the game at a high level as their journey continues. Remembering that athletes will develop at a different pace and that every athlete is different – keep the big picture perspective in mind when developing your programs.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create development opportunities within each region which will benefit all high-level players. Skills Coaches and other highly qualified coaches who can be engaged with separate skills sessions and/or team connected to team sessions. Overall skill development, position specific development and more. Sessions can be executed with players from various teams to assist with ice time demands, variety of coaching knowledge, learning opportunities for all involved.
- Create goaltending opportunities which will benefit all high-level goalies. Enhanced engagement of highly qualified goalie coaches who can offer separate sessions and/or be connected to team sessions. Goaltending Coaching for all programs at this level is a must.
- If players try out for a program and are not selected, allow them to be considered for another program prior to them being assigned an Affiliated Player (AP) opportunity. If players are good enough to be playing at the Elite Level, let's work together to find a place for that player to play on a full-time basis.

## GOVERNANCE

There is a lot expected of Hockey Newfoundland and Labrador's Minor Council and Female Council. We must determine the best way for hockey to be delivered in this province at all levels. Whether it is grassroots, competitive or high-performance hockey – each division has requirements. The volunteers delivering hockey throughout the province are dedicated and passionate. Is there an opportunity to enhance the way that hockey is delivered, perhaps take some pressure off volunteers and potentially generate further interest from volunteers to get involved in the game at a level which interests them and allows them to give back to their local and provincial organization.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a “High Performance Hockey Commission” which will oversee the delivery of all high-performance hockey in the province. Moving in this direction will allow a group of directors to execute this level of hockey in the province, while allowing Minor Councils to deliver on all levels of minor hockey in the province. Minor Council would still have oversight and a representative(s) on this newly formed group but would not be involved in the day-to-day operations.
- Consider hiring a person (part-time / honoraria) to be the contact person for Elite Hockey in the province and work closely with the new Commission which has been recommended.
- Suggested positions would be:
  - Commissioner
  - Deputy Commissioner
  - Minor Council Representative
  - Female Council Representative
  - Coach Representative
  - Official Representative
  - Player Representative – Minor
  - Player Representative – Female
  - Parent representative
  - Director at Large
  - Director at Large
- Ideally non-parents would make up the majority of this Commission.
- Create Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which will assist this Commission and other stakeholders in making good decisions and providing a consistent and fair review of teams and leagues. Will assist in making data driven decisions as programs move forward.
- Managers and Coaches need proper direction, policies and procedures with respect to expectations of the program. Having Minor Council or Female Council members oversee these teams is a big ask for people who have to be focused on all aspects of hockey in the province. By creating the High-Performance Hockey Commission

and/or having these teams “owned” by another group outside of Minor and/or Female Council, we feel that this could assist with the overall governance and guidance of these teams.

## FRANCHISING

As we look for opportunities to create more alignment and development consistencies throughout the program, the committee does feel that there is an opportunity to expand the franchise model.

The franchise model is currently being used in the U18 Major division and overall seems to be working quite well.

The committee is of the belief that the expansion of the franchise model could assist the overall programs, player development, and coach development. In addition, it may also provide the players and their families with some clarity from year to year with respect to their hockey journey at the older age groups.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- U18 Major Franchises should take over the U16 AAA teams to create alignment at this age group. Create greater opportunities for development initiatives, player movement, fundraising, cost saving measures, skills coaching and more.
- The above suggestion would be a good starting point for expansion of the franchise model. If the model proves to be successful, continue to look for other opportunities to expand in future years.
- Female U18 AAA should consider moving to the franchise model. There is a possibility here for the franchising to expand to the other divisions, but start with U18 AAA and re-examine after year 1 or 2. This could be a starting point for aligned development opportunities, creating a level of expectations in each region and building the foundation for a culture through each of the programs.
- With respect to franchising, there should be a list of questions and answers provided prior to any franchises being awarded. Below are a few examples:
  - Detailed report/documentation of your franchise before being awarded any specific team.
  - What is your mission statement and vision as ownership?
  - What qualified Coaches and Staff will you be hiring, and will you interview possible candidates?
  - Financially, do you have secure sponsors or other means of revenue stream to ensure the stability of the Franchise?
  - What would a typical weekly schedule look like for your team? (Practice to Game ratio)
  - Would your team be going to any off the Island tournaments?

- Will players receive constructive teaching video sessions, quarterly reports on their performance and other means of player development?
- Will your program offer an off-ice training program to enhance player's development?
- Will you actively be working with in partnership with the U18 Major programs / U18 AAA Female Programs?
- Will you actively be promoting your program through various Social Media platforms?

## PARTNERSHIPS

The creation of partnerships – corporate, financial, community and hockey will be extremely important if HNL is to take another step forward with respect to their high-performance programming. Providing exposure for the players, families, coaches and officials is an integral piece of high-level programs. Elite Hockey in this province brings with it interesting opportunities for partners to come on board to be a part of an exciting segment of HNL programming and at the same time providing them with valuable exposure amongst families, young people and other community minded organizations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a committee and/or hire someone (part-time / honoraria) to explore corporate partnership opportunities. There could be benefits for high level programming, as well as grassroots and competitive divisions.
- In addition to corporate partnerships, HNL and teams should be looking to engage more community partners. These types of partners will assist on many levels with regards to support, community engagement, and providing promotion for your teams.
- Determine opportunities to create stronger connections to minor hockey associations throughout the province. These partnerships are important on so many levels. As opposed to being seen as competing interests, there are opportunities for all groups to mutually benefit.
- Create a partnership with the Newfoundland Regiment – QMJHL Team. Having this team in the province will increase exposure for all involved with Hockey NL programming. Potential opportunities for showcase events, coach / player development, QMJHL scouts in the province more often.
- The Female Programs should be looking for opportunities to connect with the WJAHL. This could be a great opportunity for both groups to mutually benefit.

## FINANCIAL

This section is connected with the above discussion regarding partnerships, but regardless, HNL, leagues and all involved with High Performance Hockey must be willing to work together to find opportunities to keep the costs down for those involved. Fully understanding that there are some costs which cannot be avoided, the committee encourages all involved to think outside the box for solutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a template for team budgets which teams must adhere to during the season. Keep some consistency amongst teams to avoid teams “going overboard” with swag, perks, etc. There should be must haves with AAA programming but keep things in perspective in an effort to run an excellent program, while at the same time ensuring that we are considering families of all financial backgrounds when making decisions.
- Look for opportunities to share expenses. Ex. Is there a way to create schedules so that teams from same region travel together for weekend play? Teams from the same region working together on fundraising and cost efficiency processes.
- HNL is encouraged to re-examine how bank accounts are created for AAA teams in the province. We have received some feedback about HNL owning the bank accounts for each team and adding the DOP at the start of each season. DOP and/or Team Managers should not be having sole responsibility for these accounts.

## COACH DEVELOPMENT

It has been noted on multiple occasions that coaches have the greatest impact on an athlete’s experience in sport. No matter what level of the sport, coaches need to be focused on providing a positive, development experience for their athletes.

Hockey NL is fortunate to have some excellent coaches, but there needs to be a focus on creating a deeper pool of coaches, while ensuring that all coaches have the opportunity to continue their development. Continual learning for coaches is imperative as the game is always changing and players are wanting to learn more.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Coaching selection process needs to be enhanced. Coaches at this level must be able to showcase that they are ready to coach at this level, capable of creating a seasonal plan, understand the aspects of coaching today’s athletes and much more.
- Recruit coaches where and when needed. If getting the right person to lead these programs means that leaders will need to go out and recruit coaches – then this should happen. Coach selection process should be open, transparent and well communicated, but ensure that there is a focus on getting the right people to coach these teams.

- Would encourage HNL to mandate attendance at each of the virtual coach sessions which they host with guest presenters throughout the year. Opportunity for continual learning. Whether it is all coaches or at minimum of one coach from each staff, these types of opportunities cannot be missed.
- Coaches at the higher age levels should be willing and find a way to give back to the coaches at the younger age categories. Start creating consistencies within the regions and ideally throughout the province.
- When selecting coaching staffs, the aim should be to bring people with different skill sets so that the players benefit from a diverse coaching staff. This relates to the technical aspects of the game but also relate to coaching these athletes and knowing how best develop them on and off the ice.
- Where possible, select coaches who do not have children involved with the particular team as the head coach of these high-level teams.
- HNL has more players and coaches with high level playing and/or coaching experiences in our province than ever before. Find opportunities to get these people involved in AAA programs, High Performance Programs, Skills Coaching and other programming which will be assisting with the development of players in this province.

## OFFICIALS

The Officials Program within Hockey Newfoundland and Labrador has been doing a lot of great work with respect to the development and opportunities which are being provided for their officials.

We understand that officials are a vital part of the game and that officials are continuing to develop and evolve just as the players and coaches are doing each and every time that they step into an arena.

During the work which was done for this report, we heard many positive comments towards the officiating currently happening at this level of hockey in the province, however, we also received some concerns with respect to the assignment and performance of officials, especially at key times of the season.

This committee is understanding and respectful of the development of all officials and we realize that all officials must be given the opportunity to work higher level games to continue their development and prepare themselves for future opportunities. That being said, it is being recommended that wherever possible, a more experienced official is placed with a less experienced official to assist with the transition and game management at the higher levels. We are confident that this is happening in different areas throughout the province, but we encourage it to become common practice and expectation. This will assist with official development, while at the same time, providing an extra layer of confidence from teams when officials step onto the ice.

It is also recommended that the number of games that are being supervised at the Elite Level in increased. The presence of an officials supervisor has a tremendous impact on the development of the officials who are completing the game. It will also instill additional confidence for coaches, league officials and families that officiating is being monitored throughout the season. It will also provide an extra set of independent eyes at games should there be any issues which require additional attention.

#### HIGH PERFORMANCE PROGRAM – PROGRAM OF EXCELLENCE

Currently, the High-Performance Program is focused on spring and summer evaluations and fall competition for the Female U14 and U16 divisions, as well as the Male U14 and U15 age groups. The process looks different for Female U18 and Male U16 as outlined earlier in this document.

The committee feels that there is an opportunity to have a greater link between the AAA leagues and the High-Performance Program. By creating an enhanced connection between the leagues and the High-Performance Program, this will allow for better evaluations of players, provide education and check ins with players during the season, evaluation of coaches and support staff.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Consider changing the name of the High-Performance Program back to the Program of Excellence to keep in line with National Programs. If this change was to happen, start referring to AAA Hockey as High-Performance programming. It is suggested that the term Elite Hockey is removed from vocabulary as there can be negative connotations attached to this terminology.
- Create a group of regional scouts / evaluators who are able to track players during the season. Players can be identified for next level programming. In season evaluations can be used as a part of the process for players. Player evaluations can be based on more than just one weekend, get a better look at all players, would assist with any injuries and/or exemption requests. Would also bring another level of importance and development to regular season as these games will be evaluated.
- Hockey NL are encouraged to connect with players throughout the season with respect to next level opportunities, chances to learn and educate.
  - There needs to be more done to show the benefits of this program, demonstrate the connection to players throughout the province during the season, and communicate the benefits of the program.
- Utilize each of the AAA leagues as an opportunity to evaluate coaches and help develop these coaches for opportunities within the High-Performance Program. By following players and coaches throughout the season, those people making decisions will have a greater pool of information to choose from which should assist to ensure that the right people are being chosen to play on these teams and lead these athletes on the next step of their journeys.

- Consideration should be given to the following during the Canada Games cycle on the male and female side of the programs:
  - Expanding of staff roles to include things such as video coach, skills coach and a Director of Hockey Operations. The Director of Hockey Operations could oversee the coaching staff, trainer and all hockey related aspects of the program, while the Director of Operations would oversee all business and administrative duties. Additionally, the Director of Hockey Operations could also serve in a scouting role during the season.

## MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

While there have been significant efforts to increase the marketing and communications of the teams and leagues engaged with Elite Hockey, these efforts must be taken to the next level. These players and families are expecting their players to receive exposure to potential opportunities within the province and in other areas of the hockey world. In today's world of technology, social media and communication avenues, it is time to level up.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- We understand that partnerships have been created to video and/or stream AAA hockey in the province. This needs to become a MUST for all AAA teams – male and female. Our geography limits the number of times that our players will be seen in person by scouts and evaluators, but with the effective use of video, greater exposure will be provided to the players and teams.
- The Minor Hockey side has made significant strides with their league websites, but it is difficult to find information online with respect to female elite hockey programming – teams, schedules, stats, and other valuable information. Having a consistent home for information is important and must be incorporated.
- All teams must have an updated social media presence which would provide team updates, player profiles, and other valuable information to provide exposure to players, coaches and the overall team. There are some teams doing really good things – but there needs to be more of a consistent approach and effort.
- Suggest that HNL connects with local media with respect to creating opportunities for their players and leagues. Local media is strained with respect to resources, but if you provide them with information, they are quite good at promoting what is happening. As an example, Rogers TV has been closely connected with minor hockey for many years – is there an opportunity for a hockey show or segments on some of their local shows? Can some sort of web-based program be created to promote local hockey? There are some young, developing personalities who have shown an interest in the media – perhaps they will take a lead on these opportunities to support the overall effort.

It must be noted here that it is extremely important that significant efforts are made to market, promote and publicize Women and Girls Hockey. There have been significant strides with respect to the growth of the game over the last number of years. That being said, there has been a lot of discussion pertaining to the future of the female game and where things are headed. It is important that proper education, communication and promotion occurs. Utilizing local, provincial and national hockey leaders can assist with ensuring that the right messaging is getting out there. It is a crucial time to educate the growth of the past, while showcasing the goals of the future.

- Update websites
- Update social media
- Promotional campaign
- Education sessions
- Promotion of the new standards which are being set for programs
- Highlight the teams, players, programs
- Highlight alumni and notable names

Be proud of the past and confident in the future.

#### Labrador

Ensuring that top players and teams from Labrador are a part of this review was important to the committee. Understanding fully the geographical challenges, which occur with having players and teams from Labrador come to the Island portion of the province for competition, it must be understood that players exhibiting talent at a high performance level, should have the opportunity to move to the Island and have a place to play if this is something that the player and family wishes to do. This should not occur prior to U15 AAA, but there is a need to assist these players with their development should they wish to enhance their experience through the AAA Hockey program. It is suggested that AAA leagues look at opportunities and a process for these players to be considered for participation with teams.

In addition, at the current time, there are no AAA teams in the Labrador region. That being said, each season there is potential for higher level AA calibre teams which should be considered for playing against the top AA or higher teams on the island. These teams would be unable to compete in a league structure as it is currently set up due to travel and cost demands, but Minor Council and/or the proposed new High-Performance Committee should look for opportunities to have these teams compete.

It is also being recommended that development opportunities occur in Labrador to assist all players and teams. These sessions should be delivered by high performance coaches to assist in ensuring consistency of the teaching which is happening in other areas of the province. It would be beneficial to identify a high-performance skills coach for the Labrador region, but this person needs to be supported by HNL leaders at different points of the season.

## The Future

The recommendations listed throughout this document are the committee's suggestions as next steps with respect to Elite Hockey in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. If these changes do not bring more consistency to this level of hockey in the province, then the following should be considered.

- Centralization of all AAA hockey programming. If regions are unable to provide a competitive program for their AAA players, then consideration should be given to having all AAA hockey players developing together in a centralized environment. This would be a big change and would take much thinking of how best to make this work. The Committee is challenging all regions to change the culture and change their thinking with respect to AAA programming, but if this cannot happen, then centralization of programming needs to be considered. AAA programming would become centralized and then a competitive AA set up could be created to offer a competitive regional set up for those players who are not willing to make the AAA commitment.
- For Women and Girls Hockey, if the recommendations outlined earlier in this document do not help create more parity and consistency of competition amongst teams, then other ideas should be considered. Due to the greater number of players in the Eastern Region, this may be the region which is most impacted.
  - Consider having AAA teams compete in other leagues during the season (ex. WJAHL, DJHL) and creating AA teams to compete in the seasonal league play.
  - If this was ever to be considered, there are a variety of items which would need to be reviewed and discussed. Items such as declaration of Atlantic representatives, provincial championship participation are just a couple.
  - If we are committed to developing players, wanting more players to stay in the province and looking to create parity and consistent competitions, then all ideas need to be considered.
- While not falling directly under the Elite Hockey Banner, we are suggesting that HNL takes a strong look at the year end "Provincial Tournaments". There are a few important factors which need to be considered:
  - While there is a history of playing tournaments on Easter Week – could these tournaments be played on weekends? Freeing up Easter Week / School Closing to allow for families to spend more time together.
  - The committee believes there are opportunities for development initiatives / alternate hockey options to occur in the spring of the year prior to the full-on start of summer sports.
  - We like the idea of all players having some sort of year end tournament, but do all of these tournaments need to be provincials? Could there be some sort of regional competition amongst teams and then the winners move on to a "Championship Weekend".

- This type of format could help with travel costs, grading and other common concerns which are brought forward regarding year end “All Star” tournaments.
- Franchising has been recommended for certain age groups in this document. Should the franchising model work the groups for which it is suggested, then there may be opportunities for this concept to be looked at further in other age groups to help with alignment of programs, development initiatives, financial resources and more.

### Conclusion

The committee would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who provided feedback to be considered during the writing of these recommendations. While there are many great things happening in the province with respect to our game, we must be willing to consider alternatives. The information which was collected during this process shows that people are passionate about the game. If people are sincere about making the game better, then all participants are encouraged to work together and look at the greater good of all involved. Programs in the province will become stronger by challenging the past and looking into the future.

Creating standards of expectations and developing a definition of AAA programs is a must. If there is a desire to grow high performance programs in the province, then all involved must know what they are working towards. There are lessons to be learned within the province and from others in our region and throughout the country.

If there is a region doing good things and seeing success, others need to strive to find a way to duplicate these best practices. Understanding fully that there are many factors which prevent consistency across all programs and regions, be willing to be creative and look for new ways to do things. It may take some work and out of the box thinking, but with the right mindset and people pulling in the same direction, there is potential for all programs to go to a next level.

As a province, there must be a desire to be better and change the current culture. If high performance programming is going to be offered, then it needs to be of high-performance quality. It cannot be a glorified competitive program.

Do not lose sight that these programs need to be about development. The teams that these players join are a part of a much greater journey. Programs should be focused on developing the players for future opportunities. Winning is nice, but it should be a result of an excellent development program.

All programs should be player-centric and holistic in their approach. Focus on the right things and success will follow.