



May 7, 2013

Dear Hockey Alberta Member:

We write to inform you of three decisions made by the Board of Directors and supported by the Operations Council of Hockey Alberta. **Most notably, we have decided to eliminate body checking from the Pee wee age category beginning in the 2013/14 season.**

The three recommendations approved by the Board are as follows:

- Hockey Alberta create an overall “player safety strategy” that includes a focus on the reduction of serious injuries in the game at all levels.
- Hockey Alberta continue to work within the guiding principles of the Long Term Player Development Model (LTPD) and allow these principles to frame the decision making process around player development at all levels.
- Make a policy change to remove body checking from all divisions of the Pee wee age category.

#### Why Hockey Alberta made this decision

The safety of young hockey players is the foundation of this decision. Hockey Alberta has a mission to create opportunities and valuable life experiences in hockey for Albertans by providing exceptional leadership and service. We believe strongly in ensuring safe environments for players, coaches and officials, and we know you share that commitment.

#### The Research

The research on the effect of body checking in Pee wee hockey is clear. There is overwhelming evidence that body checking is the single most consistent risk factor for injuries and concussion in youth ice hockey. Adding weight to the research was a position statement issued by the Canadian Pediatric Society in November 2012. The Society strongly recommended that the introduction of body checking in hockey be delayed until the Bantam level or older.

#### How did the Hockey Alberta Board reach this decision?

This decision comes after several years of consultation, research, discussion and debate within this province. After consulting with our members at the 2011 AGM (Concussion Summit), 2012 AGM (Body Checking Summit), and with a survey of members in 2012, the Hockey Alberta Board of Directors established a Body Checking Review Committee. This committee, comprised of Hockey Alberta members, volunteers and staff, was tasked to review member feedback, the relevant scientific research and the positions of other Hockey Canada branches. Their duty was to formulate recommendations on options for body checking for minor hockey and report back to the Board.



Over the course of the past year, the Committee met several times to review the research and debate the direction they ultimately wanted to recommend. The dialogue and discussions were intense, in part because of the varied backgrounds and perspectives each member had on the topic. The Committee last updated the membership of Hockey Alberta with a written report at the April 2013 zone meetings. The Committee next presented its final report to the Hockey Alberta Board and Operations Council for their consideration.

As the Board of Directors reviewed the Committee's recommendations and the research evidence to support them, the decision to remove body checking from Pee wee was clear. This is the right decision for our sport and the young players of our game. The Board of Directors felt strongly that, in the primary interests of player safety, this policy level change would be made without delay.

#### What does this mean for you?

Starting the 2013-2014 season, the rules of play for the Atom age division will also apply to the Pee wee age division. We will work with your association to communicate with your teams, coaches and players that there is no body checking at all levels of Pee wee hockey, and that there will be a penalty assessed for players who body check.

We know that body checking at young ages can disrupt a player's learning and his or her acquisition of the basic skills of the game. It is important to ensure our young players are well prepared to deal with body checking at the Bantam division. As a result, Pee wee coaches will still be required to take the Checking Skills Program and encouraged to teach safe checking skills in practice.

We recognize that there will be an adjustment period for participants (players, coaches, officials, and parents) who experienced body checking as first year participants in the division last season. However, with our collective efforts, all participants are expected to adapt well and make a quick transition.

#### What will happen in the days and weeks ahead?

Our first priority was to get word of this decision to our Hockey Alberta members through this letter. Subsequently, Hockey Alberta will announce this decision to the public at a media conference in Edmonton on Wednesday, May 8.

Hockey Alberta's website [www.hockeyalberta.ca](http://www.hockeyalberta.ca) will be the hub for all information and supporting materials related to this decision. Please encourage your members, coaches and parents to refer to our site for more background and detail. We recognize that you may have questions about this change and the next steps. Therefore Hockey Alberta is ready to take your call and answer any questions you may have. We would encourage you to contact us via phone at 403-342-6777 or via email at [info@hockeyalberta.ca](mailto:info@hockeyalberta.ca).



Hockey Alberta will also provide a forum for discussion on this decision at the AGM on June 14-16, 2013. At this time, we will present the information in detail that was reviewed by the Body Checking Committee and presented to the Board of Directors and Operations Council, as well as the significant approach we took on this issue.

Hockey is an integral part of the fabric of our communities in Alberta. Our partnership in providing quality, safe and developmental environments for our players to grow and enjoy our game is unparalleled. Together we are doing what's best and trust that we will have your support as we transition in 2013 -2014. We believe that our sport will look back on this moment in our history and agree we made the right decision at the right time.

We thank you in advance for your support of this change and your help in effectively and positively communicating this important milestone to your teams, coaches and players.

Yours truly,

Rob Virgil  
Chair, Board of Directors

Rob Litwinski  
Executive Director