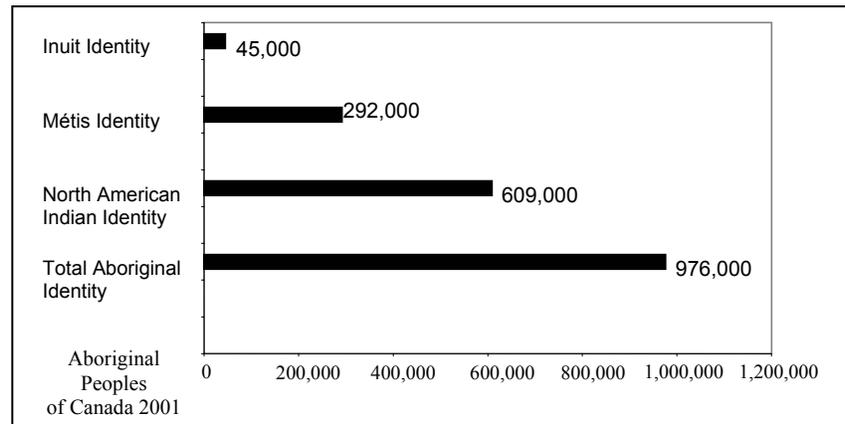


## ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND INEQUALITY

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada represent about 3.3% of the population when the criterion of identity is used. When using the criterion of ancestry, the number rises to 4.4%. Aboriginal peoples in Canada are made up of three major groups, North American Indians or First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. This chart shows the breakdown for 2001.



Since the colonization of Canada by Europeans, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have been subjected to severe inequality, disadvantage and mistreatment. This has ranged from genocide towards particular nations such as the Beothuk, death and illness from imported diseases, dispossession and occupation of land, the disaster of the residential schools system, and cultural assimilation policies, to continuing high rates of poverty.

Today's situation of inequality can only be understood in the context of more than four hundred years of racist discrimination and unequal life chances. In this fact sheet, we will detail only a few of the stark realities of inequality for Aboriginal peoples. While poverty in Canada and its attendant manifestations are still widespread amongst non-Aboriginal people, the situation for Aboriginal people is worse, not only by the numbers, but by the systemic and entrenched nature of this inequality.

And while conditions in many areas of life have improved in recent years for Aboriginal peoples, the legacy of inequality remains imprinted on today's Canada, one of the richest countries in the world. Inequality can be measured in a whole series of indicators for Aboriginal peoples. (Please see Fact Sheet #1 for measures of inequality affecting the labour force and income.)

### 1. Poverty

There is no official poverty line in Canada and the measurement of Aboriginal poverty is also limited by the lack of a recognized indicator for low income on Aboriginal reserves. We know, however, that poverty rates on-reserve, along with urban Aboriginal poverty rates, which we can measure, are very high.

The urban poverty rate (measured in terms of less than 50% of median income or Low Income Measure) for Aboriginal peoples has gone down since 1995 but still remains more than double (2.2 times) the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the same cities. In some cities, such as Regina and Saskatoon, the low income rates are over 50%.

	Aboriginal people		Others		Ratio	
	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000
Sudbury	50.3	33.5	19.5	17.7	2.6	1.9
Thunder Bay	53.0	49.4	16.8	16.1	3.2	3.1
Winnipeg	57.7	46.2	16.8	13.4	3.4	3.4
Regina	67.1	59.3	17.3	14.7	3.9	4.0
Saskatoon	65.9	54.2	18.4	14.6	3.6	3.7
Edmonton	56.5	42.3	20.1	15.5	2.8	2.7
All 27 CMAs	52.4	41.6	21.6	17.3	2.4	2.4

Source; Andrew Heisz and Logan McLeod, Low-income in Census Metropolitan Areas, 1980-2000, Statistics Canada, 2004

And future prospects for the Aboriginal population are shadowed by the poverty rates for Aboriginal children. In urban areas, where there are more Aboriginal women than men (the reverse is true on reserve), some 40 % of urban Aboriginal children are in single-parent families which have very high rates of poverty. Using another measure of poverty, the Low Income Cut-Off, an astounding 50% of all Aboriginal children in large urban areas and 43% in smaller cities and towns are living in poverty, compared to less than 20% of non-Aboriginal children.

	Urban under 100,000		Urban over 100,000	
	Aboriginal Identity Population	Non-Aboriginal Population	Aboriginal Identity Population	Non-Aboriginal Population
Incidence of low income among "economic families" in 2000	33.8%	11.2%	37.0%	14.3%
Incidence of low income among unattached individuals in 2000	56.9%	37.7%	57.7%	39.5%
% of children under age 15 in low income families	43.1%	17.4%	50.0%	20.6%
% of children living with lone parents	39.6%	19.9%	45.6%	18.0%

Source: INAC, Fact Sheet on Canada's Urban Aboriginal Population, 2001 Census, Aboriginal peoples of Canada, Cat. No. 94F0041XCB INAC 2006

## 2. Housing

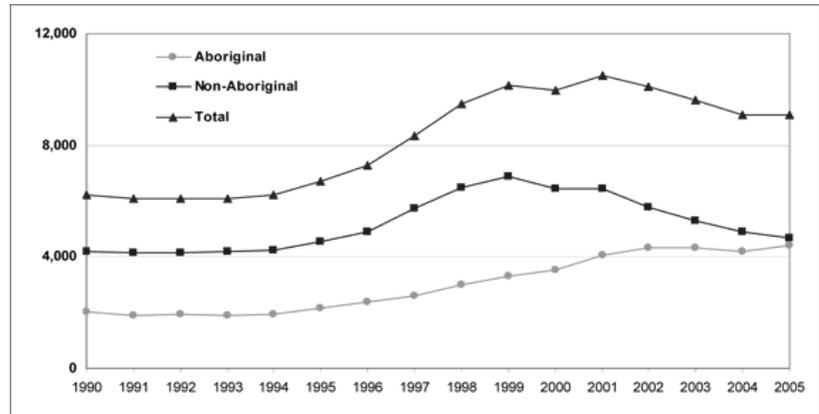
One of the major indicators of social inequality is poor housing. Almost one-in-four (23.8%) Aboriginal households living off-reserve were in core housing need, compared to 13.5% of non-Aboriginal households. Core housing need refers to a household that has a problem linked to suitability, adequacy, or affordability or a combination of these problems. 37.3% of Aboriginal renters were in core housing need. The incidence of core housing need varies across Canada from 44.5% of Aboriginal households in Nunavut to 16.8% of Aboriginal households in Québec. Off-reserve Aboriginal populations are much less likely to own their own housing – 49.8% of off-reserve Aboriginal households owned their home compared to 67.4% of non-Aboriginal households.

On reserve housing statistics, as far as suitability and adequacy of housing are concerned, are just as troubling. Overall some 27% of all housing is in core housing need with either adequacy or suitability in question. This is double the already high rate of 13.5% for non-Aboriginal households in core need. The estimated on-reserve housing shortage is 20,000 to 35,000 units and this will grow by 2,200 units per year.

### 3. Family

Family inequality is also reflected in indicators around children and spousal violence. There were some 71,000 children in care across Canada in 2000-01. The Child Welfare League of Canada estimates 30-40% of these children were Aboriginal. In many provinces, Aboriginal children represented an even higher percentage of children in care. In Manitoba (2001) and in Saskatchewan (1999) Aboriginal children comprised 68% and 67% of the children in care. In British Columbia, in 2005, 49% of children in care and 42% of those in custody were Aboriginal, but they represented only 9% of children in BC.

B.C. Children-in-Care Trends (1990–2005)



Source: Ministry of Children and Family Development, BC Government, 2006

Almost one quarter of Aboriginal women in 2004 reported they had been victims of spousal violence over the previous five year period while 7% of non-Aboriginal women reported similar abuse.

### 4. Justice

Among the women sentenced to custody in 2003/04, nearly one-third were Aboriginal, while Aboriginal men represented one-fifth of all men sentenced to custody. Aboriginal youth are eight times more likely to be in custody than non-Aboriginal youth. Aboriginal women's numbers have increased substantially from 26% in 1994/95 to 31% in 2003/04 for provincial/territorial-sentenced admissions. In some provinces, the rate is much higher. In 2003/04 in Saskatchewan, Aboriginal people represented 80% of admissions to provincial-sentenced custody (less than 2 years), while they were only 10% of the provincial adult population. In Manitoba, Aboriginal people made up 68% of admissions to provincial custody while they were only 11% of the provincial adult population.

In Saskatchewan, in 1999, the adult Aboriginal incarceration rate was more than 1,600 per 100,000 people compared to 48 per 100,000 for non-Aboriginal adults. In the Prairies, in some federal institutions (more than 2 years incarceration), 60% of the male inmates were Aboriginal and in others some 90% of inmates were Aboriginal women. Aboriginal people are also much more likely to be victims of crime – 40% compared to 28% for non-Aboriginal people aged 15 and over reported that they were victimized at least once in the 12 months.

### 5. Health

The life expectancy of Aboriginal women and men is well below that of non-Aboriginal persons, although that gap is closing. In 2001, First Nations men could expect to live seven years less than other Canadian men, and First Nations women could expect to live five years less than other Canadian women.

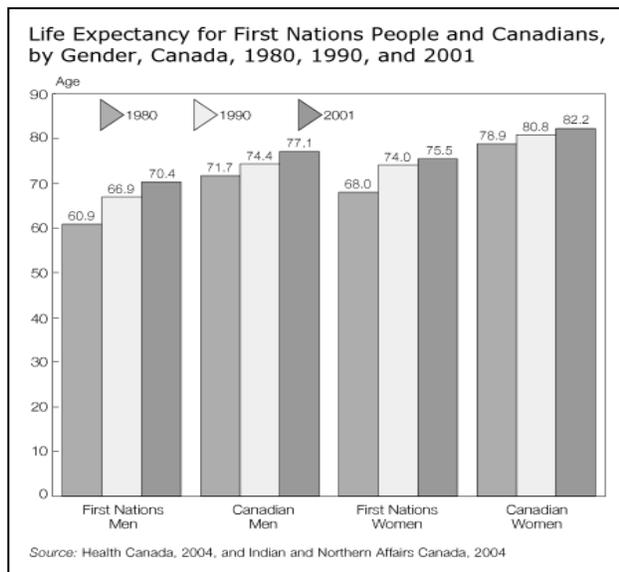
The suicide rate of First Nations youth is 500-600% greater than the national average and for Inuit youth, 1100% greater. While 56.3% of the off-reserve population reported excellent or very good

health, this compared to 65% in the general population. Of the off-reserve population, 45% reported one or more of chronic conditions such as diabetes, arthritis or high blood pressure.

**6. Conclusions**

The solutions for Aboriginal inequality and poverty have been written about in great length in literally thousands of reports and studies, including the comprehensive work of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The solutions turn around three areas.

- 1) More resources to immediately deal with issues from education and training, to housing to clean water, to health and justice. The needs are urgent and require concerted action led by the federal government with the provincial and municipal governments in partnership with Aboriginal organizations and governments.
- 2) Establishment of Aboriginal self-government and settlement of land claims. To date only 17 self-government agreements have been signed. There are today some 735 land claims, treaty and self-government issues which have not yet been settled and the number is growing each year. The political and economic empowerment of Aboriginal peoples through self-government and control over the mechanisms, institutions and programs that affect their own lives is crucial.
- 3) Development of a comprehensive urban Aboriginal strategy. Although the majority of Aboriginal people now live in cities, many of the programs and strategies are geared to Aboriginal people living on reserves.



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Here is the contact information for some of the major Aboriginal peoples' organizations.

- Assembly of First Nations <http://www.afn.ca/>
- Congress of Aboriginal Peoples <http://www.abo-peoples.org/>
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) <http://www.itk.ca/>
- Métis National Council <http://www.metisnation.ca/>
- National Association of Friendship Centres <http://www.nafc.ca>
- Native Women's Association of Canada <http://www.nwac-hq.org/home.htm>

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