

# First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education in Ontario

Fact Sheet | January 2017

## A Note on Terminology

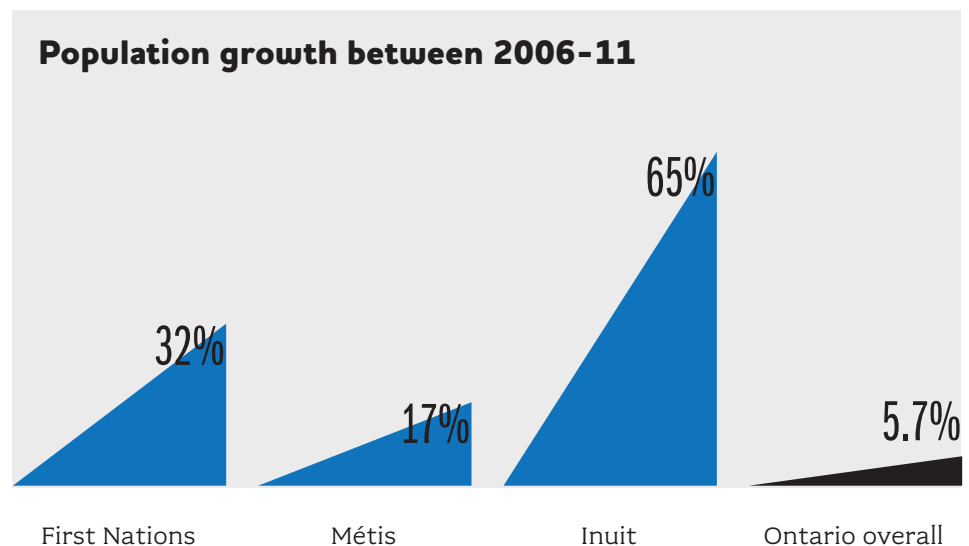
In this document, the term “Indigenous” is used to describe persons of First Nations, Inuit and Métis origin. Other sources use different terminology. For example, Statistics Canada uses the term “Aboriginal” to describe persons from First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, while the Indian Act defines those who are “Registered Indian” or “Status Indian” as persons who register under the Act and prove descent from a band that signed a treaty. Those who aren’t registered under the Indian Act, “Non-Status Indians”, are generally excluded from federal programs.

**Ontario represents approximately 22 per cent of the Indigenous population in Canada, the largest of any province.**

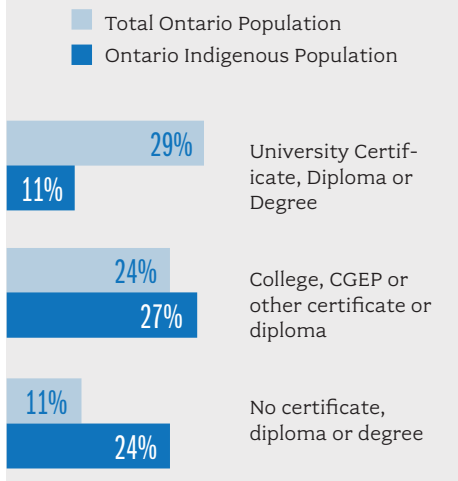
## Post-Secondary Education is a Treaty Right

Post-secondary education is a treaty right guaranteed by Canada to the Indigenous peoples of this land. This was first asserted in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and re-affirmed as a constitutional right in the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982. In addition, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) states that Indigenous peoples have a right to the improvement of education. Despite education being a fundamental right, the legacy of colonialism, residential schools, the mass removal of Indigenous children from their families during the Sixties Scoop and daily racism against First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples has imposed significant barriers to accessing post-secondary education. While the government has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure access to education, financial barriers prevent many Indigenous people from attending college or university.

There are at least 309,845 First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Ontario, which comprises 2.4 per cent of the province’s population. Between 2006 and 2011, First Nations communities grew by 32 per cent, Métis communities increased by 17 per cent and Inuit communities increased by 65 per cent while the average population growth in Ontario was 5.7 per cent. Indigenous communities are also younger as 42 per cent of the population is under the age of 25. The rapid growth in the population, combined with the increased demand to attend college or university, has placed more pressure on funding available for Indigenous peoples to access post-secondary education.



## Highest Level of Educational Attainment



## Access to Post-Secondary Education

More than 16,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis students are attending Ontario's public colleges and universities. However, a significant gap exists in educational attainment between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in Ontario. When it comes to university education, 29.3 per cent of the non-Indigenous population has a university degree, while only 11.3 per cent of the Indigenous population has a university degree. There is not a significant difference in college-level attainment, where fees are on average one-third of university tuition fees. Indigenous populations that live on a reserve are less likely to have access to education. Nearly 50 per cent of the Indigenous community that lives on a reserve does not have a high school degree.

In addition, there are more than 1000 students enrolled in the nine Indigenous institutions in Ontario — Anishinabek Educational Institute, First Nations Technical Institute, Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute, Iohahi:io Akwesasne Adult Education Centre, Oshki Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute, Ogwehoweh Skills and Trades Training Centre, Seven Generations Education Institute, Shingwauk Kinooamaage Gamig and Six Nations Polytechnic. These institutions receive no public operating funds and must rely on partnerships with colleges and universities to grant diplomas or degrees.

## Funding for Indigenous Education

Funding for Indigenous education was officially recognized to be the responsibility of the federal government in 1956, as part of the responsibility to uphold the Constitution and signed Treaties dating back to the 18th century. The responsibility to provide funding mechanisms to help pay for the cost of post-secondary education for Indigenous students has fallen to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

Currently, INAC administers the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), the University and College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEPP), the Post-Secondary Partnership Program (PSPP) and other programs surrounding youth employment strategies, work experience and skills development.

The PSSSP and the UCEPP provides funding to eligible First Nations and Inuit students enrolled in eligible post-secondary programs. Both programs help students gain the academic level and improve the employability for First Nations and Inuit students.

The PSPP provides funding to post-secondary institutions for course development for First Nations and Inuit students, including course design and delivery. Rather than providing capital funding or money directly to students, the PSPP focuses on costs associated with specific projects related to First Nations and Inuit education.

The federal government only provides financial support for First Nations and Inuit students. Métis students in Ontario can apply for the Métis Student Bursary Program (MSBP), a program that is available in 42 post-secondary institutions across Ontario and delivered by the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO). In 2015-2016 the MSBP provided 200 bursaries totaling \$136,772. The MNO strives to expand and increase programs to build more opportunities for Métis students in post-secondary education.

On April 14, 2016, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruled in *Daniels v. Canada* (Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development) that Métis and non-status Indians must be recognized as "Indians" under section 91(24) of the Canadian Constitution. Knowing that the federal government owes a fiduciary duty to Métis and non-status Indians, the government has failed to update the PSSSP to include these two groups. The SCC has not ordered the federal government to update current policies and programs to include the results from the *Daniels* decision, but rather expects these groups to hold the federal government to account in addressing their historical disadvantage.

More than  
**22,500**

**Indigenous students  
have been left out  
due to a lack of  
federal funding.**

## The Funding Gap

The PSSSP provides locally administered financial assistance to status First Nations and Inuit people and is meant to cover the costs of tuition fees, books, supplies, travel and living expenses. Before 1992, it was assumed that all eligible students would be granted money. In 1992, the PSSSP became a program that simply allocated a chunk of funding regardless of student demand instead of being determined by the number of eligible students.

By 1996, the federal government capped any increases to PSSSP funding by two per cent annually, regardless of how many students applied. Since then, funding has been unable to keep pace with the increase in student demand, living costs, inflation and tuition fees.

The lack of funding by the federal government has forced communities administering the funds to make difficult decisions about who receives funding each year. In 2014-2015, 22,000 status First Nations and Inuit students received financial assistance from INAC; this figure was the same in 2006. However, before the implementation of the funding cap, about 27,000 students received financial assistance. It was estimated that by 2007, about 22,500 people were unable to pursue post-secondary education due to a lack of federal funding. Recent contributions from the federal government to the PSSSP program of \$90 million

for two years is a positive step, but does not address the increase in the Indigenous youth population and the potential instability of funding in the long run. When a funding cap is in place, communities are certain that they will not be receiving more than the allotted amount. When the government of the day devotes 90 million in funding for two years, there is nothing to ensure that funding will continue. Because of this, Indigenous students are at a clear disadvantage in accessing post-secondary education in Canada.

In a country where obtaining employment is associated with achieving a post-secondary education, employers now require some form of post-secondary education. Raising First Nations graduation rates to be comparable to the Canadian population would lead to an economic benefit of \$401 billion (2006 dollars), and \$115 billion in reduced government spending.

In 2004 the Auditor General of Canada concluded that it would take 27 years to close the education gap between First Nations people living on reserve and the Canadian population. In the 2011 progress report the Auditor General reported that the gap had not yet been reduced. Based on the 2004 recommendations there has not been a consistent approach to reducing the gap nor has the government fully implemented an action plan in response to the audit.

While the impact of the PSSSP continues to decline, non-status First Nations and Métis peoples continue to be excluded entirely by federal legislation governing support for Indigenous people. The PSSSP is not accessible to these students, leaving thousands without the resources to attend a post-secondary institution. In addition to increasing PSSSP funding, there have been continuous calls to extend eligibility for non-status and Métis students.

In Ontario, undergraduate tuition fees have increased by 248 per cent since 1993-1994, which has made campuses inaccessible to even more students. The Government of Ontario provides minimal funding for Indigenous post-secondary education in the province. In 2015 the provincial government provided five million to support the nine Indigenous institutions. Indigenous students don't receive any direct financial support from the province, with the exception of the Aboriginal Bursaries Search Tool introduced in 2009. Ontario provides \$1.5 million in bursaries per year, which is not enough for the 16,036 Indigenous learners who attended college, and university in Ontario. The bulk of the provincial government's spending on Indigenous post-secondary education is directed to colleges and universities for support services, counselors, curriculum and teaching projects.

**\$401  
BILLION**

**Economic benefit of raising First Nations graduation rates to be comparable to the Canadian population**

**Reduced government spending if First Nations graduation rates were raised to be comparable to the Canadian population**

**\$115  
BILLION**

## **The Road Ahead: Ensuring Access for All Eligible First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learners**

Living in a knowledge-based economy, obtaining post-secondary education provides employability skills and training needed for job placement and greater earnings. . If skills are not properly transferred there will be an increase in the reliance on government transfers, the gap in labor force participation and post-secondary completion rates between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. In order to address the massive education gap and eliminate the financial barriers to post-secondary education, it is vital that government funding is immediate, and is enhanced for Indigenous learners in post-secondary education. Students who are able to access government funding and a college or university education become leaders in their field and continue on to provide meaningful contributions in their communities.

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada Post-Secondary Education. Government of Canada. 2016.

Office of the Auditor General of Canada. Government of Canada. 2011.

2016 Alternative Federal Budget. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. 2016.

The Effect Of Increasing Aboriginal Educational Attainment On The Labour Force, Output And The Fiscal Balance Centre for the Study of Living Standards. 2009.

National Household Survey. Statistics Canada. Government of Canada. 2011.

Chapter 3 - A Better Future for Indigenous Peoples. Federal Budget 2016. Government of Canada. 2016.

Focus on Geography Series, 2011 Census. Statistics Canada. Government of Canada. 2012.

Supporting Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training. Government of Ontario. 2015.

