Policy Perspectives on First Nations Issues

A compilation of essays by Master’s students in the School of Policy Studies, Queen’s University

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INTRODUCTION

The papers in *Policy Perspectives on First Nation Issues* provide a unique and timely snapshot of some of the most pressing policy issues facing Indigenous peoples in Canada, the Government of Canada and all Canadians.

Written as part of the Masters of Public Administration (MPA) or the Professional MPA (PMPA) at the School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, the student authors conducted in-depth research, going far beyond their course requirements. Most of the papers were written for a Directed Reading Course; one paper was written for a Masters Research Project; and one was written out of interest in the issue. The papers were supervised by Don Drummond and Bob Watts with support by Dr. Rachel Laforest, MPA Program Director, and were edited by Ellen Kachuck Rosenbluth.

The inspiration for the essays was the importance of current discussions between First Nations and the Government of Canada on a Government-to-Government relationship, a new fiscal relationship and closing socio-economic gaps. The papers were informed by those discussions and the background challenges that led to the discussions. In turn, it is hoped that this collection might ultimately support the process with the aim of improving the well-being of Canada’s First Nations people.
Territorial Formula Financing in the Context of First Nations Governments

Don Couturier

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Problem statement

There are at least four deficiencies in the current approach to fiscal transfers between the federal government and First Nations. First, funding is insufficient for First Nations to deliver effective programs and services that will improve outcomes on-reserve and in communities. Second, funding is short-term, and therefore is neither predictable nor sustainable. Third, funding does not allow for growth to address rising costs in service delivery, inflation, and increases in governance capacity. Fourth, the current system of separate grants, each with their own reporting and accountability requirements, creates heavy and unnecessary administrative burdens for First Nations. Provided it is applied appropriately, Territorial Formula Financing (TFF) addresses these problems and provides a financial framework for autonomy and a nation-to-nation partnership. The following paper analyzes the TFF as a new model for First Nations and offers specific recommendations for how this model could be modified and applied.

Key Messages

• Current fiscal transfers to First Nations are inadequate. Funding is insufficient, unfairly capped and unpredictable. Administrative burdens are also excessive and onerous;
• The TFF is grounded in principles that address current problems, and if carefully designed, a modified version could be applied to the First Nations context;
• A new formula should aim for reasonably comparable outcomes, should not be capped at 2 per cent, and should be introduced in a full and timely manner for First Nations with the capacity, but gradually in concert with capacity-building initiatives for those that do not;
• The “service population” variable of an escalator should be determined carefully;
• It is imperative to measure expenditure needs to emphasize macro comparability; and
• Timing and sequencing must be carefully considered.

Background

A brief history of federal-First Nations fiscal relations

First Nations played no role in negotiating Confederation or in the drafting of the British North America Act of 1867. Therefore, historically there has been no fiscal role for First Nations governments—no expenditure functions, legislative powers or taxation powers.1 Further, the Indian Act of 1876 omitted governing powers for First Nations, ensuring the fiscal weakness of First Nations governments and communities.2 Band councils, established under this legislation, were clipped by considerable constraints over their ability to self-govern. Unfulfilled treaties also undermined fiscal autonomy through the loss of resources and lands. Programs and services were underfunded, consolidating the weak fiscal position of First Nations communities.3

The shift from tight hierarchical control to more recognition of rights and autonomy began slowly in the 1960s and gained momentum in the 1990s. The shift began in the late 1960s with the transferring of administrative responsibility to individual bands for managing and delivering certain services (e.g., child care, education and social assistance). Control over the budgets and policy frameworks, however, remained with the Department of Indian Affairs. Service delivery was tightly monitored by federal officials, and strict reporting requirements were imposed.4

2 Ibid., p. 9.
3 Ibid., p. 10.
4 Abele and Prince, p. 10.
Concerns over funding for First Nations, and the social and economic consequences tied to it, are far from new. In 2005 Canada’s Auditor General noted that spending on First Nations programs increased by 1.6 per cent between 1999 and 2004 while population growth had increased by 11.6 per cent. These issues were discussed at length during the Kelowna Accord, which pledged $5.1 billion over the subsequent five years to address fiscal imbalance issues. Despite being ratified by all provinces, territories and First Nations representatives, the succeeding government failed to endorse the agreement.

Today, fiscal and policy centralization continues, impeding the ability of First Nations governments to deliver adequate public services through sufficient funding that is stable and predictable. First Nations governments are often subject to tight regulation, externally determined priorities, onerous accountability measures, overly complex programs and unpredictable funding flows. Calls for reforms began in earnest in the 1980s, but today the most common funding arrangement remains the one-year conditional grant. As Frances Abele summarizes so well, “[f]or Aboriginal peoples and their governments, fiscal relations with the Canadian government involves a high degree of conditionality in transfer payments and little taxing powers, underscored by a continuing struggle with Ottawa and provinces over the meaning and scope of inherent jurisdiction and Aboriginal title and rights.”

In July 2016, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to “examine the current fiscal arrangement(s) to identify areas/elements of the existing relationship that are impeding progress in moving towards a government-to-government relationship.”

Failure to reconfigure the fiscal relationship will have severe consequences

Inadequate funding arrangements result in negative social, economic and political consequences for both First Nations communities and Canadian society more broadly. Underfunded, unpredictable and flat fiscal transfers are at least partially to blame for depressed economic and social outcomes in First Nations communities. First Nations experience lower levels of educational attainment and skills training. They have worse physical and mental health outcomes. Fertility rates are much higher among First Nations women relative to the non-First Nations population. Moreover, First Nations people in Canada are less likely to be working than non-First Nations people and, if they are working, they tend to earn lower incomes. As long as funding arrangements remain short-term, unpredictable transfers, First Nations governments will be unable to plan autonomously and develop quality programs and services that will improve these outcomes in the medium and long-term.

Remedial programs fail to provide solutions to the systemic problems perpetuating these outcomes. They are also costly. Everyone loses when the government is retroactively responding to social and economic harm, including First Nations and Canadian communities. The current situation costs billions in foregone production and remedial programs to deal with preventable issues. The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples states:

6 Ibid., p. 8.
7 Abele and Prince, p. 10.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 16.
12 Ibid.
“The first and largest cost results from the economic marginalization of Aboriginal people. We have shown that under better conditions Aboriginal people could contribute an additional $5.8 billion to the Canadian economy. That they do not do so now is directly related to their low participation in the labour force, high unemployment, and lower productivity when they are employed. On further exploration we also found that a lack of full-time, year-round employment and low educational attainment relative to all Canadians are important aspects of the problem. The second cost of the economic marginalization of Aboriginal people consists of the extra expenditures by governments on remedial programs that address the adverse conditions facing many Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal people and some entire communities are in poor health, struggling socially and economically. Expenditures on health care and social services, including child and family services, substance abuse programs, and the justice system, are higher for Aboriginal people than for Canadians generally. We estimate the combined cost of these expenditures, which we refer to as excess government expenditures on remedial programs, at $1.7 billion in 1996...

In sum, every year that the social and economic circumstances of Aboriginal people remain as they are, it costs the country $7.5 billion. That cost - the cost of the status quo - is the equivalent of nearly one per cent of Canada’s GDP. It consists of a fiscal cost of $4.6 billion, borne by all Canadians, and a loss of net income to Aboriginal people of $2.9 billion."

The AFN estimates that today this cost could be as high as $10.6 billion, with the fiscal cost at $6.5 billion and the loss of net income at $4.1 billion. On a per capita basis, this equates to an approximate fiscal cost of $210 per non-First Nations person and a loss of net income of $2733 per First Nations person. Clearly, much is at stake. A more equitable fiscal relationship, while only one part of the equation, is critical to fostering healthy First Nations communities based on self-government and nation-to-nation partnership.

**Current funding approach for First Nations governments**

The current approach involves bilateral (or trilateral) negotiations with parties to self-government agreements or treaties. These fiscal side agreements are negotiated periodically and are unique to each government. These agreements usually establish:

- The programs and services for which the First Nations government assumes responsibility;
- Reporting and accountability provisions;
- The gross funding amount associated with those programs and services; and
- A consideration of the own source revenue capacity.

The net federal fiscal transfer is the result of the gross funding amount minus the own source revenue contribution of the First Nations government as calculated pursuant to the fiscal agreement. The main difference between this model and the federal/provincial/territorial model is that federal/First Nations transfers are periodic negotiations, whereas the provinces and territories fall under a common fiscal framework for all. When negotiating these agreements, federal negotiators determine a confidential fiscal negotiation mandate to bring to the table. There are three types of funding arrangements that result:

- **The Comprehensive Funding Agreement (CFA):** program budgeting for one year. The CFA reimburses actual expenditures;
- **The First Nations Funding Agreement (FNFA):** a block-budgeting funding arrangement lasting up to five years. Some authority is delegated to the band council, including program design and delivery, but they are subject to minimum standards; and

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17 Assembly of First Nations, p. 25
18 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 7.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
The Canada First Nations Funding Agreement (CFNFA): another five-year block-grant allowing federal initiatives to regroup funding into one funding agreement with First Nations governments and bands.

In 2013, the federal government began publishing its key terms of the own source revenue and methodologies in an effort to increase transparency. According to these documents, the principles adopted by the federal government in its negotiations are the following:

- Shared responsibility for self-government funding between federal, provincial/territorial and Aboriginal governments;
- Access to public services should be reasonably comparable to other communities living in the same size and circumstance, but need not be identical in all respects;
- Aboriginal governments should receive reasonably consistent and equitable allocations of federal funding support under reasonably stable, predictable and flexible arrangements;
- Governments should practice transparency and openess in fiscal matters;
- Fiscal arrangements should foster accountability, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and sound public administration;
- Fiscal arrangements should encourage efficiency and cost-effectiveness; and
- Fiscal arrangement should be affordable and consistent with the policies of the Government of Canada.

The document states that Canada's fiscal approach has five elements: a public statement of methodology; funding methodologies; own source revenue (OSR) methodology; accountability measures; and an ongoing advisory and review process.

In essence, the transfer is the sum of the “General Transfer” (amount by which the general expenditure base [GEB] exceeds the OSR) plus the “Social Transfer” (federal funding for health, education and social development). The General Transfer is offset by the OSR, and the Social Transfer is not. The total sum will not be below a “Transfer Floor.” A diagram is instructive:

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 4.
27 Ibid., p. 5.
28 Ibid., p. 6.
Why the TFF is more appropriate

The current model is underfunded, unfairly capped at 2 per cent growth, unpredictable and onerous

In general, funding for First Nations is not enough to meet their goals. Most of the money goes towards basic services on reserves. The remainder is often used to pay debts owed to the First Nations government by the federal government arising from claims, litigation, treaties and other historic agreements. Some will go towards self-government. Most of the funding is therefore already earmarked, leaving little room for program expansion or other initiatives that could consolidate autonomous government or improve outcomes.

Moreover, since the 1990s a 2 per cent cap on annual expenditure increases has been in place for First Nations receiving funding. The basic support services mentioned above have not been able to keep up with inflation and population growth. This is a significant reason why many First Nations communities experience housing shortages. The AFN has highlighted the inequity between First Nations funding and other equalization and TFF arrangements. Whereas First Nations receive funding for all these services through grants and contributions, the provinces and territories receive dedicated transfers in the form of the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) and Canada Social Transfer (CST).

Of particular note, annual increases according to nominal GDP growth are given for funding to support services and programs for provinces and territories—significantly higher than the 2 per cent cap for First Nations program spending. The AFN notes that “when adjusted for inflation and the rapid population growth of First Nations communities since 1996, the total budget for INAC has decreased by 3.5% and funding core services such as education, economic and social development, capital facilities and maintenance has decreased by almost 13 per cent since 1999-2000”. First Nations governments received roughly $8,400 per capita for all services in programs and funding in 2009; by comparison, federal, provincial and municipal governments received an average of $18,178 per capita.

As has been previously noted, whereas funding for provinces and territories is stable and predictable, funding for First Nations governments is negotiated annually and subject to modifications, stringent reporting requirements and unpredictable adjustments. The 2011 Auditor General’s Status Report emphasized key structural impediments to the quality of life in First Nations communities. One of the observations was a lack of a stable funding mechanism. Using contribution agreements to fund core services and programs such as health care or education, it was noted, leads to poor stability and inability to plan, issues with timeliness in delivery, difficulty for governments to be accountable to their citizens, and onerous reporting.

Other problems have been noted as well. Fiscal negotiations are time-consuming and expensive, key terms, conditions and funding amounts vary across Canada resulting in inconsistent treatment, and unresponsive block funding creates fiscal risk.

Referred to as the “discretionary” model by Richard Zuker, the result is unmet need.

29 Assembly of First Nations, p. 20.
30 Ibid., p. 5.
32 Ibid., p. 19.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Nickerson, p. 19.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., p. 20.
40 Canada, Towards a new approach, p. 10.
The TFF is grounded in principles that address these problems

In 2004, the TFF was briefly replaced by a new framework that included a total funding allotment, which grew by 3.5 per cent per year, and drew money from a collective pool for all three territories. In 2006, an Expert Panel on Equalization and Territorial Formula Financing, chaired by Al O’Brien, was struck to make recommendations for reform. The resulting O’Brien Report outlines the core principles and functions of the TFF, which are still in place today. Reviewing these principles clarifies how the TFF would address the problems identified with the current approach. The following principles were recommended:

- **Responsibility and accountability**: to promote territorial fiscal responsibility and accountability for their budget decisions while maintaining the federal government’s accountability for federal-territorial fiscal transfers;
- **Adequacy and comparability**: to provide territorial governments with adequate funds to provide services which are reasonably comparable to those in other Canadian jurisdictions at reasonably comparable levels of taxation, while reflecting the special circumstances in the challenge of providing programs and services to their residents;
- **Affordability**: to ensure affordability for the federal government and thus sustainability over time;
- **Predictability and certainty**: to permit both levels of government to project, with an acceptable level of predictability and certainty, the levels of federal/territorial financing in order to promote orderly long and short-term fiscal planning;
- **Neutrality**: to provide funding through a neutral mechanism, whereby the level of funding is not subject to the discretionary actions of either the territorial or federal governments;
- **Stability**: to provide stability of funding to meet the special needs resulting from significant fluctuations in territorial own-source revenues and expenditures caused by changes in economic and fiscal conditions;
- **Flexibility**: to provide flexibility to accommodate changes with provisions to allow for adjustments to accommodate the implementation of Aboriginal self-government, federal initiatives, and further federal program devolution; and

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42 Brunet-Jailly, p. 15.
• **Disincentives and Incentives**: to avoid disincentives for revenue increases on the part of the territorial governments and to provide appropriate incentives for the territorial governments to promote economic development, expand revenue sources, address social issues and foster self-sufficiency.

The AFN identifies several principles that, from their perspective, should guide a new fiscal approach. These are equity, fairness and security, stability, predictability, accountability, authority/autonomy, flexibility and access to capital.\(^{44}\) The principles underlying the TFF—specifically, adequacy and comparability, certainty and stability—would satisfy these goals. Some principles, however, such as including incentives and disincentives in the formula, may be inconsistent with the spirit of autonomy, self-government and nation-to-nation partnership that a new framework should support.

As early as 1996, the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* commented on the suitability of the TFF for federal-First Nations funding: “…the vast majority of transfers received from the other two orders of government should be devoted as much as possible to supporting actual services, rather than to the high costs of constantly negotiating and renegotiating annual financial agreements. Formula funding such as that found in the fiscal arrangements for the territorial governments is based on a set of indicators and is usually reviewed every five years. This allows for better planning and greater predictability and autonomy.”\(^{45}\)

**Territorial Formula Financing: how it works**

The goal of the TFF is to help the territories become self-sufficient and self-reliant.\(^{46}\) The basic idea underlying the program is that “a federal grant helps fill the gap between the amount of money a territory needs to allow it to provide ‘reasonably comparable’ public services and the amount of revenue it can raise from a combination of taxes and other sources of funds.”\(^{47}\)

There are two main components to the TFF: expenditure requirements and fiscal capacity.\(^{48}\)

**Expenditure Requirements**

“The GEB for each territory is based on historical spending amounts which reflected higher costs in the North to provide comparable services as provinces. To ensure comparability with the provinces, it is adjusted annually by the growth in provincial-local government spending and territorial population growth.”\(^{49}\)

**Fiscal Capacity**

“Fiscal capacity looks at the estimated amount territories could raise applying the national average tax rate (it does not use actual revenues).\(^{50}\) This is generally aligned with the fiscal capacity measurement in equalization. Further, only 70 per cent is included in the formula as an economic development incentive.”\(^{51}\)

The TFF formula “was designed to fill the gap between expenditure needs (how much money a territory needs to cover the costs of providing reasonably comparable public services to its citizens) and revenue capacity (how much money a territory can potentially raise from a combination of taxes, fees, and some other federal transfers).”\(^{52}\)

“The TFF is funded entirely by the federal government using taxes paid by Canadians across the country. The TFF

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44 Nickerson, p. 24.
47 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
payments a territory receives from the federal government are unconditional, leaving territories with complete discretion as to how to use the funds to provide public services to their residents.”\textsuperscript{53} In 2017-18, TFF transfers looked like this:\textsuperscript{54}

“TFF payments are calculated as the difference between each territory’s proxy of its total expenditure requirements (i.e. how much they need to spend to deliver programs and services comparable to those offered by the provinces) called the Gross Expenditure Base (GEB), and its Eligible Revenues, an amount based on how much revenues a territory could raise if it applied national average taxing practices (Figure 1).”\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{tff_payment_diagram.png}
\caption{Calculation of TFF Payment}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{54} Government of Canada, \textit{Major Federal Transfers to Provinces and Territories}, slide 14.
\textsuperscript{55} Department of Finance, \textit{Territorial Formula Finance Primer}, p. 2.
\end{flushleft}
Gross Expenditure Base (GEB)

“The GEB calculation for a territory in any given year starts with the previous year’s GEB. Each territory’s GEB is then adjusted using the Population Adjusted Gross Expenditure (PAGE) escalator. Using 2017-18 as an example, this formula is:”

\[
GEB_{2017-18} = GEB_{2016-17} \times PAGE_{2017-18}
\]

“Adjustments may be made to the GEB to reflect new government spending responsibilities through negotiations with the federal government (for example, the transfer of program responsibilities from Canada to the GNWT such as devolution of management of lands, water and non-renewable resources).”

“The PAGE escalator is applied to the previous year’s GEB to reflect the fact that a territory will have different expenditure requirements from one year to the next. It determines this by using provincial and local government spending growth in Canada and adjusting it by the relative population growth between each territory and Canada.”

Eligible Revenues

“Similar to Equalization, the Eligible Revenues component of the TFF calculation is based on a formula that measures each territory’s ability to raise revenues (i.e. their “fiscal capacity”) using a representative taxation practices approach. Unlike Equalization, there are nine revenue bases instead of five:

1. personal income tax
2. corporate income tax
3. consumption taxes (excluding excise taxes)
4. tobacco
5. gasoline
6. diesel fuel
7. alcoholic beverages
8. payroll taxes
9. property taxes and miscellaneous revenues

A territory’s fiscal capacity is then determined for each of these bases by applying provincial and territorial representative taxation practices to that territory’s tax base. This system is used to determine what a territory could have raised if it had taxed these revenue sources in the same manner as a hypothetical ‘national average jurisdiction’.”

“Of note, to ensure maximum policy neutrality, the program looks at a territory’s ability to raise revenues at average taxing practices, not at the actual revenues raised by the territory. This is to ensure that a territory does not derive an undue benefit by adopting a low taxation policy at the expense of a jurisdiction that has a higher tax effort.”

“The TFF Grant entitlement for a given fiscal year is determined in December of the year before the upcoming fiscal year and calculated based on a single estimate using three-year moving averages of actual data that is lagged by two years.”

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56 Department of Finance, *Territorial Formula Finance Primer*, p. 2.
57 Government of the Northwest Territories, Department of Finance, *Territorial Formula Financing*, internal briefing note provided to the author, May 2017, p. 3.
60 Department of Finance, *Territorial Formula Financing Primer*, p. 3.
61 Government of the Northwest Territories, p. 4.
“The TFF entitlement does not change for payment purposes during the course of the year. Changes in data that occur subsequent to a given year’s calculation are reflected in subsequent years’ calculations, however, to the extent that they are part of the applicable three-year average at that time.”

**Figure 2: Breakdown of Total Revenues for the Northwest Territories, 2017-18**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Formula Financing Grant</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Transfers</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Revenues</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Revenues</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation Revenue</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Revenues</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue:</td>
<td>$1.859 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Applying the TFF to First Nations governments**

Closing the gap in socio-economic outcomes requires funding that meets need, including a formula for increases to account for inflation, population growth and increasing costs to deliver programs. The TFF represents a workable solution. This is not a new revelation—much negotiation has been done by First Nations in fiscal relations. However, “there continues to be a fundamental difference in views between First Nations and the Crown on what the terms of a fiscal relationship should encompass. Matters around jurisdiction over taxation and services, cost sharing, and securing the necessary revenue streams to overcome the comparability gap remain unresolved matters.”

Despite these differences, discussions should begin with the end goal in mind and a clear picture of what it would take to resolve the matter. Parties can then work backwards to initiate incremental change. To that end, it is worth re-emphasizing the object of a new fiscal relationship: a more sustainable and fair funding source would improve the ability of First Nations governments to provide programs and services; First Nations face severe socio-economic disparities, and therefore their governments require additional assistance to deliver adequate services; and a stable, reliable funding base is crucial for economic development and reducing these socio-economic disparities.

**The basic formula**

In 2012, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (as it then was) offered several suggestions for a new funding approach in a discussion paper that are aligned with the TFF model. Some of the suggestions are reproduced here and cited where appropriate.

The underlying rationale of the formula should be to fill the gap between a First Nations government’s revenue capacity and its expenditure requirements:

\[ \text{Federal fiscal transfer} = \text{First Nations government expenditure base - contribution from First Nations} \]

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64 Assembly of First Nations, p. 23.
65 Temixw Planning Ltd., p. 1.
66 See Canada, Towards a new approach.
government OSR. This is similar to the TFF (federal fiscal transfer = GEB - eligible revenues).\textsuperscript{68}

The formula to calculate the transfers, much like the TFF, would have two main parts: 1) expenditure side—the calculation of an expenditure base or expenditure reference level, and 2) revenue side—the calculation of funding to be contributed by the Indigenous government from own source revenues and the federal fiscal transfer.\textsuperscript{69}

The formula should include all funding elements that would support typical government activities assumed by the Indigenous government. These would include programs and services, governance activities and treaty activities, all the while taking into account own source revenue capacity. This is quite similar to the current approach, and therefore easy to continue.\textsuperscript{70}

These elements can be summarized as follows:\textsuperscript{71}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{FISCAL FORMULA ELEMENTS} & \\
\hline
\textbf{The Sum Of:} & \\
Governance funding (A) & To support governance activities \\
Programs & services funding (B) & To support delivery of programs & services, which may include some or all of: \\
& \begin{itemize}
\item Education
\item Community Development
\item Social Development
\item Health
\item Etc.
\end{itemize} \\
Treaty implementation funding (C) & To support activities related to implementing treaty obligations, such as land & resource management \\
\hline
\textbf{Net Of:} & \\
Own source revenue contribution (D) & To take account of Aboriginal government's capacity to contribute to funding \\
\hline
\textbf{Equals =} & \\
TOTAL ANNUAL GRANT & Fiscal transfer from federal government to Aboriginal government \\
(A + B + C - D) & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

AANDC outlines various factors that influence these costs and should be considered in a new formula. These factors are likely a source of debate and contention as their inclusion/exclusion could significantly impact the final dollar figure of the fiscal transfer. This paper endorses these factors as important considerations (reproduced fully below):\textsuperscript{72}

\textit{Fixed versus variable costs:} the formula should ensure a minimum capacity to address the fixed costs of governance but also respond to variable costs that may be influenced by community size (for example, number of Status Indians/members living within the jurisdictional boundary of the Indigenous government)

\textit{Scope and degree of program and service responsibilities:} the formula will need to reflect and respond to the complexity and scope of the self-government arrangement’s responsibilities. The formula would need to address different capacity and needs among First Nations governments, some of which may only be taking on responsibilities within a single sector while others may be responsible for programs and services within multiple jurisdictions.

\textit{Complexity of government structure:} the formula will need to be scalable to reflect size and complexity of governments and their structures. The formula should take account of whether the Indigenous government comprises a single community or a larger aggregation, and whether it is a public model of government.

\textit{Annual calculation or stable escalator:} if an annual calculation approach is adopted, there is no general adjuster or escalator applied to a block. Instead, the formula would change more dynamically, directly measuring actual changes in key drivers (the number of children enrolled in school), and have price adjustment built directly into monetary elements of the formula. According to AANDC, with this approach it may be designed

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{72} Canada, Towards a new approach, pp. 14-15.
to be flexible enough to match variations in the fiscal circumstances (workload, demand for services) and so transfers would better respond to the expenditure requirements of the government over time.”

Conversely, there is a trade-off between responsiveness and stability; thus is may be preferable to design the formula to ensure year-to-year changes are smoothed to avoid sudden funding changes. The adoption of a formula approach will place special attention on the need for good data on First Nations governments and communities. A formula will require reliable data so that all parties can be assured as to the validity of the results. Specifically, reliable population and other volume data (for example, school aged children) will be critical. Cooperation between the federal and First Nations governments will also be key—the responsiveness of the formula to actual conditions will rest on the sharing of good quality data.\(^\text{73}\)

There are three types of data that would be included in the formula:\(^\text{74}\)

- **Federal policy parameters**: those numbers set by the federal government and applied consistently in all formula calculations—these are essentially the same at any one time for all.

- **First Nations community data**: are the key input variables that describe the circumstances of each separate Indigenous community, such as population, remoteness, etc.

- **External reference data**: those numbers employed in the formula but calculated or otherwise defined by another source, in particular, a province or territory (e.g., provincial education block rates), or Statistics Canada (e.g., price index).

**Periodic review and renewal**: the formulas employed for the Equalization and TFF programs are set to expire periodically (normally every 5 years, as set out in legislation and regulations governing both arrangements). This forces a resetting of the formula, which provides the opportunity to review elements and consider changes to better reflect evolving circumstances. The formula could thus have a set term after which it would need to be reviewed and renewed, with elements refreshed or revised (a likely term would be five years).\(^\text{75}\)

Referred to as an “equalization type model including own source revenue capacity”, Richard Zuker demonstrates that First Nations governments would be guaranteed enough funding:\(^\text{75}\)

**Key Recommendations**

**The formula should aim for reasonably comparable outcomes**

A new fiscal relationship should strive for more than just providing comparable levels of public services. Given the dire socio-economic disparities noted in this paper, it is prudent to adopt a bolder vision for a renewed approach. The new formula should strive for macro comparability—that is, reasonably comparable socio-economic

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\(^\text{73}\) Canada, Towards a new approach, p. 18.

\(^\text{74}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{75}\) Zuker, slide 12.
outcomes to communities of similar size and circumstances. During negotiations for a new framework for the TFF, former Premier of the Northwest Territories George Braden made the following observation:

“TFF arrangements with the territories are a means to an end. The federal government needs to make decisions on where it wants to take the territories over the next twenty-five years. Without a vision, decision-making on TFF arrangements and a lot of other key issues ... will be ad hoc at best.”

As Anthony Speca observes, “Braden was reminding Ottawa that even though it had devolved most provincial-level powers to the territorial governments, they continued to depend on federal support to exercise those powers effectively in pursuit of their social and economic goals. It was not enough for Ottawa to provide the territories with TFF, which then (as now) accounted for over 60 percent of government revenues in Yukon and the NWT, and about 80 percent in Nunavut. Ottawa also needed a clear sense of where the territories should be going, and how TFF would help them get there.”

In 1985, the TFF was introduced to replace program-by-program funding to the three territories. It is guided by the principle of comparability and is intended to account for the high costs of providing public services in the north. Arguably, the federal government ought to take the same approach in its relations with First Nations governments. Comparability under the TFF, however, is informed by the concept of horizontal fiscal equity, or “treating equals like equals.” The problem with transporting this to the First Nations context is that the magnitude of socio-economic disparity is such that treating likes alike is not enough. More substantial action is required to close the gap.

According to Richard Zuker, comparability comes in two forms: macro and micro. Macro comparability refers to comparable social and economic outcomes. Micro comparability refers to comparable levels of public services. Measures for comparability include scope, quantity and quality of public services. As most federal and territorial publications will tell you, the TFF is based on the principle of comparability. However, Zuker argues that in practice, the TFF aims to provide comparable levels of public services (micro comparability), but does not use measures of expenditure comparability, nor has it ever been assessed for comparability measures.

In other words, no data is collected to determine whether comparability is actually occurring.

Similarly, Zuker concludes that the basic concept for First Nations governments should also be comparable levels of public services. This paper diverges from Zuker on this point. Funding for First Nations should strive for macro comparability using an outcomes-based approach. An outcomes-based approach is a more precise way of determining true comparability. It may be more difficult to implement due to the issue of causality (is the increase in funding really contributing to an improved outcome? If an increase in funding does not result in an improved outcome, is it the fault of the funding, or something else?), but dismissing an outcomes-based approach does a disservice to the central objective of the transfer model.

**The formula should not be capped at 2 per cent**

As emphasized previously, annual increases according to nominal GDP growth are given to the provinces and territories to support programs and services, whereas First Nations program spending is capped at 2 per cent. This discrepancy is patently inequitable. First Nations communities are experiencing rapid population growth and require expansion of programs and services to keep pace. Administrative capacity-building is also required simultaneously to support this work. If funding remains capped at 2 per cent growth, it is highly unlikely that progress toward macro comparability will occur.

Temixw Planning Ltd. argues that “[t]o be successful, discussions between the AFN and INAC must be expanded beyond the ‘2 per cent cap’ on fiscal transfers. Canada’s aging population is having an effect on health care costs which creates spending priorities in contrast to those of a young, growing First Nation population.

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76 Anthony Speca, “Political Vision and Fiscal Reality in Canada’s north”, Northern Public Affairs, fall 2012, p. 32.
77 Speca, p. 32.
78 Department of Finance, Major Federal Transfers to Provinces and Territories, p. slide 6.
79 Zuker, slide 7.
81 *Ibid*.
With this in mind, talking fiscal transfers seems more likely to create conflict, than to achieve the objective of a government-to-government relationship.  

Annual increases in funding could be built into the formula via an escalator input, similar to the PAGE escalator in the TFF. The PAGE is determined by using provincial and local government spending growth in Canada and adjusting it by the relative population growth between each territory and Canada. Similarly, the relative population growth of a First Nation could be built into an escalator. Rather than using provincial and local government spending growth in Canada as a base, an escalator would also need to account for significant program expenditure rises needed to address the outcomes gap.

Where needed, the TFF should be introduced alongside capacity-building initiatives

Some First Nations currently have the capacity to (administratively) handle a block transfer payment like the TFF. For these nations, such a model should be introduced in short order. For others, there may be capacity concerns regarding their readiness to receive larger money transfers and marshal those resources into quality programs and services. Indeed, it seems unreasonable to expect First Nations governments to perform accordingly without the appropriate self-government structures, institutions and expertise in place. For this reason, plans for a new formula must be coordinated in concert with an initiative to increase the capacity of First Nations communities to govern themselves. One option is to introduce a formula that is scaled up incrementally, such that the recipient government receives increasing amounts year after year over a five-year period. This could occur simultaneously with a federally-supported initiative to expand institutions of First Nations governance. There is no compelling reason why the TFF could not be introduced in the short-term for those First Nations who already have the capacity, and at the same time, scale the same funding model up gradually for those without.

Again, this is hardly a new concept. The *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996* made extensive recommendations to this effect. The Commission recommended that the federal government assist First Nations communities—through the establishment of a federally-funded transitional governance centre—in increasing their capacity to govern themselves. This includes consolidating First Nations institutions based on First Nations knowledge, values and decision-making processes, human resource capacity for program delivery, special training for negotiators, constitutional development, cultural healing and revitalization projects, political processes for consensus building, and more. The details of such an arrangement are beyond the scope of this paper, but it is acknowledged that such an initiative is necessary for a new fiscal relationship to produce lasting results.

The “service population” variable of an escalator should be determined carefully

Recommendation 2 discusses the need for an escalator based on population growth and government spending increases, but what constitutes a First Nations government’s population should be given careful thought. An escalator equates to a per capita fiscal transfer amount; therefore, there must be consensus on how to measure the population of reserves. Issues that arise include individuals living on reserves who are not “registered”, and others who would be living on reserve but for housing shortages, lack of access to services, etc.

This is a complex issue. As a starting point, it seems reasonable to count anyone who would fall under the jurisdiction of the government in question and who would benefit from the programs and services it delivers. This would include individuals who are living on-reserve but are not registered, but would exclude those who have left the reserve on their own accord, even out of necessity. Building on this paper’s previous recommendations, the basic principle is that a First Nations government should receive enough funding to provide reasonably comparable levels of programs and services to the population that is eligible to benefit from those services, at a level that could be expected to achieve reasonably comparable socio-economic outcomes.

Do away with onerous reporting requirements

Transparency and accountability are important principles to ensure that money received goes toward its intended purpose. However, provincial and territorial recipients of equalization and TFF are not subject to the same onerous reporting requirements. Subjecting First Nations governments to overly stringent reporting...
requirements is time-consuming, costly and paternalistic. This paper is not suggesting that reporting be ab-
solved in its entirety; rather, it is recommending that reporting requirements be reviewed to ensure that they
are reasonable, straightforward, and in accordance with similar requirements for provinces and territories,
proportionate to the capacity of the First Nation to carry out such tasks.

Currently, the federal government requires that First Nations governments establish clear and effective ac-
countability and reporting mechanisms, in particular with respect to public disclosure of financial information.
This includes agreements and understandings with individual First Nations and provinces and territories to
clarify roles and responsibilities under self-government. In addition, First Nations are expected to provide
annual OSR reports and demographic data. First Nations are also expected to publically disclose budgets and
audited consolidated financial statements, subject to an advisory process. If a First Nation delegates any of its
responsibilities to another agent, the government must disclose related expenditures by the agent in the audited
financial statements. First Nations are also expected to publish additional information, such as performance
reports and program evaluations, “as appropriate.”

None of these individual components are particularly unreasonable, but as a collective they create a bur-
densome reporting framework that is often beyond the capacity of any one First Nations. They also suggest
mistrust. The AFN has dispelled the myths that current funding for First Nations is either extravagant, misused
or squandered. To the extent that these requirements go above and beyond what is required of a province
or territory, proportionate to the governance capacity of the First Nation, such measures should be removed.

Collect data and measure expenditure needs

If a new fiscal relationship is aiming for comparable outcomes—a departure from the articulation of compa-
rability used in the TFF—there is an even greater need for a clear understanding of what the expenditure needs
involved are. As Zuker notes, this has not been measured for the TFF or equalization. With respect to Nunavut,
the O’Brien Report recommended that Canada:

“Undertake a review of significant expenditure needs and higher costs of providing public services in
Nunavut…the case for assessing expenditure needs and higher costs of delivering public services is substan-
tially different. Compared with the rest of Canada, initial evidence points to serious disparities in outcomes
for health, education and social well-being in addition to an urgent need for adequate housing. [The funding
adjustments and annual escalators of the TFF] are not sufficient to address the challenges and gaps in Nunavut.
The Panel recommends that more work be done to assess expenditure needs in Nunavut as a starting point for
addressing those needs on an urgent basis. The review should be done jointly by the Government of Nunavut
and the Government of Canada. Any additional funding necessary to address Nunavut’s needs should be
provided through targeted programs rather than through adjustments to the TFF formula.”

From an implementation perspective, this is no easy task. With so many First Nations across the country,
each with their own unique circumstances, data collection is a real challenge. First Nations, provincial and
federal governments will have to collaborate extensively to collect data and measure the necessary expenditure
needs. It is critical to the success of a new fiscal relationship. As the AANDC observes, “[i]t is a distinguishing
characteristic of Aboriginal governments (to a significantly greater degree than provinces or territories) that
circumstances may vary substantially from one government context to another. The range of functions they
exercise, their population size, their remoteness and their socioeconomic conditions can be profoundly different.
It is thus critical to ensure that particular design of formula arrangements can address the unique position of
each Aboriginal community and its government.”

So how do you introduce a steady, per capita block grant that accounts for drastic differences in circumstances
and need? Nothing will replace the value of actual data collection and expenditure measurement on the ground.
This is necessary. Once that is done, perhaps block funding could be transferred according to regional group-

87 Canada, Canada’s Fiscal Approach, p. 10.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
92 Canada, Towards a new approach, p. 22.
to each government according to greatest need (as determined by the process of measuring expenditure need). Each government would receive their fair slice of the pie, and they would receive it on a predictable, sustainable basis subject to appropriate escalators.

Other implementation considerations

The following table, prepared by Temixw Planning Ltd., helpfully summarizes other important considerations for implementation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Issues to be addressed</th>
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| Tax powers                               | - First Nation tax powers  
- Tax Coordination agreements  
- Tax treatment of individuals and First Nation governments |
| Own Source Revenue treatment             | - Relationship to transfer payments  
- Available revenue sources (what is included?) |
| Assignment Services and responsibilities | - Service provision responsibilities  
- Eligibility for programs and services  
- Service standards and costing |
| Funding                                  | - Funding models  
- Determination of funding levels |
| Intergovernmental fiscal coordination    | - What processes should be established for sharing information and discussing policy impacts? |
| Fiscal accountability                    | - What are the models for accountability?  
- How will First Nation governments report to their citizens? To residents on their land? To funding governments? |
| Relationship to other initiatives        | - Will First Nations be able to participate in the First Nations Fiscal Management Act? |
| Dispute resolution                       | - How will concerns be registered? What will trigger a dispute resolution mechanism?  
- How can stability of arrangements be maintained while the dispute is being resolved? |
| Balancing certainty and flexibility      | - What commitments should be constitutionally protected? In legislation? In an agreement? |
| Access to capital                        | - How will First Nations have access to capital for infrastructure? |
| Data and data management                 | - What data will be required for expenditure base calculation? OSR verification? Who manages the data? |
| Institutional support                    | - To support expenditure responsibility and jurisdictions (i.e. First Nations Health Authority, First Nations Infrastructure Institute) |

Timing/sequencing of implementation

Given the issue of capacity, it seems unlikely that introducing a TFF-style transfer in the immediate-term would produce positive and measurable results. Rather, implementation should occur gradually and be scaled up as capacity increases and the framework becomes streamlined over time. The following steps are suggested for timing/sequencing:

Establish the principles: First Nations, provincial and federal governments must reach a negotiated understanding of what principles will guide a new fiscal relationship. As per the recommendations of this paper, these could involve sufficiency, sustainability, predictability, comparability in outcomes, autonomy and self-government, flexibility, etc.

93 Temixw Planning Ltd., p. 5.
Start with the vision: The final model should be agreed to early in the working group’s process. Governments can then work backwards to establish how implementation can be rolled out gradually to ensure the readiness of First Nations governments to receive per capita transfers. If it suits the interests of all parties, an implementation plan could be developed alongside the vision of the model to assuage concerns of a premature launch. However, it is important the final model be agreed to early on so that all parties can collaborate to move steadily in that direction.

Begin with data collection and measurement of expenditure need: As has been argued in this paper, comparability of outcomes is a sound guiding principle provided it is supported by the right data to measure progress. The right data is also needed in order to work out the details of the legislative and policy framework as well as the calculations of the formula.

Establish the operational framework: This includes designing the legislative and policy framework, determinations of regional groupings if necessary, scope and application of the policy to various agreements, structure and content of fiscal arrangements, operation of the formula, process of review and terms of reference.

Immediate implementation for some, gradual implementation for others: For those First Nations who currently have significant governance capacity, the new formula could be introduced as soon as the data is collected and the operation framework is in place. For those without the capacity, implementation can begin with an agreement to introduce the formula after a certain date. In the lead-up to that date, capacity-building initiatives should take place to prepare First Nations governments to receive and utilize the transfer. This will require careful balancing—on one hand, capacity should be grounded in First Nations institutions, decision-making processes and laws, where appropriate. On the other hand, each government will likely require certain types of program infrastructure to ensure a higher standard of service delivery. In this way, funding is scaled up in coordination with capacity-building efforts over a five-year period.

Review and adjust accordingly.

Conclusion

The current fiscal framework is insufficient for First Nations to deliver programs and services that will improve outcomes. Funding is ad hoc and short-term, and therefore is neither predictable nor sustainable. Funding is capped at 2 per cent, which fails to account for population growth, inflation and rising program and service deliver costs. Negotiating a new funding agreement on a yearly basis is time-consuming, costly, and creates planning unpredictability in program delivery. The AFN and INAC are in the process of negotiating a new fiscal relationship based on nation-to-nation partnership. This is an opportunity to renew the relationship on more equitable grounds.

The TFF offers a workable solution that can be modified to fit the First Nations context and ameliorate several of the problems outlined above. The TFF is premised on the principles of responsibility and accountability, adequacy and comparability, affordability, predictability and certainty, neutrality, stability and flexibility, and incentives and disincentives. Applying this to First Nations governments, the federal transfer could be equal to the difference between the First Nation’s expenditure base and the contribution of that government’s own source revenues. In determining the methodology for the expenditure base, considerations should include: fixed versus variable costs, scope and degree of program service responsibilities, complexity of governance structure, and an annual calculation or stable escalator. The escalator should account for population growth and be chosen carefully based on a sound “service population.” Additionally, the formula should be informed by measurements of expenditure needs that take as their objective macro comparability in socio-economic outcomes. Overly onerous reporting requirements should also be scaled back. The result should be a model that is based on reasonably comparable outcomes, accounts for population growth and rising costs, and fosters autonomy and self-government in the spirit of nation-to-nation partnership.

In terms of implementation, such a formula should be introduced right away for First nations with the capacity, and gradually in concert with capacity-building initiatives for those without. As it stands, many First Nations would be unable to immediately turn a more substantial fiscal transfer into high-quality programs and services. Given the historical exclusion of First Nations from the creation of state institutions and their resulting fiscal disempowerment, the onus is on the Canadian government to support endeavours to build this capacity simultaneously with an improved fiscal relationship. This could be achieved by first establishing the principles and vision of a new formula, followed by data collection and measurement of expenditure need for macro comparability. Once complete, Indigenous, provincial/territorial and federal governments could collaborate to
establish the operational framework for the new formula. Finally, the formula would be phased in incrementally alongside increases in governance capacity.

References


Canada’s First Nations Child Welfare Crisis:

A Summary and Analysis of Contributing Factors and Recommendations for Nation-Wide Improvements

Davina Dixon

November, 2017
Canada’s First Nations Child Welfare Crisis:
A Summary and Analysis of Contributing Factors and Recommendations for Nation-Wide Improvements

Davina Dixon

Canada’s First Nations Child Welfare Crisis

“There are more First Nation children in care today than during the height of residential schools. We cannot lose another generation to the mistakes of the past. First Nations are the youngest and fastest growing segment of the population. We are the future. This is about Canada’s future.”

Shawn Atleo, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, quoted in the National Post, A lost tribe: Child welfare system accused of repeating residential school history in December 2014.

“It is genocidal, if you look at it, it’s just a legalized form of the residential school system that was imposed upon our people. They’re apprehending our children because of poverty, we’re being set up for failure. We have to say enough is enough. Our children deserve to be at home.”

Chief Kevin Hart, quoted in a CBC article; Canada’s record on First Nations child welfare to face scrutiny in Washington, from December 2016.

It is clear from these quotes and from the titles of the news articles themselves, that there is no debate – Canada’s system for First Nations child welfare has always been and continues to be in crisis. Not only is the current system not meeting the needs of the children and families of First Nations communities, it is also continuing to destroy these communities and inflict harm, carrying forward many of the devastating outcomes that the residential school system created. In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, the first five calls to action are for child welfare.

Although this failure of the child welfare system can extend to all Indigenous peoples, there is particular concern over the number of First Nations children in care across Canada. In a study completed by the Wen:De research project, in which seven provinces were contacted to complete a survey on First Nations children in care, a sample from three of the provinces showed that 74.2 per cent of children in care were First Nations (status), while only 12.1% were Metis, 4% were Inuit, and 13.2 per cent were First Nations (non-status). The Wen:De research also states that, “Aboriginal children are more than twice as likely to be investigated compared to non-Aboriginal children. Once investigated, cases involving Aboriginal children are more likely to be substantiated, more likely to require on-going child welfare services, more than twice as likely to be placed in out of home care, and more likely to be brought to child welfare court” (Wen:De, 2005).

In Melissa Brittain and Cindy Blackstock’s 2015 First Nations Child Poverty: A Literature Review and Analysis, Blackstock’s work from 2011 is cited, indicating that “the estimated 27,00 First Nations children in child welfare care account for 30% to 40% of all children in child welfare care even though they represent less than 5% of the child population.” First Nations with status are still faring the worst due to the fact that they are still bound and governed by the Indian Act in Canada.

Children are the centre of First Nations communities’ and culture. In order to solve the problem of children in care, it is a critical first step to start the healing and reconciliation of entire communities through the revival

2 http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/first-nations-child-welfare-inter-american-1.3885338
of their culture and traditions. As stated in People to People, Nation to Nation RCAP, “Aboriginal people often say ‘Our children are our future.” And under the Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment, which discusses how to gather strength and build capacity for Aboriginal peoples, “healing of individuals, families communities and nations,” is the first of four steps required. In particular, “healing aims to restore physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. It implies recovery for individuals and communities from the wounds of culture loss, paternalistic and sometimes racist treatment, and official policies of domination and assimilation.” How can this even start to be realized if there continues to be a devastating loss of culture, further assimilation, and physical, mental, emotional and spiritual damage to First Nations peoples’ due in such large measure to the current child welfare system? In order to start the process of healing, reconciliation and building a nation-to-nation relationship, there must be immediate changes as well as long-term commitments from all levels of Canadian government for improving the support systems for First Nations families in need and addressing the contributing factors that cause such an alarmingly high rate of First Nations (status) children living on-reserve to go into child welfare care.

Focus of Paper

This paper will focus on the contributing factors that cause such high numbers of First Nations children on-reserve to go into child welfare care. It will also focus on recommendations for improving First Nation child and family services, programing and funding for families living on-reserve that have come out of literature reviews and research projects within the last twenty years. A synthesis and analysis of these works will result in some concluding recommendations to address the critical issues of policy development/reform, program governance and delivery and, funding model and formula improvements, all with the goal of improving or eliminating the contributing factors to the high incidence of First Nations children on-reserve in care. These recommendations will include short-term recommendations to address the devastatingly high incidence of First Nation child suicide rates, and the ever-growing number of First Nations children in care where there is often little to no success of reintegration with their families and communities.

Although each First Nation community has a unique identity, made up of traditions and cultural values and norms, this paper will examine the First Nations child welfare crisis from a national perspective in light of the high rates of First Nations children in care across the country. The contributing factors and reforms considered therefore will be applicable for a nation-wide solution.

Analysis of Contributing Factors for High Number of First Nations Children On-Reserve in Child Welfare Care

Impacts of Colonization and Indian Act

A common analysis found in the literature reviewed for First Nations child welfare was that the continued impacts of colonization and the Indian Act cause many of the contributing factors for the high rate of First Nations children living on-reserve going into care, and the low success rate for reintegration of children with their families and communities. As Brittain and Blackstock, 2015, explained, “[T]he Indian Act intensified the efforts of the enfranchisement bills designed to ‘eliminate’ Indians by further impoverishing those who resisted enfranchisement. In addition to the controls and restrictions placed on cultural practices, hunting and fishing rights, self-government and travel off reserves, the Indian Act further legislated poverty by ensuring status Indians had no claim over reserve lands.” They also explained that “First Nations people who refused to enfranchise were denied these basic citizenship rights, thus establishing government-designed poverty as a punishment for resistance to assimilation” (Brittain and Blackstock 2015).

This enfranchisement and loss of traditional economic systems of hunting, fishing, and self-governance, left First Nations communities without the ability to provide for themselves and remain self-sufficient. First Nations communities essentially lost their resources and their traditional means of survival when they were forced off their lands. First Nations families continue to suffer from these losses and remain in a state of little ability to acquire resources and to correct the damaging effects of enfranchisement. The result is generational, and community-wide poverty. Not only did colonialism and the Indian Act take away the First Nations’ traditional

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5 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, People to People, Nation to Nation: Highlights from the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996
economic systems, it led to cultural loss, through an imposed patriarchal system, which replaced the traditional Indigenous matriarchal system (Brittain & Blackstock 2015).

With the imposition of a patriarchal system, Indigenous women could no longer fulfill their traditional roles in the community. Changes to traditional roles would then lead to a breakdown of the community’s traditional structure for meeting its needs to survive and thrive. With the loss of their traditional ways of meeting these needs, Indigenous women would then have to look to other means to survive and have their families’ and their own basic needs met. Not only did this lead to cultural and identity loss, it also led to very harmful ways of fulfilling their needs. “The reorganization of the family under the Indian Act has ‘led to long-term effects on Indigenous women including homelessness, prostitution, poverty, cultural genocide, loss of family connection, and apprehension of their children’” (Brittain & Blackstock 2015, Sterritt, 2007).

As the Indian Act remains enforced, few changes have been realized to restore Indigenous matriarchal systems. Indigenous women continue to be subjected to harmful ways of providing for their families. They remain in poverty and their children are often found to be “neglected,” according to current provincial child welfare legislation.

Not only are Indigenous women left harmed with little to no resources and ability to provide for themselves and their families, First Nations peoples on-reserve continue to suffer from the long-lasting, generational effects of the residential school system. “Children, families and communities suffered by being separated from each other; thousands of children suffered horrible abuses – physical, psychological and sexual- within the residential schools; thousands of children died in the schools, many from disease and maltreatment; and most of the survivors, as well as their children, experience lasting generational effects (Milloy, 1999, 2014; TRC, 2012, 2015), (Brittain & Blackstock 2015).

The separation of First Nations children from their parents removed the ability for First Nations children to learn their people’s way of family and community, as well as their overall culture and traditions. As a further cause of destruction of First Nations people’s ability to maintain their healthy family structures, the harmful effects of the abuse in the residential school systems left these now adults with little to no knowledge of the traditional family systems, which would allow them to look after themselves and their families, and harmful coping mechanisms to deal with the lasting affects of the abuse. They did not have any knowledge of their First Nations community’s traditional support systems, and not only could they not revert to their traditional supports for themselves, they were not able to do so for their children, thus adding to further harmful practices such as substance abuse, and further incidences of “neglect.”

The removal of First Nations children far from their families and communities reduced cultural learning and supports, stripped away culturally appropriate and familiar coping mechanisms, and weakened the First Nations identity, family structure, ultimately making way for colonial judgements on First Nations communities as not caring for their children. Seen through this lens, the First Nations child welfare epidemic is a systemic problem, rather than an individual, family or even community problem. It therefore requires a holistic systemic solution, not solutions targeted solely at individuals or communities alone, that eradicates the continued damaging effects of colonialism and the Indian Act. Although there will be some more immediate changes that can help reduce the number of First Nations children on-reserve from going into care, systemic change will require long-term reforms throughout all levels of Canadian government, particularly regarding the Indian Act, federal and provincial law affecting First Nations child welfare, with a return of control of such matters to First Nations peoples.

First Nation Community Diversity & Unique Circumstances

Although the First Nations child welfare crisis exists across Canada, each First Nations community faces unique challenges, such as remoteness, the level of resources they can yield from their land, access to services, interactions with surrounding non-Indigenous communities, access to employment, training, health services and adequate housing. “In comparison with other Canadians, the high levels of socio economic need, the experience of colonization and the comparative lack of service infrastructure means that many events that would be described as extraordinary in the overall Canadian context are ordinary in the First Nations experience” (Wen:De, 2005). In other words, the long-lasting socio-economic impacts of colonization mean that many First Nations communities are living in extreme poverty and are not able to provide many of the necessities for child welfare, such as adequate housing, food, and health care. Solutions that are comprised solely of addressing the immediate needs and well-being of the children and their families, therefore, will fail to provide a long-term solution that will help improve the welfare of children on a permanent basis. Long-term solutions will need to
be based on larger structural changes that improve the socio-economic status of First Nations communities. These solutions must be designed and developed with the input of the First Nations communities to ensure they are suitable to their unique needs, circumstances, culture and traditions.

**Community and Structural Issues Leading to “Neglect”**

Indigenous children tend to be in care due to neglect, based on inadequate housing, poverty and substance abuse, while non-Indigenous children had higher rates of reported physical and sexual abuse (Wen:De 2005). There is clear evidence that supports the theory that the socio-economic deficits faced by First Nations families living on-reserve contribute to higher levels of their children in care and for longer time frames than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

The same critical issues that cause more First Nations children to go into care, also prevent the parents and First Nations communities from being able to make the needed changes to their circumstances for the children to no longer fall into the criteria of neglect. For example, parents are not able to reduce their level of poverty or improve their inadequate housing on their own, and substance abuse requires access to appropriate supports and services, (Wen:De 2005).

These findings suggest that the major factors that cause a significantly higher number of First Nations children living on-reserve to go into care are deficits in structural programs that provide the basic needs for these families, such as health care, clean drinking water, adequate housing, education, and social services.

**Poverty, Employment & Education and Housing**

In 2011, The Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) produced a Community Well-Being (CWB) index, which measures the socio-economic well-being of First Nations communities compared to non-Indigenous communities using a scoring system from 0 (low) to 100 (high). The data was collected from 1981 to 2011, on housing, education, income, and labour force activity. The income data looks at income per capita; the education data looks at the percentage of the population 20 years and older that have a high school diploma, and 25 years and older that have a university education; the housing data looks at “housing quantity” which is the percentage of “the population living in a dwelling that contains no more than one person per room” and “housing quality,” which looks at the percentage “of the population living in a dwelling that is not in need of major repairs,” (INAC, CWB Index 2011).

The following CWB scores from INAC clearly demonstrate significant gaps in the socio-economic factors of income, education, housing and labour force activity between First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities. For income, First Nations scored 59, while non-Aboriginal communities scored 84, which creates a gap of 25 points. First Nations scored 36 on education while non-Aboriginal communities scored 53, which creates a 17-point gap. Housing has a 23-point gap, as First Nations scored 71 while non-Aboriginal communities scored 94. Finally, for labour force activity, First Nations scored 68, and non-Aboriginal communities scored 84, which created a 16-point gap, (INAC, CWB Index 2011). The gaps are significant, and when compared from 1981 to 2011, the gaps have not changed by much. Since both First Nations and non-Aboriginal community scores all tended to decrease or increase at the same rates, thereby maintaining the same gaps, this would indicate that there has not been any significant change, whether it be policy or program changes or changes to funding for First Nations communities, that would improve their overall CWB well-being so they could begin to close the gap.

According to Statistics Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples: Fact Sheet for Canada, in 2011 28 per cent of First Nations peoples living on-reserve lived in over-crowded homes, while only 4 per cent of non-Aboriginal populations were in the same category. Among First Nations peoples living on-reserve, 43 per cent were living in homes that needed major repairs. The Statistics Canada fact sheet also reported that the employment rate for First Nations peoples on-reserve was 47 per cent, and 75.8 per cent for non-Indigenous populations. Among First Nations peoples on-reserve 47.2 per cent had no certificate, diploma or degree, compared to only 12.1 per cent for the non-Indigenous population.

According to the Assembly of First Nations Fact Sheet: Quality of Life for First Nations, “In 2006, the average household income for First Nations living on-reserve was $15,958, compared to $36,000 (before taxes) for non-Aboriginal Canadians.” In 2010, 60 per cent of First Nations children living on-reserve were in poverty, while the

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6 https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1345816651029/1345816742083
rate for non-Indigenous child poverty was 17 per cent (Macdonald & Wilson 2016). First Nations populations clearly have significantly lower education and income levels, and higher unemployment rates than the non-Indigenous populations.

These deficits and the significant differences in the housing conditions, education, employment and income levels of First Nations people living on-reserve and non-Indigenous populations are a result of underfunding in these program areas and structural program deficits with little to no resources and supports, which is usually a result of poor policy and program development. Programs that are currently in place do not meet the needs of First Nations families living on-reserve. The funding that goes along with these programs is and will therefore continue to be inadequate.

These structural problems have an impact on the First Nations community’s ability to provide basic needs for their residents, and leave them with little to no capability to address these issues.

To see long-term success in improving the health and well-being of First Nations families living on reserve, these structural deficits in service provision must be eliminated. As indicated by INAC’s CWB results, each socio-economic factor is equally low, and there has not been a significant closing of the gap for any of these areas, which confirms that more large-scale changes are needed, rather than targeting just one specific area, such as housing. Such long-term requirements will require changes to current legislation and funding models throughout all levels of government, with the most crucial change that of realizing First Nations self-government and control.

**Jurisdictional Disputes**

Jurisdictional disputes are among the biggest problems contributing to and perpetuating the inadequate provision of child welfare programs and services to First Nations children and families. With little to no consensus on who is responsible for what among the various levels of government and the agencies that provide services directly to the families, there continues to be inadequate and ineffective programs and services to address the immediate and long-term needs of the children and families of First Nations families living on-reserve. The tragic example of the outcome that jurisdictional disputes can have on the children that are to be protected through the provision of child welfare services, is the experience of Jordan River Anderson. Jordan was born with complicated medical issues and, waiting for the government to decide who would pay for his treatments, Jordan passed away at the age of five while never having had the chance to live at home with his family. ‘Jordan’s Principle’ was then developed “to make sure First Nations children can access all public services in a way that is reflective of their distinct cultural needs, takes full account of the historical disadvantage linked to colonization, and without experiencing any service denials, delays or disruptions related to their First Nations status” (First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada).

Unfortunately, even with the establishment of Jordan’s Principle, there continue to be jurisdictional disputes, which prevent the provision of effective child and family services that protect the best interest of the First Nations’ children. A clear example of this is the conflict over who is providing “services” to First Nations families, outlined in the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) case between the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission against Indian Affairs and Northern Development (INAC). The Commission, representing the public’s interest and the Caring Society, which advocates for improved child welfare services to First Nations families, hold the following view: “Both the Commission and the Caring Society characterize the FNCFS Program, its corresponding funding formulas and the related provincial/territorial agreements as a service provided by AANDC to First Nations children and families on reserves and in the Yukon” (CHRT, p. 9).

Meanwhile the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), which is now Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), holds the following argument: “AANDC does not exert control over the services and programs provided. Rather, decisions as to which services to provide, how they will be provided and whether the delivery is in compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements rests with the agencies and the provinces/territory” (CHRT, p. 10).

Each party holds a different view of each other’s responsibility to provide services. In INAC’s case, this is a great concern because if the view held is strictly that of funding, such as a bank where funds are dispersed and there is no control over the expenditure of these funds, then how effective will the funds be at providing

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7 Table 1, pg. 11, Shameful Neglect; Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada, Macdonald & Wilson, May 2016.
the services they are intended to provide? This view shows a disconnect between the funding formula and the development and delivery of effective short-term and long-term solutions to child welfare issues for First Nation families living on-reserve. The lack of consensus over who is responsible or accountable for the outcomes of the current programs and services provided to First Nations families living on-reserve, therefore, creates and perpetuates the many problems and deficits with the current funding model/formula.

**Funding Model Deficits**

As highlighted at the beginning of this paper, the incidence of First Nations children in care and the factors that led them to and keep them in care, are unique, and that they are based on their history, and the destruction of their culture, traditions and communities over time. Therefore, policies and programs aimed at addressing issues such as child welfare, must be appropriate to the community’s unique circumstances, and cannot solely be an extension of non-Indigenous-based funding formulas.

There are many deficits to the funding formula/model used today for child and family services for First Nations families living on-reserve. According to Wen:De, First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies (FNCFSA) are funded differently then the rest of the child welfare agencies across Canada. Provinces receive an annual budget, which is then allocated to municipal level agencies. FNCFSA's operate on a reimbursement system, whereby the services provided to First Nations children in care is reported to INAC, to receive reimbursement of the funds to cover these expenses. This exacerbates the significant funding gap between Indigenous-based child welfare programs and non-Indigenous-based programs. This type of funding model does not allow for any investment for improving services and programs, specifically preventative programing. It also does not leave a lot of room for investments such as training and education of staff, resource building, and research.

With the current funding model, INAC may also take funds that have been allocated for other services, such as housing, sanitation and water, and education, and reallocate them to cover costs for child welfare, which then perpetuates the factors that cause the higher number of First Nations children going into care. (Brittain and Blackstock, 2015) Less money towards safe and adequate living conditions, which includes housing structures and access to clean healthy drinking water, increases the likelihood of First Nations children apprehended for neglect. This type of funding reallocation ensures that the socio-economic gaps discussed earlier remain the same, with little to no significant improvements for First Nations communities, even if funding was initially allocated to those areas. Brittain and Blackstock's review also highlights that putting First Nations families in the position where they must give up such basic services such as housing and clean drinking water in order to receive services for child welfare programs further strengthens the argument that the funding for programs for First Nations peoples is discriminatory, as other non-Indigenous populations are not put at the same level of compromise for one essential service over another.

Brittain and Blackstock argue that this then prevents reconciliation through further colonization, as First Nations families may have to leave their reserves and communities to receive adequate services and basic needs such as housing and access to clean drinking water, while continuing to receive supports for family and child well-being. This takes First Nations communities in the opposite direction of self-determination and self-governance. In essence, it perpetuates the destruction of the First Nations culture and identity as families are forced to leave their communities to receive adequate care, rather than having the resources or ability to do so on their own.

The current model leaves little to no room for First Nations self-governance. Appendix B of the *First Nations Child and Family Services National Program Manual* states: “Self-governing First Nations that have included child and family services or family violence in their self-government agreements are not eligible recipients under this contribution authority for those activities included in the self-government agreement.” This limits the ability for any sharing of resources between First Nations communities’ on-reserve where one may be self-governing and the other funded through INAC. With the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)* goal of self-governance for Indigenous peoples, this funding model discourages First Nations communities from working towards self governance as agencies operating under First Nations governance will not be funded through INAC, and other communities that are may refrain from sharing their resources or best practices with those that are not. This creates a gap in funding for agencies that would like to transition over to First Nations self-governance. It also further limits the opportunities for First Nations to develop and run culturally appropriate child welfare

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programs for their families that take into account their community’s unique circumstances. The current funding model provides a more reactive type of service model for First Nations child welfare programs, as there is little to no focus on or ability to conduct research, collaborate with other child welfare agencies, or address the contributing factors for the higher incidence of “neglect” amongst First Nations communities.

An important starting place for changing the funding formula would be first to change the methods for collecting First Nations child welfare data, and determining what this data is then used for. This could help better inform policy and therefore change the funding model to better meet the needs of the First Nations communities served.

**Data Management and Availability**

A significant requirement for the development of effective policy is the access to useful, relevant and significant data to inform policies. The current data management systems used by FNCFSA’s are designed to capture and report to INAC information regarding the services provided for children in care that to be reimbursed. These systems leave little to no room to capture other sets of data that could help inform policy on the contributing factors to First Nations going into and staying in care at significantly higher ratios. “The shortcomings in information management systems impact the ability of First Nations child and family service agencies to collect data that would inform promising policy and practice solutions” (Wen:De, 2005).

On the Government of Canada website, INAC, First Nations Child and Family Services, it clearly states that the numbers used for the rates of First Nations children in care do not include the children that are receiving supports through provincially funded programs. Based on this limitation, the Government of Canada, mainly INAC and the FNCFSA, do not have access to data that could give a nation-wide picture of child welfare incidences and issues for all First Nations communities. This type of data could yield valuable information on the unique factors common amongst all First Nations peoples that cause more of their children to come into care, and for longer periods.

While trying to research current employment and income rates for First Nations populations living on-reserve, it became evident that the collection and availability of this type of data is sorely lacking and that the data that does exist is out of date (some of the most recent data was collected in 2011, as evident in the data cited earlier in this paper). Macdonald and Wilson’s report, *Shameful Neglect; Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada*, May 2016, also recommends that as part of any solution to address the extreme poverty rates, these rates need to be collected and reported on regularly.

As discussed earlier, any solution to address the high incidence of First Nations children going into child welfare care would need to be a holistic solution that would also address the socio-economic contributing factors. Therefore, to even begin to reform current legislation, funding models and governance systems affecting First Nations child welfare, appropriate research and data must be compiled, and on a regular basis. There are some national organizations that are trying to do this, but there should be a national commitment from the Government to fund and support the development of a data management system that can capture information across the country and that can be used as both aggregated and disaggregated data, to uncover national issues and those local to communities.

One example of a current research organization that has created some databases for child welfare is the Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC), whose members includes 140 national and local child welfare agencies, provincial and territorial governments and others from across the country. The Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS), which is one of the members, has partnered with the University of Ottawa to collect data on children in care, including socio-economic factors such as education, health, etc. The database is called *Looking After Children: Ontario Provincial Report (OnLAC)*. Children’s Aid Societies across Ontario have been providing data since 2000. OACAS uses this data to help evaluate current programs and services and inform policy development. The data can also help local agencies determine contributing factors that may be unique to their communities.

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Funding Options

The current funding model not only sets limitations on the dollar amount available to First Nations Child & Family Service Agencies, it also limits progress in the development of reforms to improve the contributing factors and delivery of child welfare services to First Nations communities on-reserve. There have been a number of different recommendations that have come out of recent research and literature reviews. The Wen:De research project has come up with three main funding options, which are a good summary of the many options explored.

Update the existing federal formula

The first option examined is to update the current funding formula used by INAC. Upon first considering this option, it would seem to hinder progress towards a First Nations child and family welfare program that would be designed to meet the unique and diverse needs of First Nations communities across the country as the current funding structure would remain intact. The Wen:De research, however, indicates that there are significant benefits to updating the existing formula: It is a clear formula, and by building on or amending an existing formula, improvements can be realized much faster than by starting from scratch. In Wen:De it is also recommended that the current formula be amended to allow for collaboration between agencies. “The Directive does not currently support FNCFSA in developing joint programs with other community experts and this should be changed in order to optimize the efficacy of prevention and intervention services in child maltreatment” (Wen:De, 2005). This would be an ideal change that could be reached in the shorter term, and would allow agencies that, due to their lack of resources, are struggling to provide services to receive help from or work with other agencies to share resources and programs. This change would allow some First Nations communities that are struggling with the youth suicide crisis to receive immediate support and help from other non-Indigenous agencies or self-governing First Nations communities.

Another amendment recommended is to allow FNCFSA to “access voluntary sector funding sources to augment the range of resources they can provide without a financial penalty being imposed by INAC (Wen:De, 2005). This change in the funding formula would allow FNCFSA the ability to truly enhance their services without causing a deficit or requiring further funding – particularly for short-term immediate crisis interventions such as the suicide crisis. The key to this type of change is to ensure that with the addition of some services being provided by voluntary donation sources that the FNCFSA does not end up losing actual funding dollars from INAC because of the current expenditure-based funding model. Additional recommendations for funding changes will be discussed and recommended in the conclusion of this paper.

The Wen:De research also recommends that INAC clarify two key areas under the “billable under maintenance” category. In the First Nations Child and Family Services National Program Manual, under 6.3 Maintenance (General Considerations) it states that “[m]aintenance is provided as follows: for standard Contribution funding, it is a reimbursement of eligible expenses for an Eligible Child taken into Alternate Care whose Custodial Parent is Ordinarily Resident On Reserve[.]” In Wen:De the two recommendations are around “eligible” legal costs and support services for reunifying children with their families. Depending on the unique circumstances of the First Nation family and its community, both of these areas can apply to a wide range of services and supports. Therefore, without further clarification, many of these types of services may get denied, especially when they are unique or rare – depending on the Community’s need.

The Wen:De research also presents a compelling argument for the significance of funding losses when annual adjustments are not made for inflation. In appendix A (p.40) of the Wen:De research, there is a table that calculates what the actual amount of funding from INAC would have been from 1999 to 2005 if inflation were taken into account. By 2005, there is a $21,166,538 difference between what was funded and what would have been funded if inflation had been taken into account. The total loss over the six-year span was $94,717,427. The research makes an excellent recommendation that INAC adjust funding yearly to account for increases in the cost of living. This could be accomplished without many other structural changes to the funding formula, and would provide a quick solution to help reduce the underfunding. This also highlights the fact that the current funding model has not been providing adequate funds to meet the very basic operational maintenance needs for the FNCFSA’s.

Another recommendation made in the Wen:De research project is to have the directive amended “to include First Nations legislation” (Wen:De, 2005). Currently, FNCFSA must follow the provincial legislation for child welfare based on the province in which they are located. The research recommends that INAC’s First Nations Child and Family Services National Program Manual be updated to allow FNCFSA to follow local First Nations laws.
as well. This is also a good recommendation. Although it may take more time for INAC to determine how to monitor the type of services provided through First Nation legislation, it is necessary in order to promote First Nation self-governance, and to ensure the programs, services and funding for child welfare for First Nations on-reserve, actually meet their needs while maintaining their traditions and cultures.

**Utilize and apply the provincial formula to First Nations child services in the same province**

Another option would use and apply the existing provincial funding formula to First Nations child and family services in the various provinces. As outlined in the *Wen:De research project*, this option is not ideal for achieving a funding model that appropriately meets the unique needs of First Nations families living on-reserve, which have different community structures, have access to different resources, etc. “We also know that First Nation communities do not have, to nearly the same degree, the infrastructure of programs, service, volunteer agencies and the like that provincial agencies and their communities have access to. Thus, it would not be helpful to apply a formula rooted in one set of conditions to a population whose conditions are substantially different” (Wen:De, 2005).

A concern with this type of funding structure relates to the issue of jurisdic-tional conflict. As the responsibility of the *Indian Act* rests with Federal jurisdictions, how likely would it be for provinces to include (or even attempt to include) First Nations agencies on-reserve in their program mandates? Jurisdictional responsibilities would have to be worked out and the *Indian Act* would need significant amendments or be totally abolished, in order for provincial governments to take on the required responsibilities to develop and implement effective and successful child welfare programs for First Nations families living on-reserve. This would not be an ideal option at this stage. In years to come, with more long-term jurisdictional responsibility changes, this could be realized and become an effective delivery of services, once the First Nations perspectives, culture and unique needs are embedded in and drive the services. This option could, however, move First Nations child welfare service delivery in the opposite direction, with further assimilation of non-Indigenous practices.

**Develop a new formula for First Nations child service agencies across the country**

A third option would involve developing a new funding formula for First Nations child and family services across the country. Although this option appears to be the most promising for addressing the high incidence of First Nations children in care, there are some large systemic issues with this funding model at this stage in the game. Developing a new funding formula from the ground up for such a complex social problem requires extensive research, testing, and time, and may require changes to jurisdictional responsibility and governance systems for First Nations populations. Just as the option to incorporate provincial funding models, this could also be a more long-term option that may result over time through the continued commitment of reconciliation for Indigenous peoples in Canada. There are many other significant deficits that must be addressed in order to even start the process of working towards a new First Nations funding model. For example, as outlined in the contributing factors earlier, information management systems must be updated to capture relevant and significant data to help inform a new funding model that meets the First Nation’s family and community needs.

*Wen:De* recommends that the “[funding formula should promote seamless continuum of prevention services that allow children and their families to transition easily between program.” Therefore, the attempt to implement a totally new First Nations funding model may cause further delays or jurisdictional disputes for services and leave First Nations families on-reserve susceptible to greater harm.

**Additional approaches**

Building on the first recommendation, the *Wen:De research project* has three additional funding recommendations. First, to “reflect lower maintenance costs and an increased percentage of funds for prevention and community development or family healing support initiatives through;

- A multidisciplinary team approach to funding;
- Linking prevention funding to children in care and/or families receiving services; and
- Linking prevention to agency capacity to implement and evaluate programs (Wen:De, 2005).
These recommendations would shift INAC's current funding model from “reactive” services to “preventative” services.

The next recommendation is to categorize the types of “prevention services” and allow for flexibility to reallocate funds between these types of services to ensure that First Nations families are receiving the appropriate services based on their unique needs. The Wen:De research project defines prevention services as follows: “Primary prevention” as “community development services to prevent child maltreatment; “Secondary prevention” as “the range of services provided to children who are at significant risk of experiencing child maltreatment;” and “Tertiary prevention,” which is recommended when response is required for “children who are at significant risk or are experiencing child maltreatment” (Wen:De 2005).

Overall, it is clear that there are some significant changes that can be made to the current INAC funding model that would allow for immediate improvements to the funding allocated to FNCFSAs and that would help to lay a foundation for an eventual transition to a First Nations designed and controlled funding model.

Data Management & Availability for Informed Policy and Program Development

When conducting research for this paper, there was a wealth of literature that highlights the challenges and factors that contribute to the high number of First Nations children on-reserve in care but there was very little up-to-date statistical data to strengthen the arguments. Most of the data utilized in the recent research dates back six years or more. For such a crucial issue as child welfare for First Nations children living on-reserve, there is little current data that can be used to compare factors such as income, employment, health, and education.

The mechanism that could greatly help reduce this lack of data concerns the data management systems that are currently utilized by the First Nations Child and Family Service agencies for the purpose of reporting to INAC for their funding. As outlined earlier, these data management systems are designed solely for the expenditure reimbursement systems, which only utilizes data from a point in time at the end of the year. If other information about the families were collected alongside the data currently collected for the protection services provided, this extra data could tell the story of the individuals and families served as well as the factors that contribute to the high incidence of First Nations children in care. This would provide the government, FNCFS agencies, policy makers, academics and advocates the information they would need to develop sound recommendations and pilots or further research that could lead to evidence-based policy, funding and governance recommendations.

The data that is collected will need to be broad enough to capture the contributing factors, such as the socio-economic factors outlined earlier. In other words, “Big Data” is required to capture a holistic view. The other key factor is accessibility of the data. The data must be made available for academics, policy makers and FNCFSAs and First Nations communities and advocates in a timely manner in order to be utilized for research and policy and program development. Current up-to-date data will be able to provide evidence-based recommendations and also show emerging trends and results from specific program initiatives that have been implemented.

A current example of an effective data management system is the one utilized across Canada called the Canadian Looking After Children Project (CanLAC). Adapted from model created in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, the system collects information based on seven developmental areas: health, education, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, emotional and behavioural development, and self care skills. There are provincially run databases across the country where the information is collected and utilized “for a systematic evaluation of child outcomes and interventions at an individual, organizational, and national level, through data aggregation” (CanLAC). For example, in Ontario the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) utilizes a system called OnLAC, which stands for Looking After Children in Ontario. The data is collected from the Children’s Aid Societies across Ontario, by the University of Ottawa’s Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services. The data collected in this system ranges from whether the child had culturally appropriate toys and books when they were in care and what type of care (i.e. foster home, kinship, group home and customary home); to the level of education that both the child and care giver hope the child will achieve; to prenatal health history of the children in care. This extensive range of data that is collected consistently from the same populations across the province is then shared at a national level, and can be disaggregated to determine local trends and issues, or aggregated to uncover more national issues that may be consistent across all communities.

A database of this sort that collects the unique characteristics not only of the First Nations children in care, but also of their families, communities and types of supports provided, will help identify the unique contributing
factors and issues that each First Nations community is facing. As recommended in the Wen:De research project, the data collected should be disaggregated in order to understand the unique circumstances of each First Nations community that contribute to the higher incidence of children in care. It is recommended that this data base be funded by both the federal and provincial governments, as well as the First Nations family and child service agencies. The design, collection and compilation of the data should be completed in collaboration with local academic institutions, FNCFSA's and members of First Nations communities' on-reserve. The type of questions to be asked to obtain the data should be developed in collaboration with First Nations communities including their elders and the families currently utilizing child and family protection services, as well as the local service providers, along with academics in this area of research.

It is recommended that the data be collected at least once every two to three years, to ensure that changes to initiatives are uncovered in a timely manner and are available for outcome measurement.

Commitment to Research

With the improvement of data management systems, or additional systems developed, there must also be a commitment from all levels of government, FNCFSA agencies, First Nations Child and family Caring Society of Canada, Assembly of First Nations, and any other First Nations advocacy groups to conduct and share research. All parties must collaborate, sharing resources and best practices for the purpose of developing programs, policy and funding and governance systems that not only meet the immediate needs for First Nations children and families living on-reserve, but that will lead to structural changes in First Nations communities. These changes would then allow for long-term sustainable improvements to the many contributing factors, such as income, employment, education, health care, housing and culturally appropriate support systems and resources. As per the recommendations noted above for funding changes, INAC's First Nations Child and Family Services National Program Manual must be amended to allow for an integration of services between different agencies, without a loss in funding to current FNCFSA's. Through the integration and collaboration of different agencies, best practices and resources can be shared to provide optimal service when it is needed.

Jurisdictional Disputes

The Wen:De research project recommends that Jordan’s principle be a part of any of the funding agreements between INAC and the provinces. This will help eliminate jurisdictional disputes that may prohibit essential child welfare services from being delivered when they are needed.

The other main recommendation that came out of the Canadian Human Rights submission against the Government of Canada, is for the implementation of Jordan’s principle in a manner that fulfills its full intention by removing the narrow criteria imposed by the Government of Canada.

Community Capacity Assessments

The Wen:De research project recommends the use of “community capacity assessments” to determine a First Nations on-reserve community’s ability to successfully handle extraordinary events, such as the teen suicide crisis. Theses assessments would compile the resources that the community can access when facing different extraordinary events, and would identify the current gaps or lack of resources. These assessments would help the First Nations communities prepare and plan for events and seek out funding and supports for the areas in which they have few to no resources. These assessments could also be shared with local FNCFSA's to help connect the community to the needed resources to support the children and families. These assessments could also be used to help establish more appropriate funding levels based on the unique needs of individual communities. These assessments could be realized through the implementation of more comprehensive and accessible data management systems as discussed earlier.
First Nations Perspective

All provincial child welfare legislation mandates that services and supports must be “in the best interest of the child.” A crucial issue for First Nations communities is who is determining what is in the best interest of their children and how it be in their best interest if there is no input from First Nations peoples or consideration of their culture, traditions, languages, and family and community structures. If “in the best interest of the child” models, norms and criteria are based on the settler family structure and traditions, then how likely are the best interests of First Nations children truly considered and used to determine the types of supports for their well-being?

First Nations communities, Child and Family Service Agencies and the Assembly of First Nations, all hold the belief that the only way to ensure that services are provided to their children and families, “in the best interest of the child,” are services designed and delivered by First Nations communities, and agencies. Although, this could be accomplished by updating each provinces’ legislation, First Nations people recommend that they create and control their own legislation. With concerns of continued biases from a settler perspective of the best interest of the child, creating their own legislation and having the ability to control their own programming would ensure that the First Nations have the ability to maintain their culture and traditions in the supports for their families. One of the criticisms of legislation created and controlled by First Nations is that they do not have sufficient capacity. In a CBC news article, Cindy Blackstock stated, “[T]he government has presented no evidence that more than 100 First Nations agencies, including many which have operated for more than two decades, are somehow all incapable of addressing and implementing services. I think that’s akin to really saying, we can’t treat you equally because you’re not capable.”

This statement strengthens the argument that settler views and norms permeate the child welfare system in the Canada, including what the appropriate supports are and how they should be delivered. If First Nations peoples have a way of supporting their families that is different than the typical settler culture and traditions, how can it be determined that First Nations communities do not have the capacity to deliver effective child welfare programs, when the criteria for making this judgement is based not on their own cultural norms but on the traditional settler view of governance and family traditions?

The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission (AJIC), under the child welfare systems, examines three key differences between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal child welfare systems. The first difference is that “Aboriginal agencies believe it is not possible to ‘choose’ between the best interests of the child and the best interests of the community; the one profoundly affects the other.” The Aboriginal perspective of the best interests of the child, includes continued connection to the community, as their community and a sense of belonging to the community are all a part of a healthy sense of well-being. The second main difference is that Aboriginal practices refrain from removing the child from their family as much as possible, and focus more on bringing supports into the family. If the family’s circumstances warrant the child be removed – again based on Aboriginal determinations – the child will then be placed with a relative or another family on the reserve, not removed from the reserve. The final difference outlined is the fact that Aboriginal communities focus on maintaining the connections and relationships with their families and communities as a definition of well-being, while non-Aboriginal culture focuses on the availability of opportunities based on socio-economic determinants, such as education, and employment. The AJIC concludes that, “[I]n examining these differences, it becomes clear that interpretations of best interests of children are culturally bound, and not universal. Aboriginal views of the best interest of the child, or, for that matter, the views of any culture, can conflict with non-Aboriginal views. Such differences are legitimate and should be respected.”

Based on the First Nations recommendation to create and control their own legislation, a total overhaul of the current child welfare system in the country would need to occur, as the Federal government continues to have jurisdiction regarding First Nations peoples through the Indian Act, while the provinces administer programs such as child welfare, to which First Nations peoples must adhere. In the First Peoples Child & Family Review journal published by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, the article, The Indigenous Child Removal System in Canada recommends in their conclusion that, “The Indigenous child removal system must be dismantled immediately and a system put in place that deliberately disrupts the racist and colonial ideological foundations upon which the current system has been built. We can use the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

11 http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volumel/chapter14.html#10
recommendations to create a new system that more accurately reflects equitable nation-to-nation relationships and honours Indigenous children, families, and culture.”

Similarly, the fourth call to action in the TRC, states, “We call upon the federal government to enact Aboriginal child-welfare legislation that established national standards for Aboriginal child apprehension and custody cases.” It is clear that there is a need for First Nations peoples to design and control their own systems for child welfare. The difficulty with this task is the transition, as abrupt changes could leave First Nations communities vulnerable to further disadvantages in funding and services.

**Approaches to Date**

While trying to determine the best options to reform the current child welfare programs for First Nations children, it is important to consider what has been tried, what the outcomes have been, and to consider other approaches that may have had an indirect impact on the incidence of First Nations children in care. As outlined in the contributing factors section above, the socio-economic factors of income, employment, education and housing all contribute to the high incidence of First Nations children in care, and for significantly longer periods of time. Therefore, it is helpful to examine a community that has had some success in improving these socio-economic factors.

In 1975, The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement was first established for the purposes of creating a land settlement agreement that included revenue sharing for the Cree and Inuit of these lands. The agreement not only included a revenue sharing agreement, it also included agreements for the creation and control by the Indigenous people, of economic development, education, health and social services and most importantly, their own local governments. As a result of these agreements, the Indigenous communities have been able to improve all of the socio-economic factors that contribute to the factors of neglect for apprehending more Indigenous children.

In *Shameful Neglect: Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada* David Macdonald and Daniel Wilson highlight that the poverty rates in Quebec for First Nations is the lowest at 37 per cent and argue that “[t]his is largely due to the relatively low poverty rate (23 per cent) among the children of Eeyou Itschee (James Bay Cree), who benefit from a resource revenue sharing agreement.”

Such agreements, which clearly establish revenue sharing and return of control and governance to Indigenous peoples, strengthen the argument that not only must an increase in income and funding be realized by these Indigenous communities, but the funding must be accompanied by control over their own governance and design of their own systems and programs, which maintain their culture, traditions, and traditional economic systems.

**Jordan’s Principle**

Although Jordan’s principle was established to address the ongoing jurisdictional disputes, it did not result in the anticipated improvements due to the Government’s narrow criteria upon implementation. This narrow criterion excluded First Nations children not living on-reserve, as well as those who were not classified as having multiple disabilities. It thus continued to discriminate against the same First Nations children it was designed to protect. The First Nations Family and Children Caring Society of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations filed a claim against the Government of Canada with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) for failure to fully implement Jordan’s principle as originally order by the CHRT in 2011.

The CHRT found Canada to be in non-compliance of the original order for the implementation of Jordan’s principle, on May 26, 2017 - the third non-compliance order against the Government of Canada for this same issue. It provides a good example of the importance of following the full recommendations made to improve the access to services for First Nations children. When the full intent of an initiative or policy is not fulfilled, it can in turn not only fail to fulfill its purpose but cause further damage through continued discrimination against First Nations children across the country.
British Columbia’s Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAA)

Although in British Columbia there has been some movement towards Indigenous communities taking back the control over their child welfare programs, there continue to be significant struggles, particularly related to a lack of appropriate funding. In the *Delegated Aboriginal Agencies: How resourcing affects service delivery* report completed by Bernard Richard, Representative for Children and Youth in March 2017, the following findings were reported:

- The federal funding models for DAAs are flawed and discriminatory, leading to more children ending up in care.
- The uncertain status of provincial planning for Indigenous child welfare, combined with inequitable and inconsistent funding to DAAs, has resulted in differences in support for children depending on where they live.
- Lack of trust and communication among DAAs, MCFD [Ministry of Children and Family Development] and INAC adversely affects service delivery to children, youth and families.
- Funding issues leave DAAs short-staffed and unable to provide the comprehensive services that are needed.
- Child welfare practice is undermined by funding and staffing issues.
- The capacity of DAAs to offer culturally-based prevention services is limited by staffing and funding issues.12

This example strengthens the argument regarding the significance of the required changes to current funding models and eligibility criteria as outlined in this paper and highlighted from the *Wen:De* research. The struggles with the current attempt to return control over child welfare to Indigenous communities uncovers the key areas that must accompany such a change in governance in order for this shift in control to realize its beneficial potential. Any shift in governance will need to be supported by funding models that meet not only the unique needs of the community, but that will provide the funds required to establish the appropriate supports and maintain them. Such supports include infrastructure, such as building and capital, human resources staffing and access to professional services that the community may not be currently able to provide such as counselling and additions treatments.


Response to Canadian Human Rights Tribunal January 2016 Ruling

“[T]he government accepts the ruling and is taking action by setting out to truly reform the system,” Yvonne Jones, parliamentary secretary to Indigenous Affairs Minister, Carolyn Bennett, stated, according to the Huffington Post, October 28th, 2016. In CBC News article, *Liberals commit to ‘comprehensive reforms’ on First Nations child welfare*, Carolyn Bennett stated, “[A]t the moment, we pay and the provinces deliver and the children are not doing well. . . . Our job now is to engage with the provinces and territories to change the way the services are delivered. There are more children in care now than there were at the height of residential schools. That has to stop.”

In the House of Commons on October 27, 2016, NDP MP, Charlie Angus, brought forth the motion for the government to comply with the CHRT ruling by fulfilling the following obligations:

- Immediately investing an additional $155 million in new funding for the delivery of child welfare, which has been identified as the shortfall this year alone, and establishing a funding plan for future years that will end the systemic shortfalls in First Nations child welfare;
- Implementing the full definition of Jordan’s Principle as outlined in a resolution passed by the House on December 12, 2007;
- Fully complying with all orders made by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and committing to stop fighting Indigenous families in court who are seeking access to services covered by the federal government; and

• Making public all pertinent documents related to the overhaul of child welfare and the implementation of Jordan’s Principle.

Carolyn Bennett announced that day in the House that she had appointed Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux on September 22nd, 2016, as her “special representative responsible for leading the engagement process on the total reform of the on-reserve first nations child and family service program.” She followed this announcement by stating, “[T]his appointment represents a key step in our commitment to engage with all the provinces and territories and all partners for the full-scale reform of the first nations child and family services programs.” This appointment confirms the government’s recognition that the First Nations child welfare crisis requires immediate and significant action, above and apart from the ongoing commitment to reconciliation as a whole.

In addition to Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux’s new role, there are other strategies for this engagement approach, as outlined by First Nations Child and Family Services. These include: holding meetings with and surveying all agencies providing First Nations child welfare services; the establishment of a “National Advisory Committee to provide advice on the engagement process and the reform of the program;” a “National Summit on Indigenous Child Welfare;” communication strategies through websites and surveys; as well as ongoing research. The expected outcomes of this engagement process will be summaries of the public’s opinion, (yet to be posted on the FNCFS website), research reports, including the one to be completed by Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux, summaries from the summit and National Advisory Committee.

In the course of Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux’s efforts to lead the reformation of the First Nations child welfare system, she has completed meetings throughout the country, consulting directly with First Nations Communities. Although Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux’s report is yet to be released, her findings reported thus far support many of the recommendations outlined in this paper about governance over child welfare and funding allocations. As quoted in the Anishinabek News, May 19th, 2017, she stated, “This is a very important conversation... I went to every single province and the Northwest Territories and Labrador . . . I went to 18 different First Nation communities. The main consideration here . . . is the whole question of jurisdiction and authority being restored to communities so they can make decisions on their own behalf and the question of flexible funding so that it’s either block or it’s moveable so that people can put the money where it needs to go.” In the article, Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux refers to the Six Nations community that currently receives funding directly for health care with the combined ability to decide how to spend the money - a flexible funding model that allows for a more effective allocation of funds, and ultimately produces better service outcomes. This example strengthens the argument that the combination of both flexible funding models and the ability to self determine are needed for First Nations communities to successfully control their own child welfare system.

Another recommendation discussed in this paper and supported by Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux’s research is regarding the type of services provided, i.e. apprehension support versus prevention and capacity-building support. Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux, also quoted in the Anishinabek News states, “[T]he way it has been structured, the more children you have in care, the more apprehensions that were made, the more resources you got to accommodate that. We want to flip the system on its head, so that more resources go to the communities so they can do the healing and the prevention work and the social workers’ role would actually be to help those communities build that capacity.”

As recommended in the Wen:De research project, Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux’s engagement and consultation with First Nations communities across the country resulted in the recommendation that the First Nations child welfare system be redesigned to provide more preventative services. This can be achieved in both the short and long-term by opening the current funding model, to allow for funding allocation for preventative services and programs.

Conflicting Views for Moving Forward

Although there is consensus among activists, scholars, FNCFSA’s and all levels of the Canadian government on the requirement for immediate and drastic action, there continues to be conflicting opinions on the most effective way to move forward to address the child welfare crisis.

14 https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/ANNEX_F_-_ENGAGEMENT_PLAN_APPROACH.pdf
15 http://anishinabeknews.ca/2017/05/19/this-is-a-very-important-conversation-says-cynthia-wesley-esquimaux-on-reconciliation/
The federal government has demonstrated its commitment to determine effective solutions through the engagement approach carried out in 2016 and 2017. This engagement process has ensured that First Nations communities on-reserve across the country had the opportunity to provide their own perspectives and input. It is a step in the right direction to allow for more self-determination and will allow for a joint nation-to-nation solution. As Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux stated, “[T]hey [the liberals] want to be able to do this systematically and strategically to ensure that the people who need the resources, immediately, get them.”

Meanwhile, this approach is being criticized by the opposition as well as activists such as Cindy Blackstock. Blackstock is referenced in a CBC News post in February 2017 stating, “The government is hung up on further ‘engagement’ on how best to reform the system, while more and more children are taken from their communities.”

Both arguments have validity and need to be taken into consideration in determining how to address the First Nations child welfare crisis. As discussed in this paper, the contributing factors are bigger systemic issues that cannot be addressed by an increase in funding alone. The Liberals’ engagement approach is therefore the best way to fully understand the contributing factors, and the policy, program and funding areas that need to be addressed. It may be more time consuming, but an issue such as First Nations child welfare took years to develop into its current state and will take just as many to successfully address the problems.

By contrast, with the rising number of First Nations children taking their own life, something needs to change immediately to prevent such devastating outcomes in the current system. Therefore, in addition to the longer-range engagement approach, there needs to be a commitment to immediate changes that can help address these critical health and safety issues.

**Concluding Recommendations**

A number of critical recommendations can assist in making short and long-term improvements to the child welfare system in Canada for First Nations families living on-reserve as well as fulfilling the five calls to action of the TRC and rebuilding First Nations culture and communities through renewed nation-to-nation relationships.

**Short-Term Recommendations**

With the First Nations youth suicide crisis and the continued high rate of First Nations children in child welfare care, immediate changes are required to ensure the safety and well-being of these children are maintained. To address these concerns for First Nations families on-reserve, some recommendations listed below should be completed within the next one to two years. These short-term changes will start a foundation upon which more long-term recommendations can be developed.

**Funding Changes**

One of the most critical initial changes required to make a positive difference for the well-being of First Nations children living on-reserve is to the current federal funding model and service criteria. The Government of Canada has committed to investing $634.8 Million dollars in the First Nations Child and Family Services program from 2016 to 2021, on top of the current annual budget.

Although this investment is a crucial step in the right direction, the issue of dollar amount alone is not the only issue with the funding provided through INAC for First Nations Child and Family Services. As summarized thus far, the majority of recommendations for changes to funding refer to the formula and criteria used to determine what types of services are covered and who is eligible for funding. While an increase in funding is required, the exact dollar amount can only be determined once the following recommended changes have been implemented.

Critical changes to the current INAC funding directive will help provide some immediate relief to FNCFSA

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and FN communities while trying to improve the child welfare crisis. In support of the Wen:De recommendations, the current federal funding model used by INAC should be opened up to allow for FNCFSA's to receive voluntary donations, without a loss of their current funding, to help alleviate the current strains due to lack of funding and resources. The formula criteria should also be opened up to allow for collaboration and partnerships for service delivery and sharing of resources. This will provide FNCFSA and First Nations communities immediate or quicker access to the needed services through service agreements and sharing of resources, rather than having to wait for more long-term structural improvements in their communities.

As recommended and supported in this paper, for First Nations legislation to be included in the funding model, a shorter-term solution, or starting point would be to have members from First Nations community reserves, as well as FNCFSA members design the new funding model criteria and allocation of funds to better meet their communities’ needs. This will help create more culturally appropriate supports, and help direct funds to optimize services. It will also help to lay a foundation that will eventually help transition to the development and incorporation of First Nations legislation.

Another short-term solution, which may take a couple of years to implement, is the establishment of funding agreements similar to the Memorandum of Agreement Respecting Welfare Programs for Indians of 1965, between the Government of Canada (INAC) and the province of Ontario. As stated in the Wen:De research, this is one of the funding agreements with INAC that actually works well. It allows the province to provide services to First Nations children on-reserve, and receive reimbursements from INAC, which helps expand the availability of supports to First Nations children on-reserve, in addition to those provided by the FNCFSA. An expansion of such agreements to other provinces will help clarify and establish a formal process to help fully implement Jordan’s principle, as provinces can provide immediate services and seek reimbursement from INAC afterwards without policy reviews and further disputes. This will also allow First Nations communities and FNCFSA the ability to access other services that they may not have access to in their local communities.

It is also recommended that the next budget cycle include a commitment to funding specifically for research, education and training, and preventative measures. Funding should be approved and allocated ahead of time, with funds allocated to service and programming improvement, unlike the current expenditure reimbursement system and there should be limitations put in place for the reallocation of funds to different service areas, when there is a continued effort to make significant improvements in those service areas, such as housing, education and health for First Nations communities.

This funding commitment for research can be utilized for the development of databases that can be used across the country by FNCFSA, both currently funded and not funded by INAC, to collect significant and relevant data to help guide further program and policy development affecting First Nations communities on-reserve.

With INAC’s funding model opened up to allow other non-Indigenous child welfare agencies to provide services to First Nations children and families, there should be education programs and training for all employees so they are aware of the unique challenges and circumstances of their local First Nations communities; the long-lasting socio-economic impacts of colonization; and how this in turns contributes to the higher incidences of “neglect” for First Nations children.

Sharing Resources

With the opening up of the funding criteria with INAC it is recommended that the sharing of resources, research, and best practices between provincial Child Welfare agencies and local First Nations Caring Society Agencies occur on a regular basis. Partnerships should be formed to share resources and help promote access to resources for more remote First Nations communities.

This could be in the form of local service agreements between First Nations and non-Indigenous child welfare agencies and supporting resources.

Data Collection, Management and Access

After changes to the current funding model, improved management systems that can capture, categorize and interpret big data will provide the biggest benefits to reform the current First Nations child welfare system and will help to provide long and short-term improvements.
It is recommended that immediate partnerships be formed with local academic institutions to help design data management systems, and then collect, manage and analyze the data. The data should be published yearly and made accessible at no charge, i.e. it should be “Open Data” so that policy makers and researchers have access to the data to help make immediate, timely recommendations for amendments or changes to current programs and funding.

There should also be a governing body, led by First Nations people, potentially the Assembly of First Nations or a group affiliated with them, to help coordinate and apply the data and recommendations for evidence-based policy and program reform recommendations. Having data collected and available yearly will allow for a continuous commitment to improvement, and will allow for many smaller changes over the years, rather than trying to make large sweeping changes to all constitution, budgets, jurisdictional responsibilities, and local agency supports and services that affect First Nations families on-reserve. Many large and sweeping changes are required and that the government has committed to such changes as those listed in the 94 calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). Without the regular collection of significant relevant data, along with further research and analysis of the data, however, the smaller, accomplishable steps required to lead to these bigger changes will never be realized.

**Self-Determination**

Although First Nations self-governance is the goal of First Nations communities, a shorter term, first step in this direction is the provision for First Nation self-determination in terms of the supports required for their families and children. First Nations communities should be able to contribute to the decision of the types of supports for their children and, in doing so, to ensure their local cultures and traditions are maintained. This will also help to promote supports that keep the children connected to their families and communities. Local First Nations communities should have input and be able to contribute to the service plans for the children and their families. The introduction of more culturally appropriate supports will help to build a foundation to establish First Nations child welfare legislation such that they would no longer be restricted to provincial mandates.

**Long Term Recommendations**

Many of the contributing factors that cause First Nations families to have their children taken into care because of neglect are based on structural deficits that leave First Nations communities without resources and the ability to provide many of the basic needs for wellbeing, as outlined above. These structural, systemic problems require structural changes and systemic solutions. Although these issues require a larger scale coordination of changes between the levels of government and First Nations communities and agencies, a commitment must be seen to accomplish these longer-term recommendations to provide long-term sustainable solutions to the First Nations child welfare crisis. The most crucial change for long-term systematic change starts with First Nations self-governance.

**First Nations On-Reserve Community Development**

**Self-Governance**

Since the factors contributing to higher proportions of Indigenous children, specifically First Nations children living on-reserve, taken in to care are based on structural deficits that lead to inadequate housing, poverty and addictions, the solutions must involve investment in the development of First Nations communities. Although a long-term endeavour, it is the key to long-term sustainable improvements to the welfare of First Nations families and children living on-reserve. The return of self-governance to First Nations communities will eventually undo the many damaging effects that the history of colonization has created. The oppressive nature of the Indian Act must be lifted through significant changes – which could be realized in a new Nation-to-Nation Act that could be applicable across all Indigenous nations in Canada. There is no doubt that there is a commitment from the Government of Canada for a new relationship and this could start by amending the Constitution to create a new Act to foster and protect this renewed relationship. This will then allow First Nations to self-govern without suffering further disadvantages, such as missing out on funding opportunities, or access to resources or research, or the removal of their resources without consent and/or profit. Although this is a momentous change, it seems highly unlikely that many of the following recommendations would be successful without this first step.
Socio-Economic Factors

As evident in INAC’s CWB Index, First Nations communities across the country are struggling to thrive with significant gaps in socio-economic areas such as housing, health care, education, employment and income. Without larger scale systemic changes, these gaps will continue to exist, if not eventually widen. But these gaps, which contribute to the higher rate of First Nations children meeting the “neglect” factor for child welfare cannot be improved with just increases in funding, additional staffing or programing for child welfare services. Much larger systemic changes are required that will allow First Nations communities the ability to revive their traditional economic systems. As mentioned in the point above, changes are required to the Indian Act to allow First Nations communities to realize self-governance and rebuild and sustain their traditional economic systems.

Rebuild First Nation Cultures & Traditions

Finally, with the ability to self-determine and self-govern, First Nations communities will be able to rebuild their communities based on their unique cultures and traditions. A community’s identity and sense of well-being is based on its culture, traditions, and maintaining these cultures through the continuation from generation to generation. Currently, this maintenance rarely exists as communities have been stripped down significantly by colonization, and/or continue to lose their identity as their children are removed – leaving them and their communities with a bleak future.

Funding Models & Legislation

The following recommendations for changes to the current funding model would help address and support the progression to First Nation self-governance.

First, it is recommended that the current federal funding reimbursement system be changed from reimbursement that is provided once at year end, to monthly reimbursements for expenditures. This will allow for a more accurate reflection of the actual costs and would allow communities to respond quickly to changes to costs due to changes in policy, supports and resources, or the community’s capacity to provide the needed supports.

With long term plans of re-establishing First Nations self-governance, the current federal funding model must be redesigned to allow for First Nations legislation (whether it would be national or local would be left to First Nations) and these models would replace the current provincial legislation that FNCFSA’s must follow. This will help to redefine child welfare programs and policies to ensure they are suited to the unique circumstances of First Nations communities and will ensure the most culturally appropriate supports.

Closing Remarks

Over the years, there have been little to no improvements in the rates of First Nations children in care, regardless of the attempts to allow some self-determination, or provide some influxes of funding here and there for First Nations communities. These efforts have been nothing more than piecemeal attempts to solve a larger systemic problem. It is time for the Canadian government to commit seriously to the bigger scale changes that are required to accomplish short and long-term improvements. The only way any long-term improvements to the health and well-being of First Nations children, families and communities, can be realized is with significant changes made first to the current funding model followed by the amendment or reformation of the Indian Act to create a new Nation-to-Nation Act, where neither imposes its will upon another, and neither is left disadvantaged under the Act.
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Indigenous Child and Family Services: An in-depth review

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Indigenous Child and Family Services:  
An in-depth review  
Amanjit Kaur Garcha

Abstract

A history of colonization and cultural oppression has led to intergenerational poverty and trauma for Indigenous peoples. As such, Indigenous people in Canada experience representation in child welfare agencies at rates that are disproportionately high. Existing literature and data on child and family services across Canada and internationally was reviewed specific to Indigenous communities. The extent of the review was limited to factors influencing child welfare, including variables such as poverty, health, history, family and community structures. It was found that there was inadequate information on the outcomes of child and family services specific to Indigenous communities. Where data was available, it was evident that Indigenous children are over-represented within Canada’s child welfare sector at higher rates than the rest of the Canadian population. The disproportionately higher rates of children in care within Indigenous communities and the lack of structures to address the issue further disadvantage Indigenous communities.

Current initiatives that are in place to address the lack of services available to Indigenous children and communities are analyzed. A discussion of the various initiatives found that government funding, lack of education and data collections were central issues. As such, recommendations regarding improvements to data collection, education and the funding for service providers are proposed to tackle the prevalence of Indigenous children in child welfare agencies. The recommendations address the root causes of the increased use of child welfare services within Indigenous communities that are embedded in the structural underpinnings of the Indigenous populations. Too often the voices of Indigenous communities are being addressed by policy makers who are far removed from the realities of Indigenous peoples, and who base well-intended policies on perceived stereotypes of Indigenous communities. Accordingly, the predominant focus of the paper remains the need to address the child and family services issues from the perspective of Indigenous peoples and to return governance to Indigenous communities.

Introduction

Prior to European contact, Indigenous communities successfully developed their own governments and economic structures while remaining interconnected through their rich cultural customs, traditions, and languages (Kilmayer, 2001). They managed vast, resource-rich territories through treaty negotiating and trading networks. Following contact, however, many of these structures collapsed as Indigenous peoples fought to defend their land and sovereignty. Colonial oppression has meant that Indigenous groups in Canada have become one of the most impoverished peoples in the developed world, leading to a structural breakdown causing a chain reaction in other areas such as economic and health prospects. The resistance of the government toward consultations and interactions with Indigenous communities has hindered any meaningful progress forward.

The first section of this paper will establish the historical context that has led to the current overrepresentation of Indigenous children in child and family services in Canada. Discussion of the root causes is imperative for achieving a greater understanding of the problem, let alone determining a solution. The second section of the paper will illustrate the current state and depth of Indigenous presence in child and family services in Canada today. Questions pertaining to culture, identity, oppression, and colonization will also be explored. The section will also examine existing programs and initiatives throughout the country with specific focus on their successes and shortcomings. The third section of the paper will provide a comparative perspective on service delivery in Canada and internationally. Finally, recommendations will be made with the overarching aim to uncover paths towards resolution and reconciliation.
Historical Relevance

European colonization in North America has had a profound impact on Indigenous communities ranging from “infectious disease, warfare, and an active suppression of culture and identity” (Kilmayer, 2001). The impact has been so great that it is estimated that close to 90 per cent of the Indigenous population in North America died as a result of direct or indirect contact. This is a population that prior to contact was present in numbers upwards of 7 million (Kilmayer, 2001). Historically, Indigenous communities were met by racism, marginalization, and policies aimed at forced removal of their children and cultural assimilation (Price-Robertson and McDonald, 2011). Indigenous people residing in Canada were met by attempts to eradicate and suppress Indigenous culture, the rationalization being that Indigenous people were primitive and uncivilized (Kilmayer, 2001).

Residential Schools

Between 1879 and 1973, the government set up church-run schools intended to educate Indigenous children (Kilmayer, 2001). The overarching aim was to address the concerns of Indigenous independence and “savagery” (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010). The schools were designed to take children out of their families, away from any cultural influences. During their 8- or 9-year stay at residential school, the children were instilled with practices and values of the dominant society (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010). With mandatory attendance and the suppression of Indigenous languages, customs and habits, the result was broken bonds between children and their families (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010). The children remained at the schools for about 10 months of the year. In the schools they were forbidden to speak their languages and encouraged to reject their homes and heritage (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010). While attending the schools, there were cases of children being subjected to physical deprivation and abuse (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010).

For more than 100 years, Indigenous children were removed from families and put in residential schools; the last federally operated school remained open until the late 1990s (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). During the forced removal and implementation of residential schools, it is estimated that more than 150,000 children were displaced (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report detailed the undue damage and pain caused by the residential schools within Indigenous communities (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Sixties Scoop

The closing of residential schools was not the end of government intervention in Indigenous families. The federal government made amendments to the Indian Act in 1951, delegating responsibility for Aboriginal health and welfare to the provinces (Milner, 2001). As a result, Indigenous families and communities were subject to widespread provincial intervention, which set the stage for the apprehension of Indigenous children (McKenzie et al., 2016). In the application of child welfare policies for Indigenous children, the service providers emphasized placing children in adoptive care with non-Indigenous families (Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock, 2004). The trauma for children went beyond being placed in white families, as they were removed from their homes and relocated outside the province and sometimes the country (Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock, 2004). Indigenous activists and other scholars refer to the removal of children and the adoptive process as the “Sixties Scoop” by (Milner, 2001). During this time, Indigenous children were apprehended, in part due to “the incongruence between Euro-Western notions and cultural practices and realities of Indigenous communities” (McKenzie et al., 2016). Social workers were under the impression that apprehension of the children would keep the children away from the crushing realities of reserves such as poverty, poor housing and unsanitary health conditions (McKenzie et al., 2016).

Jordan’s Principle

Jordan River Anderson was a First Nations child from Manitoba who set the precedent for cost sharing amongst the various levels of government with regards to healthcare for Indigenous children. Jordan was born with a medical condition that required hospitalization for more than two years, after which doctors agreed he could go home. Due to inter-jurisdictional disputes over who covers the cost of in-home care, Jordan remained in the hospital despite being approved to be cared for in the home. Jordan spent an additional two years in the hospital,

On December 12, 2007, a Private Member’s Motion aimed at adopting approaches that advocated for First Nations children’s needs first was introduced and unanimously supported in the House of Commons (TFN Health Centre, 2017). The child first principle, called Jordan’s Principle was introduced to address jurisdictional disputes (Blackstock, 2008). The principle holds that governments’ primary focus is to provide care to the child in need first and then sort out jurisdictional disputes regarding who is responsible for the care. Designed to prevent any First Nations children from being denied care, Jordan’s Principle upholds the following principles:

- Applies to all First Nations children
- Involves all jurisdictional disputes, between federal departments or between federal and provincial governments
- Provides payment for needed services by the government or department that first receives the request (FNHA, 2017)

To support Jordan’s Principle, the Child-First Initiative was enacted to fill gaps in health resources lacking for First Nations children but available to other Canadian children (TFN Health Centre, 2017). The initiative is to run for three years, from September 29, 2016 to March 31, 2019 with total federal funding equalling $382.5 million (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2015).

The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal issued their latest update on implementing Jordan’s Principle on May 26, 2017. It was established that “the government department of first contact pays for the service and seek reimbursement from the other government or department after the child has received the service”. The implementation of the Principle will ensure there are no gaps within government services afforded to First Nations children, such as mental health and special education (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2017).

**Indigenous Child and Family Services in Canada**

Since the Sixties Scoop, assimilationist programs have been looked into and attempts have been made by Government and Indigenous people to amend the programs to provide the intended services in the interest of the child. Accordingly, provincial and territorial child welfare policies have been revisited to take into consideration Indigenous heritage and the significance it holds for Indigenous children (Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock, 2004). The policies were restructured to give Indigenous communities greater control over the welfare of their children, with some provinces extending engagement to make it a requirement for a band representative to be present during proceedings involving children of First Nations status (Trocmé, Knoke and Blackstock, 2004).

**Legislation Within Provinces and Territories**

Child welfare is provided under the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial governments. Child welfare is a mandatory service across Canada, but the delivery of the services varies according to provincial and territorial child welfare statutes (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). There are basic characteristics shared across jurisdictions regarding the investigation and reporting of children facing maltreatment (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Statutes in the jurisdictions vary on the specific components of maltreatment within childcare, the process required for investigations, the requirements for the removal of children, and the timelines for determining the child as a warden of the state (Public Health Canada, 2010).

More distinct differences arise in practices regarding specific service delivery such as counselling and supervision, and out-of-home care (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Differences amongst provinces and territories also arise with regard to regulations and investigative policies (Public Health Canada, 2010). The differentiations among assessment tools and competency-based training programs also create variance in the delivery of child welfare services (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Depending on the province or territory, the childcare services are delivered under a centralized government system or decentralized agency-run model (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Provincial and territorial child welfare statutes are applicable to all residents, and some jurisdictions go beyond to protect Indigenous children specifically including considerations for services made available to Indigenous children (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Select jurisdictions have introduced services available to Indigenous children that are run entirely by Indigenous organizations or Indigenous counselling services working alongside the mandated child service agencies (Blackstock, 2003).
Provinces with specific mention of Indigenous children in Children’s Acts are:

**British Columbia**
Child, Family and Community Service Regulation
- “An interim plan of care must include the following …if the child is an aboriginal child, the steps to be taken to preserve the child’s aboriginal identity” (Child, Family and Community Service Regulation, 2016)
- Specific reference to consider Aboriginal identity

**Alberta**
Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act
- “If the child is an aboriginal child, the uniqueness of aboriginal culture, heritage, spirituality and traditions should be respected and consideration should be given to the importance of preserving the child’s cultural identity” (Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, 2016)
- Special attention is to be paid to Aboriginal children

**Manitoba**
The Child and Family Services Act
- “Indian bands are entitled to the provision of child and family services in a manner which respects their unique status as aboriginal peoples” (The Child and Family Services Act, 2015)
- Special attention is paid to Aboriginal children

**Northwest Territories**
Child and Family Services Act
- “This Act shall be administered and interpreted in accordance with the following Inuit societal values…” (Child and Family Services Act, 2013)
- Reference to the administration of that act taking into consideration Inuit societal values is being considered as providing special consideration for Indigenous children (Child and Family Services Act, 2014)

**Nunavut**
Child and Family Services Act
- “A Child Protection Worker shall, unless it is impracticable to do so within the time limits set out in subsections 12.1(1) and (2), serve a copy of the application for an apprehension order on the applicable aboriginal organization set out in the regulations, if the child is an aboriginal child” (Child and Family Services Act, 1998)
- The act has special attention paid to Indigenous children during the apprehension process by the child welfare agency

**Ontario**
Child and Family Services Act
- “To recognize that Indian and native people should be entitled to provide, wherever possible, their own child and family services, and that all services to Indian and native children and families should be provided in a manner that recognizes their culture, heritage and traditions and the concept of the extended family” (Child and Family Services Act, 2017)
- Special attention is paid to Aboriginal children
Prince Edward Island
Child Protection Act
• “If the child is aboriginal, the importance of preserving the cultural identity of the child…” (Child Protection Act, 2015)
• Special attention is paid to Aboriginal children

Quebec
Youth Protection Act
• “In order to better adapt the application of this Act to the realities of Native life, the Government is authorized, subject to the applicable legislative provisions, to enter into an agreement with a first nation represented by all the band councils of the communities making up that nation, with a Native community represented by its band council or by the council of a northern village, with a group of communities so represented or, in the absence of such councils, with any other Native group, for the establishment of a special youth protection program applicable to any child whose security or development is or may be considered to be in danger within the meaning of this Act” (Youth Protection Act, 2016)
• Special attention is paid to Aboriginal children

Saskatchewan
The Child and Family Services Act
• “The minister may, having regard to the aspirations of Aboriginal people to provide services to their communities, enter into an agreement with a band or any other legal entity in accordance with the regulations” (Child and Family Services, 2017)
• Special attention is paid to Aboriginal children

Provinces without specific mention of Indigenous children rights in Children’s Acts are:

Newfoundland and Labrador
Children and Youth Care Protection Act

New Brunswick
Family Services Act

Nova Scotia
Children and Family Services Act
• “The preservation of a child’s cultural, racial and linguistic heritage promotes the healthy development of the child” (Children and Family Services Act, 2017)
• The act does not directly provide sensitivity to Indigenous children, but does promote respecting cultural and racial differences in the administration of the Act
Indigenous Child and Family Services: An in-depth review

Yukon

Child and Family Services Act

Children’s Act

• “If practicable a child shall be placed with a family of the child’s own cultural background and lifestyle preferably in their home community, but if such a placement is not possible within a reasonable time the child may be placed in the most suitable home available” (Children’s Act, 2002)

• “In deciding whether to make an order for temporary or permanent care and custody the judge shall have regard to the following considerations relating to the best interests of the child… the cultural heritage of the child” (Children’s Act, 2002)

• The act does not directly provide sensitivity to Indigenous children, but does promote respecting cultural and racial differences in the administration of the Act

Provinces and territories have been updating their childcare mandates and standards, which has had a direct impact on the children coming into contact with maltreatment investigations (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). The updates have shown a difference in the cases investigated and reported by the Canadian Incidence Study. The Canadian Incidence Study, conducted in 2003, found that cases of maltreatment had doubled since the previous study, which was conducted in 1993 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). As suggested by Public Health Agency of Canada, the results are in part indicative of the changes in jurisdictional mandates and standards with regard to reporting and investigative practices rather than an actual increase in the cases of children abused or neglected (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010).

A Closer look into Childcare in Canada

Ontario

In Ontario, the services provided to Indigenous children on reserves are made possible through cost sharing between the provincial and the federal governments (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, 2015). The 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement established this cost sharing of services to First Nations (Chiefs of Ontario, 2017). The child welfare programs are available on reserves because the agreement requires that welfare programs in Ontario be extended to individuals living on reserves (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, 2015). The province is then reimbursed for approximately 93% of expenditures made on reserves by the federal government (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, 2015). Provinces can be reimbursed for services in the following areas: social assistance, child and family services, childcare and homemaking (Chiefs of Ontario, 2017). The agreement continues to be in effect today, despite the First Nations not being a signatory to the agreement.

Ontario is implementing the Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy, working alongside Indigenous partners including First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous partners (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017). The aim of the strategy is to provide services to Indigenous children and youth that are holistic, culturally driven and community based (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017). Key takeaways for the strategy include the enhancement of jurisdictional responsibility of First Nations in addition to the expansion of Indigenous control over Indigenous children services available within the communities (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017). The second key takeaway is allowing service providers to track and evaluate the progress of their work on the strategy (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017).

The strategy is among the initiatives being undertaken to fulfill Ontario’s commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. In 2016, the Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne, announced the investment of $250 million over a period of three years towards reconciliation (Office of the Premier, 2016). The funding has been allocated to provide up to $150 million for efforts aimed at closing the gap and removing barriers (Ontario, 2017). Funding in this category will go towards social and economic challenges faced by Indigenous communities resulting from colonization and discrimination (Ontario, 2017). As such, this funding will allow for the expansion of child and family programs on reserves and available through Indigenous and federal partnerships (Ontario, 2017). Additionally, the money will make it possible to have programs working with remote high-need communities to determine problem areas with regard to child welfare services (Ontario, 2017). Closing the gap will also help to address the high rates of suicide among Indigenous people by supporting culturally sensitive suicide prevention strategies for children (Ontario, 2017).
Furthering the effort of working towards reconciliation, Ontario has committed to investments of $93.5 million over two years for early-years programs (Ontario, 2017). The aim of the investment is to support Indigenous children and families during the crucial developmental years of a child’s life. The funding will support programs that provide culturally relevant child and family supports on-reserve, in addition to licensed child care spaces and family programs off-reserve (Ontario, 2017). To further provide supports for Indigenous children, Ontario is investing $2 million in 2017-2018 to fund youth culture camps in Indigenous communities (Ontario, 2017). The commitment goes further to allocate $2.5 million annually towards the initiative beginning sometime between 2018-2019 (Ontario, 2017). The initiative is a result of the success of the pilot camps that were established in February 2017 in Fort Albany First Nation and Pikangikum First Nation (Ontario, 2017). The community-based cultural program camps provide guidance to Indigenous youth on leadership skills and traditional knowledge and languages (Ontario, 2017). In partnership with Indigenous groups, the province of Ontario is working toward expanding the initiative to 12 regional leadership camps and to more than 40 community camps by 2019 (Ontario, 2017).

The initiatives being taken in Ontario are indirectly proactive pre-emptive measures to address the causes of child and family problems. Child welfare agencies get involved in households when there is a breakdown of family structures and a risk of harm to children. Ontario is working towards providing for high-need communities, addressing child and youth suicides by creating outlets for Indigenous peoples. For instance, children and youth are provided with camps that encourage the growth and development of Indigenous culture. Additionally, the recognition and aim to expand the control over Indigenous children welfare services to Indigenous communities is a significant step towards reconciling the governmental interference within Indigenous children’s development.

**British Columbia**

The government of British Columbia established agreements with the federal government to fund programs that would support services such as child protection for Indigenous children living on-reserve (McKenzie et al., 2016). The funding failed to support services, such as daycare, that would enable families to stay together (McKenzie et al., 2016). As such, family separation preventative services were not included in the federal government agreements (McKenzie et al., 2016). The result has been a lack of preventative services available to First Nations families across the province of British Columbia (McKenzie et al., 2016).

In establishing what best standards are used across the country, it is also important to recognize what is to be avoided in providing child and family services. The example of British Columbia makes clear the importance of establishing policies that are proactive in providing preventative services for Indigenous families. To encourage a positive space for child development and avoid the interference of child protection agencies, it is important to provide services that assist parents in child rearing. In the example provided, it is making a service such as daycare available to Indigenous families. Indigenous peoples are amongst the most disadvantaged in Canada and accordingly, they lack economic prospects and are stuck in poverty. As has been established, poverty is one of the factors that greatly impacts children’s well-being. To escape the cycle, it is important to provide supports that serve as pre-emptive measures.

**Manitoba**

Considered to be the best model for inter-jurisdictional cooperation, Manitoba’s child welfare system is unique compared to other Canadian child welfare systems (INAC, 2013). The model in Manitoba consists of “a mixed public-private (non-profit) model consisting of four Child and Family Services Authorities; General, Metis, First Nations Southern and Northern” (INAC, 2013). The four authorities are delegated to govern and oversee the agencies providing child and family services under their mandate within Manitoba (INAC, 2013).

Further investigation is needed into the mixed-model developed in Manitoba, but it is promising in providing the gateway to successful service delivery. As mentioned previously, childcare and Indigenous affairs fall under different jurisdictions in Canada. As such, it is important to establish what criteria are best situated to provide Indigenous child and family services.
International

Australia

Indigenous communities in Australia face challenges that are similar to those in Canada, stemming from “historical and ongoing dispossession, marginalization, and racism, as well as the legacy of past policies of forced removal and cultural assimilation” (Price-Robertson and McDonald, 2011). Factors such as poverty, family violence and unemployment negatively impact the children of Indigenous communities (Price-Robertson and McDonald, 2011).

Additionally, a number of factors inhibit the successful delivery of services. First, the lack of infrastructure in Indigenous communities creates difficulties for service delivery. Second, the social workers are met with demanding caseloads and low pay causing burnout. Third, the relationship with those delivering and those receiving services is often characterized by a lack of trust, social control, disempowerment, and disorganization. Lastly, evidence is lacking, which would provide an indication whether the current and new practices are having a positive response on the Indigenous communities (Price-Robertson and McDonald, 2011).

In administering services to indigenous communities, it is important to take into consideration the following approaches:

• Working with (rather than working “on”) Indigenous communities
• Ensuring your service is culturally competent
• Focusing on attracting and retaining the right staff
• Cultivating networks and relationships
• Adopting an action research approach (Price-Robertson and McDonald, 2011).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Family Services established the Closing the Gap organization to conduct research and evaluative studies to collect evidence on what works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage (Australian Government, 2017). According to research conducted by Closing the Gap for 2010-2011, five principles and practices showed improvement in early childhood outcomes:

• Holistic and early intervention and education
• Involvement of families
• Teacher training
• Cultural competence and cultural safety
• Local involvement in program development (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012)

The study also identified principles and practices that hindered any meaningful progress in child welfare. The predominant actions that are counter productive are as follow:

• Lack of engagement of families
• Services that are not integrating Indigenous communities completely
• Programs that are conducted at the local scale level (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012)

The Australian studies provide insight into the key factors to consider in service delivery.

Child Welfare Overview

“High-quality child care is associated with enhanced cognitive development, greater language and math proficiency, better social skills and interpersonal relationships, and improved behavioural self-regulation” (Hillemeier, 2013). These attributes are criteria that determine the well being of children, but unfortunately cannot be applied to the services available to Indigenous children. As with many other services available within Indigenous communities, child welfare lacks the standards that are available to the greater Canadian population. To provide context for Indigenous child and family services, there will be a discussion of the state of the child welfare services available to the greater Canadian population.

There is a data shortage in Canada with regard to child welfare agencies; and information is further lacking with regard to Indigenous children. The research capacity of child welfare is limited due to the weak research culture, as compared to other sectors such as healthcare (Trocmn, Roy and Esposito 2016). The child sector
lacks the infrastructure within service agencies to provide credible research as the agencies lack staff skilled in research and statistics to conduct sufficient studies (Trocmn, Roy and Esposito 2016). There are few agencies that have the capacity to review the proposals made by external researchers (Trocmn, Roy and Esposito 2016). Additionally, agencies have limited access to academic journals, creating an environment where they are uninformed about current research, which creates a barrier for the implementation of new innovative practices and program design (Trocmn, Roy and Esposito 2016). An additional barrier in child welfare research is the association of child welfare, which includes families in crisis, ethical issues and the need to protect the child first and foremost (Trocmn, Roy and Esposito 2016). These associations deter researchers from working alongside child service agencies (Trocmn, Roy and Esposito 2016). Insufficient research has resulted in Canadian “data on service provision, service trajectories and service outcomes [to be] limited” (Trocmn, Roy and Esposito 2016). Without information availability, it is difficult to analyze the services being provided on their efficiency, effectiveness and impact on communities (Trocmn, Roy and Esposito 2016).

For Indigenous children and families, funding for investments is provided by the federal government. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) is the federal body responsible for overseeing the well-being of Indigenous peoples. INAC has developed the First Nations Child and Family Services Program that allots funding to service providers. There are four funding approaches: “1) funding arrangements with provinces and territories; 2) Directive 20-1; 3) the Enhanced Prevention Focused Approach [EPFA]; and 4) the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement in Ontario” (FN Caring Society of Canada, 2016). A condition to receiving funding on-reserve from INAC mandates the use of provincial or territorial child welfare laws (FN Caring Society of Canada, 2016). This is possibly concerning, as some jurisdictions have child welfare laws that incorporate Indigenous cultural sensitivity while others do not. In practice, this creates the potential to provide unequal care to children and families based on jurisdictional residence.

**Indigenous Children**

After the closure of residential schools, the government still possessed full control over the child welfare system. Accordingly, Indigenous children could be removed from their homes if the parent(s) were deemed unacceptable. Many Indigenous scholars have suggested that the measure of suitability was not based on the ability to care and provide for their child, but on the parent(s) willingness to provide a Western or European education of traditions and values. For Indigenous families, there were no services for family counselling or family reunification as there were for non-Indigenous families, leading to automatic placement into foster care or adoption (Chrisjohn, 1997).

Residential schools and the Sixties Scoop, all resulting from attempts by the government to implement Western ideals on Indigenous peoples, have had a significant impact on Indigenous communities. Approximately 40 per cent of children within the Canadian child welfare system are identified as Indigenous (NCCAH, 2010). The figure is a higher rate than the number of Indigenous children taken away from families and placed in residential school (NCCAH, 2010). This disproportionate rate of Indigenous over other children in the welfare system is not only an astonishing figure, but also an indication of the living standards of Indigenous peoples. The figure can be attributed to factors such as higher rates of poverty, intergenerational trauma, mental health problems and addiction in Indigenous communities. The cycle of trauma and poverty leads to a greater number of children in care, and this in turn perpetuates the causal factors leading to children being taken away. As will be discussed further, children are taken away from households that neglect the child’s well-being, which can include factors such as parental substance abuse. Once a child is removed, the cycle creates an environment for the parents who lose the child to turn to addiction. It also creates a space for the child taken away to abuse substances.

Due to the injustices that Indigenous children faced and continue to face, they lack the childcare attributes mentioned above. Instead, Indigenous children are victims of neglect, resulting in their overrepresentation in child protection services for close to four decades (NCCAH, 2010). Neglect is different than abuse in that it is specific to causing harm to a child over time resulting from the reluctance to act in the child’s best interest (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, 2015). It is well documented that children of Indigenous heritage are overrepresented in Canada’s child welfare system (Stokes and Schmidt, 2011). According to the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect conducted in 2008 (CIS-2008), 22 per cent of the substantiated child maltreatment cases in Canada involved Indigenous children (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Of these cases 15 per cent involved First Nations children, 3 per cent First Nations non-status children, 2 per cent Métis children, 1 per cent Inuit children and 1 per cent children of other Indigenous heritage (Public Health Agency of
Canada, 2010). These findings are similar to those in the United States, where American Indian/Alaskan Native children represent 2 per cent of the children in out-of-home care when the group represents only 1 per cent of the American population (Stokes and Schmidt, 2011). Similar to Canada and the United States, Australia has a problem of the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care (Stokes and Schmidt, 2011).

In researching child and youth health, the National Collaborating Center for Aboriginal Health found that there was a particular overrepresentation of First Nations children in care compared with Métis and Inuit children (NCCAH, 2010). The neglect children faced is characterized by insufficient food and clothing, lack of support for children at risk of self-harm, and factors such as inadequate educational, medical and emotional supports (NCCAH, 2010). With respect to Indigenous children the neglect also stems from structural underpinnings beyond parental control such as poverty (NCCAH, 2010). Researchers studying neglect within Indigenous communities found poverty, inadequate housing, and substance abuse to be the three predominant factors affecting child welfare (NCCAH, 2010).

There are three primary factors that distinguish non-Indigenous and Indigenous families within the child welfare system (NCCAH, 2010). First, the Indigenous families are more reliant on social benefits to survive, as the adults in the household are far more likely to be unemployed or without a full-time job (NCCAH, 2010). CIS-2008 revealed that 33 per cent of the substantiated cases of maltreatment involved families receiving social assistance or other benefits to supplement income (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Second, families living on reserve had a greater chance of moving around during the year (NCCAH, 2010). According to CIS-2008, 22 per cent of the cases were children whose families had moved at least once in the previous year (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Those off-reserve were 2-3 times more likely to be placed in housing that was unsafe or overcrowded (NCCAH, 2010). Third, Indigenous families were more likely to be a household dealing with substance abuse issues (NCCAH, 2010). At least one household hazard such as substance abuse accounted for 12 per cent of the investigations noted in CIS-2008 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). The lack of opportunities and differences in the care available to the Indigenous children are evident in the mortality rates of Indigenous infants, which are 1.7 to 4 times higher than non-Indigenous infants (McCalman et al. 2016).

To protect these children from neglect and ensure the child’s safety is the jurisdictional responsibility of the provinces and territories with aid from Indigenous child welfare protection agencies (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). In dealing with children from Indigenous communities, however, service providers are restricted with regard to the impact they can have due to structural constraints out of their control (NCCAH, 2010). Child welfare agencies dealing with Indigenous children come across the following challenges:

- Family violence and internalized oppression
- Poverty, education and unemployment
- Fetal alcohol syndrome effects
- Suicide
- Funding issues
- Jurisdictional disparity involving responsibility (Bennett, Blackstock and De La Ronde 2005).

**Minorities**

Like children from Indigenous families, children from visible minority families are more frequently investigated by child protective services as compared to the general population (Lavergne, 2008). Chantal Lavergne and colleagues found in their descriptive study on Canadian protective services and racial/ethnic groups that investigations were conducted 1.77 times more for Indigenous and minority groups than for the general population of children (Lavergne, 2008). It is recognized that both Indigenous and minority families struggle with meeting the needs of the family and ensuring the well being of family members (Lavergne, 2008). Lavergne found that physical abuse cases were frequent amongst Asian children, and acts of neglect were the main concern for Black and Indigenous children (Lavergne, 2008).

Lavergne and others established the importance of recognizing the cultural background of children being reported to Canadian protective service agencies (Lavergne, 2008). Visible minority families have a complex reality of child rearing, and when analyzing the situation, it is important to recognize the families’ needs (Lavergne, 2008). Members of visible minorities are often immigrants struggling to make it in Canada. These individuals are faced with challenges such as labour market entry problems, discrimination, poverty, health
problems and inadequate housing (Lavergne, 2008). Minorities are also likely to settle in neighbourhoods that are disadvantaged and experience social isolation for the members (Lavergne, 2008). As such, the struggles of raising children in Canada cause conflicts not only from all of the listed structural barriers but also from cultural barriers. There is often a conflict between Western ideals and the understanding of child rearing in minority communities, which leads to the involvement of child welfare agencies.

**Indigenous Peoples’ Perspectives**

**Family Bonds and the Childcare System**

Indigenous youth have indicated that growing up without a family is unnatural, and have advocated for the need to maintain a connection with their families (OCYA, 2016). Further, families and children conveyed the need to restructure the function of the child welfare agencies from taking children away from the family towards making the family work and stay together (OCYA, 2016). Indigenous children stated that despite the challenges existing within the family, the familiarity and connection with parents provided a source of support. One child verbalized this sentiment as follows, “You can’t break up families. Everyone I know always goes back no matter what. No matter how bad it was at home, they want to go back. Someone needs to listen to that” (OCYA, 2016).

Within Indigenous traditions, grandparents caring for children and acting as primary caregivers to their grandchildren is not uncommon (Varley, 2016). In establishing child welfare policies, it is important to respect the bonds rooted in these traditions. Indigenous communities have consistently voiced the need to provide child welfare services that do not disturb the family. The removal of Indigenous children from families by welfare societies not only results in an overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care, but also increases the safety risks of the children (OCYA, 2016). The intervention by the welfare agency often causes trauma as a result of the removal of the child from their home environment (OCYA, 2016).

The children and families affected by child welfare agencies also made evident the need to recognize that for Indigenous peoples, family goes beyond the nuclear family. For Indigenous peoples, responsibility of the child is innately different from Euro-Canadian views. Parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family, the neighbourhood and in some cases the whole community is part of the network of individuals involved in childcare (OCYA, 2016). As such, it is important to understand the value of family extending beyond simple relationships to a support system that that forms part of the identity of children.

Raven Sinclair, associate professor at the University of Regina and member of the Gordon First Nation, raised questions regarding the current practice of determining what is in the child’s “best interest” (Sinclair, 2016). She raises concerns over non-Indigenous peoples equitably and fairly determining the best course of action required for the betterment of the lives of Indigenous children. Sinclair expressed that “if stereotypes and negative social constructions of Indigenous people are normative, and racism is deeply and unconsciously rooted in the collective Canadian psyche, can a white judge who is tasked to determine a child’s best interest be objective and judicially neutral” (Sinclair, 2016). Due to the underlying differences in understanding, in practice, the legal and child welfare agencies are still channels for the continued scooping of Indigenous children (Sinclair, 2016). Sinclair recommends the dismantling of the Indigenous child removal system as it has been constructed on colonial ideologies of childcare, which is not necessarily relatable to Indigenous peoples (Sinclair, 2016). The aim should be to replace the system with one that respects Indigenous peoples and their culture.

Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, adjunct professor at Lakehead University, reiterated, during an interview, that the design of provincial and territorial child welfare legislation needs to be addressed. Some child welfare agencies are basing a child’s wellbeing on the notion of whether each child has their own bedroom, a reality that is not found in many Indigenous homes (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017). Policy makers who are not living within Indigenous communities and who have not even visited an Indigenous community are making decisions about the wellbeing of Indigenous children and communities, which have seen poverty viewed as a crime (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017). She argues that Indigenous peoples need jurisdiction of their own children, and the creation of Childcare Acts should encompass the values and realities of the communities impacted by the Act (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017). Currently, Acts that have reference to Indigenous sensitivity within Childcare Acts are limited to the writing within the Act and not reflective of what happens in practice. External forces are drafting the Childcare Acts, in effect, without the incorporation of the opinions Indigenous people (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017).

Wesley-Esquimaux argues that healing and intervention is needed by the right agencies, those that work with families to help resolve issues rather than punish them (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017). It is crucial to begin taking the say of Indigenous people in the matter of childcare, asking what they want to do rather than telling them
what needs to be done (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017). There needs to be a space to start asking questions of “what happened to you rather than what’s wrong with you,” in order to understand the structural problems of poverty and substance abuse (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017). Wesley-Esquimaux states there is need to strip away stereotypes about how Indigenous people are doing and how to fix the problem by simply looking from the outside in. The key is to engage with Indigenous peoples and have them begin the conversation of restructuring childcare.

Wesley-Esquimaux recognized Ontario as a model province for childcare services available to Indigenous children. Ontario has been doing a good job leading strong reform with respect to childcare applicability to Indigenous children (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017). There is a recognition that the current system setup is not compatible when applied to Indigenous children and as such needs to be restructured completely (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017). Wesley-Esquimaux also praised Ontario for funding some communities directly (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2017).

Making Headway

Through the collaboration of First Nation and non-Aboriginal peoples, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada provides resources to Indigenous communities that allow for child, youth and family empowerment (FNCFCS, 2016). The Caring Society has made significant contributions as one of the voices advocating for the rights of Indigenous children, youth and families (FNCFCS, 2016). One of the most notable contributions was winning the case filed regarding discriminatory practices by the government to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (FNCFCS TWO, 2016). The case was filed on February 23, 2007 in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN, 2017). On January 26, 2016, the tribunal announced a verdict that found the government did in fact discriminate against 163,000 First Nations children (FNCFCS TWO, 2016). The government was found guilty of providing inequitable child welfare funding, in addition to the failure of implementing Jordan’s Principle in practice (FNCFCS TWO, 2016).

It took nearly a decade before the verdict from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal was finally announced. Bob Watts, adjunct professor at Queens University and a member of the Six Nations Reserve, spoke regarding the reluctance of the government to come to terms with the discriminatory practice (Watts, 2017). Watts cited the government’s attempts at upholding legal infractions in the tribunal, which were not held up in court (Watts, 2017).

Discussion

Main factors influencing childcare conditions:

- Structural inequalities resulting from historical injustice
- Economic disadvantage—lack of jobs
- Low educational opportunities
- Abusive households—alcohol and drug consumption

Family is central to Indigenous culture and community and, as such, any meaningful engagement to improve child and family services needs to begin with the family. The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples highlighted the importance of family structures. In order to have community and individual healing, there needs to be family rehabilitation (INAC, 2010). Indigenous societies place great emphasis on extended family and clan members’ relationships as they provide social safety nets in times of need (INAC, 2010). Indigenous communities have social norms of sharing and mutual aid, which extends to aiding each other in communally raising each other. Assimilation and colonial practices targeted children, and disrupted these bonds and importance of family for current generations of Indigenous children (INAC, 2010). Children are held at a special space within Indigenous cultures, and a “failure to protect a child from harm is perhaps the greatest shame that can befall an Aboriginal family” (INAC, 2010). However, as outlined in the previous sections the past and current generations have lived through failures in protecting Indigenous children (INAC, 2010).

INAC provides funding to support agencies that provide child and family services that are controlled and managed by First Nations, and have been delegated by the province (INAC, 2017). The funding for Indigenous run agencies is a step towards re-establishing control of childcare by Indigenous peoples. The agencies provided with funding however do not have readily available data regarding the progress that is occurring within their agencies. Also lacking is information on what is being done by these agencies compared to non-Indigenous run child welfare agencies. INAC has data available regarding the expenditures and the eligibility for receiving funding, but fails to provide meaningful information on the results from the agencies.
Overwhelmingly, scholars and Indigenous peoples have been pushing for greater control of childcare by Indigenous peoples, but there is an insufficient foundation to realize that goal. The push for Indigenous self-government within many Indigenous communities seeks the development of Indigenous welfare agencies that provide “family support, prevention and early intervention services, as well as foster and adoption placement” (Ball, 2008). Several recommendations have been made to reform the state of the Indigenous child welfare program, but government response has not extended beyond promises of funding. The federal government provides funding to support Indigenous agencies, but the magnitude of the problem is beyond the scope of individual agencies across the country. As such, a single body run by Indigenous peoples needs to be established that has the potential to make the proposed changes a reality.

The current child and welfare system will continue to yield an overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care. Without an update to the foundation and structure of childcare in Canada, Indigenous children will continue to be targets of a Euro-Canadian understanding of child welfare. Non-Indigenous and Indigenous children cannot continue to be assessed by the same criteria, for it will continually disadvantage Indigenous children and communities.

In researching Indigenous child and family services, it was difficult to find sources that provided an in-depth look at services offered specifically to both child and family groups. There is more information available on child welfare services, which can be extrapolated to provide an indication of the well-being of Indigenous families. An additional problem identified was that with all the existing programs and initiatives for childcare, there exists a gap in baseline data available to evaluate intended outcomes. These initiatives also lack ongoing program monitoring, evaluation and redesign measures. The problems identified outline the lack of comprehensive policies and programs.

Options

There was considerable damage and pain caused by residential schools and other assimilationist policies, which were actively aimed at stripping Indigenous peoples of their culture and language. As such, in moving towards reconciliation and rebuilding, it is important to acknowledge the strong sense of identity and community engagement within Indigenous peoples that needs to be considered. Child welfare concerns need to be addressed employing culturally relevant tactics. There needs to be greater engagement from within Indigenous communities in developing the programs that are aimed at addressing the concerns of Indigenous child and family services. As has been outlined in the research, previous interactions of social workers with Indigenous communities and their children have been unsuccessful. The reason for the failures was the continual enforcement of Western ideals on Indigenous communities, despite the service workers having the community and the child’s best interest in mind.

Option 1: Education

It is crucial that funding be allocated to the development and delivery of a culturally relevant curriculum specific to child and family services, within Indigenous communities. As such, any suggested strategic funding formula should include a respectful and consultative decision-making process that involves Indigenous representation. The inclusion of Indigenous representation is essential as it provides the perspective of someone on the receiving end of the services. An interview conducted with Bob Watts made it evident that policy makers and those delivering the services are still unable to meet the needs of children and families due to a cultural knowledge gap (Watts, 2017). Oftentimes when a child does need to be taken away from a family, the child is not given to extended and/or clan family due to technical reasons imbedded within foster care policies (Watts, 2017). Within Indigenous culture, children are raised in a communal setting with childcare as the shared responsibility of not only the immediate but all also extended kinship and clan (Watts, 2017). As such, when the child is in need, it is often requested by Indigenous peoples that extended family and clans be given the guardianship of the child. The discrepancies in the traditional practices of child welfare agents and Indigenous peoples with regard to best practice for guardianship needs to be addressed.

By ensuring that service providers are knowledgeable about the diverse customs, traditions, languages, and values of Indigenous groups, they will be equipped to establish a placement for the child that is truly in their best interest. Children who are provided the opportunity to stay with distant kinship are more likely to benefit from an experience and education that celebrates their identity rather than suppresses it.
Working towards building an education geared toward providing better childcare services, it is important to allot funding to educate Indigenous children and youth. It is recommended that specific funding be provided to educate Indigenous children, enabling them to return to their communities with the tools of community improvement. An option to administrating the proposed recommendation is creating a pilot that will provide subsidized schooling or scholarships paid for a few select individuals in problem communities. The aim will be to allow the selected individuals to gain access to higher education regarding childcare. This will create childcare workers who are not only aware of culturally sensitive practices needed to deal with Indigenous communities, but are from the communities and have an insider perspective. In the past, as has been established in this paper, more often than not, case workers aim to do what is best for the child without being aware of different cultural practices.

**Option 2: Strengthening Families Program**

As discussed previously, children are sensitive to their environment, which can have significant impacts on their health and well-being. As such, it is recommended that a pilot project incorporating the Strengthening Families Program (SFP) be introduced within child welfare services directed at Indigenous children. The program has been used in families suffering from problems such as substance abuse and aims to prevent child maltreatment. The research on childcare has indicated that Indigenous communities are victim to these issues in large numbers. The program has culturally sensitive components and has been successfully tested with First Nations families in the U.S (SFP, 2017). The focus of the program is to provide parenting skills training, child skills training, and family training (Brook, McDonald, and Yan 2012).

**Option 3: Research Hub**

Currently, there is no national child welfare program, and as such there are discrepancies in the care received by children across jurisdictions. It is recommended that research be commissioned that will specifically look at best practices within the provinces and territories. It is important to have a single source establish the similarities and differences evident across Canada regarding child and family services for Indigenous peoples. The number of Indigenous children who end up in foster care compared to other children is alarming. As such, research specifically looking at indigenous children and childcare can help determine not only the cause, but also the practices that lead to overrepresentation within child welfare. In conducting research, it is important to determine the variance in the reasoning provided to place an Indigenous child in foster care. The practice of placing Indigenous children in care based on Western ideas of children's well-being and neglect is insufficient in providing for what is best for Indigenous children. Therefore, there is a need to establish criteria that are specific to Indigenous communities when determining when a child absolutely needs to be placed in foster care for the betterment of the child’s mental and physical health.

It is recommended that there be investments made toward research within child welfare beyond the scope that currently exists. Child welfare agencies lack the tools for sufficient research, creating gaps in the available data regarding the services and the resulting consequences. As such, the development of a research hub can work towards creating a checklist that can be used across jurisdictions that would greatly improve the care provided to the children. The checklist can include criteria such as risk assessment factors and alternatives to foster care. Essentially, the aim is to develop methods of determining what types of care are best suited for Indigenous children and families, specifically addressing improvements to the practices of child welfare workers.

**Recommended Option**

The proposed recommendation to address the concerns raised by Indigenous child and family services is closing the information gap. The aim is on concentrating on the data gap that exists in many areas of Indigenous affairs, but specifically childcare. Specific to the problem of child and family services, it is recommended that a monitoring and reporting framework be developed and implemented. The framework would contain common, agreed upon performance indicators for child welfare. The objective would be centered on closing the disparities between the child and family service that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Provinces such as Ontario and British Columbia are investing heavily in Indigenous affairs and child and family services, but there lacks meaningful information on where the money is being spent specifically.
The rationale for providing the following recommendation is that current programs are being implemented to address care for Indigenous children but lack an evaluative process. For instance, Jordan’s Principle has been implemented but the outcomes resulting from the initiative lack an evaluative assessment. It is often criticized for not truly being implemented in practice as it has been established in principle. As such, programs and initiatives should be evaluated on established criteria to make it easier to determine their successes and shortcomings. This is not only beneficial for Indigenous communities to hold service providers accountable, but also allows government service providers to have data and evidence of initiatives that are aiming to reconcile with Indigenous peoples.

Additionally, there is insufficient data being collected on the costs of providing child and family care and programs specific to Indigenous communities. The information is not readily available, which undermines the fundamental assessments of program delivery. Without knowledge of inputs and outputs, it is difficult to measure whether the program is successful and having a positive impact. Without data on expenditures it is also difficult to determine whether the program is ineffective due to a lack of funding for specific program delivery tools or whether there are other external causes for program inefficiency.

The research can begin by focusing on municipalities that have been seeing positive outcomes from the Indigenous communities regarding the delivery of child and family services. Bob Watts commended the work currently being undertaken in the municipalities of Sudbury and Sarnia (Watts, 2017). Watts recognized Sudbury for being good at partnering childcare facilities with Indigenous communities, and Sarnia for the apprehension process with respect to Indigenous children (Watts, 2017). Sudbury has numerous agencies providing services to Indigenous families that promote health, language, traditions and culture (City of Sudbury Children Services, 2017). The agencies’ services include daycare, healthy children program, Indigenous prenatal nutrition program, community support program and many more. These various agencies and programs can be analyzed in detail regarding the function and resulting outcome. Indigenous peoples in the Sarnia-Lambton area have access to the Best Start Hub, which provides access to “child care community professionals who provide a range of child development, assessment and services” (Little Friends Child and Family Development Centre, 2017).

In order to progress forward with the recommendation, a number of factors should be considered. Firstly, based on an examination of historical and current circumstances, the government may not possess the political will to push forward with meaningful action. Ontario has been very vocal in the announcement of reconciliation and funding for programs invested in Indigenous affairs. Other provinces and territories, however, have not allotted investments towards Indigenous affairs to the same degree. As such, despite child welfare being the jurisdictional responsibility of provinces and territories, not all jurisdictions are investing towards the issue of Indigenous child welfare to the same degree. Therefore, there is a need to have the federal government’s agenda of improving the state of Indigenous affairs within Canada aligned with the child welfare services available across Canadian provinces.

Jurisdictional responsibilities are another concern that may hinder effective action. For example, the federal government is responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development while Indigenous Relations are designated as a provincial responsibility. However, it is the municipal government that remains responsible for family and community support services. As such, Indigenous child and family services are an inter-jurisdictional issue, which raises concerns over who is responsible for funding and program development. These issues are similar to those raised prior to the development of Jordan’s Principle. Jurisdictional responsibility also brings up concerns regarding by whom and how services will be provided for those Indigenous children and families on- and off-reserve equally. Therefore, in line with the recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation report, the federal government should ensure that all Indigenous peoples, whether living on-reserve or not, are provided with culturally relevant funding and support.
Conclusion

An examination of the available literature and data on child and family services and Indigenous communities illustrates that Indigenous peoples are at greater risks of being affected by child welfare agencies. There is a significant lack of statistics pertaining specifically to the treatment of Indigenous children within the child welfare agencies. As such, recommendations that address the key underlying factors leading to child well-being have been proposed. The recommended proposal considers the role of data collection and education. These two components are addressed to raise awareness of the issue from the perspective of those impacted by the issue of child welfare overrepresentation. As outlined, to make meaningful progress on Indigenous child and family services in Canada, it is important and necessary to not only obtain the perspective of Indigenous peoples but also to have a shift in governance. The aim has been to reach the root of the problem at the structural level, while moving forward with the development of sustainable relationships that are grounded in mutual respect and collaboration.

References


A Life Worth Living: Life Promotion for Indigenous Peoples on-Reserve

Ashley Keays

November, 2017
A Life Worth Living: Life Promotion for Indigenous Peoples on-Reserve
Ashley Keays

Problem Statement
Factors contributing to social disorder among Indigenous youth puts them at greater risk for death by suicide.

Purpose
To examine underlying factors that lead to disproportionate rates of death by suicide among Indigenous peoples on-reserve and to develop a framework to achieve effective long-term solutions to encourage life-promotion.

Introduction
The plight of Indigenous peoples in Canada is a direct result of an undeniable history of systematically oppressive structures and policies aimed at ridding the nation of the “Indian problem”. The dispossession of land, language and culture through assimilation mechanisms such as the Indian Act, Residential Schools, and 60’s Scoop has shaped a legacy of interwoven social, political and economic challenges. Such challenges have made way for a widening gap in the quality of life for Indigenous peoples on-reserve, including disproportionate rates of death by suicide, in comparison with the rest of Canada. Suicide is a symptom of a much broader issue. In 1995, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples’ (RCAP) released a special report on suicide among Aboriginal people called “Choosing Life.” This report speaks to the symptom of suicide as a “collective anguish - part grief, part anger - tearing at the minds and hearts of many people” as a result of a “cumulative effect of 300 years of colonial history: lands occupied, resources seized, beliefs and cultures ridiculed, children taken away, power concentrated in distant capitals, hopes for honourable co-existence dashed over and over again” (RCAP, 1995). Indigenous peoples are the youngest and fastest growing population in Canada. If the widening gap and social disparity is not addressed now, Canada will have a much larger, much more complex issue to deal with in the future.

Background / Context
• There exists a social crisis among several Indigenous communities. Nishnawbe Aski Nation, a political territorial organization representing 49 First Nations communities in northern Ontario, reported 18 suicides in the first seven months of 2017 in their territory.
• The rate of death by suicide among Indigenous youth is approximately five to six times higher than that of the non-Indigenous youth in Canada (Canadian Institute on Health, 2000).
• Attawapiskat First Nation, a small community located 400 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, experienced a swell of youth suicides in March of 2016, when thirteen youth died in a single suicide pact (Ansloos, 2017).
• The underlying reasons for the action/behaviour of suicide are unwieldy, and have many confounding and contributing factors that are difficult to pinpoint. Death by suicide is considered a symptom of a deeper problem: An indicator of significant distress within communities and “a result of the interaction of broader personal, historical and contextual factors” (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2007).
• Death by suicide not only impacts one person or family, but rather creates a significant negative ripple effect for an entire community. Most communities are small and closely knit, which creates a “greater risk of the contagion effect, leading to a cluster of suicides.” This is described as “echo” clusters that “occur over an extended period of time after the original cluster, which is evidence that a single death by suicide can resonate for months to come” (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2013).
• Indigenous youth often experience isolation, poverty, and unhealthy family dynamics. A loss of identity as a result of “colonization, marginalization and rapid cultural change have left them in the wake of foreign values and beliefs and deep conflicts about who they are” (Government of Canada, 2003). Young people feel a sense of hopelessness as a result of trauma; a loss of their spirit (Ireland-Noganosh, 2017).
• According to RCAP, youth feel that the causal factors are always present, “in the confusion they feel about
their identity, in the absence of opportunity to make a good life, in the bleakness of daily existence where alcohol and drugs sometimes seem to offer the only relief” (RCAP, 1996). A thought of suicide has a pull “as a way out of apparently insurmountable conditions and yawning spiritual emptiness” (RCAP, 1996).

- Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler has linked the problem of suicide on-reserve to the high prevalence of childhood sexual abuse. The devastation caused by abuse experienced in residential schools has created “a cycle of childhood sexual abuse that has rippled through generations” (Chin, 2017).
- The lack of resources on-reserve has made it even more difficult to determine the real impacts of such high instances of sexual abuse. Alvin Fiddler states, “We don’t have the police tools, we don’t have the mental health tools, and these children are left on their own” (Chin, 2017).
- As a result of intergenerational trauma, “home” is not always considered a safe place for healing, as family members facing various stresses are not in a position to provide a safe haven that meets the needs of their children (Government of Canada, 2003).

Situational Analysis

The Cost of Death by Suicide

- While it is impossible to put a price on the cost of suicide among Indigenous youth on-reserve in Canada, the financial implications of the disproportionate rates are obvious especially given current demographic trends. Indigenous peoples on-reserve are the youngest and fastest growing population in Canada.
- A report on the economic burden of injury in Canada in 2004 classifies suicide as an “intentional injury” that costs $2,442 million every year. This cost includes direct costs of $707 million and indirect costs of $1,735 million (SmartRisk, 2004).
- Direct costs relate to the cost of resources required to treat the individual including: diagnosis, treatment, continuing care, rehabilitation and terminal care of people experiencing a major illness or impairment. They include expenditures for hospitalization, home care, outpatient care, nursing home care, services of physicians and other healthcare professionals, pharmaceuticals and rehabilitation. Also included are the administrative costs of third-party payers (public and private) who fund such expenses (SmartRisk, 2004).
- Indirect costs relate to the value lost to society as a result of the illness or injury including “societal productivity losses, which account for the injured individual’s inability to perform his or her major activities” (SmartRisk, 2004).
- The study also recognizes the intangible costs associated to injuries such as “pain and suffering, economic dependence and social isolation” but does not attempt to quantify them, which makes the indirect costs quite conservative (SmartRisk 2004).
- The connection between suicide and mental health is obvious. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 90 percent of those who die by suicide suffer from some form of mental illness (CASP, year unknown). The cost of mental illness in Canada is significant: the financial impact on the health care system was estimated to be at least $7.9 billion in 1998 – $4.7 billion in care, and $3.2 billion in disability and early death. In addition to this, $6.3 billion was spent on uninsured mental health services and time off work for depression and distress that was not treated by the health care system (CMHA, 2016).
- The cost of doing nothing far outweighs the opportunity to change the health outcomes for Indigenous youth. A public policy focus on prevention has proven to be a better investment in reducing suicide rates. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center in the US estimates that the average cost of one suicide was $1,795,379, costing the country $93.5 billion in 2013. They highlight the importance of the integration of services stating that only 3 percent of that cost was associated with actual medical treatment. They determined that every dollar spent on psychotherapeutic interventions and interventions that strengthened linkages among different care providers saved $2.50 in the cost of suicides (SPRC, 2015).
- The issue of suicide has many contributing factors. A Report released by the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs in June 2017 articulates the connection between mental health and social determinants such as employment, housing, healthy child development, income, gender, and culture (Mihychuk, 2017). A report released by the Office of the Chief Coroner on death by suicides in Pikangikum
First Nation echoed this finding, as do many First Nations leaders and mental health practitioners. They highlight the “importance of addressing these basic physical needs in order to give First Nations youth a reason to live” (Government of Canada, 2003).

- While examining the issue of suicide from a cost perspective, it is reasonable to attempt to determine the economic potential of healthy and vibrant Indigenous communities with low rates of death by suicide on-reserve. Unfortunately, data on this is not available. In 2015 however, the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) estimated that eliminating the educational attainment gap by 2031 has the potential to increase employment by 90,000 workers, increase contributions to the GDP by as much as $28.3 billion (2010 dollars) or $672 per Canadian living in 2031, and increase the average employment income of Indigenous peoples by much as $11,236. It is important to note, that the potential is significantly greater than projected as these estimates do not include closing the income or employment gaps. CSLS also estimates that the cumulative gains to output between 2011 and 2031 could be as high as $94.9 billion when the employment rate gap conditional on education alone is closed, $58.1 billion when the income gap conditional on education is closed, $260.7 billion for the entire educational attainment gap alone, and $334.7 billion if all three gaps are closed. They highlight that the gains from closing all three gaps individually do not equate with the gains from closing all three gaps at once given the complex interactions between them (CSLS, 2015).

- It can be assumed from this study that closing the educational attainment gaps between Indigenous people and the rest of Canada would not only decrease the prevalence of suicides, but could potentially “generate massive returns to the Canadian economy by raising employment and labour productivity” (CSLS, 2015).

**Funding Gaps or Mishaps?**

- In 2004, $65 million dollars over five years went towards establishing a National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (NAYSPS) to “improve Aboriginal health outcomes, and to adopt measures to address the health disparities facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada” (Health Canada, 2016). The program still exists, but thirteen years later, there has been no significant improvement in the quality of life for Indigenous youth on-reserve.

- Short-term funding cycles have made it extremely difficult for small, community-based organizations to develop annual proposals. With no funding to sustain operations, employees experience a cycle of layoffs and rehiring. The time lag on funding means that some recipients have only 20 weeks to administer a year-long program (Mihychuk, 2017).

- NAYSPS is also criticized for negatively affecting an organization’s capacity to effectively deliver services as they currently deduct administrative fees from contribution agreements. Aliko Lafontaine states that “6 per cent of all program dollars dispensed by Health Canada is reclaimed in administrative fees. Another 15 per cent to 20 per cent is used for internal costs such as staffing, management, reporting and evaluation. However, the same investments do not appear to be made in enhancing Indigenous communities’ capacity to deliver care” (Mihychuk, 2017).

- With respect to health benefits, the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) under Health Canada provides Indigenous peoples with supplementary mental health benefits not covered under provincial health systems. This funding formula is problematic in that health accounted only for $14.2 million or 1.4 per cent of NIHB’s overall budget in 2013-2014. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) estimates that there is a $136 million shortfall for mental health services in First Nations communities. Chronic funding shortfalls in health services has “ill-served Indigenous peoples and harmed Canada’s overall health and reputation” (Mihychuk, 2017).

- The unfortunate truth is that such problems are well known to program administrators as evidenced by an internal 2015 memo from Health Canada’s First Nations and Inuit health branch. It identified the many gaps in health care services for Indigenous peoples who had complex care or mental health needs. “Children and families on reserve were often referred to provincially run programs that require them to travel far for treatment” (Chin, 2017). Moreover, programs were “often not equipped to deal with trauma or are ‘culturally unsafe,’” and “were not keeping up with the cost of inflation” (Chin, 2017).

- In an effort to address these complex issues, in June of 2016 the government announced a $69 million investment over three years for additional mental health and crisis intervention teams in Ontario. This includes “32 mental health and wellness teams that can work with First Nations communities to provide
long-term support” and “four new crisis teams that can be activated to travel and respond to communities like Wapekeka quickly” (Chin, 2017).

- In the 2016 budget, the government committed $71 million to provide adequate health services for Indigenous children through the implementation of Jordan’s Principle. This funding falls short of meeting the demand according to Cindy Blackstock, the executive director of First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. She argues that it would realistically cost upwards of $200 million to close the gap. Some families are in such a state of crisis that they have “given their own children up to child welfare officials in order to get them the mental health services they need” (Chin, 2017).

- The suicides continue resulting in many communities entering into a state of emergency. In the first seven months of 2017 four young people have taken their lives in Pikangikum First Nation, two of which were only 12 years old. To combat this, the Ontario Provincial Health Minister announced an immediate $1.6 million investment to fund 20 full-time mental health workers. For a community of approximately 2,400, it is possible that a large investment like this may make actually make an impact given that close to 400 people are in need of counselling.

A Framework for Life Promotion Initiatives

Indigenous Knowledge: A Necessary Paradigm Shift

- Social, political and economic structures exist out of the perspectives embedded within a particular worldview or epistemology. Significant fundamental differences exist between western and Indigenous worldviews, which directly impact the design and implementation of any program or initiative within a community. Dr. Michael Doxtater highlights some fundamental differences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Worldview</th>
<th>Indigenous Worldview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survival of the fittest</td>
<td>Mino bimaadiziwin “the good life”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition to stay alive</td>
<td>Refocusing the balance and harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One group dominating over the other</td>
<td>Everyone gets to eat, everyone gets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to be healed and everyone gets to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>happy</td>
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- Traditional Indigenous social, political and economic institutions are modeled after careful observations of the natural world. Gregory Cajete draws upon Thomas Berry’s Dawn Over the Earth: Our Way into the Future:

  The possibility of a sustainable future is in tune with the truth of nature’s primal laws, because our images of the future are self-fulfilling. The images we create, the languages we speak, the economics we manifest, the learning systems we espouse, and the spiritual, political, and social order we profess must all reflect and honour interdependence and sustainability. If we live the images of hopelessness, that these are the final days, that all that matters is ‘me, mine, now,’ then these are the realities that we will bring about (Berry, 1991 as cited in Cajete, 2000).

- Indigenous knowledge systems have always encouraged the process of introspection rather than a parental “we know best” mentality. Elder Red Kelly speaks foundationally on the vastness of the cosmos and universe. The fact that the Milky Way is 100,000 light years away, that there are 200-400 billion stars, with sun only being one of those stars, speaks to the “humble nature of the small piece you are in creation” (Kelly, 2017). To create any sort of positive change leaders must “look inside themselves as individuals, as families, as communities, and as nations, and to engage in a process of restoring and maintaining balance within the cosmos (Simpson, 2008). The belief is that in order to change the world you need to change yourself.

- Embedding Indigenous knowledge within initiatives and structures designed to improve the lives of Indigenous peoples plays a crucial role in achieving desirable outcomes. The challenge is to “affirm and activate the holistic paradigm of Indigenous knowledge to reveal the wealth and richness of Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings, and experiences, all of which have been systematically excluded from contemporary educational institutions and from Eurocentric knowledge systems” (Battiste, 2002).
Mino Bimaadiziwin is an Ojibway word that means all visible and non-visible parts coming together for a good life. To fully live this teaching “a human being must be able to experience the coming together for a good life as a limitless verb, both objective and subjective existing inside and outside the lived experience individually and collectively. This totality of the lived experience through mino bimaadiziwin, therefore, is actualized in any present moment, in any present situation for each lived generation and is deeply carved in the memory and culture of the language, and the people who inhabit this language, past, present and future” (Denard, 2016).

The “principles of mino bimaadiziwin cannot be governed or determined by the Canadian government or their imposed systemic legislated structures. Mino bimaadiziwin is self-governing through natural law and community governance and application of traditional knowledge approaches” (Denard, 2015). The desire to validate Indigenous knowledge systems using a Eurocentric worldview must be challenged in order to transform policy from a tool of oppression to a tool of sovereignty.

Marcia Anderson DeCoteau, an Indigenous doctor in Canada, speaks about “epistemic racism,” a form of racism that situates one knowledge system as superior to another. To say that Indigenous ways of knowing “has to be supported by western science or western evidence is to say that western knowledge is superior to indigenous knowledge, and our knowledge can’t be valid or valuable unless there’s western science saying its valid” (CBC, 2017). It is important for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to reject this basic assumption, and instead interpret Indigenous knowledge through its own lens. “So when our knowledge keepers and our elders and our healers have held knowledge that’s been passed on through generations of effectiveness then we can believe that and we can rely on it, we don’t need a scientific study to prove that its valid” (CBC, 2017).

Sovereignty, Culture and Healing

Cultural revitalization in a modern context plays a significant role in the untangling of the oppressive colonial structures that cause Indigenous youth to be at risk for death by suicide. “Culture is the absolute lifeline. It’s not a privilege. Culture and Anishinaabe culture in particular, fulfills a visceral and spiritual need” (Keetch, 2017). It creates a sense of pride in identity, “culture through dance, crafts and ceremony allows Indigenous youth to reclaim the ways of their ancestors that was once taken away from them. Culture promotes healing for families, communities and nations” (Nelson, 2017).

Lessons embedded within Indigenous knowledge have, in a lot of ways, preceded that of western science. For example, Indigenous communities have recognized the significance of maternal health through oral traditions long before the discovery of fetal alcohol syndrome in 1973. Indigenous teachings also say that with every action, there are impacts to the seven generations before you and the seven generations after you, which has now been proven through the western scientific theory of epigenetics. Studies involving Holocaust survivors and their children found that trauma presents itself through generations regardless of whether the trauma was directly experienced by the individual.

Programs and structures designed to improve the lives of Indigenous communities and youth must be rooted in culture, which is considered to be “the home youth don’t realize they want to come back to” (Keetch, 2017). A powerful example of the role of culture in healing is evidenced in Alalkki Lake, British Columbia. Traditional Indigenous healers were employed to help members revive traditional dances, ceremonies,
spiritual practices. The community was introduced to the cultural teachings embedded in pow-wows, sacred medicines and the drum with the guiding philosophy that “culture is treatment”. The community experienced a significant positive impact as a result of this, with the alcoholism rate declining from 95 per cent to 5 per cent in 10 years. The treatment strategy/philosophy used by the people of Alkali Lake was replicated by other communities such as Poundmaker and Round Lake, where incredible results have also been achieved (McCormick, 2000).

- Although Indigenous populations experience higher rates of death by suicide overall, this reality is not true among all of Indigenous peoples on-reserve in Canada. In fact, the single most significant factor in differentiating a community with the highest rates of suicide and the lowest is self-government. Communities that are self-governed have a strong sense of culture and have the presence of protective factors. In turn, they have low, almost non-existent suicide rates (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2013).

- The Indigenous notion of self-government differs from western notions of sovereignty in that self-governance structures are synonymous with culture and the natural world. Vanessa Watts highlights that “for Anishnaabe peoples, like most Indigenous nations, sovereignty is place-based, spiritual and incorporates all elements of creation (animals, rivers, plants, rocks, etc.)” (Watts, Year Unknown). Building on this, the presence of self-government is directly related to the socio-economic conditions experienced within Indigenous communities. The systemic deficits in the Indian Act, for example, create tension and barriers for self-governance that must be addressed in order for communities to fully reach their social, political and economic potential.

- The role that self-governance plays in community health is highlighted in a study released by the Government of Canada in 2003. It states that communities with the presence of three or more of the following factors experience substantially fewer suicides: self-government, active land claims, education, health services, cultural facilities, police and fire services. In contrast, communities without any protective factors compared to those with all six experience a ratio of “138 suicides per 100,000 versus 2 per 100,000” (Government of Canada, 2003).

- A study by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development connects culture and self-governance through the notion of cultural match. “Cultural match” refers to the match between governing institutions and the prevailing ideas that exist within the community about how authority should be organized and exercised (Cornel, 1998). They state that “successful economies stand on the shoulders of legitimate, culturally grounded institutions of self-government” (Cornel, 1998).

- The study states that “simply having resources—natural, human, or financial—does not account for what the relatively successful tribes have been able to achieve” and that “it is not the case that relatively successful tribes are those that have good natural resources or high rates of educational attainment, or are the ones that have been able to get their hands on the most financial capital” (Kalt, 1998). It is instead the fundamental difference between the notion of achieving success through mechanisms of “nation-building” vs. a “jobs and income” approach. A nation-building approach situates a problem with a solution that is more ambitious and comprehensive than simply starting a business or projects. It creates space to construct an environment where both businesses and people can flourish, based on a value system deeply embedded within the culture of the community (Kalt, 1996).

- The White Mountain Apaches of the Fort Apache Reservation in Arizona and the Oglala Sioux of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota are examples of how significant a role “cultural match” plays in the health and development of a community. Both are very similar communities with respect to size, availability of resources and governance structures, but exhibit very different socio-economic conditions (Kalt, 1998). The only difference between one being the most economically prosperous Indigenous community in the US and the least, is the presence of a “cultural match” between the contemporary governance structure and their historic traditional governance structure. It can be argued then that the presence of a “cultural match” is the single most powerful determinant of whether a community will be economically, socially, and politically strong.

- Given this, it is not surprising that the presence of Indigenous language is an indicator of low suicide rates. With language comes a close connection to culture. A study of various Indigenous communities in British Columbia highlights this as it found that bands with higher levels of language knowledge (more than 50 per cent) had fewer suicides than those bands with lower levels (Government of Canada, 2003).
• RCAP was attuned to the inclusion of culture in their 1995 report, in which five case studies on various Indigenous mental health promotion strategies were published. Their findings found that the presence of the following factors contributed to success:
  • Community-initiated
  • Drew from the traditional knowledge and wisdom of Elders
  • Dependent on consultation with the community
  • Broad in focus
• RCAP further articulated that strategies aimed at community and social development should always “promote community pride and control, self-esteem and identity, transmission of First Nations knowledge, language and traditions, and methods of addressing social problems that are culturally appropriate” (Health Canada, 2003).
• In 2001, a Suicide Prevention Advisory Group was jointly appointed by the AFN and the Minister of Health to review existing research and provide recommendations to curtail rates of death by suicide among Indigenous youth in Canada (Government of Canada, 2005). The recommendations from this Advisory Group fell into four main themes:
  1) Increasing knowledge about what works in suicide prevention
  2) Developing more effective and integrated health care services at national, regional and local levels
  3) Supporting community-driven approaches
  4) Creating strategies for building youth identity, resilience and culture
• The importance of reclaiming Indigenous identity emerged again when the National Aboriginal Healing Foundation highlighted that the most promising strategies in suicide prevention focused on the bolstering of traditional culture within the community; and that “people with strong spiritual and/or religious beliefs of different kinds are linked with resilience and positive mental health” (NAHO, 2005).
• Although the National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) admits that there is a lack of evidence on the effectiveness of suicide intervention strategies geared toward Indigenous youth, they found a body of evidence that suggests benefits from programs that:
  • Restrict access to the means of suicide
  • Provide school-based education to teach coping skills, how to recognize and identify individuals at risk, and how to refer them to counselling or mental health services
  • Train youth as peer counsellors or “natural helpers”
  • Train other individuals with whom youth come into regular contact (teachers, nurses, primary care providers, clergy, parents) to recognize and refer youth at risk
  • Mobilize the community to develop suicide prevention programs, a crisis intervention team, family support, and activities that bring together youth and Elders to transmit cultural knowledge and values
  • Insure that mass media portray suicide and other community problems in appropriate ways.

**Suicide Intervention: An Indigenous Approach**

• Deborah Denard addresses suicide using an Indigenous worldview by means of the Medicine Wheel praxis. Medicine Wheel Surviving Suicide – Strengthening Life Bundle aligns with NAHO’s ‘best practices’ through a “continuum of care approach that includes, i) Life promotion and Suicide prevention ii) Risk Management and Crisis Intervention iii) Post-vention and Supportive Resources iv) Promotion of Stability and Sustainability” (Denard, 2016). Her research advances traditional knowledge and Indigenous community approaches in collaboration with mainstream approaches. The medicine wheel is a foundational tool, in that it connects “the history, culture, tradition and identity through our stories, songs, ceremonies, languages, and governance. It celebrates the sovereign place of nationhood, strengthening life released from the intergenerational impacts of colonization, suppression and displacement” (Denard, 2016). It is a visual representation of every important element in promoting life, as it relates to individuals, families, community, service providers, and governance structures.
The focus on life promotion rather than suicide intervention is consistent with Indigenous perspectives on ensuring that every individual “sees life as worth living” (Rice, 2017). Strengthening the elements within the medicine wheel teachings is a catalyst to healing and reconnection to culture.

The Anishinaabe teaching of the Seven Stages of Life and the eastern and western doorway also lends itself to a cultural understanding of what it means to live a long and good life (or Mino Bimaadiziwin) from an Indigenous perspective. In this teaching, creation prepares for an individual’s birth long before entering the physical world - seven generations prior. As a baby develops in the womb, specific rituals and ceremonies are conducted that speak to the role of the parents, extended family and community. They also speak to the importance of knowing one’s purpose on this earth.

John Rice, a Mide Elder and knowledge keeper, conceptualizes a healthy community as one where every individual, from young to elderly, sees life as worth living; where they in some sense give themselves life by connecting to the land and their purpose in life.

John Rice speaks about the significance of Anishinaabe unborn child rituals, where one of a man’s sacred responsibilities in life is to sing the ‘Father Song’ to his unborn child in their traditional language. The meaning translated in English is, “I wonder what your hands are going to do.” This simplistic ritual expresses an expectation to the unborn child that they will enter into the physical world, that they are wanted and will work to find their purpose in life. It is felt that the absence of ceremonies like this accounts for the suicidal feelings of some Indigenous youth (Rice, 2017).

Knowledge keeper Tammy Nelson says that “learning begins in the womb. As parents, we have a responsibility to our children, to teach them about love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, wisdom and truth and
“to pass on the knowledge and traditions of our ancestors” (Nelson, 2017).

• She speaks about another important ceremony early in life, completed with the afterbirth or placenta. To summarize, the family gives thanks to the role of the placenta given that it has sustained and fed the baby while in the womb. The placenta is offered back to the earth, which in turn grounds the child. Once the umbilical cord falls off, a medicine pouch is made and the chord is placed inside the pouch with the four sacred medicines: tobacco, sage, sweet grass and cedar. The pouch is sealed and hung where the baby sleeps. It stays with them to keep them safe as they grow, and when the young adult leaves home for school or to get married. If something were to happen to that child while away from home, the afterbirth (placenta) would bring loved ones back home to the land, as they grounded their children with Mother Earth in ceremony when then first arrived (Nelson, 2017).

• Everything in creation starts in the east. When an individual is born into the physical world they come through the “eastern doorway”. Throughout their life they move through the seven stages of life and when they die they move through the “western doorway”.

• The seven stages of life are significant in that in each stage, there are clear roles and responsibilities along with rituals and rites of passage. They are summarized as:
  1) The Good Life – infant and toddler stage where all their needs are taken care of. A child is not considered an empty vessel but rather born with wisdom, close to the spirit world.
  2) The Fast Life – child and youth stage where they are in a place of discovery and learning, teaching those around them about love.
  3) The Wandering Stage – youth and young adult stage where they will wander, observe and inquire. They begin to see their purpose as they start to understand their place as they relate to others.
  4) The Planning Stage – young adult and adult stage where they are ready to start fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. At this point they have learned the truth about who they are.
  5) The Planting Stage – adult and parent stage where they are beginning to start a family or contribute to the community through their work. These relationships embody the teaching of respect.
  6) The Doing Stage – parent and grandparent stage where the individual is ready to fulfill their potential or higher calling. This process embodies the teaching of humility.
  7) Teaching Stage – grandparent and Elder stage where they are ready to share what they have learned in their life. They are in a place of reflection and teach the importance of honesty.

• There are times where an individual can “get stuck” in a certain stage, causing spiritual, emotional, physical and mental sickness. As it relates to Indigenous youth, the transition from The Fast Life is an integral piece in the reduction the rates of death by suicide, especially given current funding and service gaps. The Seven Stages of Life teachings are as “relevant today as when the first teaching was given; when the first story was spoken. The gifts of these teachings, in re-telling and remembering them, is that we are all connected and from these teachings and stories as we gather knowledge and understanding to experience mino bimaadiziwin through our actions” (Denard, 2016). It is integral that Elders and knowledge keepers be given the arena to support youth in moving through each stage of their life through ceremony and traditional teachings.

• Cited in Denard, reconnecting and finding purpose in life happens through a process of supportive introspection. By asking the following questions individuals can transition through each of the Seven Stages of Life to achieve balance:
  • Where do I come from?
  • Who am I?
  • Why am I here?
  • Where am I going?
Recommendations

The recommendations below support the implementation of Article 24 (2) and 21 (2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration includes:

Article 24 (2): Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.

Article 21 (2): States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Immediate Crisis Intervention Funding

Provide flexible and adequate funding for immediate crisis intervention. Communities experiencing significant rates of death by suicide will have access to funding to hire permanent mental health professionals, crisis teams and culturally safe helplines.

Develop an Independent Indigenous Advisory Committee

A comprehensive approach cannot be developed without the input and direction of Indigenous peoples. It is recommended that an advisory committee representing Indigenous peoples living on-reserve in Canada be developed. This structure will operate independent of the government and will be based on traditional teachings of governance and consensus building. The objective of the committee will be to provide information about embedding Indigenous knowledge in all Life Promotion Initiatives. They will be responsible for advising on how to implement the First Nations Wellness Continuum Framework. They will also be mandated to develop a culturally driven model for measuring well-being based on Indigenous values (human, social, natural, and financial capital). The health of a community through an Indigenous lens or worldview will place more value on the strength of relationships among families and communities as well as the land. This model will be used to determine specific goals to measure and evaluate as community driven programs/initiatives roll out. The advisory committee will be comprised of equal representation from government, community, and Indigenous political intuitions through the following councils:

- Women and Children’s Council – to provide insight and vision on the future
- Youth Council – to provide insight and vision on the future
- Men’s Council – to provide insight and vision on the present
- Elders’ Council – to provide insight and vision on the past

Long-term, Integrated and Output-Driven Approach

Widen the timeframe for life-promotion initiatives from the typical one-year timeframe to a 25-year time-frame to achieve realistic and meaningful outcomes. Funding will no longer operate within a short-term structure, but rather a 5-year term (at the very least).

Recognizing that the gravity of the suicide problem is complex and multi-dimensional, it is recommended that the government take aggressive action in closing the gap in related areas such as: housing, education, policing and fire services, employment & economic development, infrastructure, and early Childhood Development. Communities that have adequate services in these areas have practically extremely low suicide rates. If a meaningful effort is not directed in closing these gaps, additional life-promotion initiatives will see little success.

Outcome targets will be developed based on the “well-being measures” identified by the Indigenous Knowledge Advisory Council, but for the purpose of this document, targets may look something like:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>10 Years</th>
<th>25 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase the presence of community driven events (i.e. infant playgroup programs, recreation classes, or social events)</td>
<td>10 per cent increase</td>
<td>30 per cent increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve school attendance *Cohort 1: the first group of students entering the school system with the presence of the implemented program</td>
<td>10 per cent increase for Cohort 1</td>
<td>50 per cent increase for Cohort 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve graduation rates **Cohort 1: Graduation in 2034/2035. Research suggests that early intervention (as early as in the womb) will prove to be successful, which means those born in 2017/2018 will graduate from high school in 2034/2035</td>
<td>10 per cent increase for Cohort 1</td>
<td>50 per cent increase for Cohort 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the number of culturally-based events occurring in the community (powwows, sweat lodge/long house ceremonies, community circles etc.)</td>
<td>20 per cent increase</td>
<td>40 per cent increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the presence of Indigenous language speakers</td>
<td>10 per cent increase</td>
<td>30 per cent increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the amount of time spent doing traditional activities on the land (i.e. hunting, fishing, or harvesting medicines etc.)</td>
<td>10 per cent increase</td>
<td>25 per cent increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Income levels *while considering the realities of living in remote locations/availability of employment</td>
<td>5 per cent increase</td>
<td>20 per cent increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Promotion of Culture and Early Intervention**

Provide funding to hire traditional Elders to revitalize culture within the community and provide access to: rites of passage ceremonies, powwows, sweat lodges, and knowledge sharing on medicines and drumming, for example. Culture promotion can exist within the education framework where knowledge keepers are hired to take community members onto the land to revitalize the respective community’s traditional ways of harvesting food, medicine etc.

Policy initiatives developed, will be based on a long-term, intergenerational approach through the renewal of cultural teachings relevant to the area. Indigenous knowledge and oral teachings must be regarded as valid regardless of whether the information has been validated by western science. Examples include the use of the Medicine Wheel praxis the Seven Stages of Life, and placenta ceremony.

**Culturally Appropriate Capacity Building within Health Services**

Mandatory training will be provided for existing health care workers in an effort to gain an improved understanding of the complex historical impacts affecting Indigenous peoples. In addition, educational institutions must provide at least one mandatory course to all students in any health care-related program.

Funding will be provided for the development of speciality training programs that are designed to build capacity among Indigenous peoples on-reserve and to increase the number of Indigenous people working in the health field. This will also mean a more meaningful focus on the inclusion of traditional healing practises in the health care system. Funding will be provided for traditional healers to provide services out of the community nursing station.
Long-term Self-Governance Capacity Building: Development of the Fiscal Relations Institute

The Fiscal Relations Institute will be mandated to evaluate, monitor and build community self-governance capacity. The institute will support the transition from dependency to self-governance within communities by using the Harvard model of “cultural match,” which outlines the achievement of self-governance through the following actions:

- Expansion of jurisdiction (provincial and federal governments vs. First Nation jurisdictional powers)
- Diversification of revenue solutions by moving away from a single source of revenue to reduce dependency (If local economy is limited, encourage partner governments to provide funds that are multi-year). For this to occur there must be meaningful structural changes to the Indian Act.
- Broadening Accountability so that First Nations communities are accountable to both their funders and their own citizens. Improving perceived legitimacy by sharing how and why decisions are made (so citizens can weigh their performance).
- Investment in Capacity Building by connecting traditional knowledge so the actions fit with Indigenous concepts of leadership development and governance.

Third party management must be avoided at all cost, especially given that it is costly, ineffective and counter-intuitive to what the research suggests is appropriate for addressing issues facing Indigenous communities on-reserve.

The goal will be to promote and support the transition from Indigenous communities being government-dependent to self-governed through the use a ratio-based scale (from 1-6). The Institute will ensure that that community will jump 1 level every 5 years. The assumption is that after every “Cultural Match” workshop and commitment of the community, they will have achieved a level 2 starting point. Each of the above factors will be determined in partnership with the government and community. The ratio outlining each level is as follows:

On-reserve Indigenous Self-Governance / Government

**Level 1: 0/100**
- Level 2: 20/90
- Level 3: 40/60
- Level 4: 60/60
- Level 5: 80/60
- Level 6: 100/0
### Funding Allocation for Life Promotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immediate Crisis Intervention</strong></td>
<td>$500 million per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest $2 million per year for 250 communities (approx. 40 per cent of 632) to hire mental health workers and crisis teams. Estimation based on the $1.5 million allocated for 20 mental health workers in Pikangikum FN (a community of 2,400) in July of 2017.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promotion of Culture</strong></td>
<td>$50 million per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest $200,000 for 250 communities (approx. 40 per cent of 632) to hire traditional elders to revitalize culture within the community (powwows, sweat lodges, sacred medicines etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programs Aimed to Improve Mental Health</strong></td>
<td>$250 million per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest $1 million for 250 communities for mental health workers and crisis teams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culturally Appropriate Capacity Building within Health Services</strong></td>
<td>$50 million per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest $200,000 for 250 communities (approx. 40 per cent of 632) to improve the delivery of culturally appropriate health services. This includes: 1) Specialty Training Programs 2) Traditional Healers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Governance Capacity Building: Development of the Fiscal Relations Institute</strong></td>
<td>$25 million per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designed to bolster capacity in the area of self-governance and to transition each community from dependency to self-autonomy using the Harvard model of “culture match”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest $100,000 for 250 communities (approx. 40 per cent of 632)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop an Independent Indigenous Knowledge Advisory Committee</strong></td>
<td>$5 million per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(estimated using the TRC Commission budget $12 million each year for 5 years divided by 632 communities, multiplied by 250 communities)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$780 million per year for 25 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***Given that not every Indigenous community on-reserve experiences high suicide rates, the above is estimated using 40 per cent of the 632 communities in Canada. A ‘qualifying criteria’ must be developed jointly with the Independent Indigenous Advisory Committee and the Fiscal Relations Institute. This may alter the number of reserves in need of funding.***
Life-Promotion Assessment Tool

The Independent Indigenous Advisory committee will oversee the development of the Life Promotion Assessment Tool: “A Life Worth Living.” The tool will assist communities in choosing their life-promotion strategy. It will be adaptable and agile in accordance with Indigenous knowledge principles. The first draft below is based on the research findings within this document. The final draft must include meaningful input and consultation with the Independent Indigenous Advisory Committee and respective communities. Once completed, the tool will be validated through ceremony. The teachings embedded within the eagle feather will be used to illustrate key components of effective life-promotion initiatives/approaches. The eagle feather is significant among Indigenous peoples and communities as it is symbolic of leadership and teachings of Mino Bimaadiziwin or living “the good life”. The eagle flies the highest and brings thoughts and prayers to the spirit world. Being gifted with an eagle feather through ceremony, being passed down or finding is one of the highest honours. It means that the individual caring for the feather lives life in a respectful way guided by the Seven Grandfather Teachings of love, humility, respect, bravery, wisdom, honesty, and truth.

The soft plumes at the base of the feather are symbolic of the early stages of life. When born, an individual is frail and pure, but already possesses all the gifts they need to fulfill their purpose in life. They are not considered an empty vessel but rather at the stage in their life where they are closest to the spirit world.

The center of the feather is considered the “life-line.” It is strong and sturdy, which is symbolic of an individual walking on a “good path” in life. The center of the feather is where an individual is healthy in all elements of their life (mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally). It is where they are provided with the support to discover their purpose in life.

The feather is comprised of tiny strands, which are symbolic of the many challenges experienced in life. When pulled, a break in the smooth feather appears. This is an illustration of the times when the Seven Grandfather Teachings are forgotten. As one moves to the outside of the feather, it becomes much less sturdy. It is through the support of family, friends, Elders, programs and services that an individual can be gently guided back to the center of the feather and smoothed out again. It is when they remember the teachings of the Seven Grandfathers that the feather returns to its original state.
“A Life Worth Living”

A tool developed for Indigenous peoples and Communities to assess programs and approaches designed to promote and prolong life

Center: Foundation
- “Culture Match” – Life-Promotion Program governing structures closely align with the respective community’s traditional governing structure
- Accountable to Community Members – open communication
- Cultural Component – activities designed to bolster cultural identity and traditional rites of passage ceremonies (finding life’s purpose)
- Self-Autonomy – community has their hands on the “levers” for meaningful decision-making. This includes policy changes to circumvent the Indian Act.
- Tightly Integrated Services – community linkages, coordination and collaboration across sectors (not just in times of crisis)
- Long-Term and Outcome Focused – realistic target setting with at 25-year time-frame. Has the program or initiative achieved what it was designed to do?

Outer Feather
- Crisis Intervention – adequate supportive services in times of crisis
- Culturally Safe Health Services – providers are educated on the historical impacts of assimilation policies such as the Indian Act, Residential Schools and the 60s Scoop. Traditional healers are made available through community health services.
- Gate Keeper Training – pro-social members of society can recognize risk factors for death by suicide and refer/connect individuals to appropriate services

Plumes
- Early life-promotion focus (as early as in the womb). Revitalize rites of passage ceremonies to promote intergenerational healing.
- Expert Advisory Panel – comprised of subject matter experts from all sectors to assist/support design, implementation and evaluation
- Targets developed and defined prior to implementation (success factors defined by the community).
- Culturally safe data collection prior to program implementation to measure and evaluate effectiveness.
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Watts, V. (Year unknown) What is sovereignty for Indigenous people?
Reconciliation with Indigenous People Through Business and Opportunity

Kristen Sara Loft

November, 2017
Reconciliation with Indigenous People Through Business and Opportunity

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Introduction

True reconciliation cannot occur without acknowledging and addressing the socio-economic gaps between Indigenous people and other Canadians. A nation-to-nation relationship may not be possible under the current socio-economic situation without the support of industry and corporate Canada, provincial and federal government agencies, financial institutions, educational institutions, and local Indigenous governments. Increasing opportunities for Indigenous business to develop and grow would allow for the ability to create self-sustaining communities and create meaningful partnerships within communities.

The federal Liberal government has committed to creating a nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous people in Canada and to reconcile the relationship with Indigenous people by implementing the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations in the Calls to Action and the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the impacts of public policy on Indigenous economic development and wealth creation, and the role they have in business and opportunity for Indigenous peoples – specifically within First Nation communities. This will be done by exploring the current realities of Indigenous people with respect to their socio-economic situation; education policy; their correlation with the Canadian labour force; the impacts of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The paper will identify barriers to Indigenous business and make recommendations for a path forward to reconciliation through business and opportunity. While the issues affecting Indigenous economic development and economic policy are multi-faceted, the importance of reconciliation through business and opportunity are monumental.

Roughly one-quarter of all Indigenous people in Canada live on a reserve. For the most part, they are members of a First Nation and considered “status or registered Indians” under the Indian Act. Irrespective of location, status First Nations people make up roughly half of all Indigenous people in Canada. Unlike other identities, status is legally regulated under the Indian Act (CCPA, 2016).

Socio-Economic Determinants in First Nation Communities

While Canada celebrates 150 years of Confederation, the Indigenous population within the larger nation-state does not see a reason for celebration. There are many instances across the country of resistance, education by protest, and social media campaigns expressing why Indigenous people do not support a nation built on the backs of their ancestors while they are a marginalized population facing astonishingly shameful socio-economic situations.

A First Nation youth in Canada today is more likely to end up in jail than to graduate high school. This translates to adult First Nation people being incarcerated more than six times the national rate (CSC, 2013). Furthermore, in Saskatchewan, the adult First Nation incarceration rate is over 1,600 per 100,000, compared to 48 per 100,000 for adult non-First Nation (Macdonald, N. 2016).

While Canadians, on average, enjoy some of the world’s best health care and quality of life, Aboriginal peoples generally have poorer health than the non-Aboriginal population, particularly in terms of maternal, fetal and infant health; child health; certain communicable and non-communicable diseases; mental health and wellness; violence, abuse and injury; and environmental health. This disproportionate burden of ill-health can largely be attributed to adverse socio-economic conditions and historical circumstances (NCCAH, 2012).

A recent study on child poverty reports that half of First Nation children live in poverty, which is triple the national average (CCPA, 2016). It is important to note, that Statistics Canada reports on poverty rates do not include people who live on a reserve or people living in the territories (where roughly half of all Inuit people are located), for various (flawed) reasons. Because this data is excluded, official poverty rates in Canada appear to be lower than they would be if these populations were counted (CCPA, 2016). These statistics point to a stark reality that directly correlates to education obtainment levels, which in turn is a symptom and a cause of poverty for First Nation peoples in Canada.
Despite evidence that education can counteract the effects of poverty, barriers to obtaining a quality education on-reserve abound. Capital budgets for reserve schools are underfunded by at least $169 million a year (A. Rajekar, 2009). The lack of a proper educational foundation is a significant barrier for an Indigenous entrepreneur to create a successful business later in life. The lack of education obtainment coupled with the social conditions issues faced by Indigenous people has profound effects on their economies.

**First Nation Education**

The current delivery system of education in First Nation communities is failing youth, and ultimately communities. Low graduation rates result in a lack of opportunities for First Nation people, leading to poverty, negative impacts on quality of life for Indigenous people and to Canada’s economy in general.

While there are many differing opinions on the amount of funding on-Reserve schools receive in comparison to their provincial counterparts, it is estimated Indigenous students on-reserve experience a funding gap on average of between 20-30 per cent of what provincial schools receive, which results in overcrowding and large student to teacher ratios (Quesnel & Lily, 2015). The education funding gap negatively affects Indigenous education outcomes. Secondary school data identifies the rate of First Nation graduation rates at approximately 36 per cent, in comparison to the Canadian graduation rate of 72 per cent (AFN, 2011).

With Indigenous communities still dealing with the legacy of Indian residential schools, many maintain that Indigenous education today exists in a ‘policy vacuum.’ With the release of ‘Indian Control of Indian Education’ document by the National Indian Brotherhood in 1972 the policy trajectory of Indigenous education shifted from federal government control to band councils and other First Nation education authorities (Quesnel & Lily, 2015).

Today the federal government only intervenes to allocate funding and, as a condition for receiving resources from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), band operated schools must provide comparable educational programming to that of provincial schools (Richards & Scott, 2009). By the beginning of the 2007/08 school year approximately 113,000 Indigenous students were living on-reserve with 60 per cent attending one of the 500 band-operated schools. The other 40 per cent of students were attending provincial schools with bands paying tuition to the relevant provincial school district.

Education rates in BC saw substantial improvements between 2001-2009 when the province’s Aboriginal Special Education Fund targeted resources towards increasing culturally welcoming spaces and Indigenous representation on education governance boards in addition to providing scholarships and financial awards to Indigenous learners (BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012). The most comprehensive and successful regional agreement with application to future policy initiatives is the Mi’kmaq educational authority, established in Nova Scotia, which is seeing a 90 per cent secondary school graduation rate. This agreement between all levels of government introduced a system that blends the provincial curriculum with Mi’kmaq cultural practices and language lessons.

Increased funding to on-reserve schools will not fix the education attainment for Indigenous people; an entire overhaul of policy and approach is needed. This will not occur when policy is developed by government officials; the involvement of Indigenous communities will be crucial to the success of educational programs. It is evident that Indigenous learners succeed when policy and resources converge to better represent Indigenous culture, language and partnership in developing curriculum while respecting socio-linguistic traditions and knowledge systems.

A policy revamp of the existing First Nation education system is needed; and it must be acknowledged that poverty is preventable – and that education is integral to that pursuit. Not only will improved educational outcomes result in better social conditions for Indigenous peoples, but they also will furnish a source of much-needed skilled workers to fuel future economic prosperity [Brunnen, 2004].

The alarming socio-economic issues and problems with current delivery of education have contributed to substandard living conditions in Indigenous communities. The poverty of First Nation citizens profoundly effects individuals, families, communities, and the Canadian economy – due to the inability to fill the existing labour force gap. Indigenous entrepreneurs, with little to no formal education, often use traditional skills such as tourism (hunting, fishing, area tours), arts and crafts (beading & carving), cultivating and farming, to create small businesses. However, these businesses would have a better chance of success if people had training in business administration, hospitality, etc.
Indigenous Labour Force

The First Nation population is one of the fastest growing segments of society. In First Nation communities 49 per cent of the population is under 24 years of age compared to 30 per cent of the general population (Statistics Canada, 2011). In 2036, the Aboriginal working age population is expected to account for 4-5 per cent of the total working age population, up from 3.5 per cent in 2011. This increased share reflects the much more rapid growth in the Aboriginal working age population than the non-Aboriginal population over the period. With continued ethnic mobility (transfer from non-Aboriginal identify to Aboriginal identify for an individual between census years) the Aboriginal population advances at a 3.0 per cent average annual rate, and even with no ethnic mobility it grows at 2.0 per cent. In contrast, the non-Aboriginal working age population is projected to grow at only 1.1 per cent rate per year (Drummond & Sharpe, 2017).

This faster rapid population growth means that Aboriginal people will account for between 6.3 to 10.6 per cent of labour force growth in Canada over the 2011-2036 period. (Murray, 2017) With Canada’s overall aging population, the young First Nations demographic is facing the inability to fill the predicted gap in the labour force due to lack of education and skills training.

Low education attainment rates for First Nation citizens is having detrimental effects on their population and on Canada’s GDP. The social and economic impacts of educational deficit are significant for First Nations youth and their communities as well as for the country, First Nations youth without a high school diploma are twice as likely to be unemployed as those with a grade 12 diploma (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013).

How does this correlate to GDP growth rate in Canada? The Centre for the Study of Living Standards has estimated GDP in Canada would be $36.4 billion (2010 dollars) greater in 2031 if the Aboriginal educational attainment gap and related gaps for employment rates and income by level of education were closed (Calver, 2015). These numbers are for the Canadian average. For Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where there is a larger portion of Aboriginal people, their contributions to labour force growth over the 2011-2036 period are much larger: 24-30 per cent and 36-38 per cent respectively (Drummond & Sharpe, 2017).

These projections show the need for investment in capacity development, education, and the support of Indigenous businesses, which are crucial to communities and the Canadian economy. The work done to recognize the rights of Indigenous peoples with respect to development on their lands has created some opportunity for communities to be partners in business. In partnerships, opportunity is often identified for training and employment, and these agreements may have some impact on Canada’s GDP and Indigenous employment.

United Nations Declaration of Indigenous People

Indigenous Peoples’ struggle for international recognition, and a global voice in the internal politics of nation states was recognized in 2007 with the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). The Declaration is a comprehensive document that outlines the rights of Indigenous people in relation to land, governance, recognition and the importance of their right to determine their relationships with nation states in a “spirit of coexistence, mutual benefit, and full respect” (UNDRIP, 2006).

At the time of the adoption of the Declaration at the UN in 2007 four countries rejected the document over legal concerns - Canada, the United States of America, Australia, and New Zealand. These countries have since adopted the UNDRIP but their initial rejection has had adverse effects on already strained relations. Although the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People is not a legally binding document it is “an important standard for the treatment of indigenous peoples that will undoubtedly be a significant tool towards eliminating human rights violations against the planet’s 370 million indigenous people and assisting them in combating discrimination and marginalization” (UNDRIP, 2006).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People did several things for the world’s Indigenous people. It ensured Indigenous people were recognized by the nation states in which they co-existed, and gave platform to those Indigenous people who wished to pursue the governing of their own affairs and share in their respective country’s resources. Numerous articles of the UNDRIP address the economic well-being of Indigenous people:
“Article 19
States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

Article 20
Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.

Article 21
1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.

2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Article 32
Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands or territories and other resources.

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

States shall provide effective mechanisms for just and fair redress for any such activities, and appropriate measures shall be taken to mitigate adverse environmental, economic, social, cultural or spiritual impact” (UNDRIP, 2007).

In some instances, UNDRIP has caused the disruption of power, progression and profit for Canada and Canadian businesses as Indigenous people assert their rights over their traditional lands through court proceedings. And there are many cases in which Indigenous people have fortified working partnerships with resource development companies to ensure their priorities are reflected in development, and have brought their communities a step closer to closing the gap in disparity that exists in comparison of broader Canadian society.

Indigenous communities across the country are making progress in collaborative processes on major projects and business, and are becoming the economic drivers. It is important that best practices and lessons learned from these experiences be actively shared among Indigenous communities and corporate Canada. Consultation is a large component of Aboriginal title cases, such as Calder, which first established that Aboriginal title could exist in Canadian law, to the recent historic Tsilhqot’in Nation case in which the Supreme Court confirmed that the nation retains Aboriginal title to a large area of their traditional lands, and withheld the need to reestablish traditional use.

Many companies and government agencies recognize that creating a relationship with Indigenous communities is in the best interest of business. The process of engagement and relationship building with one or multiple communities is an enormous undertaking, but essential for success.
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

In June 2008, the Government of Canada issued an Apology to survivors and families for the Indian residential school system and the legacy of intergenerational trauma it has left for many. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created to document the experiences of the students who attended these schools with the intent to heal and learn from past mistakes.

The TRC worked to record the oral history of Indian residential schools (IRS), educate others on the effects of IRS, and to make recommendations towards reconciliation with Indigenous people and the rest of Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada published a report entitled Calls to Action, which outlines 94 recommendations for reconciliation with Indigenous people. It is now one of the forerunners in providing evidence for the necessity of a new relationship in the areas of education, justice, and business, to name a few. For reconciliation to occur, Canada will need to move from apology to action.

Calls to Action

The work of the TRC recognized many aspects to reconciliation with Canada’s Indigenous people and acknowledged that “collective efforts from all peoples are necessary to revitalize the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society” (TRC, 2015). Recommendation 92 speaks to business:

“Business and Reconciliation

92. We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:

i. Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.

ii. Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.

iii. Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism” (TRC, 2015).

The Calls to Action includes the recommendation for UNDRIP to be adopted by Canada in terms of business, consultation, and Free Prior and Informed Consent – perhaps because it covers a broader range of rights for Indigenous communities. Whereas, the Calls to Action will be important if each recommendation is implemented by the Government of Canada, Canadian businesses, and Canadian citizens, UNDRIP and the Calls to Action can also be useful tools for domestic and foreign business interests in Canada looking to develop resource development on Indigenous lands.

The Duty to Consult

The Supreme Court of Canada has held that the Crown has a legal duty to consult Indigenous people on projects that may impact their Aboriginal and/or Treaty rights. The Crown may delegate procedural aspects of the duty to consult to project proponents, such as mining and energy companies. However, this puts the responsibility of proper consultation and accommodation on proponents of such projects. Companies that have not seen the duty to consult as a priority or a legal obligation have met fierce opposition to development on First
Nation traditional lands, and in many cases, have had projects delayed or cancelled.

Industry and proponents of projects that have approached First Nation communities potentially impacted by development, in the spirit of respect and transparency, and entering into a partnership, are more successful. We are seeing a shift in Canada with businesses adopting a high standard for corporate social responsibility leading to a social license to operate. This builds positive corporate reputations and credibility to achieve certainty – a commodity that increasingly demands sharing diverse project benefits, with mutual economic prosperity as the common fundamental principle for all involved.

First Nations are actively seeking to be partners in responsible resource development, including the use of their lands for transportation of resources and extraction. The push for their involvement is to ensure the environmental risks to their traditional territories are minimized and that they will be accompanied by fair economic gain.

Corporate social responsibility, the social license to operate, and partnerships with First Nation communities are all designed to mitigate risks of opposition. Most industry leaders recognize they need First Nation communities as partners for projects to be successful; otherwise there will be opposition, businesses may be tarnished, and projects will be interrupted at enormous costs to the proponent. These partnerships are “good news stories” for the stakeholders involved. In an interview with Phil Fontaine, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations and President and Owner of Ishkonigan Fontaine Strategic Solutions, on the shift in the way business is being done with First Nations, he stated, “Being respectful and creative on the front end creates less risk of opposition than being reactive and unprepared on the back end” (P. Fontaine, personal communication, July 3, 2017).

Although, the Crown cannot transfer the legal duty to consult to third parties, they may delegate procedural aspects of that duty to industry and corporations. Some industry and corporations are becoming leaders by recognizing it is in the best interest of proponents to develop relationships directly with Indigenous communities.

Many companies and government agencies recognize creating a relationship with Indigenous communities is in the best interest of business. The process of engagement and relationship-building with one or multiple communities is an enormous undertaking, but essential for success.

A Community Reconciliation Partnership

Woodfibre LNG, Squamish First Nation, B.C.

The Woodfibre LNG project is an export plant for liquefied natural gas with related terminal and penstock. It is located in Squamish territory at a former village site named Swiyat, which is also known as Woodfibre, Howe Sound, British Columbia (B.C.).

The Squamish membership expressed serious concerns about the risks associated with the project, such as impacts on the sensitive habitat through sea water cooling technology. Since Howe Sound has seen a recent revitalization of the marine environment after decades of impacts by industrial projects, there was further concern over potential hazard from compressor stations in proximity to residential areas.

Woodfibre LNG took their duty to consult and accommodate seriously and approached the Squamish Nation as a partner in the project. The proponent was supportive of the Squamish Nation conducting their own independent environmental assessment of the project, which yielded the issuance of an environmental certificate with 25 legally binding conditions. Woodfibre LNG agreed to accept all 25 conditions to solicit consent by the Squamish nation.

This partnership demonstrates the following important points:

- Squamish Nation’s ability to exercise governance and jurisdiction; and it demonstrates that parallel environmental assessments can run concurrently and yield certainty in decision making.
- It translates community concerns through legally binding conditions that entail environmental as well as economic benefits.
- It creates a fair and reasonable process to remove ambiguity of expectations and results.
- It also actualizes reconciliation with other levels of government. It signals to the market that First Nations engagement is a path to certainty for projects.
The project collaboration was not without its challenges. Chief Ian Campbell, Squamish Nation explains, “Some of the biggest challenges were consulting with membership that expressed opposition to the project and wanted the nation to simply say no. We had to communicate that the conditions reflected all of the concerns we heard and that it put the nation in a stronger position to exercise jurisdiction, regulatory oversight, benefits, partnerships, opportunities, and tools to manage and protect our values of environment along with aboriginal rights and title” (personal interview, 2017).

Corporate community responsibility means corporations can no longer ignore Aboriginal rights and title or environmental concerns/accommodation. There are numerous court rulings that have recognized and strengthened Aboriginal title and the need for meaningful partnerships. Chief Campbell ensured that all considerations were encompassed in the dealings with Woodfibre LNG: “We incorporated the designing of a regulatory process that draws on information produced through Canadian environmental assessment regimes, while adding further technical analysis to consider the Nation’s unique relationship to the project areas such as cultural and spiritual values” (personal interview, 2017).

For generations, governments have systematically attempted to usurp power from First Nations and allocate jurisdiction to provincial and federal governments. This represents a significant problem for proponents to navigate the uncertainty and legalities that can compromise their projects. The Squamish Nation were able to become viable partners in the Woodfibre LNG project by strengthening their ability to manage their traditional lands and waters; make informed decisions about projects that government is issuing rights to, on top of aboriginal rights and title; effect major design changes to the project; and position the community to have monitoring, oversight, and enforcement of their environmental conditions in order for the project to proceed.

The Squamish Nation was an integral part of designing the framework for engaging multiple stakeholders. The various stakeholders include Squamish membership (4000 members), the district of Squamish municipal government and residents, other Howe Sound communities and regional districts, NGO’s, environmental groups, the Province of BC, the Federal Government, Squamish Chiefs and Council, Fortis BC, BC Hydro, Woodfibre LNG, and international purchasers of natural gas.

Despite the recent announcement that Petronas’ Pacific Northwest LNG megaproject is no longer going forward (a project that has been strongly opposed by First Nation groups), Byng Giraud, vice president of the Woodfibre LNG project “is confident its project will still go through” (CBC News, 2017).

**Impacts of UNDRIP and the Calls to Action on Business**

There is no denying that existing disparities in Indigenous communities have been perpetuated by colonization and the system of Indian residential schools that dismantled families, cultures, traditions and languages, and have led to a process of alienation, displacement, oppression and marginalization (TRC, 2012). The social and economic situations of First Nation peoples are well documented and analyzed, but the statistics on Indigenous business and economic prosperity are lacking.

The Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business describes its mission to “build bridges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, businesses, and communities through diverse programming, providing tools, training, network building, major business awards, and national events” (2017). It is important to note CCAB uses the term “Aboriginal”, which refers to First Nation, Inuit and Metis, since they work closely with each group of Indigenous peoples.

The importance of Indigenous involvement in community economic development is not only a priority in Canada, but the United States as well. Healing and progression of Indigenous communities are crucial as indicated in the findings of the research results of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, which started at Harvard University in the late 1980s. The Harvard Project has identified five important factors in successful economic development, which are sovereignty, culture and language, institutes, strategic planning and leadership (2015).

The impact the UNDRIP and the Calls to Action have had in terms of business are two-fold. With the recognition of consultation, consent and inclusion, these documents have resonated with some businesses focused on partnerships with resource developments. This has resulted in First Nation communities developing business partnerships with meaningful ownership and inclusion. Although there are examples of communities receiving far less than their counterparts (Attiwapiskat and DeBeers), there are recent examples of true partnerships (Squamish and Woodfibre LNG).
“Good news” stories from communities that have been able to work cooperatively resulting in economic opportunities for their members through employment, improve infrastructure, support social programs where government funding falls short such as education, and the overall economic prosperity for the community, are promising. The demonstration of “corporate–community responsibility” refers to the strong corporate responsibility practiced by Indigenous businesses, which tends to be community focused. Corporate–community responsibility includes economic development, social wellness, and cultural preservation initiatives (Conference Board of Canada, 2008).

Many partnerships with industry, corporations and government agencies create opportunity for Indigenous communities, and often create an environment for individual business opportunities. They do not, however, address barriers for entrepreneurs and small business for Indigenous individuals.

**Indigenous Entrepreneurship**

The Canadian Council of Aboriginal Business (CCAB) is the leading organization focused on Indigenous business and economic development. They offer a vast network of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and businesses, research on a national level on business trends, and capacity development through various training programs. CCAB has done extensive research in the areas of Indigenous business. They have concluded that “research shows that Aboriginal entrepreneurs are motivated by a desire to innovate, expand and profit from their businesses, but they also face unique challenges to their growth and development” (2016).

One of the biggest obstacles Indigenous business owners face is locating outside sources of funding, with 51 per cent of Aboriginal business owners saying they found this to be very difficult in their own experience. Additionally, once lenders or programs are found, nearly half (45 per cent) found it difficult to meet the qualifications or requirements for lending (CCAB, 2016). Most small businesses use their own revenue sources to start their company.

Three in ten Aboriginal businesses have a formal business plan, a level that is essentially unchanged since 2010. Those without a business plan tend not to see the value or do not have the resources to devote to creating one. However, most successful business owners are more likely to have a written business plan (37 per cent) (CCAB, 2016).

There are existing government programs to support Indigenous business and entrepreneurs. Many businesses, however, do not qualify because they do not meet the requirements, such as a business plan. It seems that many are not aware of government programs or outside sources of funding, perhaps due to internet connectivity issues, living in an isolated community, or lack of access to a network of professionals to discuss/learn of business opportunities and programs. There is a disconnect between seeing the value of a business plan and not qualifying for funding due to not having a business plan.

In this digital era, if a business is not on the internet, it does not exist. However, connectivity is not universally available to Indigenous communities and businesses. Almost half of First Nations households do not have an internet connection (AFN, 2008). These problems are more common for businesses located on-reserve. Social media sites are more likely to be used than formal business websites.

Prohibited land ownership creates a limited access to capital. “Prohibited land ownership under the Indian Act and limits on alienation of municipal lands that arose out of the referendum that followed the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement make it difficult for Indigenous entrepreneurs to access funding for businesses, since they are unable to leverage land as collateral for a business loan” (Conference Board of Canada, 2016). This is a major obstacle that must be addressed for on-reserve businesses to succeed. The inability to access loans from financial institutions for business plans, which are required in order to apply for business loans, is hindering the growth, sustainability, and success of Indigenous small businesses.

Using creativity to overcome obstacles is important to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. The key to success is not to plan for perfection. Rather, Aboriginal entrepreneurs must address challenges not only with well-thought-out and effective strategies, but with creativity. Aboriginal businesses encounter the same obstacles as all small and medium-sized enterprises but they also face specific challenges related to legislation, cultural barriers, and remote location (Conference Board of Canada, 2016). Highly successful Aboriginal business owners are likely to be located off-reserve (77 per cent versus 69 per cent of moderate and 62 per cent of low successful companies) (CCAB, 2016).
The statistics on First Nation socio-economic determinants, education, and labour force create clear reasons for businesses located on-reserve being less successful. They also, demonstrate the need to invest in policy change, address the funding gap, and build capacity, to promote governance revitalization, business and financial literacy certification, and to uphold a real commitment to Indigenous business and opportunity on all levels.

**An Entrepreneurial Reconciliation Partnership**

**Indigenous Roots, Armstrong, BC**

In December 2016, a Joint Venture announcement was made between former Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Phil Fontaine and the Cronos Group launching Indigenous Roots - the first majority-owned Indigenous licensed producer of medical cannabis. This agreement would see opportunity in the emerging cannabis market brought to Indigenous communities, that are often overlooked for involvement and partnerships.

As Mr. Fontaine states, “It’s about revitalization of First Nations economies, it’s about wealth creation, it’s about providing a service to an underserved client group, it’s about jobs, training and it is about capacity-building. And I think there are real opportunities here for the indigenous community” (Financial Post, 2017). The business model is multi-faceted as it focuses on investment opportunity, economic development, specialized training and employment, lobbying of the federal government for insurance coverage, and it has proposed a clinical trial for opioid reduction.

Medical cannabis for personal use has been legal in Canada for 20 years. The industry has grown to a large-scale production as patients unable to grow for themselves are accessing cannabis from licensed producers. Legislation legalizing recreational use was introduced by the Liberal government in May 2017, and proposes to roll-out for public distribution in early 2018. The role for regulation and sales will be determined by Provinces and Territories. Although, these jurisdictions will be positioned to benefit from the taxes collected from cannabis sales they will also be saddled with the problems associated with substance sales such as driving under the influence and curbing the black market. Indigenous communities have a unique position within provincial regulation, since they fall under federal law or in many instances create their own bylaws through their First Nation governments.

For example, in Ontario, tax-free sales of unregulated tobacco products to Indigenous and non-Indigenous customers are occurring on-reserve, driving the economy for individuals and for community governments (through quota fees collected), with little to no interference from the Province. In Saskatchewan, however, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indigenous Nations struck an agreement with the Province to reduce tax-free tobacco sales to Indigenous people and stop tax-free sales to non-Indigenous customers in exchange for gaming agreements.

The Indigenous cannabis industry will be a new market for communities to decide their economic future, which may or may not include Provincial regulation. If on-Reserve sales to all customers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are regulated by communities and do not include sales tax, the distribution of recreational cannabis will be appealing to all since there would be a significant savings. The recreational market in Canada has been estimated to have a potential economic impact reaching $22.6 billion dollars annually (Deloitte, 2016). The economic injection for Indigenous communities involved in the cannabis market is poised to be substantial.

Lobbying efforts, supported by the AFN, for coverage of medical cannabis under the Non-Insured Health Benefits for Status Indians and Inuit people has resulted in pressure on the Federal Government to extend the same benefits as those afforded under Veteran’s Affairs Canada. First Nations and Inuit people alone represent an expected cannabis market opportunity in excess of $300 million annually (GMP Securities, 2017).

New economic opportunities for Indigenous communities are not without their struggles. The Joint Venture company has met with over 100 First Nation communities across Canada since the announcement in December and has encountered the following issues:

- While community leadership want to invest in the opportunity or want to explore operating a facility, there has been push back from community members who view cannabis as an illegal drug – this has resulted in lengthy referendums or refusal to be involved;
- In resource development, most community’s involvement is financed by the proponent, province or federal government. Investment of own-source revenue or community capital is not the normal practice;
- A few communities wish to invest in Indigenous Roots to become equity owners, but had Treaty Land Entitlement funds held in trust and there are many issues/barriers to accessing capital;
• Investment markets are fast-paced, as we have witnessed in Canada with the cannabis markets soaring, but Indigenous communities are cautious with development and involvement in new arenas. This has caused the capital investment stage for Indigenous Roots to be much longer than licensed producers are accustomed to;

• Financial institutions will not issue loans to First Nation governments for investment in the cannabis market.

Mr. Fontaine has been referred to as the “grandfather of Reconciliation” due to his persistence as National Chief to negotiate the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which saw the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Indigenous Roots is a company that is utilizing the economic endeavors of Indigenous communities and the expertise of the Cronos Group on the foundation of Reconciliation.

Mike Gorenstein, CEO of the Cronos Group stated, “the Cronos Group is committed to our relationship with Mr. Fontaine, his team, and Canada’s Indigenous people – who are a marginalized segment of society. We want to see opportunity brought to communities and for the federal government to address the equity to access issues. We are committed to reconciliation and are pleased to be a part of a project that will bring real change to Indigenous communities” (personal interview, 2017).

Existing Indigenous Business Programs

There are a few existing post-secondary institutions offering Indigenous business administration certification and diplomas, as well Indigenous organizations offering training to existing community economic development representatives. The following is a summary of programs available.

The University of Saskatchewan offers an Aboriginal Business Administration Certificate which is designed to provide programming for Indigenous students who do not meet admission criteria for the undergraduate program. Successful students gain admission to their Bachelor of Commerce degree program if they wish to continue.

The Beedie School of Business in B.C. offers an Executive MBA in Aboriginal Business & Leadership. Camosun College, located in Victoria, B.C., offers a certificate with the option of applying it to a diploma or an applied degree and states that “The core of the program’s curriculum is rooted in Indigenous perspectives through:

• integration with general business offerings, addressing the need for practical leadership and management education;

• participation in specialized seminars facilitated by Indigenous people who have combined academic and practical experience;

• completion of a community business project, working to strengthen relationships and build capacity in local and regional Indigenous communities” (Camosun, 2017).

The Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity offers a certificate in Best Practices in Indigenous Business and Economic Development, and Cape Breton University has a business mentorship for high school students.

McGill University, QC offers a certificate in Indigenous Business Management focusing on numerical and financial literacy, as well as management skills. The program is described, “to help develop the skills needed to create a business or effectively work in an established organization, create a business plan, develop projects, communicate with confidence, effectively manage internal and external stakeholders, understand the fundamentals of how organizations operate within a social, political, and legal framework, and negotiate and manage conflict” (McGill, 2017).

The Aboriginal Financial Officers Association focuses on capacity development for professionals working in the areas of finance and management. They have recently announced an Indigenous Executive Program with Harvard Business School. The first intake of students was in May 2017.

The CCAB has recently launched the Tools & Financing for Aboriginal Business, an interactive service for members offering advice and assistance in the areas of finance, operations, human resources, legal and regulatory, marketing and communications, and technology – all important areas for all businesses.

Government programs are offered through INAC for small businesses, but as information has shown many do not meet the requirements due to the lack of a business plan. Although, there are programs across the country to assist with business administration, if pre-requisite requirements are not met for admission, students will forgo formal business education and use their own resources to start small businesses.
Numerous sources can be found to assist with Indigenous business certification, if research is conducted and if a person has access to connectivity. There is a lack of programs in Indigenous business administration and financial literacy to assist with small businesses in Manitoba, Ontario, the Territories, and the Maritimes. The gap that exists in these geographical areas can be addressed through partnerships with post-secondary institutions, Indigenous organizations and Indigenous communities. A barrier to individuals accessing existing programs offered by educational institutions may be the inability to meet admission requirements (lack of a high school diploma). It would therefore be beneficial to create a business program with input from Indigenous communities/organizations that would lift these requirements. Indigenous entrepreneurs can achieve more success in sustainable business and growth if given the proper tools and training in management, financial literacy, and business plans.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations address barriers associated with individual Indigenous business and opportunity:

**Recommendation #1**

Financial institutions to revisit policy limitations on lending capability to Indigenous entrepreneurs located on-reserve. Work with local Indigenous governments to establish a framework, agreement, and policies aimed at financial assistance with individual businesses and opportunities.

**Recommendation #2**

Recognizing the barriers posed by lack of internet connectivity, federal and provincial governments must ensure all citizens have access to the internet. Work to ensure high-speed internet access is available in First Nation communities, including isolated communities.

**Recommendation #3**

Assist Indigenous governments to identify changes needed within community bylaws to encourage financial institutional support for Indigenous entrepreneurs located on-reserve. Since land ownership is not possible through the Indian Act, identify ways that collateral or individual holdings can be leveraged/identified to lift the barrier of accessing capital.

**Recommendation #4**

Post-Secondary institutions work with Indigenous communities/Indigenous organizations to provide, create, identify business administration programs/certification to assist with individual entrepreneurs, community economic development corporations, and Indigenous governments in every province and territory.

**Recommendation #5**

Government agencies and educational institutions to work with Indigenous communities, Provincial-Territorial organizations, National Aboriginal organizations across Canada to promote awareness of business support programs and options for financing support to small businesses.

**Framework**

**Recommendation #4** is particularly relevant to Post-Secondary institutions work with Indigenous communities/Indigenous organizations to provide, create, identify business administration programs/certification to assist with individual entrepreneurs, community economic development corporations, and Indigenous governments in every province and territory.

Purpose: With its reputation as a leader in business education, Queen's University has been identified as an ideal institution to create an Indigenous business administration certificate/program in partnership with the
Canada Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB). Queen’s University has made an internal commitment of “reconciliation through education” and the Smith School of Business and School of Policy Studies has expressed its interest in creating a partnership with the CCAB and Indigenous communities to increase financial literacy to allow greater opportunity for entrepreneurs to access financial programs and complete business plans.

This multifaceted certificate/program would see Queen’s University professionals travel to isolated Indigenous communities to deliver instruction, host cohorts of students from various locations across Canada assemble in one location for delivery of programming, a team Queen’s Commerce graduates with Indigenous entrepreneurs to assist with the creation of business plans, and an option to take the program on the Queen’s campus (which may have a different admission requirement). This program will be geared to existing and future Indigenous entrepreneurs in the hopes of increasing the success numbers of small businesses. Marketing and communications, as well as accessing existing financial grants will be crucial in the certificate/program delivery.

Inputs: Create the framework for an Indigenous Business Administration Certificate (to include Management Skills, numerical and financial literacy, business plan preparation, marketing and communications) in conjunction with Indigenous communities and the CCAB. Align the objectives of the Queen’s advisory council, CCAB, and Indigenous community partners. Ensure that the targeted funding agencies are approached directly to support the certificate program. Procure Indigenous teaching methodology from local Indigenous sources, with an emphasis on culture and values. Train and develop curriculum based on existing Indigenous business administration certification/degrees.

Outputs: Work with educational institutions and professional associations to recruit a diverse supply of Indigenous educators capable of delivering program content relevant to both Indigenous values and business training. Partnerships with other Indigenous organizations to promote certificate program. Advocacy for program and benefits, funding agencies to see merit. With successful completion of the Queen’s business administration certificate First Nations will be stronger contributors to the Canadian economy.

Immediate Outcomes: Increased partnerships, transfer of knowledge, expertise and best practices for the Queen’s Indigenous Business Administration Certificate aimed at student achievement, business and numerical literacy, business plans, and management skills. Short-term benefits also include increased opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration and issue identification among First Nation communities, First Nation organizations, and Queen’s University.

Intermediate Outcomes: Are targeted to change the behaviour of existing Queen’s curriculum delivery, educators and encourage student diversity over the medium-term. Positive outcomes in the medium-term will include: an increase in Indigenous students obtaining the knowledge to create/maintain a small business, linked to an increase in sustainability; an increase in the number of Indigenous businesses with business plans; complete business plans, linked to the ability to access capital, investment and government programs. This will also facilitate future participation and smooth transition (by marketing and program promotion), for future Indigenous students looking to be involved in business and the opportunities they present.

Final Outcomes: The core objective of the Indigenous business administration certificate/program are to be realized in terms of improved business practices for Indigenous students through a program designed with Indigenous input. It is the goal of this framework that in the final outcome the Indigenous business success gap will be closed between First Nation and their Canadian counterparts. This will provide benefits of business literacy for Indigenous students and Canada’s economy participation, with a focus on social innovation, community-corporate responsibility, and sustainability. An evaluation of the program on regular basis must be conducted to ensure effectiveness.

Conclusion

The discussion on reconciliation often focuses on education, health, justice, although business is often overlooked. While community economic prosperity is important, it is equally important to support entrepreneurs within communities to contribute to the economy through employment, as suppliers of goods and services, and encouragement of First Nations youth. Reconciliation through business will happen through partnerships with organizations, communities, entrepreneurs, financial institutions, and learning institutions.

There is much work to be done in assisting Indigenous-owned businesses, most notably the barrier to start-ups such as accessing capital and the lack of business plans. It will take concerted effort to revisit governance issues and economic policy prohibiting financial institutions’ support of on-reserve businesses, and partnerships between organizations.
Drummond and Sharpe recognize that closing the socio-economic gaps plaguing Aboriginal Canadians also requires that institutional/infrastructure deficiencies be addressed. The Advisory Council appropriately criticized the nature of federal funding for Aboriginal communities, which focuses more on social than economic needs and lacks predictability. The lack of access to high-speed broadband in many Aboriginal communities is an example of an impediment to economic development. Weaknesses in administrative and managerial capacities of the Aboriginal population need to be addressed as well. For example, it is estimated that only 31 per cent of Aboriginal businesses have a written business plan. This situation can be explained by education/literacy deficiencies (2017). In addition to education deficiencies, the cost of having a business plan prepared by a third-party are unaffordable for Indigenous entrepreneurs. This impedes their ability to access funding and grants for small businesses because they do not meet the requirements of the application/qualifications.

Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through business should not only be a priority of Canadian governments, but also of the private sector, financial institutions and educational systems. The different areas discussed in this paper show the many contributing factors influencing the well-being and economies of Indigenous communities and individuals. There is no one answer to the multitude of barriers experienced by Indigenous businesses, but rather a series of recommendations on policy, government action, and partnerships with industry and educational institutions to reconcile with Indigenous people through business and opportunity. Support and championing partnerships, offering formal training to assist with First Nation economies, creating opportunity for wealth, employment and sustainability, and developing tools to promote the well-being of Indigenous citizens at the community and individual level, can have a positive impact on quality of life and ultimately the Canadian economy.

A partnership with Queen’s University, the Canada Council for Aboriginal Business and the Indigenous community aimed at business education and the creation of business plans has the opportunity to demonstrate reconciliatory action, by giving small business the tools to succeed and expand. With a focus on social innovation, community-corporate responsibility, and investment in Indigenous business education this program will signal Queen’s commitment to reconciliation.

References


APPENDICES “A”

Overview of Sction 89 of the Indian Act

89 (1) Subject to this Act, the real and personal property of an Indian or a band situated on a reserve is not subject to charge, pledge, mortgage, attachment, levy, seizure, distress or execution in favour or at the instance of any person other than an Indian or a band.

Section 89 of the Indian Act prohibits use of reserve land as collateral. A bank is less likely to lend money if it cannot seize assets, in case of default. No-Indigenous people or entities cannot buy or sell Indigenous reserve land.

Section 89 often forces entrepreneurs to put forward other assets or seek government programs to strengthen equity position to qualify for a loan. While it is difficult to obtain security for assets situated on reserve, it can be accomplished with appropriate legal advice and structuring.

Certificate of possession are authorized under the Indian Act and are considered legal proof of a band member’s possession of a piece of land on reserve. They can only be issued, sold or exchanged between band members and are protected under the Indian Act against seizure. Their usefulness as collateral or equity and for business development purpose is limited.
First Nations Education: Increasing First Nations PSE Attainment

Taylor Matchett

November, 2017
First Nations Education: Increasing First Nations PSE Attainment

Taylor Matchett

Introduction

“Officials from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development confirmed to the Committee that at present “[t]he government’s top priority is on K-12”. The National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning takes the position, however, that one component of Aboriginal education should not be given precedence over others: There is a significant but unusual discussion about whether government should focus on elementary and secondary education as opposed to postsecondary. This is not the type of discussion that occurs within [the]mainstream when considering how to support the achievements of students. Federal government involvement in First Nations and Aboriginal post-secondary education should not be an either-or matter.” The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs

Issue Statement

In the culmination of what was previously an endless stream of barriers put before the Indigenous peoples of Canada, the federal government is finally addressing the need to establish a fundamentally different relationship with the country’s First Nations population. To do this, the Prime Minister of Canada has committed to work with the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs to forge a Government-to-Government relationship with First Nations. Together they will make moves to close the numerous and persisting socio-economic gaps that exist between First Nations and the general Canadian public, and to establish a reformed and improved fiscal relationship.

Moving forward to effect real and positive change for First Nations will require a great deal of transformation in the approaches currently being taken in key areas such as health and wellness, child welfare, justice, and education. It is important to note that the reforms needed are not superficial; a 2015 report issued by the Assembly of First Nations highlighted that in the past 18 months four separate international human rights organizations demonstrated that Canada was in violation of its human rights obligations by failing to address the gaps in socio-economic outcomes experienced by its Indigenous population. While the areas affecting First Nations in Canada are far-reaching and substantial in number, it is important to analyze each issue deliberately and with meaningful attention to detail. Most importantly, however, the highest value must be placed on recommendations and insights provided by members of First Nations communities themselves as they are best suited to determine what solutions will work best in their individual circumstances.

For the purposes of this paper, it is the need for reforms in First Nations’ education that will be considered. More specifically, the gap in enrolment and retention in post-secondary institutions between First Nations’ and the general Canadian public will be examined, with a particular focus on highlighting the practices and innovations that have yielded positive outcomes in recent years at post-secondary institutions in Canada. Prior to turning the attention to those best practices, however, some consideration must be given to understanding the reasons why improving post-secondary education outcomes for First Nations is so imperative, and, importantly, to articulating the severity of the situation at this point so as to further encourage the attempts that have been made thus far. To do this, the concept of education as a socio-economic indicator will be explored, followed by a consideration of the value of reaching the level of post-secondary education for First Nations in comparison with the general Canadian public. The persisting gaps experienced by First Nations that are fostered by the education system at different levels will be highlighted, followed by a review of the best practices and innovations being used at post-secondary institutions within Canada. The report will conclude with a number of

3 Ibid.
recommendations for improvement in several key problem areas.

Finally, a note on terminology that will be used over the course of this report: With the absence of available data for some topics concerning First Nations people, there are times when the report refers to data collected that is, instead, describing a trend within the Indigenous population more generally. This will be evident by use of the word ‘Indigenous,’ or by explicitly specifying that the information is describing First Nations people if it is. Further, with the focus of this report on exploring methods to increase enrolment and retention in post-secondary education, the terms ‘post-secondary education’ and ‘tertiary education’ will be used interchangeably.

Determining the Significance of Education

Education as a Socio-economic Indicator

Despite numerous other gaps and challenges being faced by First Nations in Canada, it is believed that the most significant positive changes for the community as a whole can be effected by properly engaging the tool of education. Strong evidence points to the fact that education can and should be used as a cost-effective policy lever in dealing with social challenges; education policies have been shown to complement policies aimed at addressing social issues such as crime, health, and social cohesion. Educational attainment has been shown to be positively correlated with several desirable social outcomes, such as improved health and political efficacy, with these results holding constant even after accounting for age, gender, and earnings. For these reasons, education is widely considered to be a proven method used by communities and individuals alike to make a worthwhile impact on advancing economic and social progress. Further, as it is linked to other socio-economic indicators, education is known to play a significant role in shaping a person’s future, largely due to its strong influence over an individual’s career choices.

Other studies also demonstrate that educational attainment at a higher level directly correlates with key socio-economic indicators, such as income, employment and overall well-being. Related data gathered by the OECD in its Education Indicators 2016 report shows that adults who had achieved comparatively higher levels of education tend to show a greater degree of civic engagement in comparison to their less educated peers. Of the 25 OECD countries with data available on this topic, the self-reported voting rate between the two groups indicates an average gap of 15 per cent in favour of adults with a higher level of education. In addition, a gap exists between the two groups in relation to a person’s overall life satisfaction; on average, the group of adults with higher levels of education is 18 per cent greater in their reporting of high levels of life-satisfaction in comparison with groups that have reached a lower educational attainment. This could be linked to the finding that variances in income and education between different individuals and groups tend to diminish as their respective levels of education increase, which remains true whether the increase is in the form of a certificate, diploma, or degree.

Accompanying the positive associations between increased education and improved socio-economic indicators is the evidence demonstrating the comparably strong relationship between a lack of education and a number of undesirable social outcomes. One such outcome is that those who have attained only a low level of education are much more likely to engage in criminal activity than those who achieve high school certification or tertiary education levels. There are various reasons why this is the case, the first being that education serves to increase the returns associated with legitimate work, thus increasing the opportunity costs associated with

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6 Ibid.
8 Ibid
11 Ibid.
criminal behaviour and incarceration. Additionally, education is believed to alter one’s preferences in different ways, such as by increasing a person’s tendency to be patient or risk averse. Speaking specifically with regard to skills related to literacy, those with low literacy are more likely to experience poor problem-solving skills, and feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction. Low-literacy or illiterate people are also less likely to be active in their community than the average citizen, and often feel isolated or like outcasts as a result. This may in turn explain why people with low literacy statistically are more prone to criminal involvement, either as the offender or victim. Looking to the statistics available that examine literacy in Canadian prisons, 79 per cent of those who enter correctional facilities did not graduate from high school and 65 per cent have lower than a Grade 8 level education.

Unsurprisingly, as higher educational attainment is linked with improved health outcomes, the reverse also holds true. Research has shown that among populations lacking a high school diploma, life expectancy has decreased since the 1990s, while for other segments of the population it has increased. Generally speaking, education not only provides opportunities to learn about health, but it also equips people with a health literacy that they can reference later in life in order to avoid negative outcomes. With higher education being linked to a higher degree of economic achievement, those that have obtained an education are less likely to experience the stresses of economic or relative deprivation, which at times may result in a state of poverty. Further, those with a lower level of education may be more prone to deal with the stresses they are experiencing using unhealthy coping behaviours. Without certain levels of education, therefore, peoples are systematically deprived of health-related knowledge, and are more likely to find themselves in situations that put their health at risk.

### Value of Education for First Nations

As demonstrated in the preceding section, there are various positive socio-economic returns that are fortified if an individual achieves a higher level of education, as well as negative socio-economic outcomes that can be avoided in pursuing the same course of action. With this being said, it can reasonably be concluded through the evidence provided that an individual is more likely to reap positive outcomes by furthering their education as much as possible than by choosing not to do so. In the context of this report, the groups to be compared in the context of education levels and relative outcomes are men and women of the general Canadian population, First Nations men and women, and the country of Canada itself. This section will illustrate the variances, as well as the rewards that would be enjoyed by Canada as a whole if the gaps in education, both secondary and post-secondary, between the general Canadian population and First Nations peoples were closed. Apart from the obvious intrinsic value that would ultimately be derived by closing the post-secondary education gap, it is also possible to make solid estimates as to the returns that would be felt by First Nations individuals, and Canada as a whole.

Apart from education having been identified as a fundamental human right that is necessary for one to survive in the modern world, it is also capable of bringing various benefits to society in the form of higher income and employment opportunities, as well as improved social status, enhanced skills, and access to networks. Through returning those benefits to society and individuals, increased levels of education also help to avoid the economic costs of sustaining large numbers of people in poverty as well as lost opportunity costs associated with untapped productivity. When calculated for the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, “the cost

14 Ibid.
15 Literacy and Policing in Canada. “The Link Between Low Literacy and Crime”. Target Crime with Literacy, No Date.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
of doing nothing,” meaning if the federal government were to not do anything to address the disparities being experienced by Indigenous populations, was estimated at $7.5 billion annually, plus $5.8 billion in terms of lost productivity and costs incurred due to high reliance on social services and poor health conditions.\footnote{Ibid.}

As of 2011, there were 1,400,685 people in Canada that declared their Indigenous identity, representing 4.3 per cent of the total Canadian population.\footnote{Statistics Canada, “Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit,” Census Program, September 15, 2016, http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm.} In comparison with the 2006 census, this represented a 20.1 per cent growth in the Indigenous population over five years, while the non-Indigenous Canadian population grew by only 5.2 per cent in the same period. Within the Indigenous population, First Nations account for 60.1 per cent, and 2.6 of the overall Canadian population.\footnote{Ibid.} When looking at the number of people in the country aged 15-24, the Indigenous population accounts 5.9 per cent of all youth in Canada. Projections for the future highlight that this trend in the growing demographic of young Indigenous people will continue; in the period from 2011-2036, faster population growth of Indigenous Canadians means that the Indigenous will make up between 6.3 per cent-10.6 per cent of all labour force growth in the country.\footnote{Ibid.} While this range is provided for the entire Canadian population, some provinces will see even more significant labour force growth as a result of their Indigenous population. Manitoba and Saskatchewan are expected to experience 24 per cent-30 per cent and 36 per cent-38 per cent labour force growth respectively, due to their large Indigenous populations.\footnote{Andrew Sharpe and Donald Drummond, “Raising Potential Growth in Canada: The Contribution of Closing Aboriginal Socio-Economic Gaps,” unpublished op-ed, 2017.}

In terms of what is required for the average individual to secure employment, having a successful educational background is of great importance in the present day. For many entry-level jobs a high school diploma is the minimum requirement for application. With regard to employment that would be considered more secure and well-paying, post-secondary certification is generally required.\footnote{Jane Preston, “The Urgency of Post-Secondary Education for Aboriginal Peoples,” Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, November 19, 2008.} Staggeringly, it is expected that 70 per cent of future jobs in Canada will require some type of post-secondary education, and that by the year 2031 that percentage will have risen to 77 per cent.\footnote{No Author, “Canada’s Demographic and Advanced Skills Crisis,” Association of Canadian Community Colleges, August 2011.} As a result of these requirements, Statistics Canada stated that the nation should look to invest in sustaining post-secondary institutions and programs as a means to decrease unemployment rates, implying that progress for Canadian society is largely determined by the extent to which the population attains post-secondary certification.\footnote{“The Urgency of Post-Secondary Education for Aboriginal Peoples,” 2008.}

The data that is available on the topic supports this view, indicating that there are a number of factors strongly linked to post-secondary education. When looking at 15 OECD countries with the available information, on average, a 30-year-old male graduate of a tertiary program will live eight years more than a 30-year-old male who does not have a post-secondary education. Among women the gap is smaller, but those with a post-secondary degree still live four years longer on average.\footnote{“Education at a Glance 2016 OECD Indicators,” 2016.} Interesting differences also exist with regard to civic involvement: In 27 OECD nations, 80 per cent of post-secondary graduates indicate that they vote while just 54 per cent of those without post-secondary degrees indicated that they do.\footnote{Ibid.}

Unsurprisingly, income is strongly associated with post-secondary education. Turning to Canada and the Indigenous population specifically, those who have obtained university degrees come significantly closer to the medium income of non-Indigenous Canadians.\footnote{“The Income Gap Between Aboriginal Peoples and the Rest of Canada,” 2010.} While the median incomes for the overall Indigenous population and non-Indigenous populations aged 25-54, respectively, were $27,866 and $38,657, for the segment of each that had obtained a post-secondary diploma or degree, the difference was between $37,036 and $43,834.\footnote{Statistics Canada, “Income - Aboriginal Statistics at a Glance: 2nd Edition,” Government of Canada, November 09, 2015, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-645-x/2015001/income-revenu-eng.htm.} Therefore, while the median Indigenous person earns about 72.1 per cent of what the median non-Indigenous...
person earns, the median Indigenous Canadian with post-secondary certification earns 84.5 per cent of what the median non-Indigenous person of the same background earns. This represents a shift in the income gap from 28 per cent to about 15.5 per cent. This being said, below the Bachelor level Indigenous peoples tend to earn significantly less than Canadians that have obtained similar levels of education.\(^\text{38}\) Finally, there was also a marked difference in the average incomes between those that had attained post-secondary credentials and those that had attended school at a post-secondary institution but not graduated from the program.\(^\text{39}\)

Also related to income, other studies have found that gaps in employment rates present between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians tend to diminish as comparative levels of education increase.\(^\text{40}\) In fact, whether the students being examined are First Nations, Métis, or non-Indigenous, high school completion alone tends to increase the probability of employment by at least 25 per cent.\(^\text{41}\) While the largest difference in employment rates between the two groups was for those without certification, this being a difference of 15 per cent, for those with high school it was 8 per cent, with a trade certification was 9 per cent, and with college or CEGEP certification the difference was 7 per cent.\(^\text{42}\) For those with university level certification, the difference in employment rates between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations was less than 2 per cent.\(^\text{43}\) In contrast, it is important to note that the harms experienced by the Indigenous population with regard to employment in relation to education level are disproportionately to the non-Indigenous population; failing to obtain a high school or post-secondary certification is more strongly associated with unemployment for Indigenous people than for non-Indigenous people.\(^\text{44}\) Accompanying the higher income and rates of employment, higher education levels have also been found to advance other benefits, including healthy social development, healthy lifestyles, and positive life choices.\(^\text{45}\) Studies also show that increasing post-secondary opportunities for Indigenous people may be helpful in alleviating the unacceptable social conditions that have been dealt with by generations of Indigenous peoples, such as poor housing conditions, inability to access clean drinking water, disproportionate infant mortality rates, and suicide rates.\(^\text{46}\)

By raising First Nations and other Indigenous populations up to post-secondary education levels comparable to those of the non-Indigenous population, there are also numerous returns that would be enjoyed by all of society. First, with respect to savings that would be incurred, the Ontario Native Education Counselling association found that the cost of a university level education is twenty times less expensive than social assistance programs.\(^\text{47}\) Further, the Centre for the Study of Living Standards estimated that if Indigenous education levels and labour market outcomes were to reach non-Indigenous levels from 2006, the federal and provincial governments would collect an additional $3.5 billion (in 2006 dollars) in tax revenues in the year 2026. Also taking into account the fiscal savings, the government balance in 2026 would improve by $11.9 billion. Overall, for the period from 2006-2026, increasing Indigenous education and social well-being would result in up to $115 billion cumulatively for the Canadian government.\(^\text{48}\)

Additional estimates can be made with regard to GDP growth that would be generated as a result of closing the educational attainment gap for Indigenous peoples. Over the period from 2011-2031, eliminating the education gap could result in a rise in the growth rate for labour productivity of 0.03 per cent and an employment rate growth of 0.02 per cent by the end of the period. These increases would accumulate and represent a $261 billion increase in GDP between 2011-2031.\(^\text{49}\)

\(^{41}\) Barry Anderson and John Richards, “Students in Jeopardy: An Agenda for Improving Results in Band-Operated Schools,” CD Howe Institute, January 2016.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) Ibid.
\(^{47}\) Ibid.
Gaps and Barriers in First Nations PSE Attainment

Gaps in Primary and Secondary School Attainment

In examining outcome gaps between First Nations and the non-Indigenous population as they exist in relation to post-secondary education, the logical starting point is that which occurs prior to any education obtained at a post-secondary institution, from Kindergarten through to Grade 12. While there are programs and initiatives that can be used by post-secondary institutions to improve outcomes for First Nations students, if they are subjected to barriers at the primary and secondary levels, the result may be a failure to graduate from high school; a condition for admission to any post-secondary institution.

Upon its original implementation and continuing throughout the years, the overarching objective of primary and secondary education programming for Indigenous students was to provide those who were eligible and living on-reserve with education programs that were comparable to those being offered in provincial schools in the same province of residence. In advancing this goal, there was also the assumption that the two groups would achieve similar education outcomes, and that those outcomes would result in socio-economic benefits to themselves, their communities, and Canada as a whole. With regard to the concept of ‘provincially comparable education’ and what this entails, three principle measures have since been identified: funding, programming, and outcomes. While there have been substantial developments since the 1970s, data shows that First Nations achievement in primary and secondary education still rests at a level far below that of other Canadians, and that the gap persists in relation to each of these three principles.

Although there is no denying that band-operated schools located on-reserve are a much better option than the previous residential school systems they have replaced, the reality is that they are extremely weak when compared with provincial schools in their respective regions. Further, when considering the fact that the main guideline that was decided upon when introducing these schools was that they should be of a comparable quality to provincial schools, the shortcomings that have been borne are even more disappointing. In contrast with the non-Indigenous Canadian population, and even in comparison with other Indigenous groups, the outcomes for First Nations’ living on-reserve in the primary and secondary education systems are dismal. When looking at young adults between the ages of 20 to 24, 9 out of 10 non-Indigenous students have at least a high school education. Within the same age group, 8 out of 10 Métis have at least high school, as do 7 out of 10 First Nations that live off-reserve. The ratio for First Nations living on-reserve that were high school graduates was 4 out of 10, which is extremely low, even relative to other Indigenous peoples. The overall percentage of the Indigenous population that does not have high school certification is 32 per cent which is more than twice the rate for non-Indigenous Canadians of 15 per cent.

Gaps in Post-Secondary Education Attainment

With the identified achievement gap that exists at the primary and secondary levels of education, First Nations students are automatically put at a disadvantage in terms of their potential rates of success in post-secondary education as a significant number of them (32 per cent) do not qualify for admission. As of 2011, it was found that 48 per cent of the Indigenous population from the ages of 25-64 indicated that they had a post-secondary qualification, while 45 per cent of the First Nations population reported the same. With regard to the people reporting ‘no certificate, diploma or degree’ another gap was significant, with 29 per cent Indigenous people

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 “Students in Jeopardy: An Agenda for …,” 2016.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Calver, 2015.
from 25-64 connecting to the statement compared to just 12 per cent of the same age group in the non-Indigenous population.\textsuperscript{60}

Another finding of the 2011 census confirmed the persisting trend of there being a gap in the number of Indigenous people who attain a university degree over a college diploma. Of the 45 per cent of First Nations between 25-64 that had post-secondary qualifications, 13 per cent were found to have a trades certificate, 19 per cent a college diploma, and just 9 per cent with a university degree.\textsuperscript{61} While the First Nations population that has graduated high school is found to have comparable levels of college level attainment to non-Indigenous Canadians, the gap is much more significant when contrasting the two groups according to university attainment.\textsuperscript{62} Among those in the 25-44 age group in 2011, 37 per cent of non-Indigenous Canadians were found to hold university certification, compared with 12 per cent of the Registered Indian population and 16 per cent of Other First Nations.\textsuperscript{63} With regard to First Nations that have graduated from some form of post-secondary education, a number of trends in program choices are present, the most popular being general arts and sciences, social sciences and services, education, and business and commerce.\textsuperscript{64} Among all Indigenous identity groups, with the exception of the Inuit, a higher proportion of women were found to have obtained post-secondary certification than men. Women were also more likely to have completed college or university, but less likely to obtain certification in a trade or through an apprenticeship.\textsuperscript{65} Indigenous women also seem to be obtaining post-secondary certification at a rate faster than Indigenous men; from 2006-2011, the number of women with post-secondary moved from 36 per cent to 40 per cent, while it moved from 34 per cent to 36 per cent for men.\textsuperscript{66}

One clear takeaway from this data is that non-Indigenous Canadians seem to have access to more opportunities, and tend to be more prepared for success in post-secondary programs than the Indigenous population. It is suspected that these results come from a number of causes. At a very basic level, the teaching and learning styles, language, methods of communication, and cultural patterns present in post-secondary institutions all vary significantly from the more traditional teaching pedagogy typical of many Indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{67} In 2006, for example, it was found that 51 per cent of First Nations people that were living on a reserve generally conversed using their Indigenous language, but very few post-secondary institutions offer instruction in those languages.\textsuperscript{68} While non-Indigenous Canadians attending school at post-secondary institutions face their own challenges, Indigenous students are ultimately thrust into an environment that is extremely different from the reality they are familiar with,\textsuperscript{69} particularly if they are moving from a remote location and to a city.\textsuperscript{70} Within this new and non-Indigenous dominated education system, the understanding and recognition of Indigenous ways of learning, culture, and other needs tends to be quite limited. This quality, in combination with individual barriers, such as a lack of motivation or self-esteem, can be overwhelming to students and manifest in feelings of anger and frustration, but also powerlessness, and poor mental and physical health.\textsuperscript{71}

Gaps in Adult Outcomes

Though the gaps experienced by adult First Nations later in life do not add to the gap in post-secondary outcomes, they are significant in that they illustrate the disparities felt by First Nations after having not succeeded in accessing a proper education, at the post-secondary level, and likely also the high-school level by extension.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} No Author, “FACT SHEET First Nations Post-Secondary Education,” The Assembly of First Nations, no date.
\textsuperscript{65} Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} No Author, “Education as a Social Determinant of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Health,” National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.
\textsuperscript{70} “Increasing Indigenous PSE Attainment and Retention,” telephone interview by author with Shari Beaver, Student Success Coordinator, First Peoples House of Learning at Trent University, July 6, 2017.
\textsuperscript{71} National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010.
As previously indicated, the minimum level of educational attainment generally required to access employment is the completion of high school, while many other career paths require some form of post-secondary education as a precursor to hiring. Referring to the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS), 72 per cent of First Nations people aged 18-44 living off-reserve that had completed high school were employed, while 9 per cent were unemployed, and 20 per cent were not part of the labour force. The unemployment rate for all of Canada was 6.5 per cent as of 2017. Looking at First Nations living off-reserve that did not succeed in completing high school, 47 per cent were employed, 15 per cent unemployed, and 37 per cent were not part of the labour force. This indicates that there is merely a 2.5 per cent gap in unemployment rates between the general population and First Nations that attended high school, but an 8.5 per cent gap for those that left high school before graduating. A contributing factor to these higher rates of unemployment is the relative locations that some First Nations communities find themselves in. In some cases, seasonal jobs and social assistance benefits may be the only sources of income for those living on reserves that are largely rural or remote. While there are likely many sociological outcomes that transpire as a result of unemployment (depression, substance abuse etc.), this gap directly translates into a notable difference in the average level of income reached by First Nations in comparison with the general population.

According to 2001 census data, First Nations people living on-reserve earned $14,616 per year on average, Indigenous people living off-reserve earned $20,888, and non-Indigenous Canadians’ average income was $30,062. When compared with the Inuit and Métis, Métis men are found to earn the highest average incomes within the Indigenous population, while First Nations women are found to earn the lowest average incomes. In spite of these numbers, however, 23 per cent of First Nations parents that live on-reserve indicate that they, another family member, or their children themselves, are making efforts to save for the child’s post-secondary education. This percentage also represents a gap with non-Indigenous Canadian parents, however, where 50 per cent of parents with one or more child expected to graduate from high school are saving for their post-secondary education. With post-secondary education being so closely linked with improved opportunities for employment, minimizing the gaps in post-secondary education outcomes felt by First Nations must be a primary focus for the federal and provincial governments.

### The Funding Gap

The discrepancy in funding provided to First Nations schools and students, compared with the level provided to schools and students of the provinces, is possibly the most contentious component in explaining the chronic gaps in achievement for First Nations students, holding true no matter what level of education is being discussed. As a result of the 2 per cent cap on annual funding increases that was put in place by former finance minister Paul Martin in the 1990s, all Indigenous programming has suffered. Though the cap was initially implemented as a temporary measure of fiscal restraint, serious efforts to lift it only recently transpired with the election of the current Liberal government into office, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s promise to establish a new fiscal relationship with the Indigenous population of Canada. Prior to this

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74 Statistics Canada, 2015.
75 Preston, 2008.
77 Preston, 2008.
78 Millennium Scholarships, 2005.
79 Ibid.
80 Preston, 2008.
recent development, and since the introduction of the cap in 1996, the First Nation population has increased 29 per cent, and there has been a steady growth in inflation.\(^\text{84}\) When combined these two factors indicate that the required annual funding increase for First Nations education would have been 6.3 per cent to account for rising prices and population growth.\(^\text{86}\) During the same period of time, federal transfers to schools in the provinces and territories averaged 4.1 per cent annually, even though they only required a 3.2 per cent average annual increase largely due to a steady decline in enrolment.\(^\text{87}\) Though this is not to say that funding has been the only missing piece in the First Nations Kindergarten through Grade 12 and post-secondary education gaps, in combination with the many other barriers faced by First Nations students, this absence of stable and predictable funding at all levels of First Nations’ education systems over the past twenty-one years has significantly exacerbated the current situation.\(^\text{88}\)

As such, due to this baseless 2 per cent cap on the education funding growth rate, it is unsurprising that First Nations students attending school at the primary and secondary levels, both on and off-reserve, have suffered. Beginning in 1996 when the cap came into force, $5,544 was provided to First Nations schools for each student by AANDC. This amount was already 15 per cent lower than what was paid by INAC to provincial and territorial schools to cover the costs of First Nations students attending them.\(^\text{89}\) As of 2011 AANDC was providing close to 50 per cent more funding for First Nations students attending provincial or private schools,\(^\text{90}\) and in the year 2011-2012 First Nations schools were receiving $14,056 per student.\(^\text{91}\) Most funding that AANDC provides is to cover instructional services, roughly 60 per cent; based on the per student rate, $9,839.20 is spent in this area.\(^\text{92}\)

In addition to the level of funding per student not being at the appropriate level, a large gap is also present when looking at the funding that is left to First Nations schools to pay for the day-to-day costs of running a school system. Among the most serious concerns that were raised by First Nations during the interview and case study portion of the Summative Evaluation of the Elementary/Secondary Education Program on Reserve conducted by AANDC was current and upcoming increase of operational costs in comparison with the resources that were actually available to them.\(^\text{93}\) With specific regard to instructional services, those that participated in the Evaluation broadly agreed that they experience significant gaps in terms of their capability of attracting and retaining teachers and support staff. Many cited the extreme difficulty in balancing the provision of competitive salaries and benefits, while accounting for increasing program and infrastructure costs.\(^\text{94}\) Further, when looking at small school districts whose characteristics are similar to those of many First Nations schools, funding provided by the provinces is higher: British Colombia, for example, allocates $2,029 more and Quebec $5,953 more in terms of instructional services.\(^\text{95}\)

While a lack of academic preparation also contributes to the achievement gap in tertiary education for First Nations, research indicates that the absence of financial resources available to students is the most significant factor.\(^\text{96}\) Among the First Nations students that indicate that they do not intend to pursue a post-secondary education, financial challenges are raised most often in explanation for what keeps them from doing so; 40 per cent say that they do not have the money, while 59 per cent express that they must instead work to support their family.\(^\text{97}\) With regard to First Nations youth that are planning to pursue a post-secondary education, when asked if anything may alter their plan, 48 per cent indicate it would be due to a lack of money and 43 per cent respond that they may be required to work in order to support their family.\(^\text{98}\)

In spite of the financial barriers and desperate need for additional government funding, the federal and provincial


\(^{85}\) The Assembly of First Nations, “FACT SHEET First Nations Education Funding,” AFN, no date.

\(^{86}\) Ibid.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.

\(^{88}\) Tasker, 2016.

\(^{89}\) The Assembly of First Nations, “FACT SHEET First Nations Education Funding,” AFN, no date(a).

\(^{90}\) Ibid.

\(^{91}\) Drummond, 2013.

\(^{92}\) Ibid.


\(^{94}\) Ibid.

\(^{95}\) Drummond, 2013.

\(^{96}\) Millennium Scholarships, 2005.

\(^{97}\) Ibid.

\(^{98}\) Ibid.
governments often conflict over which level of government is responsible for funding education. The provision of funding for Indigenous tertiary education, therefore, is also an issue of debate. While the federal government holds that post-secondary education falls within the responsibilities of the provinces, provincial governments argue that funding arrangements fall within the federal realm as part of its fiduciary duty. In one survey that was conducted, First Nations students were asked to provide their stance towards different statements. The responses showed that 53 per cent of those surveyed believed that the current levels of government funding were insufficient, while 46 per cent indicated that they felt that First Nations children lacked adequate academic preparation throughout their high school careers to sufficiently prepare them to attend a post-secondary institution. In another survey of First Nations on-reserve, 58 per cent expressed their belief that governments hold the greatest responsibility for funding post-secondary education. Non-Indigenous students are found to hold this view equally. Due to the aforementioned federal-provincial funding dispute over post-secondary education, however, many Indigenous post-secondary programs are insufficiently funded, or they receive no funding at all. In Ontario for the 2007-2008 school year, for example, Indigenous post-secondary institutions were funded as little as $1,527 for each student, while the average amount received by the mainstream tertiary institution was $9,669.

Another area of disappointment in relation to government funding is the Post-Secondary Education Program, a creature of the department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). The program is comprised of three main elements, including the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) which provides funding for First Nations and Inuit students in their pursuit of tertiary education, the University and College Entrance Program, which aids First Nations and Inuit students in establishing the entrance requirements for post-secondary institutions, and the Indian Studies Support Program, which supports post-secondary institutions and First Nations to construct programs that target the needs of First Nations and Inuit students. As the program has been subject to the 2 per cent cap on funding increases, however, it has been unable to expand in pace with the growing Indigenous population. Drawing again on an example from 2008, in that year the PSSSP provided $300 million for an estimated 22,303 students, while the real total costs associated with supporting those students was $724 million. With specific regard for First Nations students being supported by INAC’s PSE program, there was a significant decline from 1997 when 22,938 students were funded, to 2009 when only 18,729 were funded.

This decrease should not be misread as a decline in interest or qualification: an estimate by the AFN indicated that in 2008 alone there was a backlog of 10,589 eligible students that did not receive any funding and have not been able to enrol in post-secondary education. In the current day, this number has grown. This reality was reflected by the Vice Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Natives, Lyle Whitefish, when he stated; “There is a wait list on every reserve of students wanting to continue on past grade 12 and [due to lack of funding] we can’t accommodate them all.” There is indication, however, that the program could be quite effective if it provided more students with funding - despite the decline in the number of First Nations students enrolling and receiving funding, the program’s total number of graduates has increased in the same period, reaching its highest rate in 2008. This finding suggests that, given the support and financial resources required to succeed, First Nations students are becoming more likely to achieve positive outcomes in post-secondary education.

### Additional Socio-economic Gaps and Barriers

In combination with, and likely in some cases perpetuated by, the funding gap, there are numerous other challenges facing First Nations people that have contributed to the negative outcomes experienced in the realm

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100 Ibid.
101 Millennium Scholarships, 2005.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid
104 Preston, 2008.
105 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 The Assembly of First Nations, no date(b).
112 Preston, 2008.
113 Ibid.
114 The Assembly of First Nations, no date(b).
of Indigenous education. These barriers to accessing post-secondary education opportunities are widespread in classification and can be social, historic, geographic, demographic, cultural, or individual in nature.\textsuperscript{115} Previous assimilationist policies have forged a grim legacy, resulting in the many social issues that remain to be dealt with.\textsuperscript{116} Perhaps even more difficult to overcome, however, is the generally widespread sentiment of distrust and in some cases hostility felt in relation to education by many segments of the First Nations community, as well as by the Indigenous population as a whole.\textsuperscript{117} The horrific occurrences that took place during the time of the residential school system, and the history of those abuses being passed down to Indigenous youth, means that feelings toward the education system are likely characterized by apprehension and a certain level of discomfort. Whether these feelings are fleeting or deep seated, they discredit the institution of school to some degree and do not foster an environment for Indigenous students that is conducive to learning.

In addition to the barriers perpetuated by Canadian history, there are social barriers to post-secondary education for First Nations that range in complexity, from not being able to access the appropriate resources in on-reserve or remote schools and lacking self-confidence, to the absence of suitable role models, the presence of discrimination, and having to learn while in a condition of poverty.\textsuperscript{118} These challenges can be felt individually, or in combination with each other, and may result in a student’s inadequate academic preparation and inability to qualify for admission to post-secondary education.\textsuperscript{119} While such conditions also have a negative impact on segments of the non-Indigenous Canadian population, First Nations communities are shown to deal with these challenges at levels disproportionate to the non-Indigenous population. For example, with specific regard to children, roughly half of First Nations youth are known to live in poverty, and 48 per cent of children in foster care are Indigenous while the Indigenous people comprise only 4.3 per cent of Canada’s population. This percentage represents 40,000 children in care, over three times as many children that attended residential schools at the peak of the program.\textsuperscript{120} Additional issues that are experienced more generally among First Nations people include the boil water advisories, the fact that over 4,300 First Nations people are still displaced from their homes as a result of flooding in 2011, and rates of tuberculosis among First Nations people, which are 31 times the national average.\textsuperscript{121}

The tendency for First Nations students to be at a different stage in life once they do enroll at a post-secondary institution should also be considered in accounting for the more complicated path that they face in accessing tertiary education. In contrast to the typical non-Indigenous Canadian student who is 18 or 19 years of age with no spouse or children, First Nations university and college students are more likely to be married and have one or more children, and over 50 per cent of Indigenous post-secondary students are over the age of 22.\textsuperscript{122} Further attention should also be paid to the fact that the majority of First Nations students at the post-secondary level are women, many of whom have children and may be single parents. If those women are unable to access day-care for their children this creates a significant barrier to them being successful in their educational pursuits.\textsuperscript{123} This picture of the typical First Nations’ student demographic, though certainly not all-encompassing, illustrates some important variations from the typical non-Indigenous student demographic, in that First Nations students enrolled in post-secondary education are much more likely to be simultaneously dealing with other responsibilities, such as needing housing suitable for a family and financing child care.\textsuperscript{124}

\textbf{Current Program Analysis}

If the gap regarding the number of First Nations students reaching post-secondary attainment is to be minimized and eventually eliminated, there are two areas for initiatives and program delivery where the most significant efforts must be focused: improving opportunities for First Nations to access post-secondary education,
and, subsequently, increasing their rates of retention and success in completing tertiary programs. This section will review the various programs and initiatives being used by post-secondary institutions Canada-wide, and one initiative being headed by the Australia government to address similar issues with their own Indigenous population, to address the need for responsiveness in both these target areas.

The information presented will highlight the best practices currently in use to achieve improved outcomes in post-secondary education for Canada’s First Nations population. While some information has been accessed using methods of secondary research, many details pertaining to the described programs and initiatives specific to Canadian post-secondary institutions were uncovered by conducting primary interviews with representatives from those institutions to get an idea of which of their programs were enjoying the greatest results. With this in mind, it should be noted that most college and university programs and initiatives in these areas are targeted at improving access and retention for all Indigenous students, as opposed to First Nations specifically, which is the focus of this paper. As has been highlighted, however, First Nations account for the majority of the Canadian Indigenous population, and tend to experience the worst outcomes with regard to post-secondary education. Therefore, while many of the programs and initiatives to be discussed do not explicitly target improving First Nations post-secondary education outcomes, because First Nations form such a large portion of the Indigenous population and account for a significant segment of the post-secondary education gap, the conclusion can be drawn that the efforts being made are largely applicable to First Nations students, both current and prospective.

Pre-PSE Level Programs and Supports

With respect to the first area of focus, improving opportunity for access, the point in the education system that requires reform in order to address this key component of the post-secondary gap, is at the primary and secondary levels, or pre-PSE. One of the greatest challenges in educating First Nations students at the tertiary level is that not enough of them complete high school with the grades that are required to be admitted to many post-secondary institutions. As previously identified, First Nations students face many challenges in their attempts to secure an education. For many, these challenges can result in the student not graduating from high school, or their choice not to pursue additional education afterwards. While eliminating these challenges and closing the gap in First Nations’ high school graduation rates will take the time and effort of many different contributors, there are certain strategies that can, and are, being used by post-secondary institutions themselves to increase access to tertiary programming.

The literature on this topic clearly notes the value of the foundation for learning that a student develops in the years from Kindergarten through to the completion of high school. It is in these years that they develop the skills and the mentality required to learn, and begin to enhance their interest in continuing the learning process throughout their lives. Indigenous youth are often found to be lacking the necessary skills to prepare and qualify them for learning at a post-secondary level. They also differ significantly from the non-Indigenous population in that their expectations or vision for themselves in the context of post-secondary education may be non-existent. The absence of adequate resources for schools on-reserve, the presence of teachers with insufficient training, the lack of visible Indigenous role models, and the legacy of residential schools, are all contributing factors that reinforce this persevering problem. While the gaps that exist at the K-12 level require specific attention to address serious shortcomings, part of the responsibility for improving outcomes in the primary and secondary levels lies higher up with post-secondary institutions. This is a task that colleges and universities have been taking increasingly seriously in recent years, leading to their identifying some best practices and approaches to improve access to post-secondary education for Indigenous students, including First Nations. The focus of the efforts to improve access are concentrated in four main categories of programs and initiatives: Outreach and Awareness Building, Recruiting and Community Partnership, Transitional Programming, and Financial Initiatives.

125 PSE Conference 2011
126 Ibid
127 PSE Conference 2011
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
Outreach and Awareness Building

Post-secondary institutions are increasingly pursuing initiatives that involve engaging with Indigenous youth early on in their relationship with the education system. The most popular forms of outreach and awareness-building transpire in the form of programming targeting Indigenous youth, as well as trips made by members of the college or university administration to various Indigenous communities. The difference between these initiatives and the institutions’ more traditional recruiting strategies, is that they are not geared towards persuading youth to attend their specific post-secondary institution. Instead, they aim to begin a conversation as early as possible about the idea of pursuing post-secondary education in general.

In this regard, consideration must be given to the fact that many Indigenous youths have formed negative associations with formal education due to their parents’ and grandparents’ experiences in residential schools. This dark history also means that, in many cases, young Indigenous students are not exposed to academic and career role models that would serve to foster their aspirations of attending a university or college. Research in this area has found that individual factors such as visualizing future and destiny, commitment, valuing education, self-esteem, reflection, and educational self-efficacy are key in establishing a student’s commitment to tertiary education. Students that are lacking self-efficacy in terms of education would be more likely to reply “no” to a questions such as “can I succeed in post-secondary education”. The concept’s relationship to learning engagement is found to be circular: as a student becomes increasingly engaged, they learn more and increase their self-efficacy, but students with low self-efficacy are more likely to be bothered by self-doubt and will abandon tasks much more easily. In order then, to improve student’s self-efficacy and overall confidence, outreach and awareness-building initiatives can help Indigenous students to visualize a future in post-secondary education, and help them to be committed to their educations at the primary and secondary levels as a result.

A variety of programs at post-secondary institutions aim to address the general outreach and awareness-building aspect that is crucial to get Indigenous youth thinking about post-secondary education. Those that were interviewed described a number of initiatives that they have in place to help young students recognize that their futures hold the possibility of attending college or university. Some of the most notable are outlined as follows:

- The TRACKS (Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science) program, run through the Indigenous Environmental Studies and Science Program and the Kawartha World Issues Centre, invites Indigenous youth to their campus over March break. Youth are able to engage in camp programs and classroom workshops, while building relationships and being exposed to various mentorship opportunities.
- The First Nations University runs Science Camp open to First Nations and Inuit youth aged 12-15 from all across Canada on their Regina Campus.
- The University of Winnipeg runs a science program called ‘Let’s Talk Science’ as a form of outreach that targets inner city youth in the heart of Winnipeg.
- The University of Toronto conducts outreach with various Indigenous communities, such as a Grade 6 class from Attawapiskat that visit the campus for a day. A representative from the First Nations House indicated that this type of engagement is important to show Indigenous youth from a young age that there is a place for them on campus, and that there are other people that resemble them who share their values.

130 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
Queen's University does early engagement with Indigenous Grade 7 students in order to make them, and their parents, aware of the possibilities to attend post-secondary education, and runs programs in which youth are brought to visit campus on a weekly basis. Janice Hill of the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre says that these weekly trips are useful in helping participants to picture themselves at school in the future.139

The University of Victoria has been hosting a ‘Mini University Summer Camp’ for over 10 years. The camp is a one-week program that is open to students in British Columbia in grades 9-12. Those that attend stay in a university residence, and engage in social and cultural activities over the week. The school also involves elders and its student ambassadors at various points in the program.140

The University of Toronto's SOAR Aboriginal Youth Gathering (Strategic Outcomes for Academic Progress) run by the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education since 2009,141 invites Indigenous youth aged 14-17 to their campus over March break. Students visit the First Nations House where an elder speaks with them at the beginning and end of the week, they participate in a variety of activities at all different faculties, and they experience the City of Toronto on different day trips, such as to the Native Canadian Centre, CN Tower, and Eaton Centre.142

In addition to these programs whereby post-secondary institutions invite Indigenous youth to visit their campuses, helping them to recognize that they should see post-secondary education in their future, many schools, including Aurora College, Trent University, and Queen's University, travel around their respective regions to promote PSE as an option. Trent’s Liaison Officer works on a number of early engagement pieces, including paying visits to Indigenous high schools and communities to discuss the idea of post-secondary education as a whole, rather than as specific to Trent.143 Similarly, Queen's Aboriginal Youth Worker focuses on the community engagement piece and works with youth aged 16-24 by attending community based education fairs to encourage PSE as an option.144

A final initiative worth mentioning put forth by Queen's University is the Future Further Campaign that works to present profiles of typical students as role models, rather than only high profile Indigenous people. The goal is to 'introduce' them to the normal, average student in order to demonstrate that they are capable of similar achievements.145 This initiative supports research in this area that indicates many Indigenous students hope to become role-models themselves so that they might inspire others, within their own communities in particular.146

By planting a motivation to learn and be successful in young Indigenous students, initiatives such as these can aid them in appreciating the great value of obtaining a post-secondary education, as well as help them recognize that post-secondary institutions are places where they belong.147

Recruiting and Community Partnership

Similar to outreach programs and awareness-building, recruiting strategies and community partnerships are another method by which post-secondary institutions can encourage interest and access for Indigenous students. The main difference here, of course, is that recruiting strategies undertaken by post-secondary schools tend to be focused on promoting enrolment at their own schools. This being said, during the interviews that were conducted, multiple representatives stated that, while Indigenous students would be welcome at their own institutions, they would still be genuinely happy if the students were to attend college or university at

139 “Increasing Indigenous PSE Attainment and Retention,” telephone interview by author with Janice Hill, Director, Aboriginal Student Centre, Queen’s University, July 19, 2017.
143 Shari Beaver, Trent University, July 6, 2017.
144 Janice Hill, Queen’s University, July 19, 2017.
145 Ibid.
146 Gallop & Bastien, 2016.
147 2011 Indigenous issues in PSE
Increasingly, tertiary institutions are contacting students in high schools and junior high schools, using their initiatives to distribute information on the possibilities of post-secondary education, and academic assistance, with an aim to provide an enjoyable and positive first experience with a post-secondary institution. As it is recognized that students often have a good idea of whether or not they will attend post-secondary education prior to entering junior high, building relationships in this way is commonly interpreted as a crucial component in getting Indigenous students onto a post-secondary campus.

Recruiting students by means of community partnership can also be a good strategy to spark the interest of Indigenous students. Over the course of the interviews that were conducted, a trend was apparent whereby Indigenous students preferred the idea of remaining closer to their homes and communities rather than moving to a city-centre for post-secondary education. By partnering with communities in their respective regions, institutions are able to form relationships, encourage enrolment at their schools, and bring to the attention of Indigenous students that an opportunity for post-secondary education may be closer to home. Examples of both such initiatives at different institutions that have been successful are:

- Trent University, Queen’s University, The University of Victoria, and The University of Toronto, all employ full-time staff under various titles that serve an Indigenous recruitment function. These representatives travel to Indigenous high schools, provincial high schools, career fairs, and some middle schools to inform Indigenous students about the programs and services that are available to them at their respective institutions.
- Trent has formed a partnership with the Aboriginal Education Council in the region. An education officer from different communities in the area sits on the Council, and Council members bring and disseminate information about the University to the students in their communities.
- The First Nations University of Canada has worked to form a strong relationship with the Scott Collegiate, also in Regina. For the last two years, classes have been brought to the University once a term to participate in a lab and gain exposure to the campus. Last year they also ran their first shared graduation powwow initiative with the high school.
- Aurora College engages in sharing best practices for increasing enrolment with other institutions in recognition that each region deals with the issue somewhat differently.
- North Island College collaborates with two Regional Advisory Committees that each represent 15 First Nations. The College aims to get out into communities to meet with these organizations, and to see if there are any partnerships or programs that they can join and contribute to.
- The University of Winnipeg runs an Ojibwa language program at the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre. Running the language program through the Centre serves as a way for community members to have a link to the university.

While the post-secondary institutions mentioned above indicate that they want to increase Indigenous student enrolment at their schools, some specify that they are not necessarily competitive, not should they be. Janice

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148 Janice Hill, Queen’s University, July 19, 2017.
149 2011 Indigenous issues in PSE
150 Ibid.
151 Shari Beaver, Trent University, July 6, 2017.
152 Janice Hill, Queen’s University, July 19, 2017.
153 Ruth Young, University of Victoria, July 7, 2017.
155 Ruth Young, University of Victoria, July 7, 2017.
156 Shari Beaver, Trent University, July 6, 2017.
157 Grace McLeod, First Nations University, July 18, 2017.
158 “Increasing Indigenous PSE Attainment and Retention,” telephone interview by author with Sarah Tilley, Director, Student Services Division, Aurora College, July 10, 2017.
160 Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg, July 6, 2017.
Hill of the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre at Queen’s said that, while their Aboriginal Recruitment Representative travels around the province to inform students about post-secondary education, their goal is not necessarily to encourage them to enrol at Queen’s. Rather, as suggested earlier, it is considered an achievement in itself if an Indigenous student chooses to pursue post-secondary education at any school.

**Transitional Programming**

The implementation of transitional programs by post-secondary institutions have ultimately been used as methods for easing students’ transition to college or university, or as bridging opportunities for students that may not have all the necessary academic requirements for standard admission.

In terms of helping admitted students to transition to post-secondary education, such programming is crucial to address the particular needs of the Indigenous student demographic. In addition to the socio-economic, historical and educational barriers experienced by many Indigenous students, a large segment of them live very far from post-secondary institutions. Indigenous students are also more likely to have been out of school for a period prior to their arrival. There are a number of consequences that are related to these trends. With respect to living a substantial distance from post-secondary education, the choice to attend college or university means that students have to live on their own, leaving behind their homes and communities and the support that comes with them. This degree of separation often proves to be too significant a barrier for students to overcome, and can result in their dropping out of their programs. Further, taking long breaks in their education can mean that Indigenous students may arrive at college or university ill-prepared to succeed and without the proper knowledge of how to excel within a tertiary institution.

In order to make the transition to post-secondary education more seamless, it is necessary to provide a full-range of supports for Indigenous students seeking to obtain tertiary certification, especially if they followed a non-traditional pathway to get there. Many Indigenous students are found to require support in the areas of math, science and writing, and, in addition to academic resources, may require help in securing housing or negotiating leases, child care, transportation, and the provision of emotional support more generally.

Transitional programs also refer to those made available to students who may not meet academic demands and requirements for entry to a post-secondary institution. This situation applies to Indigenous students who may not have been able to access the appropriate courses at their respective high schools, as well as those who have been on hiatus from formal education and are in need of academic upgrading and orientation to a particular system.

Examples of both types of transitional programs are widely in use at Canadian post-secondary institutions. Several initiatives at different schools are outlined below:

- For Grade 12 students in the Port Alberni region, North Island College provides the opportunity to visit the campus to do some work prior to their ultimate arrival at school. This allows students to become accustomed to things and helps to make their transition to post-secondary education go more smoothly.

- The University of Winnipeg has a number of transitional supports that helps Indigenous students to access the institution, including the University Preparatory Program (UPP). UPP is primarily GED preparation program for Indigenous high school students that can take between 12-16 weeks. It also offers a large incentive for students; if they pass and come to the University of Winnipeg, their first-year’s tuition and the cost of books will be paid for.

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161 Janice Hill, Queen’s University, July 19, 2017.
162 Rosenbluth, 2011.
164 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
166 Rosenbluth, 2011.
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
170 Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg, July 6, 2017.
• There is also programming at the University of Winnipeg for Indigenous students coming straight from high school, but who may not have all the requirements necessary for admission. Through the Collegiate Model School that is on campus, students are able to take up to three of their required Grade 12 courses. This initiative has found particularly helpful in cases where certain classes may not have been available to students at their respective high schools.171

• The University of Winnipeg also partners with Fisher River Cree Nation just north of Winnipeg. Indigenous students from the region are invited to the University of Winnipeg campus during the spring term to complete the 6-week academic writing course that is offered. The program is open to all students in Fisher River Cree Nation, even if they will be attending different post-secondary institutions, and helps to prepare them and transition them to tertiary education.172

• For students that wish to attend the University of Toronto but do not have adequate grades, there is the opportunity to complete a transitional year bridging program. The program involves a year of upgrading, then those who pass with the required marks are admitted to the University. Julie Ann Shepard of the First Nations House at the University indicates that many of their Indigenous students come through these bridging opportunities.173

• In an alternative approach to transition and bridging programs, the University of Victoria attempts to increase access by giving further consideration through Special Access Categories. Through this process, a student that does not meet the general requirements for admission can submit a request with the support of a liaison officer to prepare an argument as to how they would be a successful student at the University. The argument is customized based on the individual, and is considered based on lived experience, cultural experience, debilitating health issues, and family obligations, among other methods of reasoning.174

While such transition programs are useful in improving access for Indigenous students, they must take special care to ensure that they are not helping students to transition to tertiary education only to be unable to handle the academics and school environment. With such programs, it is crucial that there also be the appropriate supports available to students once they have enrolled at a post-secondary education. In the absence of those services, the result may be that Indigenous students arrive at school only to feel that they cannot succeed in completing their program, thus reinforcing negative feelings toward to education system that are already very present in the Indigenous community.

Financial Initiatives

With financial and funding concerns being at the height of many Indigenous students’ concerns in regard to their hopes of accessing post-secondary education, financial initiatives are one of the most important methods of improving access to tertiary education for First Nations students. Chief Don Maracle has expressed his belief that insufficient funding being provided to Indigenous students is to deny them a basic human right, based on the reality that education, and increasingly post-secondary education, is highly necessary for survival in today’s modern world.175

Financial programs and initiatives at the post-secondary level are available to Indigenous students by means of the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), loans and bursaries, government programs and scholarships, educational institutions, organizations and the corporate sector.176 A number of such programs that set out to provide funding and thus improve post-secondary access are as follows:

• Aurora College is equipped with a strong Student Financial Assistance Program, and partners with various Indigenous groups to help fund their students. Some of their Indigenous partners have education divisions within their organizations through which they will provide funding for Indigenous students enrolled in short-term programs. The Native Women’s Association, for example, will provide funding for students to attend the College.177

171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
174 Ruth Young, University of Victoria, July 7, 2017.
175 Rosenbluth, 2011.
176 Ibid.
177 Sarah, Tilley, Aurora College, July 10, 2017.
The University of Winnipeg runs a high school in conjunction with the University of Winnipeg Collegiate Model School. Students that attend are provided with a collegiate, private school education with a great number of supports. Students from inner city schools and schools in low income areas are nominated based on suitability for the program, which has roughly 50 students entering Grade 9 each year. In addition to accessing a high-level education, students are also enrolled in the University’s Tuition Credit Program; students at the collegiate high school, and at other partnering schools, can be nominated to earn credits towards university tuition.178

To encourage students to enrol in post-secondary education straight out of high school, the First Nations University offers a bursary for first-year students that are graduating from Grade 12.179

In addition to their bursaries that are available based on financial need, the University of Victoria offers many Indigenous specific scholarships, some of which are targeted for members of the Indigenous community or the Indigenous institute in the area.180

Indspire

Despite the numerous initiatives outlined above, and the assumptions of the general public that Indigenous students have great access to funding for post-secondary education, it is clear that the amount of money being made available to Indigenous students is not enough to meet the demand.181 Just as one example, the PSSSP (i.e. the federal program that is intended to be responsible for funding Indigenous students that are eligible to attend university) has had a waiting list with over 10,000 Indigenous students that meet entry requirements but do not have the funding they need to pursue tertiary education.182

Australia: “Closing the Gap”

In consideration of moving forward and aiming to address the shortcomings relative to Kindergarten through Grade 12 and post-secondary education of First Nations, examples of potential methods to be applied in closing the education gap are not limited to Canada. One case that touches on the importance of primary and secondary education, is that of Australia, which also houses a large population of Indigenous peoples, specifically the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.183 Similar to Canada’s First Nations peoples, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia experience a number of serious and persisting gaps with regard to socio-economic outcomes in comparison with the non-Aboriginal Australian population. A main difference is that Australia recognized that these gaps were unacceptable, and that steps must be taken in order to address them, roughly ten years ago.

To foster constructive change moving forward, the Council of Australian Government (COAG) developed measurable targets to monitor the chosen areas of focus and for improvement, the targets being: life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and employment outcomes.184 Their targets with relation to education being to: halve the gap experienced by Indigenous students in their reading, writing, and numeracy skills within the decade, and to halve the gap in Indigenous year 12 attainment by 2020.185 To keep on track and be accountable to the public with respect to yearly movements on targets, the Prime Minister of Australia releases a ‘Closing the Gap’ report annually that describes any positive or negative developments on the targets they are working towards.186 It should also be noted that the project began by setting generous timeframes to take into account the sizable challenges they were facing in addressing the aforementioned issues.187

179 Grace McLeod, First Nations University, July 18, 2017.
180 Ruth Young, University of Victoria, July 7, 2017.
181 Rosenbluth, 2011.
185 Ibid.
187 Ibid.
PSE Level Programs and Supports

Turning the concentration to the second area of focus in improving post-secondary outcomes for First Nations students, the increasing retention and program success component and the provision of programs, services, and initiatives, refers to those in place at post-secondary institutions. In seeking to improve post-secondary outcomes for First Nations, and Indigenous students as a whole, it is important to understand that the barriers they face do not disappear once they gain access to a tertiary institution. In reality, the barriers merely transpire into new challenges that they must face and, in some ways, could be considered to be more perplexing than those they confronted at the primary and secondary levels. Upon entering a post-secondary institution, there are many additional barriers to education that First Nations students must overcome; the discomfort and adjustment of leaving home, feeling isolated and lonely, being immersed in a new culture, having to become accustomed to living in a city, and dealing with racism, to list a few. In addition, First Nations must not only adapt to new academic requirements, such as the learning and teaching methods used at the tertiary level, but they must also deal with feelings of alienation toward the content being taught in some of their courses, or having professors that may not be culturally sensitive to the appropriate ways to instruct Indigenous topics and students.

Research on the provision of programming at the post-secondary level to support Indigenous retention points to the need to establish a continuum of supports for students that is available throughout the student’s learning experience. It should also be considered that while sharing of best practices and initiatives is an important component of improving outcomes for Indigenous students, one program that yields positive results in a particular region or institution may not be the most appropriate fit in another. Ultimately, the student supports in place at tertiary institutions aiming to increase retention for First Nations must pay considerable attention to upholding the integrity of Indigenous students’ identities and culture, as well as to providing them with the appropriate academic resources to succeed. With this in mind, as well as the previously highlighted challenges often experienced by Indigenous students at post-secondary institutions, there are four key categories that Indigenous programs and initiatives tend to fall within at the tertiary level: Academic Programs and Supports, Cultural and Personal Supports, Transitional Programming, and “Financial Supports.”

Academic Programs and Supports

For many Indigenous students that are beginning school at the post-secondary level, a great challenge manifests in attempting to adapt to the new and unfamiliar ways of learning in use at most Western tertiary institutions. In the historic sense, “success” for Indigenous people in tertiary education was associated with assimilation, as to succeed in education at this level meant that Indigenous students had to conform to mainstream behaviours and values of those institutions. In the modern day, education is beginning to be seen as a key tool in capacity-building, as well as in helping Indigenous communities achieve their goals of self-government and self-determination. Despite this shift in ideology, the majority of mainstream institutions in Canada read success in academics almost exclusively in terms of performance outcomes and external measures as they relate to intellectual achievement. By mainstream standards, then, a successful Indigenous student would be measured like any other, namely by finishing their course work at a high level of quality, achieving a high GPA, and completing their program in a timely manner.

According to research findings, however, success for Indigenous students in post-secondary education is not determined according to such rigid parameters. Rather, Indigenous educational success also takes into account one’s achievements with regard to “finding their gifts,” “responsibility of reciprocity,” and “ability to maintain cultural integrity,” which involves “having a sense of oneself and keeping hold of one’s Indigenous understandings.” Additionally, measuring academic success purely in terms of curricular achievements can also be negative for Indigenous students as they are often still faced with marginalization on a daily basis. They may experience prejudices and negative experiences from other students or faculty, for example, with inaccurate portrayals of Indigenous peoples in the curriculum further disadvantaging them. As such, interpretations of

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188 Rosenbluth, 2011.
189 Ibid.
190 Ibid.
192 Ibid.
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
“success” should include Indigenous components, and it is imperative that the colonial legacy not be dismissed in the context of higher education, as the system itself has been, and continues to be, a hidden but also overt model for colonization.195

Mentors and role models are identified as being important to inspire individuals during the course of their education. Faculty and staff that assume these roles for students can promote an environment that is empowering and supportive for existing and incoming Indigenous students. Additionally, having representation of Indigenous academics can instill determination in the experiences of Indigenous learners in tertiary education.196 With the presence of Indigenous role models within post-secondary institutions in areas of academics and supports, cultural compatibility for the Indigenous student is increased.197 It also helps to aid Indigenous students to “see themselves reflected in the landscape, curriculum, and faculty of the institution.”198 Some such tertiary institutions that are reflecting these principles through the programs and initiatives that they run are:

- Mentorship programs are very popular as a means to provide academic supports to Indigenous students and are in use at Trent, the First Nations University, Queen’s, and The University of Winnipeg among many others Canada wide.199 200 201 202 Trent’s mentorship program is particularly far reaching; it is offered to all first-year students, it provides writing supports and tutors in specific disciplines, connects students with mainstream academic advising, and organizes study days and retreats where all members of the program will get together.203
- The University of Victoria has their Centre for Indigenous Research and Community-Led Engagement (CIRCLE). CIRCLE is primarily a means to facilitate, promote and lead research that is ethical and relevant to improving the lives of Indigenous peoples, but also has a secondary function of engaging with Indigenous graduate students in meaningful ways and connecting them with other graduate students and Indigenous faculty.204
- The University of Toronto has an in-house Aboriginal Learning Strategist that aids Indigenous students in interpreting the curriculum they are leaning. If they come across something that fosters feelings of anger or hurt, the Aboriginal Learning Strategist helps them to let go of those feelings and reform them into something positive.205
- A distributed learning model is employed at Aurora College where their goal is to bring education as close to the community level as possible. This approach allows Indigenous students to stay close to their communities, and to learn within small class sizes (most do not exceed 15).206
- The University of Winnipeg has introduced reserved seating in many first-year classes and faculties in case its Indigenous students need help registering or may have acquired last-minute band funding. About 600 first year spots in total are saved, helping to ensure that Indigenous students that find themselves in these positions are not required to merely register in the courses that are left over.207
- The Community-based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP), also from the University of Winnipeg, has the goal of increasing the number of Indigenous teachers.208 The program invites educational assistants that wish to obtain their education degree to work at the University for 6 years while taking courses during the summer term. At the end of the program, successful participants will have

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195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
197 Rosenbluth, 2011.
198 Ibid.
199 Shari Beaver, Trent University, July 6, 2017.
200 Grace McLeod, First Nations University, July 18, 2017.
201 Janice Hill, Queen’s University, July 19, 2017.
202 Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg, July 6, 2017.
203 Shari Beaver, Trent University, July 6, 2017.
204 Ruth Young, University of Victoria, July 7, 2017.
207 Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg, July 6, 2017.
Taylor Matchett

• Within the Teaching and Technology Unit at the University of British Colombia there is the Indigenous Initiatives Division. This division works with instructors that are dealing with Indigenous issues within their classrooms, whether they already have those components in their courses or are seeking to add them. The appropriate teaching methods are explained in detail to help professors consider and understand the difficulties that can accompany information, and how to present topics in a way that is not alienating to Indigenous students.

• UBC also provides curricular supports to its students through the website that it developed: Indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca. The website was created in response to Indigenous students’ frustration that many of their classmates lacked the basic knowledge and information needed for discussing Indigenous issues, and how it caused their classes to begin at a crawl. The website provides students with a resource to access accurate information on those topics to get them up to speed without slowing down their classmates that are well-versed in the same information.

Related to these types of programs and initiatives is the finding that it is important for instructors in post-secondary education to make their academic expectations as clear as possible, this being of particular importance for marginalized students. In absence of clear expectations being set out, it is more likely that Indigenous students’ feelings of self-doubt, alienation, and inadequacy will perpetuate. The setting of such expectations, however, must be realistic rather than too high or low. Whereas expectations that are too high may generate difficulties that may have been expected, expectations set too low can translate into students perceiving that instructors do not believe in them, or that they would be unable to complete the course otherwise (without those concessions). It is also important not to assume that categorical experiences or attributes are reliable predictors of future behaviours. In terms of academics, Indigenous students should not be stereotyped; they should instead be motivated to succeed at a high level rather than to scrape by with passing grades, as “no one rises to low expectations.”

Cultural Programs and Supports

Ensuring that there are a number of programs and supports that promote a sense of Indigenous culture and heritage on campus has been observed as being important and appreciated in overall efforts to encourage the retention of Indigenous students at post-secondary institutions. Establishing a strong cultural identity has been seen to serve in a protective way for Indigenous students, whether they are just entering, continuing or completing tertiary education. Reinforcing this identity subsequently helps those students to persist within a system of education that was not constructed with Indigenous students in mind.

Studies have also suggested that educational programs that advance strong cultural identity may lead to “cultural integrity.” This is associated with establishing cultural capital, such as by helping Indigenous students to connect with social networks and faculty. Providing Indigenous students with opportunities to participate in culture-specific activities has also been shown to help them achieve a sense of balance, this being an Indigenous value for one’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual domains being equally incorporated and acknowledged. Such feelings can also result in a ripple effect for many Indigenous learners such that they experience increases in confidence, self-esteem, and capacity, leaving students better equipped to deal with the

209 Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg, July 6, 2017.
211 “Increasing Indigenous PSE Attainment and Retention,” telephone interview by author with Linc Kesler, Associate Professor & Director, First Nations House of Learning, Senior Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Affairs, University of British Colombia, August 3, 2017.
213 Linc Kesler, University of British Colombia, August 3, 2017.
215 Ibid.
216 Cameron & Puiras, 2009.
217 Ibid.
218 Gallop & Bastien, 2016.
219 Ibid.
Looking at institutions that have an Indigenous Student Centre, typically focused on promoting and offering culture-specific resources and activities, the outcomes produced are largely positive, leading to increased levels of Indigenous student social and academic engagement. In connection with those outcomes, these centres are viewed as contributing to the retention of Indigenous students at post-secondary institutions. An example of one such initiative would be for an institution to provide an environment for its Indigenous students to engage in cultural and social activities, like powwows and potlucks, while subsequently establishing a network of peers. The availability of, and participation in, such environments has been linked to several positive impacts for students, such as a sense of belonging and acceptance, as well as providing validation for lived experiences. In one study, it was indicated that finding positive support from peers was a key factor to remaining in school for the majority of participants. These students expressed that being around other Indigenous students that they had many shared experiences with positively influenced their overall motivation to attend tertiary education. In other studies, at institutions that lacked a space that was dedicated to Indigenous students, many expressed that they would like access to lounges or resource centres that were specific to them. Other findings have indicated that Indigenous liaisons or counsellors are also greatly appreciated due to the fact that they provide more accessible alternatives to general services of the institution. Some of the culturally based programs and initiatives in Canadian post-secondary institutions are as follows:

- At Queen’s there have been efforts to incorporate Indigenous learnings and awareness using various methods. An elder in residence, for example, will provide different teachings on a variety of topics, such as traditional concepts, pedagogical approaches to learning, and will also be present and active in welcoming’s across campus and discussions with faculty regarding new curriculum ideas. Laura Maracle, the Aboriginal Cultural Safety Coordinator of the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre, also works to raise cultural awareness by speaking with classes, groups, and clubs on campus, about various topics.

- In nearly all institutions that were contacted there was some level of involvement with elders on campus, from those that travelled there for weekly office hours to the many institutions that have an elder in residence. In many cases elders are available to smudge with Indigenous students and provide them with guidance and support, they attend activities and events that are held on campus, and they conduct various teachings on topics of an Indigenous nature. One practice in place at the First Nations University of Canada is the opportunity for students to go medicine picking with their elders where the medicine is used right on campus. Grace McLeod, Director of Student Success Services at the University, says that the initiative goes over very well with their students.

- The First Nations University runs cultural events each term, including their annual fall pow-wow that involves the surrounding community, and the feast and pipe ceremony that is run each term by a different faculty department.

- Providing food is popularly recognized as a successful approach to help Indigenous students feel welcome, and to provide a time when they are able to connect with staff in a relaxed setting. Queen’s Four Directions Centre holds feasts twice a month where there is a home cooked free meal for those that attend. Janice Hill says that the feasts create a setting for service providers to connect with students. Similarly, the University of Victoria offers a Pit Cook outside the First Peoples House during the first week of classes as part of its Indigenous student orientation. Students that attended indicated that they had felt somewhat lost at school had felt comforted after hearing the drums at orientation and smelling the fire there that day.
Originally a component of the LE NONET pilot project run at the University of Victoria, the Campus Cousins mentoring program is available to Indigenous students. Upper year students are selected based on their strength in academics, cultural workshops, propensity to be outgoing and social, and to uphold their health and wellness. While the First Peoples Office of the University closes at 4:30PM, these students keep the facility open later to run activities and create opportunities for Indigenous students to connect with one another. Part of the program's success is recognized as being due to the students being given the freedom to meet others on their own. While the program used to be on a one on one basis, it has transformed into a social network where the partnerships being made are comparatively more meaningful.

The University of Victoria seeks to support its Indigenous students with the Indigenous Student Recognition ceremony that is held for graduating classes. The ceremony not only serves as a positive experience for Indigenous students to celebrate their success in completing their program. It may also positively impact other Indigenous students that witness or hear about it and who may look forward to a similar experience when they complete their own programs. The University of Winnipeg runs a similar event in through the annual graduation pow wow that is always widely attended.

Students at the University of Toronto contribute to the creation and publishing of the First Nations House Magazine, which is released one or two times per year and is made up entirely of students contributing articles whose focus are on Indigenous communities at the University. The magazine is also taken by the Indigenous recruitment officer when they go to visit different communities. Julie Ann Shepard of the First Peoples House indicated that, prior to working at the University of Toronto, she witnessed the magazine inspire a female Indigenous student to pursue her Master’s degree.

At UBC students undertook to develop an Indigenous Studies Program video due to their feeling depressed that people did not understand what was happening to them, what they were going through, and that if their brothers or sisters were in the same position in later years, not much would have changed. The video has been widely viewed and is used to demonstrate to Indigenous students that there are others thinking about these things, they are not alone or isolated in their feelings, and that there are attempts to address these issues on the UBC campus.

The University of Winnipeg makes it a priority to accommodate the lifestyles of its Indigenous students. Many are older than the average student and may be married with children, and this is reflected in the services they provide. One and two-bedroom apartments are available on campus, and there is a daycare run by the University’s Student Association.

Finally, UBC believes that it is important to make territorial acknowledgments, and to express that these acknowledgments are not trivial. Their approach in conducting acknowledgment is to explain why they are doing it, its importance, the further opportunities that students have to discuss the acknowledgment, and the relevance to the history of the University. It has slowly become part of the university discourse that the land was taken from the community and that the university was unavailable to the community for 50 years. One representative at UBC stated that these recognitions are important and make a positive impact on Indigenous students that come to the school and sees the acknowledgments.

Ultimately, these types of programs and initiatives are introduced in recognition of the fact that all students must feel welcomed and accepted in their post-secondary institutions in order to be fully able to take advantage of the educational opportunities there that are available to them. Many Indigenous students in particular have not felt included in mainstream institutional culture, and require a setting where they can be themselves, feel welcomed, supported, and nurtured by the college or university. They deserve to have access to culturally secure spaces on campus where their needs are embedded within the learning environment.

231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
233 Anonymous, University of Winnipeg, June 24, 2017.
236 Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg, July 6, 2017.
Transitional Programs

Addressing the observed phenomenon where more First Nations students tend to favour a college program over university, many institutions have elected to form partnerships that allow students to transition to a university education after completing some, or all, of a college diploma. Other transitional initiatives focus on providing extensive academic support in the early stages of students’ tertiary education to increase their likelihood of success and retention.

These transition, or bridging, programs tend to involve Elders and advisors, and typically include access to a range of supports, such as peer mentoring, counselling, academic upgrading, soft-skills training (e.g. test-taking), degree and non-degree credit courses, and planning advice related to course selection or employment in the future. The approach taken by a number of schools, including the University of Toronto, Red River College, University of Manitoba, and Ryerson University, is to offer a first-year transition program, which functions as a second stream to achieve Grade 12 equivalency levels. These programs have been found to be successful in helping Indigenous students form personal relationships and establish personal networks for support prior to beginning their formal education. Some of the main programs aimed at offering a transitional opportunity are:

- Trent University has established various Articulation Agreements with Colleges in order to assist students in transitioning from diploma to degree programs. Through these arrangements, students are given credit for the schooling they have completed in their diploma programs that counts towards the degree program at Trent to which they enter. Three more of these agreements were just signed in 2016 with Durham, Fleming, and Loyalist College, to make it possible to easily transition from the Social Service Worker programs at each institution into Trent’s Bachelor of Social Work program.

- The University of British Columbia has found its partnership with Langara College has helped to improve access for prospective Indigenous students who tend to prefer post-secondary institutions that are smaller in size or are closer to their original homes. Indigenous students attending Langara College that make the move to transfer to the Vancouver campus at UBC are incentivized financially and are provided with various transfer supports for making the change through the First Nations House of Learning. With this in mind, it is worth noting that the UBC Okanagan campus in Kelowna has its own program in place to increase access, illustrating that best practices differ from region to region, and even at times within the same institution.

- Through the Foundations of Indigenous Learning Diploma, Trent University provides an opportunity for Indigenous students that may not have had access to university level courses at their high schools. The program is two years in length and is open to those that have the equivalent of Grade 12, who qualify as mature students, or who have their admission approved through the First Peoples House of Learning. This program is noted as being a method for increasing access in lieu of implementing lower entry requirements for Indigenous students.

- The University of Winnipeg’s Transition Year Program was created to provide assistance for first-year Indigenous students in developing the academic and personal coping skills to encourage success in...
post-secondary education. The program is not preparatory or mandatory, but provides extra supports to Indigenous students throughout their first year that elect to participate. Students have access to tutoring, mentoring with a returning Indigenous student, and the option to sign up for an academic writing course to provide further assistance in their transition. Tim Coughlan of the Aboriginal Student Services Centre states that for those that participate in the program, between 60-70 per cent are retained and return for their second year.

As can be seen, the main component of transitional programming is to create personal connections for students that they will be able to access throughout their post-secondary education. In addition to these initiatives that help Indigenous students to transition to the demands of tertiary education, institutions are increasingly realizing the importance of forming relationships with communities and their students long before their initial application to post-secondary education. Instead, there should be a continuum of supports made available to Indigenous students present during the application process as well as the post-secondary experience, and beyond graduation into the future.

Financial Supports

The financial struggle for Indigenous students, unfortunately, does not end following the receipt of funding to pay for their post-secondary education. While many institutions have made substantial improvements, there is still a need for tertiary institutions in Canada to be more proactive in their commitments to fundamental change. This necessitates commitment from senior administration and governing bodies to improve Indigenous education within the structure of the institution, in its strategic plan, and in its budget. In the current situation that many institutions find themselves in, accessibility and affordability are presenting huge difficulties, in large part because of the previous 2 per cent cap on education spending put in place by the federal government.

Even once Indigenous students are enrolled in and have “accessed” tertiary education, the financial barriers that they continue to face are very serious, with this experience emerging as a clear trend among Indigenous students at many, if not all, institutions interviewed for the purpose of this paper. While a number of Indigenous students do receive band funding over the course of their time in school, it is often insufficient to support them completely throughout their program. An example of this would be students that receive band funding but attend school at the University of Toronto - while the money provided may be enough to cover costs associated with tuition, it may not be sufficient to cover the high cost of rent in the City of Toronto.

In addition to being a cause for personal stress, studies have shown that in experiencing financial difficulties, Indigenous students are likely to experience a negative impact on their studies. Keeping in mind that many Indigenous students have taken non-traditional pathways to arrive at post-secondary education, the funding they are provided with many not be enough to cover tuition, as well as housing, daycare, living expenses, and transportation. As such, financial barriers in this form are found to lead to hardship and stress. Even if additional funding comes through, it typically does not occur until students have been negatively affected. Some of the efforts made by institutions to address these financial needs are outlined as follows:

- North Island College has emergency funds available for its Indigenous students that are struggling financially. Students are able to draw on them when they need to up to a set maximum.

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251 Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg, July 6, 2017.
252 The University of Winnipeg, no date.
253 Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg, July 6, 2017.
254 Rosenbluth, 2011.
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
257 Cameron & Puiras, 2009.
258 Anonymous, University of Winnipeg, June 24, 2017.
260 Ibid.
261 Cameron & Puiras, 2009.
262 Ibid.
• The Aboriginal Scholars Program incentivizes academic success at North Island College where students that have achieved a grade of B+ or higher are eligible for a $250 reward.264

• Aurora College has three campuses, each with its own Student Success Coordinators who are responsible for finding tutors for students that the College pays for.265

• Emergency funding is available to Indigenous students at the University of Victoria in cases of unforeseen circumstances or emergency while attending the school.266

Another initiative that addressed this financial component of post-secondary retention, is the financial support element that was introduced as a part of the LE NONET pilot program at the University of Victoria, specifically the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF). The ERF was born through the Bursary Program coordinator’s realization that some students participating in the program did not meet minimum financial requirements to receive the $1000 bursary, but were also at risk of leaving school due to unresolved, short-term financial crises.267 The same coordinator observed that a number of the needs faced by Indigenous students were culture-specific and required an approach that was distinctly different from the more general financial supports offered by the university.268 The ERF made available a total of $750 to each student per academic year, which they were able to draw upon at their discretion up until reaching the maximum amount.269 In response to this resource, Indigenous students indicated that the funding made available through LE NONET had a significant impact on their capacity to perform in their studies, and served to relieve the stresses they had been experiencing due to financial hardship.270 This example demonstrates that a reasonable level of financial support made available to Indigenous students during their time in post-secondary education can go a long way in reducing their stresses and hardships, thus allowing them to achieve the levels of academic success that they are capable of.

Programs and Initiatives to Watch For

Finally, in conjunction with the many programs and initiatives mentioned above that are enjoying success at their respective institutions, there are also a number that have been introduced very recently, or will be implemented in the near future.

• The University of Winnipeg recently launched a new Indigenous Course Requirement, meaning that Indigenous learning is part of the undergraduate degree requirements for any and all students as of Fall 2016.271 Students will be able to choose from a wide variety of courses to fulfill this requirement, such as Indigenous Authors of Canada.272 In conjunction with the course requirement there will be a number of supports available to students and faculty, including a speakers’ bureau of students. One function of the bureau will be to step in in cases where others are not comfortable speaking from their own experiences; bureau members can instead share their experience so that there is still the opportunity to have these difficult, but important, conversations. Faculty members teaching these courses will also be required to attend three workshops a year to discuss best practices, share experiences, troubleshoot any issues, and be alerted of expert resources.273

• The Kahswentha Indigenous Knowledge Initiative at Queen’s was established following the introduction of the Indigenous Studies minor to address the limited number of Indigenous faculty on staff; while settler scholars can teach to a certain degree, there should also be engagement with the Indigenous

264 Ibid.
268 Ibid.
269 Ibid.
270 University of Victoria, “LE, NONET Research Project Supporting Aboriginal Student Success Executive Summary,” University of Victoria LE, NONET, 2010.
272 Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg, July 6, 2017.
273 Anonymous, University of Winnipeg, June 24, 2017.
voice in order to get both sides of the story.\textsuperscript{274} The initiative aims to resolve the misunderstandings and knowledge deficit of Indigenous peoples through awareness-raising and by providing opportunities to share knowledge between non-Indigenous students, staff and faculty. It also seeks to provide opportunities for experiential learning, and to promote alliances and build communities within the local Indigenous community.\textsuperscript{275}

- Janice Hill of the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre at Queen's University is currently working on various initiatives, including a new reflection room, moving towards land acknowledgment, and acknowledgment of colonization.\textsuperscript{276}

- The First Nations University's Faculty of Administration and Business is launching an Entrepreneurial Youth Camp this August 2017.\textsuperscript{277}

- The First Nations University will also shortly be introducing the STAR program (Student Transition and Retention program) in order to provide further assistance for its students that are more vulnerable and have a more difficult time adapting to post-secondary education.\textsuperscript{278}

- North Island College is steadily and carefully working towards indigenizing its programs with the ultimate goal of ensuring that any added content will be meaningful as well as highly relevant to those courses.\textsuperscript{279} Also, this coming Fall semester of 2017 they will be offering a Tourism and Hospitality Program that has a specific Indigenous focus. Two hotels were purchased in light of this program, and have been engineered with Indigenous culture in mind. The hotels will provide work and learning opportunities as well as help to boost local tourism.\textsuperscript{280}

- Aurora College is taking a closer look at their recruitment process in order to determine how they can better support the students, as well as be more available to them throughout this time.\textsuperscript{281}

- The Biishkaa program was run at Trent University in 2015 as a two-year pilot project to help transition Indigenous students to a university lifestyle,\textsuperscript{282} and was supported by the Mental Health Innovation Fund.\textsuperscript{283} Ultimately classified as an orientation program, Biishkaa “provides incoming Indigenous learners with strong interpersonal connections at Trent University, laying a solid foundation of social and academic support grounded in Indigenous cultural traditions”.\textsuperscript{284} During the intensive three-week program that is run in August just prior to the beginning of school, participants engaged in traditional teachings and activities, academic workshops, and were assigned a peer mentor that would be accessible to them for program and the upcoming school year. Initial feedback from the program was very positive, with students expressing that they felt they had made good connections with their peers as well as the staff at Trent’s First Peoples House of Learning.\textsuperscript{285} Trent has secured funding for the peer mentoring component of the program and is working towards gaining the capacity to offer the other services as well.\textsuperscript{286}

- The University of British Colombia announced the construction of the Indian and Residential School History and Dialogue Centre in September of 2016, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s request for proposals to introduce a National Research Centre to act as a repository for its records.\textsuperscript{287} Once the Centre is complete, it will aim to provide an accessible location in western Canada.

\textsuperscript{274} Janice Hill, Queen’s University, July 19, 2017.
\textsuperscript{275} Queen's University, “Kahswentha Indigenous Knowledge Initiative,” KIKI | Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre, no date, http://www.queensu.ca/fdasc/undergraduate/get-involved/kiki.
\textsuperscript{276} Janice Hill, Queen's University, July 19, 2017.
\textsuperscript{277} Grace McLeod, First Nations University, July 18, 2017.
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{279} Anonymous, North Island College, June 2, 2017.
\textsuperscript{280} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{281} Sarah Tilley, Aurora College, July 2, 2017.
\textsuperscript{282} Shari Beaver, Trent University, July 6, 2017.
\textsuperscript{283} Trent University, 2015.
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{285} Trent University, 2015.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{287} University of British Colombia, “Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre,” Aboriginal Portal, no date, http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/indian-residential-school-centre/.
for previous students and survivors of residential schools, as well as for their families and communities, to have access records as well as other historical materials collected by the TRC. The Centre will also provide a space where they may speak of their experiences, history, and the effects and implications that have transpired as a result.288

• Queen’s University is looking at introducing two new Indigenous studies programs. The first will be run through the School of Business as the Business Certification Program for Indigenous Individuals/Communities. The emphasis on the program would be on social enterprise, namely Indigenous private business and entrepreneurs.289 The second, the Graduate Diploma in Indigenous Policy and Governance, is still in the beginning stages of planning but will be associated with the School of Policy Studies. Currently, Queen’s is considering May or September of 2019 for their first intake of students in the program.290

Although these programs have not yet been tested in the field of education, they have been informed by previous experiences and are working towards the broader goal of making post-secondary institutions into places that are welcoming and understanding of the needs of Indigenous, and First Nations, students of Canada.

Requirements to Increase First Nations Access and Retention in PSE

As has been established, closing the education gap that exists between First Nations people and the general Canadian population is predicted to take 28 years.291 This statistic, however, does not mean that only First Nations children entering the education system 28 years from now will be able to experience positive outcomes or be unable to close the gaps relative to their own situation. With post-secondary education having been identified as one of the strongest equalizers in society, closing the gap that exists in this stage of the education system for First Nations people would have the potential to reap notable rewards that would transpire much sooner than 28 years from today.

As demonstrated in the previous section, there have already been some significant efforts made by post-secondary institutions to do their part in improving outcomes for the Indigenous student population in general, this segment including First Nations by definition. Despite the numerous programs and initiatives in place at each institution, however, actually closing the post-secondary education outcome gap for First Nations will require a more widely-focused and holistic approach that includes contributions from many players. This section will go over some key areas in which there are issues and considerations that must be addressed in order to move towards closing the First Nations post-secondary education gap. It will then make additional recommendations for achieving that end which have been informed by the available literature, and by the primary interviews that were conducted with various representatives of Indigenous departments at post-secondary institutions, as well as some affiliates of Canadian Indigenous groups and organizations. It should be noted that, while the following areas are considered to be crucial elements of the path towards closing the post-secondary outcome gap, they are not to be thought of as an exhaustive list; there are many components attributed to the larger issue, and it would be beyond the scope of this paper to address them all.

Previously Established Principles

Though the current efforts by the Government of Canada to improve relations with First Nations are noteworthy and must attempt to address these issues in ways that they have not yet been attempted, consideration must still be given to past work and consultations that have been conducted. Any movements made to advance the state of First Nations attainment in post-secondary education, education more broadly, and in all other areas where gaps exist between First Nations and the general public, should begin by referencing the many recommendations that have already been put forth in those areas. With regard to post-secondary education specifically, efforts to address the outcome gaps have been made by several entities. These include the RCAP, AFN, and conferences on the topic of increasing tertiary successes for Indigenous students. The knowledge that has been gained through 288 Ibid.
290 Lynn Freeman, “School of Policy Studies Proposed Indigenous Degree Program,” e-mail message to author, August 04, 2017.
these efforts should be employed to guide the direction of where future efforts should be aimed.

With those principles in mind, and after having set the stage to fully appreciate the value of tertiary education to First Nations and Canada as a whole, this paper moves ahead to push for further improvements to be made at the Kindergarten through Grade 12 level of education, in the strategies of post-secondary institutions, and ultimately, in the resources available to both. As acknowledged by Prime Minister Trudeau, there is a great deal of work to be done at all levels. An approach that concentrates efforts at only certain points in First Nations education while neglecting others would be inappropriate and insufficient to address the inequality in outcomes that these communities have been experiencing for far too long. These gaps exist at all levels of the education system and do not operate exclusively of one another. They demand a proportionate level of attention in efforts aiming to close them. Improving post-secondary attainment for First Nations is highly dependent on eliminating the outcome gap at the primary and secondary levels. It is most unlikely, therefore, that significant progress in closing the post-secondary outcome gap can be made without a holistic approach that considers all levels of education, with the fundamental strategy coming from First Nations themselves and given the transparent support of government.

**Accountability and Governance Structures**

Perhaps one of the most fundamental needs is the requirement to ensure that responsibility for, and accountability to, First Nations post-secondary outcomes are clearly defined and are as transparent as possible. The logical first step would be to end any remaining cause for doubt or debate with relation to which of the two governments is responsible for funding which aspects of First Nations education – at all levels.

Constitutionally, it is clear that the federal government is responsible for education provided to First Nations students at the Kindergarten through Grade 12 levels on First Nations reserves. Additional responsibilities are outlined in the numbered treaties dated between 1871 and 1910, which indicate that the Crown must maintain schools on-reserve and provide educational services to First Nations as part of its treaty agreements. For First Nations students that live on reserve but attend a public elementary or high school, there are tuition agreements arranged between school board and First Nations communities that are funded through INAC. Finally, federal policy explicitly states that the educational services provided to First Nations students on-reserve must be of comparable quality to that which is required at provincial schools in the same province. This being said, however, there is no legally binding Education Act governing First Nations education to ensure that this standard is upheld. Therefore, regardless of this statement in federal policy, there is no statutory requirement for schools on First Nations reserves to make available the same services and functions as provincial public schools. The reality instead is that taxpayers are funding a system that is not required to provide provincial-level certification, or even a generally acceptable standard of education, and that is failing First Nations students.

Another issue that arises with regard to the tuition agreements between First Nations and provincial school boards, is that in some cases INAC does not keep tabs on those agreements. Some First Nations are even being charged fees with no agreement in place. Due to this lack of monitoring, there have been a number of instances in which it was found that school boards were overcharging First Nations for their tuition fees. In 2012, it was found that an Ontario school board had, without any authority, been charging a higher base fee, causing the First Nation to pay an extra $1.3 million over three years. Another example of poor monitoring was found again in Ontario, where it became evident that some schools were over-identifying Indigenous students as special needs, then associating additional costs with unnecessary services and equipment that do not even end

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293 Ibid.
295 Simeone, 2011.
296 Ibid.
297 Bains, 2014.
298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.
300 Bains, 2014.
up being used for that student in their time at school.\textsuperscript{301}

For these reasons, the development of a First Nations Education Act would be highly recommended. While the federal government has given recognition that changes must be made and is working towards those changes in some ways, accountability to First Nations must become part of binding Canadian legislation. While the previous attempt to introduce such an Act, in the First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act (Bill C33), did not pan out and the UNDRIP instead included Articles 14 and 21 with respect to education,\textsuperscript{302} First Nations’ on-reserve schools should be given the same level of protection that is guaranteed for provincial public schools. Discussions over such an Act should primarily find ways to address the shortcomings that First Nations people recognized in Bill C33, and should be in the form of a nation-to-nation dialogue between First Nations and the federal government to ensure that it creates a legislative base that will be part of the foundation for closing the education gap.\textsuperscript{303}

In conjunction with a First Nations Education Act, the second recommendation is to introduce regional organizations under control of First Nations themselves that are similar in structure to the school boards of the provinces. The hope would be that the First Nations school boards would be equipped to better manage schools on-reserve well-suited to keep track of the education outcomes of its students,\textsuperscript{304} and have the authority and flexibility to raise issues in the system that must be addressed and supported by the federal government. If First Nations schools are expected to have outcomes similar to provincial public schools, they must have at least the same opportunity and access to resources for organization and governance, and be in control of determining what methods work best in their region and for their own students.

With respect to responsibility and accountability for outcomes in post-secondary education, any questions related to whether the federal or provincial government takes precedence must be answered in the First Nations Education Act. While it is clear that the federal government is responsible for funding First Nations students on-reserve, in provincial public schools, and to access post-secondary education,\textsuperscript{305} obligations to ensure the quality of programming and services for First Nations students at post-secondary institutions should be outlined in the Act. While it is clear that many institutions are experiencing success with many of their programs when they were interviewed, there was also the overwhelming sentiment that there would be room to introduce more programs and increase the availability of services based on the level of interest and needs of Indigenous students.\textsuperscript{306} As the government has expressed its determination to address the education gap, including at the post-secondary level, there should be a commitment at either the federal or provincial level to ensuring that post-secondary institutions are sufficiently equipped to do their part in increasing access and retention.

In order to support post-secondary institutions in their efforts towards increasing access and retention for First Nations students, the creation of an Indigenous Post-Secondary Learning and Sharing Organization is also recommended. The function of the organization would be to collect and distribute information on the best practices and innovations being used by universities and colleges to increase access and retention of their Indigenous students, including efforts of their working towards reconciliation and the indigenization of their curriculums and campuses. Information on these practices would be collected and organized according to region in order to be most effective and relevant to the post-secondary institutions accessing it.

Within the organization it is also recommended that there be a branch to collect data measuring the achievement of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students in post-secondary education, again organized and published according to region. This branch of the organization would be responsible for publishing annual reports on outcomes related to Indigenous post-secondary achievement, similar to the practice of the Australian Prime Minister of issuing annual reports on the education outcomes of their Indigenous population.\textsuperscript{307} Other functions of the organization could include:

Running national and regional conferences for post-secondary institutions on increasing access and retention for Indigenous students;

\textsuperscript{301} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{303} Drummond, 2013.

\textsuperscript{304} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{305} Simeone, 2011.

\textsuperscript{306} Grace McLeod, First Nations University, July 18, 2017.

\textsuperscript{307} Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016.
Promoting partnerships between colleges and universities to create more opportunities to bridge Indigenous students from their college diploma into a university degree;

Developing additional funding opportunities to finance programs and initiatives at institutions’ Indigenous student centres.

Funding

A second fundamental component related to closing the First Nations post-secondary gap is the issue of funding. As previously noted, the discrepancy in funding being provided to First Nations schools compared to provincial schools is significant at all levels in the education system. This problem has been compounding since the 2 per cent cap on funding growth from 1996. The cap has affected First Nations at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. On-reserve schools have been crippled in that they do not have enough money to hire quality teachers, provide their students with access to many necessary resources such as books and computers, and are generally unable to finance education services that come close to those provided at public schools in the same province. This being said, attempts to compare the funding levels provided to First Nations for education by the federal government and those of the provinces is not as straightforward as tabulating the total amounts spent on each student. In reality, the two systems are structurally different. Each has different services included in their respective calculations, and funding allocations throughout the country are extremely variable.\(^308\) Instead of aiming to match education spending on-reserves to that of the provinces, obtaining the provincial schools’ achievement outcomes should be the goal in this case.\(^309\) As it is the overall achievement gap that is the topic of concentration, the funding component should be considered in the appropriate context, as an input that is absolutely necessary to achieve the outcome but also not sufficient to do so.\(^310\) The inputs that are necessary to produce the desired outcomes must first be determined, and only then would the actual costs that will be incurred to do this within a needs-based system be established.\(^311\)

Moving forward in an attempt to determine the degree of the funding gap since the implementation of the 2 per cent cap requires examining the rate of growth of inflation, and the total population of First Nations over the same time period.\(^312\) The Chief’s Assembly on Education did just that in 2012, estimating that the annual growth rate increase that would have been necessary to successfully fund First Nations education would have been 6.3 per cent a year since 1996.\(^313\) From this they were able to determine that chronically underfunding First Nations education had resulted in a funding shortfall of $747M in the year 2010-2011, and $3B cumulatively since 1996.\(^314\) Furthermore, this amount does not even account for the amount that would need to be spent in order to bring First Nations’ school systems up to the standards of the 21\(^{st}\) century, such as libraries, technology, vocational training, sports and recreation, something resembling a school board, and First Nations languages education.\(^315\)

With the federal government’s recognition that changes needed to be made with regard to outcome gaps for Canada’s Indigenous population, Budget 2016 announced that there would be an investment of $2.6B on primary and secondary on-reserve education, spent over five years and beginning in 2016-2017.\(^316\) To address the need for additional schools on-reserve, repairs to existing schools, and for both to be properly maintained, the Budget also announced that there would be $969.4M sent over five years allocated to infrastructure on-reserve for First Nations education.\(^317\) While these figures undoubtedly represent a significant investment in First Nations communities and a step in the right direction towards closing the education gap, the $2.6B falls short of the estimated $3B required to address the funding shortfall that has been building since 1996, and will continue to grow over the next five years. From a funding standpoint therefore, this investment seems as though it will come up short. The investment also does not address the need for First Nations primary and secondary education

\(^308\) Drummond, 2013.
\(^309\) Ibid.
\(^310\) Ibid.
\(^311\) Ibid.
\(^312\) Assembly of First Nations, “Chiefs Assembly on Education,” AFN, October 2012.
\(^313\) Ibid.
\(^314\) Ibid.
\(^315\) Ibid.
\(^317\) Ibid.
systems to have access to funding that is stable and predictable. Planning long term investments and allowing First Nations to have the flexibility to reallocate resources accordingly will likely be a necessary requirement to close the gap. For these reasons, it is recommended that the federal government make it a clear priority to implement a new funding formula for First Nations education based on nation-to-nation level discussions with First Nations themselves to decide on the appropriate growth rate and structure.

Zeroing in on the need to improve access for First Nations students looking to enrol in post-secondary education, Budget 2016 also acknowledged that “Ensuring Indigenous students have the same opportunities for success as other Canadian students also means ensuring Indigenous high school graduates can access post-secondary education.” In order to reduce the many barriers that youth currently face in doing this, the government stated that it would seek to “work with students, parents, educators and Indigenous groups to explore how to best ensure that students wishing to pursue post-secondary studies have the resources and supports they need to pursue their dreams and be full participants in the new global economy.” While these statements would indicate otherwise, Budget 2016 did not allocate any funding to be spent on targeting improvements in access and retention for Indigenous students, despite the Prime Minister’s 2015 promise to invest $50M more annually for the First Nations Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). Upon hearing news of the government’s failure to come through with the promised funding, AFN Chief Perry Bellegarde expressed his disappointment, stating that 10,000 students were trying to access post-secondary education but had been stuck on a waiting list. Since 1997, the PSSSP, a federal program designed to aid First Nations and Inuit students attend PSE, has declined by 18.3 per cent in terms of the total number of students to whom it provides funding.

The promised funding for the program was instead withheld until Budget 2017 where it was announced that funding for the PSSSP would increase by $90M over two years starting in the year 2017-2018, to support the tertiary funding needs of roughly 4,600 Indigenous students. Another $5M was allocated to Indspire, a charitable organization that is Indigenous-led, and is the largest funding provider for Indigenous education other than the federal government. This $5M was promised each year for five years, and is conditional on the organization matching funding by $3M from the private sector each year. Should they be able to do this, it would provide $40M over a period of five years in scholarships and bursaries for Canadian Indigenous students. Though this $40M to be spent towards Indigenous PSE is needed, it is insufficient relative to the number of Indigenous students that are eligible to attend school but cannot access funds. In their 2017 Federal Pre-Budget Submission, Indspire indicated that they were requesting $15M over seven years for their Teach for Tomorrow Initiative, $5.75M over five years to be spend on their K-12 Institute, and $30M each year for five years to advance the abilities of their Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships and Awards program in order to address their goals for education. While $40M was the amount that they were provided with, the total amount requested over a period of 5-7 years was $193.75M.

This level of support is clearly insufficient to address the backlog of students that are eligible to be admitted to post-secondary institutions but are lacking the financial ability to do so, and is actually lower than the original amount that was promised. Further, that this funding was only promised for a period of two years signifies that those students on the aforementioned waitlist will not all have received the financial assistance that they need by that time. In order for the funding to be truly successful, like the funding formula, it must be stable and predictable. As stated previously, many First Nations students cite financial inability for the reason that they do not attend post-secondary school. Ensuring that enough funding is available for those that are able and interested in attending, therefore, is crucial in the effort to close the post-secondary education outcome

318 Ibid.
319 Ibid.
321 Ibid.
322 Ibid.
324 Ibid.
328 use same source from earlier
gap. For this reason, it is recommended that the federal government instead provides sufficient funding to finance the First Nations students that are on the waiting list to attend school at a post-secondary institution. This funding can be provided through the PSSSP, or through Indspire, the non-profit organization that works to fund Indigenous students in their post-secondary paths. Following this initial addressing of the system’s backlog, funding for the PSSSP and Indspire should be determined according to the average price of tuition as of the current year 2017-2018, and then adjusted each year from then on depending on inflation, and on the number of students graduating from high school or obtaining their GEDs.

Finally, Budget 2017 also undertook to complete a comprehensive and collaborative review and partnered with Indigenous peoples to evaluate federal programs that are in place to support Indigenous students seeking out post-secondary education. This initiative should not stop at solely investigating the effectiveness of existing federal programs that aim to increase access and retention of First Nations students in tertiary education, but go further to investigate opportunities for new initiatives that support this end. Though it would likely require collaboration with the provinces, one way of doing this would be to provide additional funding to the various Indigenous student departments at colleges and universities, and Indigenous institutions themselves that are attempting to improve outcomes for Indigenous students in this regard.

For many of the institutions that were contacted to discuss their most successful programs and initiatives, many expressed that there would be an interest if they were to provide more programming to Indigenous students at their schools, but that the resources to do so were not there. Providing additional funding to support academic, cultural and personal supports for Indigenous students at colleges and universities is crucial to advance the retention piece of closing the post-secondary education gap. If students are provided with access to post-secondary schools but do not have access to services that will increase their likelihood of transitioning in a predominantly Western academic setting, the obvious risk is that they may be unsuccessful in completing their degrees. In such cases those students’ self-confidence could be severely damaged, there would a great loss of potential to Canadian society, and the existing post-secondary gap will be reinforced. To begin, the government should look at opportunities to provide support for programs that have demonstrated success in the past but may not have been able to continue in their original forms due to lack of funding.

A prime example of this would be the Biishkaa program that was originally run as a pilot program at Trent University over a period of two years. While the findings of the program boasted a high retention rate, only the peer mentorship aspect of the program was retained indefinitely, due to a lack of funding available for other program aspects. In cases such as this where a program has proven successful within a particular region or institution, Indigenous student departments should be provided with the financial support necessary to successfully implement those programs. Additionally, many other schools cited a need for very basic supports necessary to meet the service and program demands of their students, such as tutoring and additional staff members. While it is important to develop a well thought out strategy for funding such programs in the long run, immediate attention should be given to efforts that have been successful or those that are sought after but incapable of keeping up with demand. It would be recommended that Budget 2018 identify and evaluate those programs so that they can reap the greatest potential for success possible in the near future.

Steps for Primary and Secondary Institutions

In addition to those steps that must be taken in order to remedy the governance and funding structures in relation to improving First Nations access and retention in post-secondary education, there are also a number of actions that could be pursued by primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions themselves to increase positive outcomes. Education outcomes at the Kindergarten through to Grade 12 levels is inextricably linked to post-secondary education, and, in a basic sense, the most intuitive way to improve First Nations access to institutions for higher learning is to improve their experiences in and success at those levels. During the course of the primary interviews that were conducted with the staff at tertiary institutions and with officials at organizations with an Indigenous focus, there were a number of recommendations that were made explicitly or could be drawn according to the gaps / challenges they were experiencing. Some recommendations were also apparent in light of the literature that is available on this topic. Those that could be implemented at the primary and secondary levels include:

331 Shari Beaver, Trent University, July 6, 2017.
332 Ibid.
levels are:

- Increasing interest in post-secondary education at the primary and secondary levels is extremely important. Due to many contributing factors including the negative experiences of their parents and grandparents in residential schools, and the absence of available role models, many First Nations students do not envision themselves pursuing post-secondary education. For this reason, the outreach and interest increasing piece is key in nurturing students’ will to succeed in the education system and pursue higher education. Initiatives such as that at Queen’s University that aim to showcase Indigenous role models are highly recommended.

- A representative from INAC recommended that the education system at large undergo reforms to include Indigenous knowledge at all levels. This should include information about the local perspective and culture, as well as more generally applicable concepts that often arise in the education system. A key requirement in the implementation of Indigenous knowledge in this way is to ensure that it is presented to Canadians and Indigenous students as meaningful and not just for show.334

In the long-term, the hope is that the high school attainment gap between First Nations and the non-Indigenous Canadian population will be closed. Once that is achieved, the eligibility component of increasing First Nations access to tertiary education would be covered and, with the more solid foundation for learning, would likely contribute to improving retention in post-secondary education. It should be noted that issues that persist in relation to funding at the primary and secondary levels have not explicitly been touched on. It is recognized, however, that resources will be required in order to implement these recommendations at the First Nations community level. Further, it should also be noted that the recommendations are not dismissive of the fact that some methods may function better in some regions than others. Ultimately, these recommendations are meant only as suggestions that may be interpreted by First Nations communities according to their own needs and specific challenges.

**Steps for Post-Secondary Institutions**

As was just noted, improvements come at the primary and secondary levels in relation to increasing high school attainment will likely address at least one piece of the First Nations post-secondary education gap. Nevertheless, steps towards improving First Nations’ access and retention at the tertiary level is not completely dependent on improving outcomes at the primary and secondary levels, nor should efforts to close the overall education gap be targeted solely at those levels. Undeniably, a major factor in the need to close the education gap for First Nations people lies in the fact that as a group they have been put at an extreme disadvantage; the current recognition that significant efforts are needed to rectify this situation are a long overdue. There is also a significant need, however, to make a concerted effort specifically in relation to closing the post-secondary education gap. Doing so will not only prepare First Nations people to succeed in the labour market, which increasingly requires at least some form of post-secondary education for candidates to be eligible, but it will also be an important piece in the future of Canada’s economy. With 70 per cent of future jobs to require some form of post-secondary education, and the significant portion of the labour force to be made up of Indigenous Canadians, positive outcomes resulting from closing the First Nations tertiary education gap will be widely observable.

As has been highlighted throughout this paper, improving access and retention opportunities for First Nations students are the main components in closing the post-secondary education gap. Again, while conducting primary interviews and reviewing the available literature a number of recommendations came to light, as they could be applied at the tertiary level:

- Grace McLeod from FNU offered the insight that, in the case of transitional programs that allow students to experience school for a week or two prior to beginning their first semester, the timing of the program is important to ensure its effectiveness. As an example, she suggested making these opportunities available at the end of summer, directly before the student would have their first day of school.335 This would help them to get appropriately settled and give enough time to organize any outstanding tasks without causing unneeded stress while they are trying to focus on their academics.

335 Grace McLeod, First Nations University, July 18, 2017.
• A representative from INAC indicated that a component of quality post-secondary education for students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, is to be exposed to knowledge of whose traditional territory they are on, as well as the history that is associated with that territory. Post-secondary institutions that have yet to do so should aim to implement initiatives for territorial and cultural acknowledgments relative to the land on which they are situated.

• Various institutions interviewed indicated that many Indigenous students tend to arrive at their schools with insufficient writing and language skills. This may be partly due to the fact that many of them speak a First Nations language as their first language rather than English. Writing and language supports were also indicated as being highly attended.

• For this reason, tertiary institutions should offer resources that help Indigenous students adjust to academic writing and language requirements.

• Some post-secondary institutions have begun to incorporate elements of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning into their curriculums, but there is much room for improvement. It is recommended that colleges and universities aim to incorporate elements of Indigenous knowledge into their programming, which currently is dominated by Western ideology. There is value in both types of knowledge and it is important to recognize this at higher levels of learning. Not only would doing so be helpful to First Nations and other Indigenous students in feeling welcome and valuable in Western institutions of education, it would also enrich the experience of all students at those institutions.

• Schools that had some form of ceremony in place that aimed to honour its Indigenous graduates reported positive responses from participants in the ceremonies themselves, as well as from other Indigenous students who witnessed those ceremonies. Some element of recognition for Indigenous graduates is therefore recommended, as it can potentially serve to motivate other Indigenous students and encourage their retention, while simultaneously celebrating Indigenous achievement in tertiary education.

• Across many institutions, programs involving elements of peer mentoring were met with positive responses from Indigenous students and administrators. Forming these relationships helps Indigenous students to adjust to being in a post-secondary environment that is not intrinsically familiar to them, and to establish a social network more easily. Having a peer mentor also gives them a highly accessible resource where they can direct questions related to any challenges they may be having. It is recommended that colleges and universities that do not already offer some form of peer mentoring aim to implement elements of it at their institutions.

As was noted with regard to recommendations at the primary and secondary levels, resources will be required in order to implement these recommendations in First Nations communities and by college and university institutions. The principle that certain methods may function better in some regions rather than others also holds true. Ultimately, any of these recommendations are meant only as suggestions that may be interpreted by First Nations communities according to their own needs and specific challenges.

Conclusion

This report has sought out to examine the current conditions of access and retention in post-secondary education for First Nations people in Canada, and to identify current best practices and innovations being used by tertiary education institutions to improve upon both. Examining the outcome gaps that exist with regard to First Nations, it is clear that a great deal of improvement needs to be made, both in regard to post-secondary education as well as the Kindergarten through Grade 12 levels. While some developments have been made in recent years, the achievement gap between the First Nations and non-Indigenous population of Canada with respect to post-secondary education remains substantial. Decreasing the outcome gap in this area is an important component in improving the overall socio-economic condition for First Nations people. Higher levels of education are associated with higher rates of health, employment, income, and general well-being. Lower educational attainment is linked with poor health conditions, higher crime and incarceration rates, and poor problem-solving abilities. As significant barriers in both access to, and retention in, tertiary education remain planted quite firmly in the reality of First Nations, the inputs required to make meaningful and positive changes will be immense.

337 Grace McLeod, First Nations University, July 18, 2017 & Tim Coughlan, The University of Winnipeg July 6, 2017.
This being said, changes have begun to formulate and a new understanding and appreciation for the poor state of First Nations affairs has been recognized by the current Liberal government. Repairing these deeply ingrained issues at a superficial level alone will require extensive investments of time, money, and consultation with First Nations people and their communities. If there is anything that previous efforts to help Canada’s Indigenous population has demonstrated, it is that any solution to any Indigenous-related issue is horribly incomplete if the Indigenous point of view is not that which is at the forefront of that solution. This holds true in the context of post-secondary education as well: if it is First Nations students and communities at which programs to increase access and retention are targeted, then the development of any new programs and initiatives should seek out the advice of First Nations, first and foremost.

First Nations people are not the only ones who serve to benefit from minimizing and eventually closing the persisting gaps in education. With the substantial number of Indigenous people, and First Nations, quickly nearing the time that they will be entering the workforce, Canadian society would be better equipped to face the demands of the labour market if the current post-secondary education gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous Canadians were to be closed.

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Indigenous Affairs
Third-Party Policy – Can it be Improved?

Vaughn Sunday

November, 2017
Indigenous Affairs Third-Party Policy – Can it be Improved?

Vaughn Sunday

Introduction

The Aboriginal peoples of Canada have had a long and checkered past with regard to their fiscal relations with the Government of Canada. The paternalism that has marked this relationship has existed since the 1800’s when church and state used residential schools to try to assimilate the Native people of Canada. The reserve system imposed a stationary lifestyle on Native peoples. The Government was to provide food and lodging on reserves rather than allow the Native people to live off the land. By removing the freedom to move about, Natives had to adjust to living a stationary life rather than following the game or moving the village every five years or so. The Territories of First Nations became far smaller than what they formerly enjoyed because the reserves created boundaries which were not there before contact. Instead the various Tribes had their own system of recognized Territory where a river or landmark might be the end of one Territory and the beginning of another. The elected system was forced onto the First Nations in the late 1800’s to early 1900’s. This foreign system of governance, which received funding from the Federal Government, created a reliance on the outside government to provide services to the community. Because the Federal Government controlled the purse strings, the reserve had limited powers to do as they wished.

Today, it is widely understood that there is never enough money for First Nations to do all that they wish to do and, in most cases, there are funding shortfalls for such things as building and road maintenance and staffing for local governance. Many of the funding formulas used by the Federal Government have not changed since the 1980’s and 1990’s while some areas within a First Nation community are not funded at all.

The education formula, as an example, had been capped since the 1990’s resulting in on-reserve children getting funded at $7,000 per year compared to over $10,000 per year for those off reserve. As a result, the First Nations of Canada are challenged financially to manage their communities and control their budgets as a whole. The current Trudeau government has formally uncapped the education funding and has created a fund for Indigenous languages and culture. This is welcome news to the First Nations of Canada.

A significant area of contention between the Government and First Nations involves the Default Prevention and Management Policy (DPMP), which was designed to assist in the delivery and control of federally-funded programs. There are 143 First Nations involved in one of the three levels of intervention under the DPMP. For those in the first level, a Management Action Plan is developed by the First Nation and accepted by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). This plan is meant to assist the First Nation in getting out of deficit. There are 74 First Nations nationally that fall under this section of the policy or 51.7 per cent of those involved. The second level involves a recipient-appointed advisor who works with the First Nation to ensure that there is no recurrence of the problem. There are 61 advisors in place nationally or 42.6 per cent of those involved in third-party policy. Finally, there are eight First Nations involved in the Third-Party Funding Agreement Management or 5 per cent of the total. These managers are appointed by INAC and ensure the administration of INAC funding. It is by far the most intrusive part of the INAC policy as the fund managers work directly within the First Nation. By region, BC and Alberta have only 8 per cent and 4.8 per cent, respectively, of their First Nations involved in third-party, indicating good management practices. By contrast, Manitoba is over-represented with 46 or 32 per cent nationally. Ontario is next with 31 First Nations or 21 per cent nationally that are involved in the Third-Party policy.

This paper will focus on the Third-Party Management system with an aim to explore the problems of third-party management and possible approaches for improving the policy for First Nations affected by it.

The Assessment Process

The Federal Government oversees the management of First Nations. Within the financial management system, the First Nations must provide financial reports and undertake an annual audit which must be made public. Indigenous and Northern Affairs uses Financial Service Officers to go to the First Nations and they do assessments on the First Nation under the General Assessment Policy. Within this policy, the First Nations are assessed for financial management risk and put into the categories of low, medium or high risk. The assessment
has been criticized as being arbitrary. The biggest criticism is that the entire process is subjective and dependent on the opinion of the Financial Service Officer.

The Aboriginal Financial Officers Association (AFOA) Canada Engagement Report of March, 2017 states, “A separate institution is needed to gauge a better overall measure of risk and capacity for First Nations that goes beyond government funding risk.” The report went further to state, “At the moment, there is no third-party Indigenous institution that contributes to the assessment of the broader risk of a First Nation. This would include the community risk and not merely government funding risk. As this is a clear path to funding more sustainable communities we recommend a three-year planning period …to a third-party Indigenous institution.”

First Nations leaders argue that there would be a better understanding of community issues and mutual cooperation should an Indigenous institution be created. The Mohawk community of Kanesatake has first-hand experience with the Third-Party management system in Canada. They also feel that the assessment process is unfair. Brenda Etienne, Council Coordinator said, “The assessment was not right, not valid and not a true picture of the financial management of the community.” She indicated that the process was “invasive, disrespectful and there was a lack of understanding from the government representatives who did not have background knowledge of the community.” Finally, Regional Vice Chief Mike Smith of the Yukon stated, “Sending government consultants into a First Nation is not a good thing because nobody trusts them.” These comments seem to support the AFOA Canada recommendation to form an Indigenous Third-Party Institution for better community assessments and end results.

The Default Management Prevention Program

Should a First Nation get into financial difficulties and not meet their obligations, not do an audit or not do their required reports, Indigenous Affairs has the right to trigger the Default Management Prevention Program, which has three levels of intervention as follows:

1. Recipient Managed – Management Action Plan: replaces Recipient Managed in accordance with Remedial Management plans (RMP) under the former Intervention policy. In this level of default management, the recipient develops a plan, acceptable to the Department, to remedy and recover from a default, to address the default and prevent its recurrence.

2. Recipient-Appointed Advisor – Management Action Plan (MAP): replaces Expert Resource Support under the previous DPMP. The Recipient-Appointed Advisor is contracted by the recipient as part of their Management Action Plan to address the default and prevent its recurrence. In some cases, a Co-Managed level of default exists where the recipient has entered into a Co-Management Agreement prior to the implementation of the DPMP and that Co-Management Agreement has not yet expired.

3. Third-Party Management: The Third-Party Manager, contracted by the Department, administers the Department’s funding for the delivery of programs and services and works to remedy the underlying causes of the default. This level of default management is a temporary measure to ensure the continued delivery of programs and services to community members.

There are 617 First Nations in Canada and most are well managed. At the present time, there are 143 First Nations in some level of Third-Party Management, which works out to 23 percent of all First Nations in Canada. Obviously the third level or Third-Party Management is the most invasive level of intervention by the government. Some of the criticism of this level of intervention includes the high cost. The AFN has stated that “very few First Nations can afford this cost….First Nations must cover the costs of intervention at an average of $170,000 per year from their Band Support Funding.” Terry Goodtrack of AFOA Canada stated that “the government needs to create things to help First Nations rather than a system similar to the Indian Agent coming to the reserve and taking over.”

Kanesatake also felt that the Third-Party Managers are in need of training and it is better to have companies that have experience in choosing a third-party manager. It was suggested that all personnel that are going into a First Nation have previous experience working in First Nations or get training in places such as the Banff Center or universities. Brenda Etienne, Council Coordinator, stated that “it is critical to have executives coming into First Nations with previous experience rather than sending someone into a First Nation that has none.” People with experience are more likely to be sensitive to local needs and customs. Within Kanesatake, the Third-Party Manager was taken to court over what was deemed to be major differences between the two parties and only a court case could resolve the situation. A further criticism was that there was no timetable for the
completion of the work within the First Nation. In the meantime, the Band Support funding was being bled dry on an annual basis.

Rob Campbell of Myers Norse Penny (MNP), one of the largest audit and consulting companies in Canada, stated that “MNP no longer does Third-Party Management” and he hopes that funding can come from a source other than Band Support funding. He further stated that “if a Band is in Third-Party Management then they have no money to pay for a company to come in.” He stated that a new program is needed to pay for Third-Party Management.

Rod Graham of Indigenous Affairs Manitoba echoed those remarks stating that in the past there were programs that paid for Third-Party managers. Asked what types of changes in policy he would like to see his response was to design a program to pay for co-management rather than use Band Support monies from the community. He stated that the Department is looking at policy changes and policy development that would support the current DPMP. He also mentioned that the development of community capacity is a key element in the development of a community.

The Development of Capacity Building in First Nations

At the moment, most Third-Party Managers are not obligated to do any capacity-building once they arrive in a First Nation. The First Nations that end up in the Default Prevention Management Program usually have limited local resource people to begin with. Rob Campbell of MNP said that Manitoba has a classic brain drain syndrome whereby students go away from their reserve and go to university and college in a larger town or city where they find work afterwards and begin new lives. Whoever is left on reserve has less education but typically they are charged with the management of programs and services provided by the Band Council.

Terry Goodtrack stated that “developing stability through capacity development is essential. Third-Party Consultants need to have the strong ability to develop local people. The execution of a management action plan is a challenge and local politics must be kept in check during the process. It needs to be a group effort.9 The report to the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs also stated that “the lack of capacity for financial management is also one of the primary root causes of financial defaults in First Nation communities.” 10 Although the need for capacity-building might seem obvious, it is not currently part of the Third-Party Default Management Policy. In the future it should be since lack of capacity is likely the largest factor in First Nations getting themselves in a position of financial deficit. Rod Graham stated that there a is great need for capacity development for northern and remote communities. He said that post secondary education is a very important factor for communities to retain their educated community members instead of losing them to cities or other First Nations.

In terms of policy changes, it is clear that whichever consulting professionals go into a First Nation, capacity building must be built into a contract. Further, in the past the programming at Indigenous Affairs had a capacity development element paid for by Indigenous Affairs. This would greatly assist those First Nations that have encountered financial management difficulties. Dan Wilson of the AFN stated that “First Nations need to assess where are they now, and where do they want to go.” He is suggesting that within a Management Action Plan, elements of strategic planning need to be used not only to get out of deficit but to provide a roadmap for future development. This exercise can provide guidance for the future and the First Nation can work on this in partnership with the Third-Party Managers that go into a First Nation community.

Recommendations for the Future of Default Management

Prior to doing research into this subject and having lived on the Akwesasne First Nation all of my life, and having worked for other First Nations on contracts, I believed that any consultant or professional that goes into a First Nation should do so with the following four principles:

1. The consultant/professional should meet with Chief and Council, elders and senior staff to outline what is being planned and get permission to work in the community.
2. The consultant/professional should work in cooperation with a steering committee of Council representatives, senior staff and community representatives on a Management Action Plan. That way there is community buy-in for the plan for remediation of the financial management and, ultimately, to get out of deficit.
3. The consultant should assist in providing training for Chief and Council and Senior Staff on such best practices as operational planning, strategic planning and use of accounting software. Local training is key to success once the consultant/professional leaves the community.
Finally, and most importantly, the consultant/professional should have a set timetable for leaving the community and the completion of his/her tasks. This should be about 18 months as the community needs to take over control of its own affairs.

These principles can be used whether or not the advisor or manager is Native or non-Native but is working within a First Nation community.

Having interviewed AFN representatives, First Nations, Government representatives, Indigenous organizations and consulting with Professors at Queens, I believe that those four principles need to be used by any professional going into a First Nation. Further, I have always found that having a First Nation professional going into a reserve helps in terms of gaining acceptance and understanding of the local issues and management challenges faced by a First Nation. There is also a higher degree of trust in speaking to a Native or Natives from other First Nations. In most cases, the experiences are very similar and the challenges are common to all First Nations. This concept will be further developed in the next section of this document.

First Nation Institutions and Resource Pools

I worked with Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO). Looking back on my experience, although the results of that experience on reserve left a lot to be desired, the organization design and theory were intriguing. The organization hires low-cost retired executives who are supposed to go into communities and provide a professional service and the clients are supposed to be matched with the retirees who are experienced in the fields in which they are giving advice. That sounds very good in theory but it is dependent on getting a good consultant from CESO with experience related to the community’s needs.

Keeping those thoughts in mind, if a group of retired First Nation professionals were to be assembled and combined with First Nation graduate students in programs such as accounting, financial management, MBA, public administration, this could form a First Nation resource pool that could be utilized to go into First Nations communities. It might be valuable to do a pilot project to test this process, giving this group parameters using the four principles mentioned previously. In Ontario, there are resource people such as Ken Jacobs from Curve Lake, a former administrator for Curve Lake and Six Nations and Francis Sam, the former administrator for Akwesasne. People with their credentials and experience could be teamed with graduate students to provide First Nation professional services to go into First Nations experiencing financial and management issues. These resource pools of retired professionals and graduate students could be assembled in provinces/regions across the country because in terms of travel, availability, and especially regional knowledge, it is easier by province. Mr. Jacobs stated that this effort would be a good initiative and might be well received at the First Nation level since it involves sending First Nation individuals with experience to work with the First Nations directly.

Indigenous Organizations

There are existing Indigenous organizations such as AFOA Canada and the First Nations Financial Management Board that are both very capable and have the management expertise to oversee such a resource pool for groups going into First Nations that are in Third-Party Management. They are both well qualified and have respected personnel. The AFOA is made up of managers, administrators and accountants, and most of them work for First Nations and Aboriginal Organizations.

AFOA Canada boasts 800 members and has an annual conference that attracts over 800 people. This organization has pointed out that an independent organization should be involved in the assessment of First Nations management and evaluations. This is an excellent suggestion and whether it is AFOA or the First Nations Financial Management Board (FNFMB), they would be well suited to be involved in First Nation assessments.

The FNFMB has extensive experience working with the First Nations of Canada including making sure that the First Nations qualify for the low interest loans that are available to its member Nations. The certification process requires the First Nations to have good management and well-qualified financial staff within their organizations. In terms of providing assistance in Third-Party Management, the First Nations Financial Management Board is currently providing assistance in Manitoba on a pilot project basis. This experience will be invaluable in the future. INAC also acknowledges that the current policy is not working. They have nothing to lose and much to gain by allowing the Indigenous organizations to get involved in working with First Nations that are experiencing financial management challenges.
The Indigenous organizations have the advantage of experience working with First Nations and, in many cases, have Indigenous staff members that are sensitive to the needs of the First Nations. The next step would be to get further access to qualified individuals from across Canada to work in the First Nations themselves. In most cases, the First Nations are challenged to have the educated and trained human resources for quality management. The existing Indigenous organizations are in place for both the assessment process and for going into the First Nations to do provide the services that are required to right the ship so to speak. Should they oversee the development of resource pools using the retired First Nation administrators and post-graduate students, a new program/policy could be developed to replace or become a part of the current Default Prevention Management Policy.

Conclusions

The Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada has recognized that the Default Prevention Management Program does not work for the First Nations of Canada. As a result, some of the most influential Indigenous organizations, such as the Assembly of First Nations, AFOA Canada and the First Nation Financial Management Board, have made recommendations for changing the processes and policies with regard to third-party management. Major reports have been developed for AFOA Canada and the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. It is recommended that these leading Indigenous organizations, AFOA Canada and First Nation Financial Management Board play a part in developing a solution for a better way of dealing with this issue.

In reviewing Manitoba and Ontario, these two provinces account for over 50 per cent of the First Nations involved in Third-Party Management. They also both have many remote and fly-in communities, which is significant as remoteness was identified as the biggest factor in First Nations experiencing financial management difficulties. The provinces with access roads all have fewer First Nations experiencing financial difficulties. The fly-in communities have less access to self-generated funds from business or leasing. They have the most management challenges as a result of being remote and without year-round road access.

Traditionally, high-powered consulting firms went into the First Nations at a very high price and the monies to pay for them came out of the Band Support funding of the First Nation. In some cases, there was no time frame to complete the contracts and transition back to the First Nations. Training was not a priority nor a part of most contracts. These policies all need to change in order to achieve better results within the First Nation communities. The solution seems to be quite apparent and the direction recommended is sound: Allow existing Indigenous institutions to manage the assessment process and the Third-Party Management program in Canada. Resource pools of retired AFOA members, retired former Band Administrators and Accountants should be teamed with university graduate students who could then go into First Nations communities to provide assistance. The four principles of getting permission to go into a community, working on a management action plan with the First Nation, providing training to Chief and Council and staff and having a set period of time to complete their tasks would guide their work. It would take some time to determine out the role of Chief and Council, senior staff and the professionals/consulting team going in so that there is no confusion and political interference could be minimized.

The current Default Prevention Management Policy could be radically altered and, in my opinion, could be improved significantly with the changes identified in this document.

A special thanks to all of the people that consented to be interviewed and spend some time with me. Niawenkowa (A Great Thank You).
Raising literacy in the First Nations’ adult population in the context of labour market participation

Anna Trankovskaya

November, 2017
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How do you put your deepest gratitude on paper?

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Here’s to new beginnings!

Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right. Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.

— Kofi Annan

Introduction

Have you ever struggled to understand a simple job posting? Ever been ashamed of not being able to read as an adult? Luckily for me, I have not. But there are thousands of people in an industrially-developed country like Canada, who have to live with this every day, especially among the Indigenous population.

Low levels of literacy in First Nations adult population impede their ability to be employed, receive competing remuneration, have an adequate standard of living, and be actively involved in the community.

The purpose of this report is to bring to the forefront the problem of low adult literacy among the First Nations population. More particularly, the paper aims to:
• Review levels of literacy among Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada, and how they measure against the rest of the world;
• Establish the connection between literacy and employment;
• Review existing governance structures and approaches to raising literacy; and
• Provide recommendations on improving the situation and encouraging adult learning among the First Nations population.

Literacy and Education in Canada

A lack of information-processing skills could be a major obstacle to full participation in modern societies, and could lead to social and economic exclusion and marginalization (OECD Skills Studies, 2016). The evident disparity in the levels of literacy between Indigenous people and the rest of Canada deepens the socio-economic gap and puts First Nations people at a bigger disadvantage.

Essential skills proficiency is strongly linked to positive labour outcomes (employability and earnings potential) (TD Economics, 2013). However, the impact of literacy and skills goes far beyond earnings and employment. In all countries, individuals with lower proficiency in literacy are more likely to report poor health, believe that they have little impact on political processes, and not participate in associative or volunteer activities. In most countries, they are also less likely to trust others (OECD Skills for Life, 2013).

With the current Federal Government, we have a “window of opportunity” to influence real and meaningful change in First Nations education. Given the tools of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, 2015, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007, the time for action is now (Bellegarde, 2017). The massive increase in the global supply of a highly skilled workforce over the last several years adds pressure and an additional sense of urgency to raising literacy in the First Nations adult population (Commission to the European Parliament, 2012).

Furthermore, poor basic skills in adults are a societal problem, not just an educational one. Effective policies will require cross-ministerial and cross-organizational collaboration, involving social partners and civil society (European Commission - Education and Training 2020, 2015). This will build on extensive consultations and collaboration with the First Nations communities, and entail new and clear division of roles and responsibilities.

Research shows that participation in literacy and numeracy programs and the higher basic skill levels that follow positively influence confidence, self-esteem, attitude towards learning, parenting capacity, and civic engagement (Benseman J., 2012). It would also have a positive impact on social outcomes, such as health and crime rate, in the First Nations population.

Simply increasing government funding, while being an extremely important factor, cannot solve the problem in its entirety, making it a necessary but not sufficient condition. It does not automatically improve literacy or result in a better education system. A more complex and well-rounded approach is required. As demonstrated in the recent C. D. Howe analysis, 53 per cent of the significant negative gap in average literacy scores between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is explained by differences in socio-economic factors, with education and home environment accounting for 94 per cent of that.

Currently, the main focus of all educational policies in First Nations communities is on improving elementary, secondary and post-secondary education. This leaves out adults and school ‘drop-outs’ in need of education. While this approach does invest in the future and ensures a literate and well-educated workforce-to-come, it does not improve literacy and education among a large portion of the current First Nations adult population, who are still very young. How can they get help? Based on the results of the 2011 school survey by the Assembly of First Nations, only 22 per cent of the 335 surveyed First Nations communities offer adult education (see Figure 1 below).
Figure 1

Proportion of communities that offer school programming in the following grades

Source: Statistics Canada 2016 - Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations, Métis and Inuit

The high proportion of low-skilled adults, including Indigenous peoples, reduces Canada’s overall economic performance and its returns on educational investments. On the other hand, there is a need for steps to increase both the demand and efficiency of markets for literacy skills, so that any new skill supply gets taken up and put to productive use (Murray & Shillington, Understanding Literacy Markets in Canada: A Segmentation Analysis, 2011).

Negative consequences of low literacy in the First Nations adult population are often overlooked and underestimated. Ironically, the traditional Indigenous style of learning is accomplished by observing adult role models. Parental level of literacy and education, therefore, has a direct relationship to the literacy scores of their children. Well-educated parents encourage learning, often becoming enablers for their children in attaining an education. It also helps them to secure jobs and provide for the needs, health and safety of their families. As noted in the Skills Matter report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), parents’ educational background exerts significant influence on children’s future proficiency in literacy. Therefore, solving the adult literacy problem will be indirectly instrumental in improving literacy in children.

The lack of meaningful actions on improving adult literacy among First Nations people by previous governments could be explained by the complexity of the issue and inability to achieve ‘quick wins’ to gain political advantage. Action on this problem has been postponed for so long, however, that it leaves no more time to waste. Arguably, it could be contributing to many other problems, foremost of which is the mental and physical health of the First Nations population.

This report aims to shed some light on the problem and to suggest practical solutions by addressing the following questions: How to encourage learning in the First Nations adult population? What kind of programs should be offered? How to improve their design, delivery and effectiveness? Should the courses be hands-on or academic? How to increase economic demand for literacy skills? Is there a need to coordinate the efforts?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this report will take the following steps:

- Review funding and cost/benefit analysis;
- Review lessons from the previous efforts to address adult literacy in Canada and internationally;
- Identify the needs of learners and suggest ways to improve existing programs through literature review and interviews with various colleges and institutes involved in raising adult literacy among Indigenous peoples in Canada.

To continue with the analysis, it is important to get some clarity on definitions and terminology used in this report.
Literacy is referenced as the ability to understand, evaluate, use and engage with written texts, to participate in society, achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential. It includes a range of skills from the decoding of written words and sentences to the comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation of complex texts (OECD Skills for Life, 2013).

A more visual definition comes from Indigenous people in Peru: literacy - is a gift that provides spiritual light and dignifies those who possess it (UNESCO Santiago, 2017).

Education is a more encompassing term, identified by the Oxford dictionary as “an enlightening experience, and the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction.” So, literate people could be uneducated, but it is rather uncommon. Once people become literate, they reach for some level of education. And that is another reason why raising literacy is so important.

Considering the breadth of the topic, this report will focus on one of the most pressing yet often overlooked issue - adult literacy in First Nations communities.

**Literacy in the Adult Population: Canada and the World**

To advance the analysis, it is important to understand how Canada ranks in the world in terms of literacy. Many people find it difficult to believe that Canada - one of the leaders among the G8 industrialized nations - has a literacy problem. However, statistics show that nearly half of all adults in Canada lack the kind of prose literacy skills that are required to cope in a modern society. In 2008, the Canadian Council on Learning released its Reading the Future report noting that as a result of a number of demographic trends (population growth, aging population and high immigration rates) Canada will likely witness little-to-no overall progress in adult literacy rates over the next two decades. According to the report’s projections, by 2031 about 47 per cent of adults will have literacy skills below Level 3 of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, with level 3 being a critical dividing line.

The OECD defines the following five levels of literacy:

- **Level 1** very poor literacy skills - an individual at this level may, for example, be unable to determine from a package label the correct amount of medicine to give to a child.
- **Level 2** a capacity to deal only with simple, clear material involving uncomplicated tasks - people may develop everyday coping skills, but their poor literacy skills make it hard to conquer challenges such as learning new job skills.
- **Level 3** adequate for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in an advanced society - this roughly denotes the skill level required for successful high school completion and college entry.
- **Levels 4/5** strong skills - individuals at these levels can process information of a complex and demanding nature.

Canada’s performance in literacy and numeracy in the recent OECD survey of essential adult skills among 24 countries was disheartening: Canada scored average in literacy and below average in numeracy. Also, Canada’s scores in both proficiencies declined from those recorded almost 10 years earlier. Although Canada has a modern knowledge-based economy, with well-developed provincial primary and secondary education systems, Canada’s score in literacy was only the average of other industrialized countries. Notably, specific socio-economic groups continue to underperform: immigrant and Indigenous populations continue to trail their Canadian counterparts (TD Economics, 2013). The top countries in the OECD literacy survey were Japan, Finland and the Netherlands, while the lowest-performing were Italy and Spain (Berkowitz, 2013).

Overall, Indigenous peoples in Canada appear to be more likely to have inadequate literacy skills than the non-Indigenous population. However, there is a significant provincial variation. Seventy per cent of Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan have inadequate literacy skills - 23 percentage points higher than the share of non-Indigenous people. The gap is lowest in Ontario—52 per cent for Indigenous people versus 47 per cent for non-Indigenous people (The Conference Board of Canada, 2017). The off-reserve Indigenous population had 60% with literacy proficiency levels below 3. The non-Indigenous population share was at 48 per cent. In numeracy results, 70 per cent of the off-reserve Indigenous population had skills below level 3, compared to the non-Indigenous population at 54 per cent (TD Economics, 2013).

To identify the gaps, a pilot study was conducted on a reserve near Calgary, Alberta, over a two-year period from 2010 to 2011. It found that people living on reserve had an unemployment rate five times higher than the non-Indigenous population in Alberta: 26.6 per cent compared with 5.3 per cent. Even when broken down by
Education level, those residing on reserve were significantly less likely to be employed than non-Indigenous people with a similar level of education (Friesen, Ottawa failing to include First Nations in key employment data, 2015). The employment rate gap between the most and least literate is 30 percentage points in the Indigenous population, which is larger than in the total population. In its 2013 report, TD Economics refers to the University of British Columbia research that found that the lower literacy levels of Aboriginal people lead to a 28 per cent earnings disadvantage (Gulati, Literacy Matters: Unlocking the Literacy Potential of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, 2013).

At the same time, the Indigenous peoples in Canada are being looked upon as an important source of population and workforce growth for the near future. Therefore, it is more important than ever to address the essential skills’ gap now. This will also contribute to increasing productivity and to improving economic growth and Canada’s overall ranking in the world.

**Literacy and Labour Force Participation**

The OECD adult skills’ survey results confirmed that adults with higher proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments tend to have better outcomes in the labour market than their less-proficient peers. They have greater chances of being employed and earning higher wages. For example, an increase of one standard deviation in literacy proficiency was associated with a 6 per cent increase in wages, on average, across the 33 participating countries and economies (OECD Skills Studies, 2016).

The relationship between literacy proficiency and employment is not as strong as that between educational attainment and employment. An increase of 3.4 years of completed formal education (the equivalent of one standard deviation) is related to a 3.1 percentage point increase in the likelihood of being employed, when the increase of one standard deviation in literacy proficiency is associated with only 0.8 per cent. This is not surprising, given the breadth and variety of skills that are developed in education and training, and the role of education qualifications as a signal of an individual’s level of skills (OECD Skills Studies, 2016). Educational attainment would be impossible, however, without raising the level of literacy. As previously noted, only when people become literate do they start reaching for some level of education. Therefore, education and its attainment are dependent on literacy.

The 2003 International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey demonstrated that 31 per cent of Indigenous people who lived on reserve in Ontario had no formal education or less than Grade 9 compared to 10 per cent in the non-Indigenous population – more than triple the rate.

Given the lower educational attainment of the Indigenous population, it stands to reason that they may be even more vulnerable to downturns in the economy. It is therefore important to understand the factors that may help the Indigenous population become more fully integrated into the labour market (Arriagada & Hango, Literacy and numeracy among off-reserve First Nations people and Métis: Do higher skill levels improve labour market outcomes?, 2016).

The National Household Survey of 2011 confirmed that employment rates for Indigenous peoples were higher with more education (see Figure 2 below). For example, among those with postsecondary credentials, the employment rate of First Nations people was 71 per cent, while that of Métis was 78 per cent and that of Inuit – 73 per cent.
As the survey showed, the median total income was also higher for those with higher education levels. Among First Nations people aged 25 to 64, median total income (rounded to the nearest $1,000) ranged from $14,000 for those with no certificate, diploma or degree to $32,000 for those with postsecondary credentials (Kelly-Scott & Smith, 2015).

The importance of literacy proficiency relative to education qualifications for employment increases with age. This is consistent with the phenomenon known as “employer learning.” In the case of young people with little work experience, employers are likely to rely on the available, albeit imperfect, signals of skills, such as education qualifications, when hiring or firing. For adults who have worked more years and whose performance has been observed over time, actual proficiency is a stronger predictor of labour market outcomes than qualifications (OECD Skills Studies, 2016).

Using the characterization developed by Autor, Levy and Murnane (2003), employment is shifting away from jobs involving routine cognitive and manual tasks, and towards jobs involving tasks like ‘expert thinking’ and complex communication (OECD, 2012). As shown in Figure 3 below, with accelerated economic labour market changes, there is a drastic change in skill requirements, especially in the advanced OECD economies, such as the U.S.
Figure 3
Trends in routine and non-routine tasks in occupations, United States, 1960 to 2009

Trends in routine/ non-routine tasks in occupations, United States, 1960 to 2009

Theory suggests that labour markets are at their most efficient when the literacy skills of individual workers are at or just above the level associated with the reading demands of the job. Small literacy skills surpluses provide a cushion against rising skill demand associated with technical change and organizational change that increases the knowledge and skill intensity of production. Large skill shortages increase the probability of workers experiencing skill loss, a phenomenon that reduces the overall supply of skill, the rate of return on educational investment, incentives to participate in adult education and training, and leads to the lost output (Willms & Murray, 2007). Literacy skill shortages have a direct negative impact on worker productivity and indirectly reduce productivity through higher rates of illness, accident and absence from work (Coughlan and Murray, 2010).

As the recent data demonstrate, the supply of higher-level literacy skills has been seriously falling behind the growing demand for those skills, as demonstrated in Figure 4 below. The reasons for this relate to skill losses, employers’ human resource strategies, and mediocre performance of the education system in providing literacy skills. With the lack of incentives for training providers, instructional quality fell to the lowest common denominator (Murray, Draft Report: Putting skills at the centre of the policy agenda: advice to the new agency, 2017).
Research results show that poor skills severely limit people’s access to better-paying and more rewarding jobs. The distribution of skills also has significant implications for how the benefits of economic growth are shared within societies. Put simply, where large shares of adults have poor skills, it becomes difficult to introduce productivity-enhancing technologies and new ways of working, which in turn stalls improvements in living standards (OECD Skills Studies, 2016).

To adapt to low supply of skills, some employers take an easy route and ‘dumb down’ the level of skills they demand. Since skill loss and gain in adulthood is driven by the cognitive demand of the job, this creates a vicious cycle, whereby the underutilization of skills of the literate workers in turn creates a loss of skills and eventually reduces pressure on the education and training system to increase skill levels for the future (Murray, Draft Report: Putting skills at the centre of the policy agenda: advice to the new agency, 2017).

The dynamics of literacy skills are very important: the supply has to meet the demand. Without the demand in place and the efficient allocation of workers to jobs, any investment of money and time into skill upgrading would be futile. When unused, the skill becomes forgotten or lost, regardless of the quality of the program.

Recent analysis, based on direct measures of human capital through literacy scores, supports a clear relationship between investments in human capital, long-run economic growth and labour productivity. Specifically, a country’s literacy scores rising by 1 per cent, relative to the international average, is associated with an eventual 2.5 per cent relative rise in labour productivity and 1.5 per cent rise in GDP per capita. These effects are three times as great as for investment in physical capital. Moreover, the results indicate that raising literacy and numeracy for people at the bottom of the skills distribution would have a greater impact on economic growth than producing more highly skilled graduates (Coulombe & Tremblay, 2005).

Achieving higher levels of literacy investment and participation will depend on engaging Canada’s employers. The fact that most adults with what are judged-to-be-inadequate levels of literacy skill are working (over 75 per cent) creates incentives for their employers to invest and suggests that instructional programs need to be tailored for the workplace (Murray & Shillingston, Understanding Aboriginal Literacy Markets in Canada: a segmentation analysis, 2012) (The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2014).

The Office of Literacy and Essential Skills of Employment and Social Development Canada sponsored a large-scale research project called the UPSKILL, launched in 2010, to evaluate workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (LES) training.
The findings from this study indicate that workplace LES training, does, indeed, have large positive impacts on workers’ skills, job performance, and a range of economic and social outcomes for workers and firms. Significant gains in productivity were observed through more effective teamwork and improved organization, which are two factors contributing to reduction in labour costs. Workers’ essential skills gains not only occurred fairly quickly after training, but also increased subsequent to training, as individuals had time to further use their skills and engage in literacy practice at work. A benefit-cost analysis also revealed a significant positive return on investment for firms, even when they bear the full costs of training delivery. Increased revenue and high productivity more than offset the costs of the program (The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2014).

Transversal skills such as the ability to think critically, take initiative, problem-solve and work collaboratively would prepare First Nations peoples for today’s varied and unpredictable career paths (Commission to the European Parliament, 2012). Increasing literacy and numeracy among the adult population is the foundation for developing these skills. There is a strong positive relationship between literacy and numeracy, on the one hand, and problem-solving in technology-rich environments on the other (OECD Skills Studies, 2016).

**Impact of Literacy on Other Policy Areas**

Not surprisingly, low literacy levels appear to have an impact on workplace participation and the types of jobs people can do. But adequate literacy skills are not only an economic issue; they have profound social consequences as well. For example, individuals with inadequate literacy skills are more likely to report poor health, to be less politically engaged, and to be more socially isolated (The Conference Board of Canada, 2017). Learning basic skills and education can improve their mental and physical health, reduce social inequality, increase inclusion and promote active citizenship, as demonstrated in Figure 5 below. It helps to visualize the relationships between adult skills and valued economic and social outcomes.
Given the centrality of written communication and basic mathematics in virtually all areas of life, coupled with the rapid integration of information and communication technology, individuals must be able to understand, process, and respond to textual and numerical information. These basic skills will be essential to their ability to participate fully in the society — whether as citizens, family members, consumers, or employees. They will provide a foundation for the development of other, higher-order cognitive skills, and access to knowledge (Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics Division, 2013).

Literacy and numeracy rates among First Nations adults and other Indigenous peoples will inadvertently influence other policy areas, as well. For example, child poverty is a particularly acute problem among First Nations population that has been caused primarily as a result of unemployment of parents. Poverty rates for children on-reserve in Manitoba are at 76 per cent and Saskatchewan at 69 per cent. Researchers found that the rates of poverty on--reserve worsened between 2005 and 2010; they cited long-standing barriers such as underfunded schools and child welfare services that stand in the way of children achieving their full potential (Kirkup, 2016).

With recent developments in technology, good basic skills are central to inclusion, engagement and cohesion. Basic skills are also important in family life. They help to better support children, reducing the intergenerational transmission of educational disadvantage. Basic skills could have an impact on health. Adults who struggle with literacy and numeracy are also likely to struggle with managing conditions such as diabetes, which require understanding and adhering to prescription regimes (European Commission - Education and Training 2020, 2015).

The responsibility for adult learning policy is often divided across several ministries and agencies, e.g., education, training, immigration, justice, and several levels of policy-making (municipal, regional, national). This shared responsibility often results in a situation in which adult learning policy is fragmented and its efficiency suffers from insufficient coordination (European Commission - Education and Training 2020, 2015). Support
should be “wrap-around,” and take into account the multiple barriers facing learners, wherever they are. Issues such as food security, mobility, affordable childcare, and access to educational opportunities are paramount (Frontier College National Forum, 2017).

Literacy in First Nations: Context for Action

This section will focus on the problem of low literacy in First Nations populations and other Indigenous communities, and will provide context for action.

First Nations peoples are descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada who lived here for thousands of years before European explorers arrived (Government of Canada, 2014). There are more than 630 First Nations communities in Canada.

“Indigenous” (or sometimes, Aboriginal) is a collective term to include First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The 2011 National Household Survey showed that 1,400,685 people had an Aboriginal identity, representing 4.4 per cent of the total Canadian population.

In 2011, First Nations represented 851,560 people, or 60.8 per cent of the total Indigenous population and 2.6 per cent of the total Canadian population. Métis represented 32.3 per cent of the total Indigenous population and 1.4 per cent of the total Canadian population. Inuit represented 4.2 per cent and 0.2 per cent respectively. An additional 2.7 per cent of the Indigenous population reported other or more than one Indigenous identity (see Figure 6 below). The results of the 2016 survey have not been released at the time of writing this report (expected to be released in October of 2017).

![Figure 6](image)

Diversity of Indigenous groups in Canada, 2016

There are two important factors about Indigenous peoples that make the problem of literacy even more compelling. The Indigenous population is fast growing and very young. It increased by 20 per cent between 2006 and 2011, compared to 5 per cent for the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada’s Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, 2016). Such a rapid increase was determined by two factors: high birth rate and an increased self-identification during the Census.

The Indigenous population is expected to make up between 12.7 per cent and 16.6 per cent of the labour force growth between 2011 and 2036 (Centre for the Study of Living Standards, 2017). This could play a key role in mitigating the looming long-term labour shortage caused by Canada’s aging population and low birth rates.

Indigenous contributions to projected labour force growth remain enormous within the Northern region, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. It was noted for the first time in one of the reports seven years ago: “Indigenous labour force and employment growth is most important for Western Canada – especially for Manitoba and
A more detailed study is being conducted by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards. It uses 2011 National Household Survey data and official Statistics Canada population projections to forecast Indigenous contribution to Canada’s labour force growth under various scenarios between 2011 and 2036. The draft report confirms that if the participation rate gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people does not close, the contribution will be between 8.7 per cent and 16.7 per cent of Canada’s total labour force growth, depending on the various projections of the ethnic mobility rate. If the participation rate does close, the contribution is forecast to be between 12.2 and 20.9 per cent. The lower bounds of these ranges are based on the assumption of no ethnic mobility between 2011-2036; the upper bounds are based on the assumption that the rate of ethnic mobility maintains its current value.

As confirmed by the study, the Indigenous contribution will be especially important to Northern Canada, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In those jurisdictions, Indigenous people will contribute upwards of 50 per cent of labour force growth in 2011-2036 period (and over 80 per cent in the case of the Northern region), if the within-jurisdiction participation rate gaps close (Centre for the Study of Living Standards, 2017).

Among Canadian provinces, Manitoba is matched by Saskatchewan in having the largest Indigenous population share (Busby, 2010). As demonstrated in Figure 7 below, both provinces have a fairly large share of Indigenous population along with Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. What sets them apart, however, is the share of Indigenous population as a percentage of total population of these provinces. It is significantly higher than in any other province: at 16.7 per cent for Manitoba and 15.6 per cent for Saskatchewan. The next highest level was only at 7 per cent - in Newfoundland and Labrador. These numbers grew compared to the 2006 Census data from 15 per cent for both Manitoba and Saskatchewan and from 5 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador. This highlights the urgency of addressing the literacy problem in the adult Indigenous population in these two provinces, in particular. In the next 10 years, with a rapidly aging workforce, Manitoba and Saskatchewan will depend heavily on the young Indigenous population to fill the gap. It should bring the problem of raising literacy among Indigenous peoples to the forefront of the federal and provincial governments’ agendas. “This will allow for an increase in the skill level of workers, boosting labour market productivity and economic growth” (Busby, 2010).

Figure 7

Canadian Provinces: Distribution of Indigenous Population

The results of the 2012 Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) indicate that Indigenous peoples have lower scores in literacy and numeracy than non-Indigenous people. **Improving literacy in the First Nations adult population will enhance their personal development and employment opportunities, and thus contribute to Canada’s economic competitiveness.** The overwhelming majority (77.5 per cent) of adults reporting Aboriginal ancestry live off-reserve and hence compete for work directly in their local labour markets, and most often against more literate non-Indigenous people (Murray & Shillington, Understanding Aboriginal Literacy Markets in Canada: a segmentation analysis, 2012). This makes the task of finding a job much more daunting. Sometimes, even a basic application process or access to online resources are challenging.

In times of globalization, technological advances and free trade agreements, **Canadian companies experience more pressure from low-cost competitors and lack of skilled workers, on the one hand, and technologically-advanced and innovative products, on the other hand.** Addressing literacy shortage to increase productivity and competitiveness seems to be the most logical and orderly step in alleviating this pressure. It will also allow for fair job competition for Indigenous people against the local workforce and foreign workers with higher level of knowledge.

Raising adult literacy in the First Nations population will help to deliver on the Liberal Government’s commitment to establish a “nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples, based on recognition, rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. It is vital to Canadians’ shared success to work together to ensure better economic outcomes for First Nations, starting with education” (The Liberal Party of Canada, 2015). Addressing adult literacy **echoes the initiatives outlined in the 2017 Federal Budget.** One of them is the Innovation and Skills Plan. It includes efforts to “stimulate innovation, equip Canadians with the tools, skills and experience they need to succeed in the workforce, and expand the level of support for job training under the Labour Market Transfer Agreements”. It focuses on people and addresses the changing nature of the economy to ensure it works for all Canadians. In an increasingly competitive global economy, more needs to be done to ensure that Canadians can learn, adapt and have good jobs throughout their working lives. The Plan is aimed at creating opportunities for lifelong learning.

Besides obvious monetary benefits, there are other important factors calling for raising literacy in the First Nations adult population, including the moral obligation to the Indigenous peoples, and dynamic effect that improved literacy and increased education will have on the leadership capacity of their communities. Better leaders will provide better direction for the future economic development of First Nations. Improved literacy among First Nations adult populations would increase their chances at higher income, education, job security and employment – main social determinants of health and well-being.

These are clear incentives for all levels of government and Indigenous communities to make raising adult literacy in Indigenous population a priority.

**Raising Adult Literacy in First Nations**

Having established the importance of literacy for Canadians and the First Nations peoples, its direct impact on labour participation, health and social well-being, and knowing Canada’s ranking in literacy among other countries in the world, it is important to review some essential factors that shape adult literacy development and life-long learning. These include educational governance, its competing priorities and funding issues; First Nations learning culture and possible approaches to improving adult literacy; as well as existing programs, international experience and recommended options for moving forward.

**Governance**

Research has shown that effective governance is the single greatest contributing factor to a community’s socio-economic progress and its overall well-being. Governance structures among First Nation communities are at different stages of development. Some First Nations have self-government agreements with Canada while others have minimal governance structures (Government of Canada, 2015). Many employers believe that tackling the issue of low basic skills must be a shared responsibility between the government, education authorities, and employers. Government financial support can be very important, but it is not enough on its own (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015).
In Canada, executive legislative responsibility for education is granted to provinces in the Constitution Act, 1867; similar responsibilities are delegated to territories by the federal government. As a result, there is no federal ministry of education and no single pan-Canadian approach to adult education. The Government of Canada plays an integral role in supporting the skills development of Canadians by investing in post-secondary education, training, and literacy in the form of transfers to provinces and territories, research and infrastructure funding, and direct support to learners (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2012).

Although raising literacy in First Nations adults is legally a federal responsibility, the provinces and territories have so much at stake in terms of their economies and budgets, that they should seize opportunities to make their own funding contributions in accordance with certain agreed-upon processes and outcomes. British Columbia has done this for a number of years. Saskatchewan has more recently agreed to do so.

Ontario runs The Ontario Lifelong Learning and Skills Plan. It includes three elements:

- Investment and enhancements to the adult education and essential skills system;
- The new OSAP support for mature students to access post-secondary education;
- The updating of key Employment Ontario programs that support unemployed, displaced and incumbent workers who require retraining and skills building.

Ontario made a commitment to enhance its adult education system, making it more learner-centred by improving pathways and expanding services and programs that will provide adults with easier access to skills training and upgrading.

Provincial and territorial governments, often in cooperation with the federal government, provide much of the funding for these programs. The structures, funding models, providers, and programs vary among jurisdictions, but each provides a wide range of learning opportunities for adults.

Educational governance in First Nations is very complex. The Government of Canada has the responsibility for First Nations elementary and secondary education for the on-reserve population, but sometimes it is under local, Indigenous jurisdiction. Off-reserve education and on-reserve post-secondary education are under provincial jurisdiction. Adult education is provided by a wide range of government, private and third-sector organizations. This complex governance structure makes it harder to identify who should be the driving force and initiator of the change.

Another layer of governance complexity comes from geographical dispersion and size of the Indigenous communities. Proximity to urban centres and schools makes it less of a challenge, and easier to govern and implement any changes to the educational programs. Remote and small communities, by contrast, sometimes lack governance and educational structure, making it harder for them to be autonomous.

The pressing literacy needs of First Nations people living on reserve argue for intervention in all First Nations communities. Such intervention would require increasing the capacity of Indigenous institutions and training delivery agents (Government of Canada, 2010). Friendship Centers could play an important role for off-reserve urban Indigenous populations.

First Nations people have called for a fundamental change in their relationship with the Government of Canada. The Prime Minister of Canada and the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada have answered this call with a commitment to creating a new Government-to-Government relationship with First Nations, establishing a new fiscal relationship and closing socio-economic gaps (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2017). As discussed earlier in this report, raising adult literacy in First Nations communities plays one of the key roles in closing these gaps.

Recently, the governance approach has included federal and provincial governments’ responsibility with some input from First Nations. Taking into account the best interests of Indigenous peoples, the culture and diversity of their communities, as well as the new government-to-government commitment, the governance of any First Nations program, including its design and implementation, should become the First Nations responsibility, and over time would ensure its autonomy. The federal government will continue to provide funding and support when required. This will allow programs to fully reflect First Nations needs and provide true independence, with transfer of accountability for the outcomes of the programs. Inadvertently, this will help to increase adult participation in the programs, as people aspire to new leadership and governance roles, and it will indirectly promote the importance of raising literacy. Smaller communities that might have difficulty with governance or program implementation will have an option to ask for assistance during the transition period from one of the local Bands, or for the federal government’s support with initial set-up.
Program Design and Delivery

Program design and delivery has been one of the most controversial issues in raising literacy in the First Nations adult population in Canada. Despite the righteous purpose of improving literacy, but without much regard for and understanding of Indigenous culture and traditions, most of the programs were bound to be ineffective.

Employment and skills training programming and services in Canada have been supported and delivered by federal and provincial/territorial governments. The federal government provides funding to provinces and territories through four major bilateral transfer agreements referred to collectively as labour market transfer agreements (LMTAs). With increased 2016 federal budget funding for LMTAs, the government launched broad-based stakeholder consultations to improve the design of the programs and ensure that the agreements are responding effectively to labour market priorities. The main findings included (The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2016):

- Programs should help gain employment and increase skills;
- Employers play a key role in providing training opportunities and reinforcing skill acquisition in the workplace;
- To ensure responsiveness, programs and services should be demand-led: driven by labour market demand and employer's needs;
- Need to improve program awareness and accessibility: it has been hard to navigate a complex system with a wide range of programs, eligibility criteria, and providers; difficult to differentiate the program streams offered by federal, provincial and territorial governments;
- Need for flexible, culturally-appropriate and innovative programs, offering alternative modes of delivery, e.g., in-home or online.

A critical element that influences program design and delivery is the proximity of First Nations communities to urban centres. It changes the approach, mode of delivery and complicates the design, considering remoteness and unique features of each community. The relationship between urban centres and rural communities is a reciprocal one. Urban centres may be Canada’s engines of growth, but rural communities help fuel these engines, providing food, minerals, energy, lumber and other important resources necessary for survival. Therefore, it is important to make sure that everyone gets adequate attention and coverage from the program.

Another important design feature is the degree of alignment between the business needs of employers and the focus of the curriculum. It is a significant determinant of gains in job performance. The more clearly employers can articulate business needs, rather than intangible interests, the easier it is to achieve the alignment, and the more likely it is to produce performance gains (The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2014).

A comprehensive organizational needs analysis is critical to understanding both needs and training context in order to customize and communicate a training solution that can best achieve positive return on investment. This can help mitigate employers’ uncertainty and further encourage them to make the investments in LES training. It should be provided within a broader package of complimentary programs that respond to alternative needs of the learners and businesses, and any workplace constraints (The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2014).

Each jurisdiction, and industry within, can have very different needs. The diversity underscores the importance of having a collective voice for provinces and territories that would represent the perspectives of all shareholders. This will help to ensure equal attention to the needs of both rural and urban Indigenous communities (The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2016).

Literacy and numeracy skills can be integrated in education and training provisions in a variety of ways. They can be the focus of dedicated programs, which make explicit reference to improving these skills, or they may be part of other programs (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015). The delivery of the programs takes place through education and training institutions, including band-administered schools, or through local programs in workplace or community settings. There is a wide spectrum of agencies, organizations, and institutions that run the programs: school boards, colleges, vocational centres, adult-learning centres, Indigenous-owned-and-operated postsecondary institutions, community groups and friendship centres, non-profit and volunteer groups, employers, unions, associations, private companies, and special groups serving Indigenous learners.

There are two very distinct types of Indigenous post-secondary institutions: the provincially-controlled and
the Indigenous-controlled institutions. Provincially-supported institutions have the authority to grant certificates and diplomas, as well as access to annual operating and special grant funding to support operations and special initiatives. Indigenous-controlled institutions are not supported by provincial policy and therefore do not have authority to grant certificates and diplomas. They must partner with mainstream institutions to offer students provincially-recognized credentials. In addition, Indigenous institutions in this system are not eligible for annual operational grant funding as are mainstream institutions. This funding structure continues to put serious limitations on the type of programming Indigenous institutes can offer (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2010). To date, only two Indigenous-led institutions have achieved provincial recognition in Canada and are allowed to issue certificates and transfer credits: Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT).

Recent positive changes in governance direction took place in August of 2017, when the Anishinabek Nation in Ontario signed the self-governing education agreement with the federal government, making it the largest self-governing agreement negotiated in Canadian history. It gives the Anishinabek Nation of 25,000 people in 23 communities control over their classroom curriculum and school resources. It also allows First Nations far more administrative control of funding for post-secondary education. This agreement was the culmination of more than 20 years of negotiations (Alphonso, 2017). It was a big and important step in the right direction.

**Approach to Adult Learning**

The philosophy and principles of adult education have been synthesized in detail by Brundage and Mackeracher (Byrnes, 1993):

- Adults can and do learn throughout their entire lifetime;
- Adult learning is facilitated when the learner’s own experience is respected as valid and regarded as a potential resource for learning;
- Programs should appear to the learner to be relevant to life experiences and needs, both past and present;
- Adult learning is facilitated when each learner can participate in/be responsible for the planning and implementing of his/her own learning objectives, activities and assessment;
- Learners must have opportunities to actively use the skills they are learning.

One of the essential foundations of student-centred learning environments is cultural inclusivity, with a focus on enabling learners to access learning resources in a manner that is congruent with their values, beliefs and styles of learning (McLoughlin & Oliver, 1999).

A transformed culture of teaching since the 1980s came from constructivist learning theory, characterized by a set of principles relating to how knowledge is created and how individuals develop understanding. One of the interpretations of constructivism is a situated cognition, based on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), who maintain that learning is best achieved when it is encountered, used and applied in real world contexts and when (McLoughlin & Oliver, 1999):

- It is situated in everyday context and acquired through active participation;
- There is a process of social action and engagement/participation in social environments;
- It is assisted by experts and through apprenticeship.

Another term used to describe this approach is ‘contextualized’, when basic skills are learned in the context of the workplace, the family or the community setting. It has been observed that basic skills linked to an occupational skill are more likely to be sustained through use at work.

This “hands-on” approach to learning seems to be especially effective in Indigenous communities. It mirrors traditional learning methods. In Australia and North America, research conducted with Indigenous adults showed that purely cognitive approaches to design of learning resources have had limited success, while interactive, dialogic approaches, which involve community interests and needs have been found to motivate Indigenous students to develop the analytic and verbal skills they need to succeed in the contemporary world (McLoughlin & Oliver, 1999).

Another approach to raising adult literacy is called the ‘embedded’ approach. It integrates basic skills learning in the curricula of an academic program. While some low-skilled learners may benefit from a classroom context, for many it can revive bad memories of their schooldays (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy
Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015). The methods of assimilation have been notoriously barbaric and cruel, most notably in the residential school system. For many Indigenous people, the notion of formal education, as it has historically been understood, leads to the expectation that they abandon their culture and Native ways of knowing (O’Connor, 2010). Many learners, therefore, prefer home-based, work-based, or e-learning approaches to improving their literacy and numeracy skills (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015). Another challenge with the embedded approach lies in a difficulty in transferring newly acquired skills to the workplace and thereby exposing learners to losing the skills again.

The Experiential Learning Services Inc. undertook research to discover which elements of experiential education lead to greater engagement of Indigenous students and improved educational outcomes. The research took pace in public and on-reserve schools, in diverse geographic locations (Yukon and northern Alberta), using diverse forms of learning and teaching. It has been established that experiential learning addresses the lack of success and disengagement amongst Indigenous students by promoting a holistic form of education that values the importance of place and its cultural knowledge (O’Connor, 2010).

Experiential learning proved to be important in several ways:

- Expanded scope of instructional approaches resonate with a larger range of learners;
- Meaningful connection between the curriculum and the lives of students makes students motivated and highlights the importance of literacy for their families and communities;
- Students are engaged in field studies that are experiential and social in nature;
- Learners understand the interrelationship between knowledge and the real world;
- Students feel the responsibility for the reality of their own actions; recognize their potential for development and self-awareness.

While both approaches have many advantages, experiential learning has become a major factor in education in Indigenous communities as they move toward greater autonomy and self-determination: to reflect on Indigenous culture, to encourage learners to feel responsible for their lands, and to secure better employment opportunities within their communities and beyond. It helps to value the importance of place and its cultural knowledge (O’Connor, 2010) and has proven to be especially effective for adult learning.

Through the 2005 survey, colleges affirmed the importance of community-based programming as one of the most effective ways of meeting the learning needs of Indigenous students. Colleges are well positioned to deliver community-based and on-reserve programs because they are already in close proximity to many Indigenous communities and reserves. Institutions work closely with Indigenous community leaders, elders, school boards, employers and graduates. Aurora College has 24 community learning centres throughout the Northwest Territories, most of which are located in Indigenous communities. For planning purposes, colleges reported they engage with tribal councils, hold community/management forums, planning reviews and meetings with elders and community leaders (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2010). There are still, however, many barriers and challenges that need to be addressed.

Money matters

The funding sources and structures set in place to meet Indigenous peoples’ education needs are varied and complex. Access to financial assistance continues to be a significant barrier for Indigenous learners (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2010).

Since 1996, there has been a two per cent cap on the annual increase in First Nations’ funding, while the population was growing at a much higher rate. As a result, federal funding “hasn’t kept up with the demographic realities, nor the actual costs of program delivery.” It did not address the growing needs of the Indigenous communities and made the education gap even bigger. The situation has started to improve since the December 2015 announcement of the then-newly-elected Liberal government to reverse the 19-year cap on funding. After decades of underfunding, however, a significant “catching up” and targeted financing are required to help close the existing gap. In delivering results on the mandate letter of the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, “federal funding for First Nations communities needs to become sufficient, predictable and sustainable”.
The Office of Literacy and Essential Skills funds a pan-Canadian network of literacy and essential-skills organizations, at both the national and provincial/territorial levels. In all jurisdictions, provincial and territorial governments also provide funds for adult learning and skills development, whether through funding of institutional providers, community and voluntary providers, subsidies directly to learners, special project funding, and/or subsidies to and cost-sharing programs with industries and businesses (Council of Ministers of Education, 2012).

A number of studies have recently tried to quantify the benefit to the Canadian population of improving literacy and education outcomes for Indigenous peoples. One of the first was a 2007 study by Andrew Sharpe and Jean-Francois Arsenault for the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS). It estimated that if Aboriginal education and education-specific labour market outcomes reach the 2001 non-Aboriginal levels by 2026 (assumed complete closing of gaps), Canadian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would rise $36.5 billion in 2026, with a cumulative increase in GDP from 2001 to 2026 of $401 billion. Of that sum, about $180 billion, or 45 per cent, was directly attributed to an increase in educational attainment by Aboriginal Canadians.

Further, the study estimated that over the same 25-year period the cumulative increase in tax revenue by all levels of the Canadian government will reach $39 billion (in 2006 dollars). It also demonstrated that if the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal program expenditure gap were closed at a constant rate between 2006 and 2026, the cumulative savings to all levels of the Canadian government would be $77 billion. They would result from the economic improvements, reduced expenditures related to employment insurance, welfare and health, and cutting back on the need for additional services and transfers.

That work was updated in the 2015 CSLS report by Matthew Calver. It projected that eliminating the educational attainment gap by 2031 will boost Aboriginal employment by 90,000 workers and the Aboriginal contribution to GDP by as much as $28.3 billion (in constant, 2010 dollars) in 2031. However, if income and employment rate gaps (conditional on education alone) are closed simultaneously with the educational attainment gap, the cumulative 20-year gain to output for Canada between 2011 and 2031 was projected to reach as much as $334.7 billion.

Another important study was the 2009 DataAngel Policy Research Inc. report titled “Addressing Canada’s Literacy Challenge: A Cost/Benefit Analysis”. It provided a thorough cost analysis on raising literacy in Canada up to level 3 – the level thought to be associated with maintaining competitiveness in the emerging global knowledge economy.

The report identified the cost of upgrade per student to be between $229 and $4,441 based on the type of learners, with the total cost of raising all Canadian adults to the desired proficiency level in literacy of $6.4 billion. This assumed to cover both direct costs of instruction and indirect costs of support services, facilities and other infrastructure costs and supplies (Murray, et al., 2009).

The study also confirmed that Indigenous adults are significantly more likely to be in literacy skill shortage than their non-Indigenous peers. In addition, Band members living on-reserve appear to be much more likely to have literacy skill shortage than their Indigenous peers in their jurisdiction. On the positive side, the majority of Indigenous adults fell into groups with relatively minor skill upgrading needs (Murray, et al., 2009).

In 2017, DataAngel Policy Research Inc. performed literacy market segmentation analysis for Employment and Social Development Canada and the Canadian Council on Learning. It identified the total cost of raising literacy in all Indigenous adults, on- and off-reserve, to Level 3 for those without recent occupational experience and to the level required by their occupation for those with recent work experience, to be $1 billion. This was based on the scores by the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies that had been imputed to the 2011 Census, with real adjusted estimates that included unit costs reflective of special needs of the Indigenous population, both on- and off-reserve. However, they did not reflect any allowance for language training costs, investments to increase the number and skills of Indigenous instructors, or development of the instructional culturally-appropriate tools.

For the purpose of this report, the total cost is simply indicative, and allows for an appreciation of the magnitude of required resources and how to better prepare for future needs. It is assumed to be a one-time expense, as opposed to an annual requirement. However, it will need to be spread across several years to ensure quality delivery of the programs with proper evaluation and adjustments along the way. Some smaller annual costs might be needed thereafter, if new adults come on stream and further upgrading is required (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2017).
Some of these costs will be offset by increases in productivity that are passed along to workers in the form of higher incidences of annual employment, more months worked per year, fewer hours worked per month, and higher wages. Using Canadian data, Murray et al (2009) have shown that raising literacy skill levels of workers gets high rates of return – about 36 per cent over a five-year period for companies and over 200 per cent for governments through increased tax revenues and reductions in spending, including the Employment Insurance benefits.

The only issue that might slow down the realization of benefits could be Canadian labour market itself. It might need some time to absorb and apply the newly-created skills. Some measures will need to be taken to increase the demand for literacy skills to compensate for the supply-side investments (Murray, et al., 2009)

Considering the outlined findings of the studies, it is obvious that the outcomes and benefits will significantly outweigh the initial costs, regardless of any discrepancies in assumptions. This will be especially true for Manitoba and Saskatchewan. As noted earlier in this report, Indigenous populations in these provinces represent a significant share of the total provincial population: 17 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively. Therefore, the initial costs will be higher, but the benefits will be more significant than in other Canadian provinces. Young Indigenous populations there will be the main source of replacement for the rapidly aging workforce and future contributors to the productivity and economic growth of these provinces.

Funding for literacy programs comes mainly from the federal government. Additional contributions come from provincial governments and private sector organizations. For the past decade, TD bank has worked with Frontier College to create early literacy opportunities in Indigenous communities. The Nunavut Literacy Council works with and encourages individuals, communities, governments, businesses, educators, and others to support literacy in Nunavut. Main sources of funding for Indigenous programs and services for Canadian colleges include operating grants from provincial/territorial governments, revenues from partnerships with Indigenous organizations, such as First Nations Bands, and federal funding through the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2010).

The 2017 Federal Budget introduced new approaches and funding to address the skill gap, ensure continuous support of lifelong learning in the Indigenous communities and improve access to education and training (Government of Canada, Department of Finance, 2017). The snapshot of these programs is presented in Appendix 1 below. It demonstrates the level of commitment the current federal government has towards raising adult literacy, with a targeted annual investment of about $1 billion between 2017 and 2022, in order to:

- help adult learners retrain or upgrade their skills to adapt to a changing labour market;
- assist young Canadians in getting the education, skills and work experience they need to start their careers;
- help women, older workers, Indigenous peoples and underrepresented groups more fully participate in education and employment opportunities.

However, all of these initiatives address only a small portion of the problem of low literacy in First Nations adult population. Daniel Wilson, a former director at the Assembly of First Nations, says government funding for First Nations programs and services may have kept pace with inflation, but for the past 17 years there has not been additional funding to reflect the rapidly increasing Indigenous population (Schwartz, 2013). A targeted response from the federal government for the total of $1 billion is required to ensure “catching up” with almost 20 years of underfunding. This targeted funding is proposed to be spread over five to six years, beginning in 2018/19, and could be partially offset by the additional commitment made in the 2017 Budget on expanding Labour Market Transfer Agreements.

The newly-established Skills Development Agency could provide leadership, market research and analysis, to help with coordinating efforts of all stakeholders, distributing funding and ensuring sound evaluation of the outcomes to inform future skills investments.

In 2010, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges identified some funding-related challenges faced by Indigenous communities that need to be considered and improved upon before moving forward:

- lack of financial assistance for students in adult upgrading or basic education – these programs are not considered to be at the post-secondary level, so there are no funding sources for students, except through Social Assistance;
- amounts do not recognize the costs of the diverse range of support services and upgrading needed by Indigenous learners before starting regular programs;
unstable project-based year-to-year funding for Indigenous program development and delivery, despite supplementary funding available through provincial governments. For example, when colleges receive funding to establish culturally-appropriate Indigenous student centres through provincial/territorial government programs, they struggle year-to-year to maintain and staff these facilities. This type of funding also results in colleges receiving last-minute funding that must be spent before the end of the fiscal year with little time to plan. This makes the service available one year and gone the next;

lack of funding for student support services in the community-based programs - institutions in Alberta and Saskatchewan, for example, reported that existing funding programs lacked the flexibility to deliver rural programming because the geographic and demographic reality in these regions does not fit the funding criteria. In order to access this type of federal funding, institutions are sometimes required to design a training program to meet the funder’s instead of learner’s needs;

insufficient coordination among federal funding agencies – sometimes several sources of funding are available for program delivery, but the funding parameters do not always match the changing labour market needs.

Existing Programs

As noted earlier, lower levels of literacy and educational attainment among the Indigenous population lead to lower rates of labour force participation and higher rates of dependence on income assistance. To address these growing challenges, in June 2009, the Government of Canada announced a new Federal Framework for Indigenous Economic Development, a government-wide platform for the improvement of Indigenous participation in the economy. In April 2010, the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy and the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership were replaced by the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS), a five-year program that was scheduled to be completed in March 2015.

ASETS supported one of the key priorities of the Framework, i.e., a skilled Indigenous workforce, by improving labour market outcomes and meaningful employment opportunities for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, based on three strategic pillars:

- demand-driven skills development;
- fostering strategic partnerships with the public and private sectors; and
- emphasizing increased accountability and results.

Under ASETS, the activities undertaken by recipient organizations were required to be implemented according to approved multi-year business plans that were to address the three strategic pillars noted above. Activities eligible for support included assistance in Indigenous labour market development, employment-related assistance, capacity building of Indigenous organizations to deliver employment-related programs and services, and support services for participants. For example, the following activities could be covered:

- support to employers/employees to encourage hiring/accepting employment;
- support to address barriers to employment, including child care centres and services;
- individual support with starting own business;
- support to design and deliver labour market services;
- ensure easy access to information on finding jobs, building skills, and career options;
- outreach, client assessment, job retention assistance;
- obtaining literacy and life skills; mentorship and coaching services;
- support with labour market opportunities and services for persons with disabilities;
- developing and upgrading reporting tools; business planning, audit and compliance.

Eligible recipients of funding included Indigenous-controlled organizations, bands, and Tribal Councils that distributed funding further based on their programs, policies and community needs. The programs would typically be delivered through local colleges and institutes, friendship and community centres, as well as through vocational training, apprenticeship programs and other ‘on-the-job’ training. The target population included First Nations, Inuit, Métis and non-status Indigenous adults living on- and off-reserve (Government of Canada, 2010).
Funding for ASETS programming was distributed to the regions using a complex allocation model. Payments were linked to financial and/or performance reviews based on the regular reporting. Examples of some key performance measurement indicators included: number of clients served; number of clients who successfully completed the program; number of participating employers in the target service area, etc.

Progress of the initiative was measured through direct, intermediate and ultimate outcomes, such as: agreement holders having the capacity to design and deliver labour market programs; program being responsive to labour market supply and demand; agreement holders delivering the programs, services and childcare supports; Indigenous people being aware of and having access to the programs; Indigenous people having the appropriate skills and support; partnerships being leveraged to support workplace and skills development; Indigenous people having the appropriate skills and support, and being increasingly employable and integrated into the labour market (Government of Canada, 2016).

Since 2014, the government has been consulting with Indigenous agreement holders, national Aboriginal organizations, provinces and territories, major employers, and other stakeholders, on the “future of the Indigenous labour market programming beyond 2015 and consideration of the ASETS renewal”.

The original multi-year funding for 2010-2015 was close to $1.7 billion, with about $300 million distributed annually. In 2016, due to the transition period and uncertainty over continuing the program, only $15 million was allocated in the budget over two years. The 2017 federal budget announced $50 million in funding for the 2017/18 fiscal year and for more government consultations with stakeholders to discuss renewal and reforming of ASETS.

Some of the previous studies on the program effectiveness of ASETS included:

- Employment and Social Development Canada internal audit of the implementation and management framework – May 2014;
- Employment and Social Development Canada evaluation of program activities and outcomes – February 2015;
- Métis National Council report on ASETS Renewal – March 2015;

Most of the feedback in these reports was positive. The program was found to be relevant and effective in preparing and training Indigenous peoples for post-secondary education and employment, as well as developing Indigenous businesses. It was concluded that ASETS “meets the priorities of the Government of Canada, and that there continues to be a demonstrable need for labour market programming for Aboriginal Canadians” (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015).

ASETS demonstrated increased employment and return-to-school outcomes. In about three years since its inception, approximately 48,000 clients became employed, 22,000 clients returned to school, 128,000 clients completed one or more interventions; with over 50 per cent of clients either employed or returned to school (Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, 2014).

The details of ASETS outcome analysis were provided as part of the 2015 evaluation report by the Employment and Social Development Canada (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015). The evaluation group measured the difference in the average annual labour market outcomes of ASETS participants in the five years before joining the program and outcomes in the year following their program start year. However, the results from that outcome analysis need to be interpreted with caution, as they pertain to a relatively short period following the start of participation. The gathered evidence demonstrated that:

- Participant’s average annual employment earnings increased by 17 per cent (+$1,621);
- The incidence of employment increased by 5 per cent between both periods.
- The proportion of participants in receipt of EI benefits increased by 3 per cent, while the average annual amount of EI benefits collected increased by 37 per cent (+$266), which implies an improved attachment to the labour market after program participation.
• Participants also had small increases in their use of SA benefits.

The Métis National Council noted in their report that employment remained the key measure of program success. David Chartrand of the Métis National Council said: “Since the beginning of ASETS in 2010 to December 31, 2013, we have together served 9,945 clients, of whom 2,221 were still in the process of completing their interventions as at December 31. Of the remaining 7,724, who completed what is known as an action plan, approximately 58 per cent had found employment within 12 weeks and 22 per cent had returned to school, which translates into an 80 per cent success rate.”

Through the ASETS program, the Native Women’s Association of Canada was able to help many Indigenous women reach their employment and skills training goals (see Appendix 2).

**Partnerships** were created among ASETS agreement holders, Aboriginal businesses, industries, educational institutions, not-for-profit organizations and different levels of government. Judy Whiteduck of the Assembly of First Nations confirmed: “The First Nations ASETS agreement holders built relationships with the business community at large. That network has become a critical mechanism to supporting First Nations citizens in accessing the work force. We can't emphasize enough how important this strategy is to our communities.”

As confirmed in the ESDC final evaluation report, dated February 2, 2015:

• About 2,350 ASETS partnerships were created;
• 71 per cent of partners were employers in either private (40 per cent) or public (31 per cent) sectors;
• 90 per cent of ASETS partners believed that their partnership with Aboriginal agreement holders would continue.

The reports noted another key factor in the success of the ASETS program - the development of customized training plans that allowed service delivery agents to meet the specific needs of particular Aboriginal individuals. Their awareness of community needs and knowledge of the local labour market resulted in high levels of effectiveness and efficiency within the program. Dawn Madahbee from the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board said: “The Board considers ASETS to be a successful program. The delivery mechanism is locally driven by Indigenous organizations, which allows for customized and tailored interventions that can target special needs and focus on the specificity of local labour markets.”

In answering the question whether ASETS should be extended, one needs to consider the arguments noted above, and the fact that Canada already has a program in place that has proven to not only produce good results, but is also familiar to Indigenous organizations and individuals, which is very important. Lack of information on available programming is one of the known barriers to participation. This program is recognizable and has a good reputation in the Indigenous communities. So, why reinvent the wheel?

The research has demonstrated that much of the literacy skill upgrading that is currently being offered is either insufficient or limited in its outreach. The mismatch between the skills of workers and the skills demanded by the labour market still exists, which means that relying on the education system alone to fix the problem is not a solution (Murray, Draft Report: Putting skills at the centre of the policy agenda: advice to the new agency, 2017). The ASETS program could provide that missing link when responding to varying labour market needs across the country. There is an opportunity to build on what is working well, to further strengthen the effectiveness of the agreements. More effort would be required from the employers and various levels of government.

This paper supports the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development to renew the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy for a minimum of five years. It is important to remember that addressing multiple barriers to employment requires several interventions over an extended period of time. The ASETS program definitely needs more time to demonstrate its full potential and effectiveness in supporting Indigenous peoples. However, it would also benefit from further improvement and reforms.

Like with any other large-scale program, several challenges and potential gaps have been identified during ASETS implementation, some of which are related to program design and administration, while others are driven by changes in population and labour market demands. After a detailed review of the findings in various evaluation reports and some published comments of the users, this paper proposes the following high-level recommendations aimed at reforming the program:
Improve Funding:
- Increase funding to match the growing population and offset the lack of funding escalation for over 15 years, while program costs and expectations were growing. This could be done through updated transfer agreements with built-in escalators for past and future years.
- Make the funding long-term and sustainable, to improve project planning, stability, and effectiveness.
- Improve funding allocation methodology, to address differences in program costs and barriers between rural and urban communities; ensure appropriate funding for the off-reserve Indigenous population; consider unique challenges faced by each of the Indigenous peoples.
- Adjust outcome requirements/deliverables for rural and urban communities and allow for consideration of incremental improvements.

Strengthen the establishment and maintenance of partnerships; improve connections with business communities and encourage industry groups to make investments in skills development and training programs; encourage formal agreements; consider offering tax incentives. Emphasize to businesses that early engagement in design is important as it allows them to align projects with their particular occupational needs. The best way to engage would be to raise awareness of the benefits and demonstrate return on investment.

Promote the program to encourage Indigenous learners. Work to improve the negative perception among employers around hiring Indigenous people.

Address capacity issues of agreement holders: high staff turnover, insufficient resources, heavy administrative burden including overlapping and duplicate reporting requirements, data collection and case management. Develop mechanisms and tools for accurate and up-to-date labour market information, specific to each Indigenous community, and ensure that the information is timely and easily accessible to service providers and agreement holders for forecasting in-demand employment opportunities. A coordinated effort is required to develop national and regional databases of Indigenous peoples seeking employment.

Improve Program Accessibility:
- Increase the allowable duration of interventions to ensure sustained outcomes.
- Make the criteria more flexible to include some of the non-employment-oriented programs. This will allow ASETS to address the upgrading and essential skills development more effectively. These programs do not always lead to direct employment, but are vital for future labour force participation for many individuals with low literacy.
- Ensure clear understanding of available programs and their eligibility criteria.
- Simplify application processes and moderate qualification requirements to be more inclusive, e.g., remove restrictions around EI eligibility.
- Offer alternative modes of program delivery.

Review and improve support services available to Indigenous ASETS clients to allow for more participation in training and employment opportunities. Make childcare services available to all Indigenous clients, including Métis, and consider covering transportation costs, especially for distant and rural communities.

ASETS is an important program to maintain. It helps to create long-term partnerships with employers, ensuring the developed skills are demand-driven, thus increasing the chance for the learner to be hired and, more importantly to sustain the skills through continuous employment.

There are many related literacy and skill upgrading programs delivered as part of ASETS through colleges and institutes, friendship centres and not-for-profit organizations, with additional provincial and private funding. Appendix 3 provides detailed examples of various Canadian and international projects.

Research Analysis

As noted earlier in this paper, low levels of literacy in the First Nations adult population impede their ability to be employed, receive competing remuneration, provide an adequate standard of living, and be actively involved in the community.
This research started with an ambitious goal of finding a perfect adult literacy program, no matter how small, that could be scaled up as part of the national effort to improve levels of literacy in the Indigenous populations and help them with the employment. At the end of the quest, it became obvious that many programs could be described as such, yet they were all different. Once compared against the results of the literature review and feedback received through the interviews, it became apparent that there cannot be any “one-size-fits-all” approach: each program fits its own, unique community, culture, history and socio-economic environment.

The 2007 review of workplace literacy and essential skills training programs in New Zealand also found “no evidence that one program model was more effective than any other” (Gray and Sutton, 2007). This echoes what the wider literature on literacy in the workplace conveys: what counts ultimately is not which model is used, but making sure that it suits the learners and their employer in terms of their specific needs and goals (CCL, 2007). In that sense, conducting a proper and thorough assessment is the key to success.

This research is based on interviews with representatives from the following institutions:

- Colleges and Institutes Canada – Ottawa, Ontario
- Assembly of First Nations – Ottawa, Ontario
- Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) – Merritt, British Columbia
- Saskatchewan Polytechnic – Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
- Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology – Thunder Bay, Ontario
- Confederate College – Thunder Bay, Ontario.

One of the approached colleges (NVIT) is Indigenous-led with a unique designation of an “Aboriginal public post-secondary institution.” It is governed by Nicola Valley’s five local bands, honouring traditional culture and values, while being a full independent member of BC’s public post-secondary education system, with legislated authority to grant its own course credits and transcripts. This made NVIT’s perspective on learning and program delivery particularly interesting. To date, there is only one other institute in Canada with the same status – Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies.

The interview questions were composed to cover issues of governance, funding and program design, in an attempt to identify possible common challenges and keys to success, discuss strategies for encouraging Indigenous adult learning. The sample size, while unintentionally small for a reliable quantitative analysis of such a vast and complex subject, produced some tentative qualitative results, echoed in the literature review presented earlier in this report:

1. Strong position of First Nations leaders that First Nations literacy training should be provided by First-Nations-led institutions with full control by the First Nations government. There is a strong need for improved relationships between First Nations and all levels of government.

2. To be effective, training needs to be unique to the community it serves, culturally appropriate, nourishing the learner’s identity, respecting family and community values, adequately funded, and delivered by specially-trained Indigenous teachers.

3. Provincial colleges and institutes have been reliable partners in providing support and training for Indigenous communities. Some concerns have been voiced about their limited ability to reach rural communities or offer basic literacy programs for learners with Level 1 and below.

4. Community and friendship centres continue to play an integral role in delivering services to all types of communities and learners, being central hubs for support services for Indigenous peoples, and administering the much-needed federal and provincial funding for programs, such as ASETS.

1. First Nations Leadership

In response to the interview request to identify success factors for First Nations adult programs, a representative from the Assembly of First Nations noted Indigenous governance as a key factor, i.e., the programs should be delivered by Indigenous-led institutions. He also emphasized the importance of First Nations leadership in defining major policies and government programs. This will ensure the effectiveness of the programs and build better relationships and understanding between First Nations and Canadian governments. Another interviewee mentioned that strict policies do not allow communities to have control over identifying their values, yet, for Indigenous peoples, this is the only source of identity.
“Culturally, Indigenous-led institutions are better for the Indigenous learners.”

– Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

The importance of Indigenous teachers, principals and curriculum was identified earlier in this paper, as part of the literature review. This was supported by all interviewees:

“A lot of times teachers and the system blame students, communities and colonialism for the failure of the programs. In reality, we need to change the system and ensure quality teaching staff, with intimate knowledge of Indigenous history, culture and customs,”

Nicola Valley Institute of Technology

In the interview with Saskatchewan Polytechnic, it was mentioned that, ideally, in provincial institutions the number of Indigenous teachers should be proportionally matched to the number of Indigenous students. This would allow for the delivery of culturally-sensitive and appropriate Indigenous curricula, to the extent possible.

To strengthen the relationships with First Nations government, two interviewees proposed that the federal government take meaningful action in addressing all recent comments and feedback received through numerous consultations with Indigenous communities and organizations. This would be the foundation for building trust in relationships, demonstrating respect, and instilling confidence in the seriousness of intentions and promises.

2. Effective literacy training for Indigenous adults

When reviewing the results of the interviews, the following distinct common features of successful literacy programs emerged:

- Culturally-relevant and respectful of Indigenous history and traditions;
- Understanding importance of family and community for learners;
- Running preliminary needs assessment and custom program development to reflect local community needs and labour market requirements;
- Indigenous program design delivered by Indigenous teachers;
- Hands-on activities and elders’ oversight and participation;
- Close proximity to home or on-site delivery with child-care service availability.

Community-based assessments are believed to be paramount to not only promoting and reaching out to potential learners, but also to the design of the program itself, whether as an individual plan, or community group training. They also help to ensure more appropriate placement for a student that would result in a rewarding experience.

As mentioned in an interview with NVIT, in order to ensure customized training and proper placement for their students, the institute came up with a detailed and innovative assessment strategy that is notably the most thorough approach to learners’ assessment among the interviewed sample group. They offer assessments to all communities in British Columbia, on a first-come-first-served basis with about 20 community visits to various locations per year. The strategy helps to assess levels of participants’ literacy and suggest an optimum student placement. This is a three-step process that is culturally-sensitive and appropriate. It helps with building rapport with potential future students and the community:

Step 1/Day 1 – orientation with community elder and sign-off on release forms
Step 2/Day 2 – discussion of assessment tools and what to expect during the assessment; run assessments and analyze the results
Step 3/Day 3 – present individuals with a snapshot of their skills on a given day (assessment day); provide overall community summary and recommendations of options to the community coordinator.

All interviewees highlighted the importance of an Indigenous perspective when designing the programs
and using of Indigenous examples. Empathy and understanding are vital for the success of the programs. At NVIT, they have a very short but extremely powerful message for the students: “We are you, too!” This gives their students a sense of community and belonging.

3 Provincial colleges and institutes continue to be reliable partners in delivering Indigenous literacy and skills programs

Through research, it has become obvious that provincial colleges and institutes currently remain the primary providers of high school equivalency programs and adult upgrading courses across Canada. With campuses reaching over 3,000 communities, including First Nations reserves, remote villages, northern communities, and urban centres, they are able to meet many educational needs of First Nations peoples. They are often the only post-secondary institutions present in remote northern communities, and, especially in recent years, many of them have been actively working to create curricula that are respectful of Indigenous values and cultures.

Saskatchewan Polytechnic has about 70 per cent self-identified Indigenous students. The Institute tries to create a welcoming atmosphere to ‘cater’ to its students’ needs through many initiatives that have proven to be effective:

- Indigenous student centres;
- Elders’ support;
- Easy access to First Nations books and resources;
- Workshops for teachers on how to Indigenize the curriculum;
- Partnerships with local friendship centres;
- Indigenous student advisors for peer-to-peer assistance.

Many First Nations communities are turning to colleges and institutes to provide their youth, who have dropped out of high school, with a learning pathway that gives them their high school diploma or equivalent, and transitions them to post-secondary education. For adult learners, colleges provide laddering opportunities from adult upgrading and essential skills development, to career-oriented educational programs and transitions to university. Two possible reasons for using provincial institutions emerged during the interviews: (1) some communities do not have the structural, governing or resource capacity to run these programs themselves; (2) most Indigenous-led institutions do not have accreditation that would legally allow them to issue certificates and diplomas that are required for entering the workforce. More Indigenous-led institutions with proper accreditation, like NVIT, are required.

A key area in community-based training is related to trades and apprenticeship. To provide trades’ training in rural and remote communities, some institutes, such as NVIT, have acquired specially equipped mobile training trailers. They have been successfully used to deliver the programs to the communities.

All interviewees confirmed that their institutions provide basic education programs free of charge to their participants, with funding received through federal and provincial grants. It was noted, however, that more often than not, funding is sufficient to cover only the start-up costs of the programs. This was highlighted as one of the biggest challenges. Many interviewees confirmed that funding has not changed over the past 15-20 years, yet the demands and needs for the programs have increased, especially with the fast-growing Indigenous population. With recent efforts of the Liberal government and all the media attention on the problem, interviewed participants confirmed that they have not noticed any significant changes locally. Program delivery agents still experience funding inadequacy, strained administrative resources and uncertainty over future policies, programs and funding.

In 2014, Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) launched its Indigenous Education Protocol, a framework to guide institutions in strengthening their Indigenous education programs. It underscored the importance of structures and approaches required to address indigenous peoples’ learning needs, and support self-determination and socio-economic development of Indigenous communities. In the near future, CICan will be doing a survey for the signed members to see how the Protocol has been changing their institution, and what changes need to take place in the future.
4. Role of community and friendship centres

Due to limited funding and resources, colleges and institutes are sometimes not able to deliver programs to rural or remote communities. Community and friendship centres provide reliable and culturally-appropriate support to Indigenous people, regardless of location. They usually administer federal and provincial funding of various programs, including controlling and reporting functions.

When working in partnership with colleges, community centres would typically run basic adult education and essential skills training, while colleges and institutes would take on programs geared to level-2 literacy and above.

In response to the question why they do not provide basic literacy training at their institutions and, instead, after assessing their students, send them to local community or friendship centres, two Ontario colleges provided the following explanation:

- Adult learners at or below level-1 literacy are cognisant of and sensitive about the perception of other people regarding their abilities and level of education. They feel more comfortable in an informal setting with smaller classes. It helps with building confidence and self-esteem.

- Unclear definitions of program success in meeting funding requirements adds unnecessary stress on community centres to meet the target numbers of learners. This is becoming alarmingly more important than student needs, and creates unnecessary and unhealthy competition, while losing focus on the best interests of the learners.

It is important to remember that for the Indigenous population in Canada, elders, cultural relevance and a community mindset should guide the design, development, delivery and evaluation of any local literacy programming (Gulati, Literacy Matters: Unlocking the Literacy Potential of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, 2013)

Several important points emerged from the interviews that are worth noting for consideration:

- **Prevention** is the most important component in moving forward, through educating younger generations, who will be joining the workforce in the near future. It is important to develop literacy and essential skills during primary and secondary education years, since catching up in adulthood is a much greater challenge.

- Providing legislated authority to First-Nations-led institutions to **grant their own course credits** and issue transcripts will be a big leap in the right direction. For the longest time, this has been one of the most deterring factors that made Indigenous people seek certified courses elsewhere in order to ensure that they could confirm their certification with potential employers.

- **The role of local businesses** and their contribution to essential skills training and basic skills upgrade have not improved much over recent years and have been quite sporadic. This will make it challenging to create partnerships and sustainable employment.

- The research supported the literature review on the need for **immediate action in Saskatchewan and Manitoba**, two provinces with extremely high rate of unemployment and low literacy among Indigenous populations.

- **A coordinated and strategic approach** to new programs and initiatives is a must, to avoid duplication of efforts and wasted resources. “Someone needs to run the ship.”

- One of the interviewees emphasized that for any literacy or educational program to be successful, the **fundamental needs of Indigenous peoples** need to be addressed first, such as: housing, food security, safety and development of self-determination. “Shelters are full of Indigenous people. They have to worry about what they will eat tomorrow, or where they will sleep. We’ll be trying to educate people, who are in the meantime trying to survive.” Literacy, most likely, will not be their first priority. At the same time, literacy and essential skills programs have to be set in place and available for when they are ready to participate in them. Until then, the focus should be on ensuring that their basic needs are met.

As suggested by one of the interviewees, the perfect recipe for the future success of Indigenous adult programs needs to include sustained political will, change of direction and attitude, First Nations leadership, and a little bit of time.
Lessons Learned

This paper reviewed the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS), including its success stories and challenges, and provided recommendations on its reform. It was established that colleges and institutes serve as key delivery agents for ASETS Agreement Holders. They help to design and implement many vital community projects to ensure success of the Indigenous peoples in the workforce. In that sense, it was important to know the professional opinion and real-life experience of the subject-matter experts from various Canadian colleges and institutes on how to improve adult literacy programs, and thus ensure quick and sustainable work placement of the Indigenous adult population. Tentative findings were presented in the previous section. To conclude the analysis, this “Lessons Learned” chapter was created. It reflects on the findings from both sections, which could be grouped into five categories:

Cultural relevance and respect

- Demand-driven programs ensure student retention in the program and quick and sustainable employability: through addressing specific individual needs and goals of the learners and providing them with a set of skills based on market demand.
- Integration of Indigenous culture and traditions, as well as respect for the diversity of Indigenous communities, contribute to program success.
- Local community ownership, along with cultural knowledge embedded in training programs, is vital for adding value and enhancing engagement in education and training, as well as providing the link to relevant local employment opportunities.

Community involvement / Design and delivery

- Detailed initial assessment of the student’s and employer’s needs is vital for the learner’s retention and overall success of the program.
- Active ownership of programs by Indigenous organizations, the ability to tailor programs to fit diverse Indigenous groups’ and individuals’ needs, and the long-term partnerships with large local employers are important success factors.
- Consideration of existing barriers is needed when developing programs: basic needs, health and social barriers, lack of community infrastructure, crowded and unsound housing, remoteness and lack of economic development.
- Individuals leaving their home communities for education and training have low levels of perseverance and completion.
- Community engagement is fundamental for the effective delivery of Indigenous programs. Family, personal, community and cultural factors can either impede completion of a program or contribute to a higher level of retention. Trainers and providers can play an active role in encouraging family and community support.
- Existing programs demonstrated the need for more Indigenous faculty and staff recruitment.
- Best results were achieved when combining literacy upgrading with hands-on/ vocational and essential skills’ training.
- Positive, supportive and respectful trainers are necessary for helping students stay on track to complete their studies.

Adequacy of funding

- Sporadic funding, repeated short-term extensions, and lengthy approval processes are associated with program delays and service gaps. In some cases, delays in funding approval have led to clients missing out on employment opportunities. When funding is secured, agreement holders are pressed for time to hire staff and start delivery, with little planning time left for programs, to make them most effective.
- There has been a noticeable challenge in coordinating and prioritizing Indigenous-specific programs and funding needs. Some institutions train more Indigenous students but are not recognized for their
expertise by external funding sources.

- The funding allocation model has to be updated to reflect differences between communities and their varying barriers. For instance, a small number of Indigenous students in rural communities does not make their programs financially viable, even though the programs may address an extremely important need.

**Coordination and governance**

- Indigenous governance and leadership are vital for the success of the programs. Better education attainment would be achieved in Indigenous-led institutions.

- Programs across Canada need strong coordination yet flexible governance:
  
  Great need to align them with other supports, and coordinate across all levels of government. These programs cannot be done in isolation: “wrap supports”, such as childcare and transportation, are vital. Small and rural communities that lack governance and education structures, experience difficulties in running the programs and having their voice heard.

- Complex systems, with multiple levels of government, often with overlapping responsibilities for employment-related programs, can result in an inefficient allocation of resources through duplication, or lack of coordination in the development and delivery of programs, and more importantly, confusion and loss of motivation in clients when ‘bouncing between providers’ and being unable to access the needed support.

- It is important to develop effective, long-lasting partnerships among service providers, community groups, education institutions and employers.

**Efficient Administration and Evaluation**

- Communities experience high administrative burden with frequent and time-consuming reporting and audits; burdensome and lengthy application requirements; and conflicting program rules with other policy areas (losing support in one program over another).

- Slow proposal review and response puts pressure on timely hiring of contractors and delays program delivery.

- Measuring success solely on having an “employment result” or confirmed “number of learners” falls short of recognizing other important outcomes of training programs, such as personal development and positive effects on families and communities.

- To inspire retention and motivation, programs should set clear learning milestones with frequent recognition of progress and incremental certification.

- Support services are key for Indigenous student retention as they address the barriers many learners must overcome to succeed.
Raising literacy in the First Nations’ adult population in the context of labour market participation

Recommendations

Various initiatives in First Nations communities suggest that it is feasible to substantially improve First Nations education outcomes. In the past, much of the discussion has revolved fairly narrowly around funding. Additional funding will be required to achieve the education gains proposed in this paper; however, while necessary, it is not the only requirement. Much more needs to be done (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2017).

Previously, there have been many attempts to raise literacy in the Indigenous adult population; however, with limited success. The problem of low literacy still persists. Clearly, it needs a different approach in order to be truly balanced and inclusive, with meaningful outcomes.

Benseman, Sutton and Lander (2005) found that the effectiveness of community-based basic skills programs is associated with community ownership of programs, resources and strong collaboration between providers and communities (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015).

To ensure the success of raising literacy in the First Nations adult population, the approach has to meet six main criteria:

1. Be designed and delivered, where possible, by First Nations with buy-in from the adults in need of training or literacy upgrade;
2. Ensure gradual transfer of Indigenous programs’ governance and ownership to First Nations;
3. Be consistent and systemic in approach with customized programs for individual community needs;
4. Be holistic: embrace all socio-economic factors; improve collaboration with First Nations; respect and incorporate culture, history and focus on lifelong learning;
5. Have sufficient, targeted, long-term funding to broadly address the issue and close the gap;
6. Include measures to increase the labour market demand for literacy skills. This will help to ensure that business communities are ready for the ‘intake’ of the newly-created skill-force and avoid the hidden issue of skill loss.

Traditional policy on raising literacy in adults has centred on the acquisition of skills through education and training. The new data make it clear that addressing loss of skills that are not being used is equally important (Murray, Draft Report: Putting skills at the centre of the policy agenda: advice to the new agency, 2017).

It is recommended that a special joint Committee or Agency be set up to include all stakeholders, and ensure collaboration and a holistic approach to the problem. It would play an active coordination and partnership role in promoting literacy in the First Nations adult population and the need for employer-based literacy training, as well as situating these initiatives in an overall strategic framework that will involve actions by the governments (Murray, Draft Report: Putting skills at the centre of the policy agenda: advice to the new agency, 2017).

The Agency would play a major supporting role in a gradual transition to full Indigenous governance of education and literacy training. It would help with capacity-building during the transition period to ensure that First Nations communities are ready to fully administer the programs. The Agency could help with identifying the desired outcomes and setting realistic targets; developing performance indicators that would be reflective of the Indigenous culture and lifelong learning approach, and developing assessment tools with incremental progress reporting. It would ensure clear communication and it would streamline funding, assist with better collaboration, provide regular support and consultations.

The Agency would develop data and analytical tools, review existing policies and initial assessments, and accelerate further evolution of the response. It would work closely with the new federal Skills Organization, assisting in researching and developing the approach reflective of First Nations’ needs. The work of the Agency could be coordinated by the federal government’s Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.

As identified through the literature review in this paper, a one-time funding of $1 billion will be required in addition to the existing initiatives, to address the gap and raise literacy in Indigenous populations. Existing funding initiatives support the day-to-day needs and assist with continuous improvement, but they are not
sufficient to close the gap. It is proposed to distribute the funding over the next five or six years. The Agency would coordinate the development of a special allocation framework, to allow for better planning and ensure a targeted response.

The federal government has a clear constitutional responsibility for making the required investments (Murray & Shillington, 2012). There is also a need to bring together an existing patchwork of policies, in one coordinated effort to address the issue. Good Indigenous-led governance will facilitate the implementation of policies on raising adult literacy; ensure efficiency and equitability, transparency and accountability of the programs.

This report has demonstrated the importance and urgency of raising literacy in First Nations adults, in order to improve labour market participation, and their economic and personal well-being. The following key steps are proposed as general guidelines to the literacy programs:

Step I: Data gathering; detailed, culturally-appropriate needs’ assessment; program design
Step II: Adequate and stable funding with set schedule of payments with built-in escalators
Step III: Program delivery:
  Responsible institutions, strong collaboration and First Nations leadership
  Buy-in from participants
  Customized programs and materials; specially-trained Indigenous educators
  Measurable and meaningful targets/milestones; Indigenous design and delivery with active input from elders; mandatory but manageable reporting
  Pilot projects/individual approach to various communities with unique needs
  Defined timeline for implementing changes
  Regular, open and clear communication/media campaigns to promote programs and encourage participation
Step IV: Monitoring/evaluation; making adjustments based on progress; sustaining the program/ensuring consistency

Recommendations provided in this report are merely guidelines, as each community will have to develop its own approach that would address individual needs, circumstances and cultural traditions. There are several important factors that need to be considered when designing the approach:

**Initial Assessment and Design**

Sensitive screening and initial needs assessment is crucial in retaining and supporting potential learners. If the design of the program does not meet learners’ needs, they might give up at the first hurdles of their learning process. Initial assessments will help to identify whether an individual has a need for literacy, numeracy or language training, and help to place him/her in an appropriate learning program (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015).

**Culture and history**

As noted by the Auditor General in November 2016, the situation calls for a problem-solving mindset with solutions built around people and with programs based on peoples’ needs. It is also important to recognize and consider cultural and linguistic diversity of First Nations communities when deciding on the approach to use, as well their ability and capacity to self-govern (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2017). Turbulent history and negative experience with residential schools have changed the attitude towards formal schooling. New approaches have to be developed, including experiential and lifelong, holistic learning, rooted in Indigenous languages and culture.

Almost 30 years ago, in 1988, Jean Lave, the originator of the situated learning theory, stated that learning is situated within authentic activity, context and culture. He argued that developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgeable skillful are parts of the same process, with the former motivating, shaping, and giving meaning to the latter. It still holds true, especially for Indigenous peoples with their strong cultural and community values.
Location

There is a considerable geographic variation in average literacy scores among Indigenous peoples, with some areas where data is not available. The proportion of Indigenous adults with literacy skills below Level 3 varies significantly geographically and by age (Statistics Canada and HRSDC, 2005). Indigenous communities are typically rural and isolated. In fact, three out of five First Nations communities have limited or no link to an urban centre; as compared to similarly small non-Indigenous communities in Canada. This also needs to be considered when developing an approach. The shorter the commuting distance, the more likely the participants will start and stay with the program.

Coordination of efforts

The needs of various jurisdictions could be very different from one to another, including interests within a province, e.g., rural vs. urban communities, or across industries (The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2016). Service delivery coordination is important for improving program outcomes and efficiency, and avoiding duplication/saving resources.

Adequate quality of teaching staff

The importance of using teaching staff with special qualifications and knowledge of Indigenous languages and culture has been proven through many literacy programs across Canada. Active participation of and support from the elders in the programs is also vital. Many colleges and universities have started offering special training for Indigenous teachers.

Addressing skill loss

People lose skills that are not being used. It is equally important to address this problem as to address problems in acquiring skills through education and training. Skills enable participation in literacy-intensive experiences, which in turn allow for the maintenance and enhancement of those skills. If people don’t use literacy skills after they have left school or college, they can lose them (Murray, Draft Report: Putting skills at the centre of the policy agenda: advice to the new agency, 2017). Employers need to create environments that allow the use of newly acquired skills. It is an important condition for effective workplace learning (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015).

The role of employers

Employers have limited ability to check the level of literacy of the newly hired staff as common credentials don’t provide reliable information. They do, however, have the means to assess and upgrade the skills of existing employees. It is important to encourage and enable them to provide literacy training. It would have a high pay-off. The government could help to develop and market a feasible and efficient training approach (Murray, Draft Report: Putting skills at the centre of the policy agenda: advice to the new agency, 2017). One of the options would be to add literacy training to vocational training.

Balance of skill demand and supply

In jurisdictions where literacy skills of workers are under-utilized, it is important to find the means to increase aggregate skill demand. This might be achieved through the adoption of more skill-intensive technologies of production and work organization.

In jurisdictions where the levels of demand for literacy skills exceed the skills of currently employed workers, which is true for most Indigenous subgroups, it will be important to increase aggregate skill supply and invest in skill upgrading. This might be achieved through making improvements in the quantity and quality of current educational outputs and increases in levels of adult education, training and literacy instruction (Murray & Shillington, Understanding Aboriginal Literacy Markets in Canada: a segmentation analysis, 2012).
Environment

Create environments for adults conducive to learning: offer childcare centres for their children for the duration of learning, offer flexible work and study hours, distant education options, one-on-one support, monetary incentives for skills improvement, scholarships towards continued education, computer purchase loans, to name a few. It is important to find motivation for each group/ area/individual and further customize the program to ensure that the learning needs are met.

Promotion/ Motivation

The lack of motivation to improve literacy skills is a serious obstacle. Often, low-skilled individuals either do not see the need to improve their numeracy and literacy skills or lack the motivation because they have low expectations of the benefits, perceive various barriers to participation, or drop out because of inadequate program design.

Typically, motivation can be helped by advertising the benefits of participation in a course and providing recommendations from former participants. A Norwegian study found that, compared to more highly-skilled learners, low-skilled learners are motivated to engage in learning by extrinsic motivators - related to rewards, such as career progression, better pay, unemployment benefits or external pressure, and might change with circumstances – rather than intrinsic motivators, which relate to learning itself - wanting to complete school degree, develop through learning, or fulfil personal aspirations (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015).

Ironically, the ‘fight’ and desire for self-governance by Indigenous peoples has proven to be one of the best motivators for improving literacy and education among Indigenous population.

Funding/ incentives

There is a need for sustainable multi-year funding commitment, to help organizations plan better and try innovative approaches. Inconsistency of funding creates gaps in service delivery, negatively impacting clients. Sporadic funding, repeated short-term extensions, and lengthy approval processes are associated with delays, service gaps, start-up problems and missed employment opportunities for some clients (Wannell & Currie, 2016).

It is proposed that the government would partially compensate employers for training costs, depending on the confirmed new average level of skill. This will encourage training providers to ensure significant skill gain (Murray, Draft Report: Putting skills at the centre of the policy agenda: advice to the new agency, 2017).

The firms have to consider the opportunities for further application of the newly-acquired skills for staff to avoid the skill loss. Government needs to find the measures to incentivize the firms to create more knowledge and skill-intense jobs, hire more First Nations people, and reduce the percentage of low-skilled staff in the labour force.

Evaluation and Monitoring

Systematic assessment of learners is important (Murray, Draft Report: Putting skills at the centre of the policy agenda: advice to the new agency, 2017). It is meant to inform future policy and program decisions, and it becomes part of reporting on use of funding for the purposes of transparency and accountability, as well as for reviewing program efficiency and effectiveness. Weekly and monthly student reports are proposed to follow the progress and help the students stay on track with their personal goals. A culturally-appropriate framework for measuring learning progress has to be agreed upon and set up. Program evaluation could be done through discussion groups with learners, interviews with community partners and supporting organizations, etc. It is important to be mindful of the burden that detailed reporting could create for small First Nations communities with scarce administrative resources.

Literacy is both a fundamental human right and a foundation for lifelong learning.
Conclusion

The problem of low levels of literacy among Indigenous populations is not new or exclusive to Canada. It is just as acute in other parts of the world, including highly developed countries, such as Australia and United States. What brings it to the forefront of the policy discussion in Canada is a set of favourable conditions that make the timing right for meaningful action. There is a strong political will on the part of the current Liberal government, on the one hand, and pressing labour market need for improved productivity and skilled workforce due to the aging Canadian population, on the other hand.

The Canadian economy does not make full use of the available supply of literacy skills. It uses only 63 per cent of the aggregate supply available in the Indigenous population. Finding ways to increase the aggregate demand for labour would yield significant increases in Indigenous earnings and output. The magnitude of potential returns justifies public investment in literacy upgrading. Realizing Canada’s full economic potential will depend critically on the rapid public investment in adult literacy (Murray & Shillington, Understanding Aboriginal Literacy Markets in Canada: a segmentation analysis, 2012).

There are also many intangible outcomes that are just as important, such as increased confidence, independence, improved mental health and better parenting skills, to name a few. An improved level of literacy will also contribute to the health and socio-economic well-being of Indigenous peoples. Given the history of colonization and residential schools, Canada has a moral obligation to provide adequate support and ensure every effort is made to rebuild trust and good relationships with Indigenous peoples and governments. This policy will become successful only when the governance and ownership are placed with Indigenous people.

The purpose of this report was to bring to the forefront the problem of low literacy among the Indigenous adult population and First Nations, in particular. Through extensive literature and studies review, it has been confirmed that low levels of literacy in the First Nations adult population impede their ability to be employed, receive competitive remuneration, provide adequate standard of living, and be actively involved in the community. This report compared levels of literacy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada, and how they measure against the rest of the world; established and demonstrated the connection between literacy and employment; and reviewed existing approaches to improving adult literacy in Indigenous populations (i.e., program design and delivery, theory behind most effective adult learning techniques, funding issues and cost/benefit analysis, providing cost estimates to eliminate skill shortages). In addition, this report explored the impact of low literacy on other policy areas; provided context for urgent action, and analyzed the effectiveness of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, which was introduced to improve labour market outcomes and meaningful employment for Indigenous peoples.

For Indigenous individuals and communities, barriers to improving literacy skills are plentiful. They range from geographic location, funding and health, to low self-esteem, lack of confidence and trust. However, with every barrier and challenge comes a solution and an opportunity. Many success factors were identified in this report and built into proposed recommendations and overall approach.

The research part of this paper had its limitations. The scope of the research included gathering information from provincial post-secondary institutions, Indigenous organizations and friendship centres. Although, many more were invited to participate, only six experts were available for an interview. This was in large part due to the fixed timing for this research and non-response rate from the participants. Therefore, the findings might not provide the intended quantitative analysis, or accurate and conclusive review of the Canada-wide approach to raising literacy among Indigenous population. However, some tentative themes did emerge, confirming the information presented in the background sections of this report.

In summary, this research demonstrated that to be fully effective, public policy needs to:

- ensure that ownership and governance is placed with the Indigenous government, and programs are delivered through Indigenous-led institutions;
- remove participation barriers; and
- encourage and motivate learners, social partners, and education providers to ‘invest’ in adult literacy.

Building the literacy ‘bridge’ will require an enormous commitment from First Nations learners and all levels of government, along with sustainable progress in other important areas, such as health, housing, food safety and security. When completed, this bridge will become, by far, the most important ‘infrastructure’ project in
Canada. Hopefully, the first powerful strides taken in the right direction by the current Liberal government will turn into an amazing journey and new beginnings.

Appendix 1

2017 Federal Budget: Skills, Innovation and Middle-Class Jobs

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Promoting STEM to Young Canadians  4  3  2  2  2  12
Subtotal - Equipping Canadians With the Skills They Need to Get Good Jobs  753  1,013  1,090  1,185  1,184  5,225
Subtotal - A Nation of Innovators  323  475  381  321  216  1,717
Subtotal - Canada’s Innovation Economy: Clean Technology, Digital Industries and Agri-Food  104  266  294  257  225  1,146
Total - Chapter 1: Skills, Innovation and Middle-Class Jobs  1,180  1,754  1,766  1,764  1,625  8,089

Source: Government of Canada – Budget 2017 – Building a Strong Middle Class

Appendix 2

The Native Women’s Association of Canada

The Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) is one of two National Aboriginal Organizations who hold ASETS agreements. NWAC is committed to enhancing and strengthening the economic reality for Aboriginal women, their families and communities across Canada. Through ASETS program, they are able to provide supports such as tuition, living allowance, child care, job starts and other resources that can help Indigenous women reach their employment and skills training goals. NWAC offers five distinct programs:

- Individual Training Purchase - assists clients in obtaining the skills they need for employment; provides financial assistance for courses and supplies.
- Job Creation Partnership - offers clients a paid work placement experience to improve their long-term employment prospects; provides funding to employers to bring on a client for a unique work experience tailored specifically to that individual’s skill set, education and previous work experience.
- Group Training/ Special Projects - provides funding to support training opportunities for employment skills and work experience through community-based projects, focused on regional priorities.
- Targeted Wage Subsidy - offers temporary wage subsidies to employers as an incentive to hire individuals who require on-the-job training or have marginal work experience.
- Self-Employment Benefit - provides financial support to clients pursuing self-employment; provides funding for start-up costs including business plan development.

As outlined in the 2016 NWAC Annual report, ASETS provided support to 253 clients with the following results:
  • Employed – 121 women
  • Returned to school – 44 women
  • Unemployed but available for work – 14 women
  • No longer in the workforce – 5 women.

It should be noted that not all clients were scheduled to complete their programs in 2015/16 fiscal year; many were set to complete in 2016/17.

In the 2015/16 fiscal year, NWAC held 17 agreements with employers, sector councils, and education and training institutes. There was a substantial increase in sub-agreement partnerships, which helped NWAC to deliver more skills training opportunities to Indigenous women within the limited budget.

Communication was the key to ASETS program success at NWAC. It included in-person and teleconference engagement with national coordinators, which helped to address clients’ concerns and improve the processes: from receiving client’s application - to intake - to final follow-up for results entry.
NWAC also succeeded in extremely strong partnerships and client interventions on in-demand occupations. New Gold Rainy River project was an example of an excellent partnership that garnered 7 Indigenous women employment with a starting wage of $45,000 - $55,000/year in an area where unemployment was extremely high.

Appendix 3

As referenced in the report, this attachment provides detailed examples on various Canadian and international initiatives and projects on raising adult literacy in Indigenous populations.

Canadian Experience

The Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency offers a complementary program to ASETS in the North - the Northern Adult Basic Education Program (NABEP). It is an education-support program designed to help Northerners get targeted training so they can participate more fully in the labour market. The program has been delivered through the three territorial colleges in Canada’s North: Aurora College, Yukon College, and Nunavut Arctic College. Between 2011 and 2016, they received $30.9 million in funding through NABEP, with renewal for $14.7 million in 2017 over the next three years. This funding has been dedicated to improve access to the adult basic education in the North. In 2014/15, the program served 254 adult learners in Nunavut; 789 adult learners in the Northwest Territories; and 215 adult learners in Yukon, with about 90 per cent learners self-identified as Indigenous peoples. One of the keys to the success of the program was its delivery on-site, in the communities.

In 2014, the Nunavut Arctic College in partnership with the Kivalliq Mine Training Society, offered a three-week Workplace Readiness Workshop for 40 participants in four communities – Chesterfield Inlet, Whale Cove, Coral Harbour, and Baker Lake. The workshop was in direct response to mining industry demand, and focused on personal management and communication skills, job application and success strategies, and personal financial management of the participants (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, 2016).

As part of the heavy equipment training program in Pelly Crossing community in Yukon, students learned nine essential skills by using heavy equipment as a vehicle for program delivery. They reviewed safe worksite practices in a classroom environment and then applied that knowledge in a real industrial setting with tools and supplies provided for them by the local construction company (Government of Canada, 2017).

A good example of essential skills training through provincial college took place in four First Nations communities in northern Saskatchewan: Peepeekisis, Okanese, Star Blanket and Little Black Bear. They were in need of skilled maintenance workers for their community buildings and homes. Parkland College was able to provide training through its Residential Building Maintenance Worker program. The college entered into an agreement with File Hills Tribal Council in east-central Saskatchewan to provide Essential Skills upgrading for individuals with essential skill levels 1 and 2, as they are often disadvantaged in the workplace because they have difficulty reading complex written instructions and learning technical skills. The File Hills Tribal Council referred participants interested in this kind of training from its bands. Okanese First Nation provided the classroom space, as well as a building where students could practise hands-on skills. As a result, the students were able to learn theory in the classroom while putting their knowledge to work in the community. Parkland College’s goal was to build individual skills while making some positive changes within local First Nations communities. Students acquired valuable skills and took pride in repairing buildings in their communities, and the communities benefited from improvements to those buildings. The 13-week program aimed to help low-skilled First Nations people obtain a level of training that would allow them to enter the workforce and maintain employment. Six students went on to complete the program, and all six were employed at the end of the training (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2017).

Northwest Community College in British Columbia offers the following programs to Indigenous students:

- Community Literacy and Learning - course that bridges community literacy programming with the college for learners and practitioners. The course recognizes and maintains the strengths of the two different providers: college and community literacy organizations.
- Career and College Prep - provides high-school-level courses for adult students in an adult environment.
- Essential Skills for Work Certificate through community-based programming - offered in partnership with First Nations communities of Northwest BC who participate in the program design and delivery.
The design and content of the program is focused on a holistic applied educational experience that integrates the social, spiritual, cultural and educational aspects of a person’s learning. As such, the program attempts to build participants self-esteem, pride and respect for traditional knowledge, culture and language; strengthen personal life skills; and, develop academic skills. It further seeks to prepare participants to make the transition to post-secondary education and/or positions within a wide range of local economies. The program integrates college resources from various departments with the cultural and social resources of Elders and community members. The community provides the “place of learning” and the infrastructure as well as access to community supports and resources. The college provides the instructional funding and resources.

International Experience

Canada is not unique in looking at ways to improve adult literacy with a strong emphasis on learner’s identity and respect for his/her culture. Other countries also recognize the importance of literacy in enhancing productivity, reducing business costs and improving competitiveness. International experiences provide many pertinent and useful examples of successful approaches to raising literacy.

One of them is nation-wide and community-based vocational literacy program piloted in India in 2006. Poor literacy remains a major issue among traditionally disadvantaged groups in India, such as women, ethnic minorities, ‘scheduled tribes’ (the official designation given to groups of historically disadvantaged indigenous peoples in India) and migrants.

A Saakshar Bharat program was implemented in 2006, typically providing 300 hours of basic literacy education, vocational education and skill development, applied sciences and sports to a learner. The government acted as facilitator and resource provider that worked closely with local communities to tailor the program to their needs. The program was funded by the government of India and other national state-level agencies, such as the National Institute for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The core content was based on the broad National Curricular Framework for Adult Education and designed according to local needs and relevance. Adult educators and subject experts developed learning material based on assessment of learners’ needs and interests. The adult education centres were the operational arm of the program, responsible for the organisation and delivery of classes. They were established by local governments at village level, with one centre being set up for a population of 5,000, with two paid coordinators and several volunteers. The details of the pilot are outlined in Box 1 below.
Box 1

Malappuram’s Vocational Skill Development Training and Literacy Equivalency program was set up in an effort to provide literacy and vocational training to socio-economically disadvantaged and marginalized communities in the Malappuram district of the state of Kerala, in south-west India. Since 2006, the program has served 50,000 learners. The philosophy was built on the idea that basic literacy can be meaningful for individuals only when they can use it in day-to-day life and in earning a living. The program’s embedded literacy curriculum was adapted to local needs, resources and contexts. Demand-driven and relevant programming was developed through the Participatory Rural Appraisal process, which ensured that content was relevant to learners’ livelihoods and socio-cultural realities, dealing with topics such as health, hygiene, agriculture and finance.

The program provided literacy training and the opportunity to attain standards equivalent to fourth, seventh and tenth grade alongside vocational skills development. Its vocational training was diverse and appealed to a variety of local industries. Instruction and textbooks were offered in the community’s local language and also available in Braille. Students kept a journal for tracking daily activities and progress. Volunteers helped learners with no or low literacy skills to fill it out. It served as a motivating factor as students could see their progress and set further learning goals. The journal also helped the trainers identify the individual needs and progress of their students to better tailor their instruction.

All students were evaluated on completion of the first year of the program. Vocational training courses were 60 per cent practical and 40 per cent theory. As part of each training course, the centre provided supplementary sessions in subjects such as financial education, health promotion, sanitation, human rights and life enrichment education. Classes were held in schools, village resource centres and other sites identified through the participatory rural appraisal process as suitable locations. The program placed emphasis on the ongoing training of its vocational tutors and literacy facilitators.

Potential participants were identified and recruited through village resource centres. The participatory rural appraisal method was used to identify the needs and interests of beneficiaries and to develop relevant learning material and training for the program.

The program conducted continuous assessment and final evaluation of all its training programs. Twenty per cent of the final evaluation was for attendance and participation. After the final evaluation, the centres awarded learners with a graded certificate, which was recognized by various government and private agencies for employment. Monitoring and evaluation were integral to the program. Both learners and facilitators engaged in ongoing learning assessment. At the onset and upon completion of the program, students conducted a self-evaluation of their degree of skill proficiency according to performance indicators set by teachers and administrators. Program coordinators assessed teachers’ performance through observation and monitoring.

Since its inception in 2006, the program has reported a number of key achievements:

- Approximately 50,000 participants have received vocational training with 43,100 working.
More female learners and alumnae report helping their children and other family members acquire literacy skills, creating an even greater impact in their communities.

Communities have become more sustainable and self-sufficient through vegetable farming and microenterprises.

The dropout rate has dramatically lowered.

Although it has made a major contribution to serving disadvantaged and marginalized groups in the region, the program also faced a number of challenges that included:

- Difficulties in accessing quality training and resources due to financial constraints. This posed a problem for teacher retention. Insufficient funding also remained a barrier to further expansion of the program.
- Overcoming negative attitudes towards learning.
- Reaching out to people in remote and geographically inaccessible areas. This challenge has been addressed by providing individual villagers with skills training they can impart within their respective villages.

Jan Shikshan Sansthan, Malappuram is a non-governmental organization supported by funding from the government alongside forms of self-financing, such as revenue earned through selling products produced within the program and collecting nominal tuition fees from those students who are able to pay. Funding was coordinated at national level, but program implementation was decentralized. Learners from scheduled tribes received full fee exemption. The centre has national and local partnerships with ministries, NGOs and industries. The total budget for the program between 2009 and 2012 was USD $1.2 billion, with the national government providing 75 per cent of the costs, and district governments covering the remaining 25 per cent.

All districts with an adult literacy rate of 50 per cent or lower were covered by the program. Its success and sustainability in the region was due to its approach and philosophy: it was demand-driven and designed to address needs identified through participatory rural assessment and analysis, conducted at the beginning and throughout the program. Furthermore, the program ensured community ownership and partnership through grassroots interventions that involved the support of local communities.

Another well-known international program on raising literacy is Australia’s “Closing the Gap” initiative that started in 2007 as a result of a social justice campaign. The Council of Australian Governments set measurable targets to monitor improvements in the health and wellbeing of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. One of the targets for learning outcomes was set to halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent by 2020 and emphasized importance of teacher quality and funding based on needs. Every year, the Prime Minister releases a Closing the Gap report to Parliament that details the progress on these targets. Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous 20-24-year-olds who had achieved year 12 or equivalent increased from 45.4 per cent in 2008 to 61.5 per cent in 2014-15, which allowed the program to be on track with the gap decrease from 40 percentage points to 25. Over the long term, these improvements, however, are not enough to meet the majority of the outcomes set by the Council of Australian Governments (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017).

In 1991, the Australian Government introduced the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program that provided grant funding to support integration of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) education within vocational training, delivered in the workplace. The main aim of the WELL program was to assist organizations with training their workers in job-related LLN skills. The program was integrated with vocational training and dedicated to the needs of the workplace. By building workers’ literacy skills alongside vocational training, it was intended to increase workforce flexibility and responsibility, productivity and efficiency, health and safety in the workplace, to improve communication and team work, and to create a training culture in the workplace. Between 2009 and 2014, more than 72,000 employees and 530 Indigenous Employment Program participants completed training. Over that time, the program has supported 1,030 training projects conducted by 160 Registered Training Organizations across 740 employer worksites in Australia. The large majority of
employers (ca. 80 per cent) reported that the training had a positive impact on their literacy skills as well as on employees’ career prospects. Embedding LLN within vocational training produced greater improvement across key employability traits than vocational training programs alone. The most important aspects for future success is the identification of business needs, availability of qualified and experienced trainers, and an efficient application process (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015).

Looking at the findings of English language research on adult literacy and numeracy since the year 2000 Vorhaus et al. (2011) summarized that “workplace basic skills courses reached people who were not normally involved in continuing education or training,” including those with low basic skills, low qualifications, older workers and Indigenous peoples (Windisch, Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a Literature Review on Policy Interventions, 2015).

**Appendix 4**

**August 8, 2017 – Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan)**

**Q** What is the role of CICan in raising Indigenous literacy?

**A** Canada’s colleges and institutes are committed to improving Indigenous education outcomes across the country. Their campuses reach over 3,000 communities, including First Nations reserves, remote villages, northern communities, as well as urban centres, offering Indigenous-specific education and training. Colleges and institutes still remain the primary providers of high school equivalency programs and adult upgrading courses across Canada. Many First Nations are turning to colleges and institutes to provide their youth, who dropped out of high school, with a learning plan that gives them their high school diploma or equivalent, and transition them to post-secondary education.

CICan coordinated the development of the Indigenous Education Protocol – a framework to guide the institutions in strengthening their Indigenous education programs, supporting Indigenous peoples’ learning needs and self-determination, and socio-economic development of Indigenous communities. 51 Institutions have signed the protocol. CICan will be doing a survey for the signed members to see how the Protocol has been changing their institution and what changes need to take place.

**Q** What funding is available?

**A** There are several specific labour-market funding programs: NABEP (Northern Adult Basic Education) - an education-support program designed to help Northerners get targeted training so they can participate more fully in the labour market, and ASETS (Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy) – for Indigenous organizations to support training, skills upgrading and help with finding a job. ASETS has had some challenges: narrow focus - employment-oriented program design; strict qualifying requirements and short-term agreements. Many provinces subsidize federal funding, but it’s not reliable. Recently, British Columbia cut back its funding. The ASETS program needs to broaden eligibility criteria and become more accessible.

We have just sent the submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, which included a recommendation that the federal government need to invest further in adult basic education, essential skills and upskilling for Indigenous peoples, to improve labour market outcomes and support economic development in Indigenous, rural, remote and Northern communities.

**Q** What work do you do to build the relationships with local employers and private funders?

**A** This type of work is typically done by local colleges and institutions through regular outreach programs by college leaders and through their satellite campuses. CICan stays in touch and promotes through events like the upcoming Indigenous Education Symposium in October, in Thunder Bay, Ontario.
Q Would that be a fair statement that most colleges participating in literacy programs for Indigenous peoples are in the North?
A No, this won’t be a fair statement. There are many colleges and institutions across Canada that participate in raising literacy in Indigenous population.

August 24, 2017 - Assembly of First Nations

Q Is low adult literacy in Indigenous population recognized as a problem that needs immediate attention?
A Yes, definitely. Main concerns include:
• Graduation at a much later age
• High drop-out rates
• No equivalency of certification
• Residential schools’ experience and decades of poor funding.
Raising literacy is viewed as a first step to education and well-being/health. Two main directions of addressing this problem include First Nations-led education institutions and improved relationships between First Nations and all levels of government.

Q From your experience, is there any particular area in the country that shows signs of having the most challenges with Indigenous adult literacy, or significant success in addressing the issue?
A Poverty rates on reserves are very high, especially in Manitoba (76 per cent) and Saskatchewan (69 per cent), which speaks to the low levels of employment mainly caused by low literacy and education. In terms of success, Nova Scotia shows impressive results in graduation rates among Indigenous peoples that surpass provincial rates. They have demonstrated considerable improvements since the 1990’s legislation on adult literacy.

Q Would you say that in the near future provincial colleges and institutes would be still the primary mechanism for delivering adult programs to First Nations adults?
A There should be three levels of delivery: (1) primary – led by First Nations institutions; (2) second – through provincial colleges and universities – they should continue to play an important role in raising adult literacy and education; (3) Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) – with better employment, level of literacy grows.
Most important component in moving forward is prevention - through educating younger generations that will become our future workforce. It is important to develop these skills during primary and secondary education years. Without them, catching-up in adulthood is a much greater challenge.

Q What are the key success factors and best delivery methods for such programs?
A Most important – First-Nations-led institutions. Other important components include constructive learning environment; strong and inspiring leadership; adequate capacity, both in funding and human resources, to allow further development of the programs.

Q In your work, have you noticed increasing role of local businesses in improving and supporting adult literacy?
A Some sectors show more concerted effort, e.g., mining/oil/gas. But overall, it’s piece-meal; current public-sector programs that help to build the connection are weak, they need to be ‘revamped’.

Q With such a variety in First Nations communities, what should be the approach to solving the adult literacy problem? Who should take on the initiative? How would you think would be better to coordinate such efforts to ensure that design and governance are provided by the First Nations?
There is a need for revised ASETS strategy with ongoing collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations:

- First Nations leadership is important in order to define how development should occur;
- Learners and people who suffered should be involved;
- Listen and follow up with meaningful actions to all the concerns previously expressed – show people that they were heard!

To succeed, we need sustained political will; allow for First Nations leadership; recognize the need to change the direction and attitude. With the history of colonialism, the system failed Indigenous peoples – need the change of direction. It will take time and changed attitude/updated approach.

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**August 28, 2017 - Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT)**

**Merritt, British Columbia**

**Q** Could you name any community education programs that have been successful?

**A** NVIT runs many interesting programs including alternative education in First Nations communities. Every program includes initial community-based assessment.

The Employment Skills Access Program is designed to assist students in acquiring essential skills for the workplace in British Columbia. The program is unique in that it emphasizes the knowledge, skills, and standards relevant to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals, families, and communities. The program also includes First Aid, Serving It Right, Food Safety, Health and Safety, and First Host. It focuses on Aboriginal content in the curriculum. An Employment Skills Access certificate is awarded to recognize the successful completion of the program. It is ten weeks in length and is delivered at both campuses (Merritt and Vancouver).

Bridging to Trades Program – 12 weeks – no specific/big literacy component, but it does get covered:

- Trade skills/hands-on;
- Employment skills;
- Student-centred curriculum;
- Facilitated by Aboriginal professionals.

Most programs are run by local teachers. Some programs get delivered to the communities in the form of 1:1 training or mobile labs (trailers).

**Q** How is funding arranged?

**A** NVIT uses CALP (provincial funding program) – Community Adult Literacy Program: in 2016/17, 91 CALP grants were awarded for the total of $2.4 million, supporting 9,000 adult learners in 85 communities in British Columbia. Local community organizations deliver the programs in partnership with public post-secondary institutions in their regions. The partnerships encourage the transition of adult learners from community adult-literacy programs into post-secondary studies and employment training. The program offers $20,000-30,000 per program per community. All colleges participate. However, the funding is sufficient for the start-up of the program. It’s not sufficient for the full term.

Community-based assessments – are run at no cost for participants – for each program; to assess level of education/literacy and suggest optimal student placement. NVIT runs assessments all over BC on a first come, first served basis: 15-25 community visits per year. Three-step process:

- Orientation with community elder; sign-off on the release forms
- Discuss tools and what to expect during the assessment – run the assessment and analyze the results
- Present individuals with a snapshot of skills on a given day (assessment day); overall summary and recommendations are provided to the community coordinator.
Q What would you say the main challenges/obstacles for Indigenous adult literacy programs would be?
A Most provincial colleges don’t reach out to the communities. Some communities are excluded from employment either through low levels of literacy/skills, or due to their remote locations. A lot of times teachers/system blame students/communities/history. In reality, we need to change the system and ensure quality teaching staff, with intimate knowledge of Indigenous history, culture and customs. Strict policies don’t allow communities to have control over identifying their values. Yet, for Indigenous communities it’s the only source of their identity. Limitations on community funding through the need to have a post-secondary funder/partner to be eligible for funding.

Q What are the keys to success for Indigenous adult literacy programs?
A Success is measured not only by academic success, but by a sense of belonging and culture. It is extremely important to understand the context of each Indigenous community where the program gets delivered to tailor it to the needs of each learner. Knowledgeable and local teaching staff. Teach students life skills; build confidence in own abilities and use their ‘voice’. Allow communities to identify their own values for the programs to emphasize their identity. Indigenous identity is a constant; to be successful, the programs have to make sure that they work around it. Empathy and understanding are vital for success. Our theme: “We are you, too!” Government should act on its many promises. While various action plans resulted in much more involvement of Indigenous communities in the control of educational initiatives, they do not go far enough. We need a concentrated movement towards more Indigenous control over education. It is important to understand socio-historical realities of Indigenous peoples. Make each program customized through Indigenous lens/eyes. Use Indigenous examples when designing the programs. Community matters the most – Indigenous learners have internal drive to help their people, they feel the responsibility to build better/balanced communities.

Q How do you encourage Indigenous adult learning? What is the best approach to adult literacy programs?
A Through culture and through students themselves. Many Indigenous places look for it within the ‘academy’, but it is within students themselves. Community is the only source, not the schools. Many students have low confidence and are very insecure in their abilities and skills. Once confidence is instilled, the learners achieve literacy on their own.

August 29, 2017 - Saskatchewan Polytechnic
Saskatoon, SK

Q There is a challenging situation in Saskatchewan and Manitoba: with fast-growing Indigenous population, aging workforce, high ratio of Indigenous population in provincial total population, high rates of poverty, and low adult literacy. Have you noticed/know of any special “push” in Saskatchewan to raise adult literacy in the Indigenous population?
A Not much has changed. Provincial government is aware of the problem; education gap is huge: only 45 per cent graduation rate and a forecast that Aboriginal population will make up 50 per cent of workforce in Saskatchewan by 2050. However, there have been recent cut-backs in funding and no change to Indigenous Strategy, yet Indigenous population is quickly growing. Not much has changed in funding/approach over
the last 25 years. Literacy programs are run in collaboration with Tribal Council, Regional Colleges and Indigenous-led institutions, including Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies.

Q  Sask Polytech runs Adult Literacy Learning Centre in Regina. Are there any other special programs for Indigenous population? Any special accommodations/ adjustments for the adult learners?
A  Programs are offered during the day and at night for convenience. We also deliver programs locally, through the partner community groups. We tried to go to remote locations and deliver the programs there, but it’s extremely hard financially and logistically. Funding is very complex, and, for different levels of programs, it is offered through different ministries, which makes it harder to coordinate (basic adult education is funded through the Ministry of Economy while post-secondary – not).

Small local institutions are most intuitive for providing basic adult education. For example, Six Nations Polytechnic partnered with Sask Polytech to deliver some Sask Polytech curriculum (e.g., broker progress for trades). They offer basic education and have developed some of their own programs with a strong Indigenous focus.

Q  Would you say that provincial colleges and institutes would be still the primary mechanism in delivering adult programs to First Nations adults? Or are Indigenous-led institutions better?
A  Culturally, Indigenous-led institutions are better for the learners, however based on statistics they don’t achieve better academic results than provincial ones. At the same time, there is much more to success at school than academic achievements. Sask Polytech has about 70 per cent students, who self-identified as Indigenous. We try to create welcoming atmosphere through:
• Indigenous student centres;
• Having Elders “on-call”;
• Aboriginal gathering places
• Easy access to First Nations books and resources;
• Indigenous liaison worker to visit local communities/ promote university programs and run the assessments;
• Workshops for teachers on how to Indigenize the curriculum;
• Partnerships with local friendship centres;
• Indigenous student advisors for peer-to-peer assistance.

Q  What would you say are the success factors for the delivery of these programs?
A  The main challenges/ keys to success include:
• Adequate and regular funding;
• Match Indigenous teaching staff numbers proportionally to the number of Indigenous students;
• Local business involvement – offer job shadowing and summer jobs to students;
• Develop culturally-sensitive resources for English language learners;
• Considering that most students are first generation learners and workers, institutions have to help them develop essential life and work skills (besides literacy), such as getting to work on time, communication skills with employers, getting driver’s licence, etc.
• Transition program is important: from basic literacy to essential skills to pre-employment;
• Need someone to run the “ship”: coordinated approach to new programs and initiatives. Hence, the decision at Sask Polytech to create the position of the Director of Indigenous Strategy. Similarly, Canadian government felt the need to create 2 Ministers of Indigenous Affairs to better share and coordinate the work, target-address the issues and have more accomplished.
August 29, 2017 - Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

Q Does Sault College offer any special adult programs for Indigenous population? What are the challenges?
A Sault College offers safe environment for Indigenous students, conducive of learning, however we can’t offer any special entry-level programs. Most of our programs are still main-stream, which presents challenges for small communities, in particular.

We offer assessment to future students. Those who scored below level 3 would be offered to go to community agencies to prepare them for college courses in the future. Students feel more comfortable that way. They are used to stigma that academic upgrading is unimportant and embarrassing. This way, when they come back to college, they feel more comfortable and prepared for joining the main stream. Sault College coordinates course outlines with community centres, to ensure smooth transition and future success of the learners at the college.

Q Do you reach out to communities to encourage learning/ taking courses?
A We have to be discreet about it and respective of local community and friendship centres. It is a sensitive topic. Local centres offer literacy programs and often have funding ‘attached’ to learners. They have to meet certain criteria and deliver on the number of students enrolled. So, it’s quite challenging for them to meet the targets, making ‘student recruitment’ a sensitive subject. Our college partners with community centres on many initiatives to provide additional support with basic learning.

Q Does Sault College work with ASETS funding/ program?
A This program is being used mainly by community centres. We partner with them for some joint projects, such as pre-apprenticeship programs – 8-week program that also includes English and Math skills. Sault College delivers academic component of the program, while local centre runs trade classes.

Q What would you say the keys to success/ common challenges for such programs?
A Main challenges include:

- It is important for the institution delivering the program to be located within the community;
- Transportation issues are big, especially for rural and remote locations;
- Unclear definition of success – meeting target numbers becomes more important than student needs to ensure funding is available;
- Difference in learning style needs to be acknowledged and accommodated;
- Need for extended student support services – increased numbers of mental health issues, addiction, learning disabilities;
- Importance of looking at a person as a whole with his/her socio-economic barriers and personal issues/
  home environment.

September 8, 2017 - Confederate College

Thunder Bay, Ontario

Q College offers various cultural services and events, including elders’ visits, storytelling circle, drumming and traditional crafts. How are they received/attended by students and where does the funding come from?
A With inflow of provincial funding in the last 4 years for the 1st generation Indigenous learners, the college was able to offer all these additional programs, including creation of the Aboriginal Student Centre that is operating like a HUB for students. It has become a key component of the college, with its warm and
welcoming environment, elders’ visits and traditional crafts’ teaching. They organize fun activities and traditional events.

Q: Does Aboriginal Student Association (OASA) play an important role?
A: Not at the moment. It’s hard to compete with main-stream student council that has resources and network, which attracts volunteers and students, including many Indigenous students. So, in that sense, they are not left out. It just doesn’t seem to be needed to have two student bodies in one college.

Q: Does the college offer Indigenous literacy programs for adults (academic upgrading)? If yes, who designs and delivers them?
A: The college doesn’t run special Indigenous literacy programs. Aboriginal literacy programs are delivered through the Indigenous Friendship Centre. They have more knowledge and experience on that, and also receive provincial and federal funding. That said, Anglophone Literacy program offered by the Confederate College has close to 50 per cent Indigenous students. The college does have special Indigenous learning targeted outcomes that are being incorporated when designing our literacy programs. The college has 1 full-time Indigenous teacher; other teachers have completed professional development courses to update their skills and be culturally-aware.

Out of three basic levels of literacy, Confederate College teaches only level 2 and 3. After assessment, students in need of Level 1 training are directed to the Indigenous Friendship Centre. When they complete Level 1, they usually return to the college to do their Level 2 and 3, and often proceed to the next level, to receive their grade 12 equivalency.

Q: I understand that the College receives provincial funding, but do you also work with ASETS program?
A: Not directly. However, when community receives ASETS funding, it usually approaches us to help with their training needs, design and delivery of targeted programs. We help them build the program and deliver it ‘on-site’. We have many rural communities, so it won’t be feasible for their learners to come to the college.

Q: Does college have an outreach program/ how do you encourage learners?
A: Yes, we do. Literacy program coordinators visit community agencies with presentations on our programs, and detailed information on what steps they need to take to apply; help with individual learning planning and consultations. Our satellite campus does similar outreach in their area. We also offer a distance learning program, which proved to be more successful with having at least one facilitator on-site for questions and support. Level-1 learners benefit from the face-to-face teaching. Overall, distance learning program helps the students build confidence, computer skills and self-determination.

Q: Does the College offer any skills assessments for future students?
A: Yes, we run placement assessments for all students. Upon review, we help students build their personal learning plans, provide options for future paths and map out their next steps.

Q: What do you see as the biggest challenges to improving literacy?
A: Fundamental needs, such as: housing, food security, safety and developing self-determination. It is important to deal with them first. Shelters are full of Indigenous people. They have to worry about what they will eat tomorrow, or where they will sleep. Literacy is not their first priority. Funding is important, but no matter how much funding we provide, we’ll be trying to educate people, who are, in the meantime, trying to survive. At the same time, literacy programs have to be established and available, for when they are ready. Until then, the focus should be on ensuring that the basic needs are met.
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Raising literacy in the First Nations’ adult population in the context of labour market participation


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