

MEDIA RELEASE

New survey reveals how mainstream society views Aboriginal Peoples in Canada

Toronto, ON – June 8, 2016. A new national survey reveals what non-Aboriginal Canadians know and think about Aboriginal Peoples in Canada today.

The results show that an increasing majority of non-Aboriginal Canadians recognize at some level the historic disparities and current challenges facing Aboriginal Peoples in this country. And this understanding underlies widespread public support for the principle of reconciliation and for taking actions to find meaningful solutions.

The survey was conducted by the non-profit Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with seven leading Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations. In some areas the survey updates findings from previous Environics surveys conducted over the past decade to provide the basis for identifying how opinions have changed over time.

"There is much in this survey to cause optimism about achieving reconciliation, particularly as it pertains to closing the socio-economic gap between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians", comments Stephen Kakfwi, President and CEO of Canadians for a New Partnership. *"But the results also underscore the importance of continued public education on the history of relations with the Indigenous peoples."*

Key findings from the survey include the following:

- Most non-Aboriginal Canadians believe Aboriginal history and culture are a defining characteristic of what makes the country unique, but less so than such icons as multiculturalism, health care and the land. And they are divided on whether Aboriginal peoples have unique rights and privileges as first inhabitants of this land, or are just like other cultural and ethnic groups in society.
- An increasing majority believe Aboriginal peoples experience discrimination today on a regular basis, comparable to, if not worse than, other marginalized communities in Canada such as Muslims and Black people. Many believe they also experience systemic discrimination at the institutional level, especially in the education and criminal justice systems.
- Two thirds (66%) of non-Aboriginal Canadians have heard or read about Indian residential schools (up noticeably from 2008), and an increasing majority (73%) believe the current challenges facing Aboriginal peoples today are to some extent the result of residential schools experience. By comparison, just over four in ten (42%) have heard or read something about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and few in this group can recall any of the specific Calls to Action issued by the Commission.
- There is solid majority public support for several policies related to Aboriginal rights and reconciliation, including increased funding for Aboriginal education to match provincial levels (91%), increased funding for clean drinking water and adequate housing on reserves (90%), mandatory curriculum in all schools to teach Aboriginal history and culture (87%), funding to protect Aboriginal languages (78%), providing Aboriginal communities with full control over their natural resources on traditional territories (66%), and settling all outstanding land claims regardless of cost (60%).
- Non-Aboriginal Canadians endorse new measures to strengthen Aboriginal representation in the federal government, including guaranteed seats in the federal cabinet and at First Ministers meetings, as well a new Aboriginal Parliamentary committee to review all new laws from an Aboriginal perspective.

“Reconciliation as defined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is about the establishment and maintenance of respectful relationships” says Ry Moran, Director of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. “Surveys such as this point to the gains we have made and the work still to be accomplished.”

“One year after the TRC report and Canadians are clearly ready for change”, concluded Wanda Brascoupé Peters on behalf of the Circle for Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. “The single most important finding of this survey is that eight in ten Canadians are open to and wanting to learn more. This is a clarion call for all of us to engage in and act for reconciliation. We are proud of the increasing role played by the philanthropic sector in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and will continue to strengthen and deepen this work.”

“This survey gives us an accurate picture of mainstream knowledge and opinions about Aboriginal Peoples which is essential for knowing where we stand as a society and where we need to go,” comments Keith Neuman, lead researcher on the project. “Without such evidence we are at the mercy of anecdote and stereotype.”

The survey is based on interviews conducted by telephone with a representative sample of non-Aboriginal Canadians aged 18 years and older, between January 15 and February 8, 2016. The margin of sampling error for a survey of this size drawn from the population is plus or minus 2.2 percent (in 19 out of 20 samples). About 40 percent of the interviews were conducted via respondents’ cellphones.

[The Environics Institute for Survey Research](#)

The Environics Institute for Survey Research conducts original public opinion and social research related to issues of public policy and social change. A central part of the Institute’s mission is to survey those not usually heard from, using questions not usually asked.

[The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada](#)

The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada is an open network to promote giving, sharing, and philanthropy in Aboriginal communities across the country, to connect with and support the empowerment of First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations, communities, and individuals in building a stronger, healthier future.

[Tides Canada](#)

Tides Canada is a national charity dedicated to a healthy environment, social equity, and economic prosperity for all Canadians. We collaborate with both donors and social change leaders, offering a platform for on-the-ground efforts to create uncommon solutions for the common good.

[Institute on Governance](#)

The Institute on Governance is an independent, Canada-based, not for profit public interest institution, whose mission is to advance better governance in the public interest by exploring, developing and promoting the principles, standards and practices which underlie good governance in the public sphere.

[Canadians for a New Partnership](#)

The mission of Canadians for a New Partnership is to establish and support a broad-based, inclusive, leadership initiative to engage Canadians in dialogue and relationship building aimed at creating a new partnership between First Peoples and other Canadians.

[National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#)

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation was created to preserve the memory of Canada’s Residential School system and legacy, and will be the permanent home for all material gathered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

[The Inspirit Foundation](#)

The Inspirit Foundation seeks to create a more inclusive Canada where differences are valued and everyone has equal opportunity to thrive both socially and economically. We achieve these aims by supporting young change leaders, funding media and arts for change initiatives, impact investing, and collaborating with organizations across sectors.

[Reconciliation Canada](#)

Reconciliation Canada is leading the way in engaging Canadians in dialogue and transformative experiences that revitalize the relationships among Indigenous peoples and all Canadians. Our model for reconciliation engages people in open and honest conversation to understand our diverse histories and experiences.

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