VI. Experiences with Non-Aboriginal People

Overview

Maintaining strong Aboriginal identities, and forming stable and vibrant Aboriginal communities in the city does not occur in isolation, but amidst a non-Aboriginal population-at-large. There is a long history of systemic racism towards Aboriginal people in Canadian society, no less so in cities where urban populations may have little exposure to, or understanding of, Aboriginal peoples. Thus, part of better understanding contemporary urban Aboriginal identities is to better comprehend how they feel perceived in a largely non-Aboriginal urban world.

In this context, the *UAPS* survey explored perceptions of and experiences with non-Aboriginal people, in terms of how Aboriginal people are thought to be perceived by non-Aboriginal people, in what ways non-Aboriginal people are viewed as different from Aboriginal people, and in what ways experiences with non-Aboriginal people have shaped the lives of urban Aboriginal peoples and who they are today. The survey also explored urban Aboriginal peoples' experiences with non-Aboriginal services in their city.

The following points summarize the main findings around urban Aboriginal peoples' perceptions of and experiences with non-Aboriginal people:

- **Non-Aboriginal peoples' impression of Aboriginal people is widely believed to be generally negative.** Nonetheless, there is some sense among urban Aboriginal peoples that impressions may be changing for the better, especially among those most familiar with their own Aboriginal background.

- **If there is a 'single urban Aboriginal experience,' it is the shared perception among Métis, Inuit and First Nations peoples, across cities, that they are stereotyped negatively.** There is a very strong perception among urban Aboriginal peoples that non-Aboriginal people hold a wide range of negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people, most commonly of alcoholism and drug abuse. Notable regional variations also demonstrate that *UAPS* participants' perceptions are shaped by where they live.

- **Many urban Aboriginal peoples say they have experienced negative behaviour or unfair treatment because of who they are.** These views are particularly strong among older *UAPS* participants, women and residents of Saskatoon. Nonetheless, despite these views, urban Aboriginal peoples tend to feel accepted by non-Aboriginal people and many feel their experiences with non-Aboriginal people (good and bad) have shaped their lives positively.

- **Non-Aboriginal people are viewed as different from Aboriginal people in multiple ways, especially in terms of their value systems and cultural heritage.** Most urban Aboriginal peoples identify at least one difference between the two groups, and the general tone of many is that there are keen differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

- **There is a general consensus among First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit in terms of their perceptions and experiences with non-Aboriginal people.** Few substantive differences exist. The one main exception is that Inuit are less likely than others to think non-Aboriginal people perceive Aboriginal people negatively.

- **Urban Aboriginal peoples report a substantial amount of contact with non-Aboriginal services, particularly banks and the health care system.** They are generally positive about their experiences, with the exception of the child welfare system, where negative experiences outweigh positive ones.

- Regardless of how much interaction they have with non-Aboriginal services, there is broad agreement among urban Aboriginal peoples that it is very important to also have *Aboriginal services.* This is considered to be most important in the case of addiction programs, child and family services, and housing services.

1. How Aboriginal peoples feel they are perceived by non-Aboriginal people

Perceptions of non-Aboriginal impressions of Aboriginal people

Non-Aboriginal people are widely believed to have generally negative impressions of Aboriginal people.

By a wide margin, and across all socio-demographic groups, most urban Aboriginal peoples think non-Aboriginal people view them in a negative light.

Seven in ten (71%) *UAPS* participants believe non-Aboriginal peoples' impression of Aboriginal people is generally negative. Only a small group think their impression is generally positive (14%), while another one in ten (11%) think non-Aboriginal peoples' impression of Aboriginal people is neither positive nor negative.

The perception that non-Aboriginal people view Aboriginal people negatively is strongest among Métis (73%) and First Nations peoples (68%), followed by Inuit (53%), who tend to be more likely than others to think impressions are generally positive or ambivalent (i.e., neither positive nor negative). Majorities in all cities think non-Aboriginal peoples' impression is generally negative, but this view is strongest among those in Edmonton (80%) and weakest in Halifax (52%), where residents are twice as likely as average to think non-Aboriginal peoples' impression of Aboriginal people is neither positive nor negative.

As mentioned, urban Aboriginal peoples in all socio-demographic groups share the perception that non-Aboriginal people view Aboriginal people negatively. However, it is important to note that this view is especially strong among women (75%, compared to 66% of men), who are among those most likely to think non-Aboriginal peoples' impression of Aboriginal people is generally negative.

Perceptions of non-Aboriginal people's impressions of Aboriginal people
Do you think non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people is generally positive or negative?
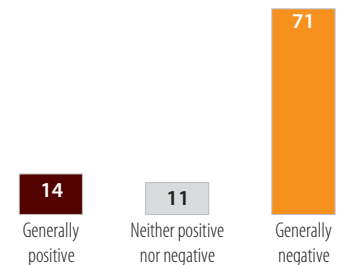
		71
14	11	
Generally positive	Neither positive nor negative	Generally negative

*That [Aboriginal people] are
alcoholics and bums who don't
want to better themselves. Drug-
gies. Poor parents. Prostitutes.
That [Aboriginal people] choose
to live how they do. Uneducated.
That Aboriginal people have it
easy. They get so many breaks.
No taxes. Free school. [Non-Ab-
original people] don't have any
knowledge of our history or past
so they make assumptions. Why
don't Aboriginal people "Just get
over it?"*

*Lazy, alcoholics, druggies, don't
have to pay for schooling, get
everything for free and pay no
taxes what so ever. "Free ride,"
get into problems and [do] not
necessarily have to deal with the
punishments.*

*Well, I think they think a lot of us
are on social assistance. There's
generally a feeling of incapabil-
ity, like "they can't do the job."
The comment I usually get is "a
lot of Aboriginal companies have
failed to deliver." The other aspect
is, believe it or not, everyone lives
in the woods. There's that im-
pression of noble savage, there's
like the exotic romantic view,
and generally we're viewed as
problematic. You know, blocking
bridges, protesting and always
looking for a free lunch.*

Perceptions of non-Aboriginal stereotypes of Aboriginal people

*There is a very strong perception among urban Aboriginal peoples that non-Aboriginal
people hold a wide range of negative and distorting stereotypes of Aboriginal people, most
commonly of alcoholism and drug abuse.*

Overwhelmingly, Inuit, Métis and First Nations peoples believe non-Aboriginal people hold a wide
range of stereotypes of Aboriginal people, and that these most commonly relate to addiction prob-
lems (alcohol and drug abuse).

Only one percent of urban Aboriginal peoples believe non-Aboriginal people hold *no* stereotypes of
Aboriginal people. Some of the stereotypes they believe non-Aboriginal people hold are presented in
participants' own words in the sidebar on this page.

Importantly, while similar stereotypes are mentioned by *UAPS* participants across cities and in all
socio-demographic groups, notable regional variations demonstrate that urban Aboriginal peoples'
perceptions of how they are viewed by non-Aboriginal people are complex, and are in part locally
constructed and shaped by where they live.

Specifically, when asked (unprompted, without response options offered) what they believe are the
most common stereotypes that non-Aboriginal people hold about Aboriginal people five main stereo-
types emerged:

- **Addiction problems.** This is, by far, the stereotype most frequently mentioned by *UAPS* participants.
Three-quarters (74%) believe non-Aboriginal people associate them with drug and alcohol abuse.
This view is strongest among First Nations peoples (74%) and Métis (74%), followed by Inuit (59%).
This view is also widespread among Aboriginal peoples in most cities, but is most common among
those in Toronto (86%), where most think non-Aboriginal people associate Aboriginal people with
substance abuse and alcoholism. As well, those under 45 years of age are somewhat more likely
than older individuals to believe addiction problems to be the most common stereotype non-
Aboriginal people hold about Aboriginal people (77% versus 67%).

- **Lazy and lack motivation.** Although less common than the stereotype of addiction problems, three
in ten (30%) urban Aboriginal peoples nonetheless believe non-Aboriginal people see Aboriginal
people as lazy and lacking in motivation. This view is most common among Métis (34%), followed
by First Nations peoples (27%) and Inuit (19%). Varying proportions of Aboriginal peoples across
cities believe this is a common stereotype non-Aboriginal people hold, but this view is strongest in
Halifax (41%), and in Edmonton (36%) and Winnipeg (36%), reflecting the Métis population in these
cities. This view is also more typical among those with household incomes of $80,000 or more
(47%).

- **Lack intelligence and education.** Two in ten (20%) think this is a common stereotype non-Aborig-
inal people hold of Aboriginal people, and is a view that is strongest among residents of Calgary
(29%), Toronto (27%) and Vancouver (26%).

- **Rely on welfare and social assistance.** Two in ten (20%) urban Aboriginal peoples also believe non-
Aboriginal people think Aboriginal people rely on "handouts" and social assistance. This is a view
held largely by First Nations peoples (20%) and Métis (20%), compared to Inuit (8%). As well, this is a
more prominent perception among residents of such western cities as Regina (27%) and Winnipeg
(25%).

- **Unemployed.** A similar proportion of urban Aboriginal peoples (18%) believe a common stereotype of Aboriginal people is that they are perennially unemployed and unable to keep a job, and as a result do not contribute to society. Notably, this view is particularly strong among residents of Regina (33%), especially Métis, and, albeit to a lesser degree, Aboriginal peoples in Edmonton (24%).

Smaller proportions of *UAPS* participants (13% or fewer) believe non-Aboriginal people hold several other common stereotypes of Aboriginal people. These include such notions as Aboriginal people are homeless and panhandlers, abuse "the system," engage in criminal activity, do not pay taxes, get a "free ride" for everything and neglect their children.

Do Aboriginal peoples believe non-Aboriginal impressions are changing?

There is some sense that non-Aboriginal peoples' impressions of Aboriginal people may be changing for the better.

Urban Aboriginal peoples are divided as to whether or not non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people has gotten better or stayed the same in the past few years, while only a small minority think it has gotten worse.

When asked about the change in non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people over the past few years, four in ten (40%) *UAPS* participants think impressions have improved. Another four in ten (41%) think impressions have stayed the same. Only 16 percent believe non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people has gotten worse over the past few years.
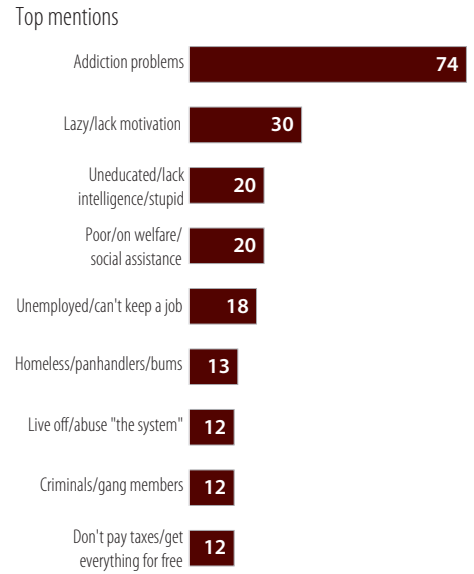
Perceptions that non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people is changing for the better is linked to where urban Aboriginal peoples live and their age. While equal proportions of First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit think impressions have gotten better, those in Vancouver (53%) and Toronto (48%) are most likely to think they have improved in recent years, while those in Calgary (29%) are least likely. Individuals 25 years of age and older are also more likely than youth (18-24) to think non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people has gotten better (43% versus 31%). Youth are more likely than others to think impressions have stayed the same.

Notably, greater optimism about non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people is also associated with a strong connection to one's past. Individuals who know their family tree very well (50%) are *most* likely among urban Aboriginal peoples to think impressions have improved over the past few years.

Finally, perceptions of non-Aboriginal people's current impression of Aboriginal people influence urban Aboriginal peoples' views of how these impressions are changing. Most *UAPS* participants who say non-Aboriginal people's current impression is generally negative either don't see this as changing (43%), or feel it is becoming even worse (20%). Still, there is a sizeable minority (35%) in this group who, promisingly, feel impressions have gotten better. Optimism is higher among those who say the current impression is generally positive (60% think non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people has gotten better).

Common stereotypes of Aboriginal people
What do you believe are the most common stereotypes that non-Aboriginal people hold about Aboriginal people, if any?

Top mentions

Addiction problems	74
Lazy/lack motivation	30
Uneducated/lack intelligence/stupid	20
Poor/on welfare/social assistance	20
Unemployed/can't keep a job	18
Homeless/panhandlers/bums	13
Live off/abuse "the system"	12
Criminals/gang members	12
Don't pay taxes/get everything for free	12

Change in impressions
Over the past few years, do you think that non-Aboriginal people's impression of Aboriginal people has gotten better, or worse or stayed the same?
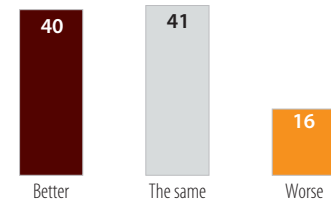
Better	The same	Worse
40	41	16

Their way of thinking… For example, how they do not value their Elders. Aboriginal people value Elders very strongly. We are closely connected and [have] a large cultural base. We have a strong connection to families. They do not understand our values and teachings.

Their culture and spiritual belief systems are very different.

Aboriginal culture, history is distinct from other people's because we're from here and have a close connection to the land. We have a spiritual relationship with the land that cannot be fully experienced or understood by non-Aboriginals because it's inherent.

They don't see things from a holistic perspective. "That everything is interconnected." Their culture promotes "independence" and every man for [himself]. They feel they are dominant – rather than "everyone is equal."

Cultural differences, ways in being raised, Métis are very close with family and know what's going on while non-Aboriginals do not.

2. Perceptions of non-Aboriginal people

How they are different

Most urban Aboriginal peoples think non-Aboriginal people are very different from Aboriginal people, especially in terms of their values, culture and socio-economic opportunities.

In addition to questions that explore how urban Aboriginal peoples believe they are perceived by non-Aboriginal people, *UAPS* also delved into how they think non-Aboriginal people are different from Aboriginal people.

UAPS participants were asked (unprompted, without being offered response options) in what ways, if any, they think non-Aboriginal people are different from Aboriginal people. Most (77%) urban Aboriginal peoples identify at least one difference between the two groups. It is also important to note that *UAPS* participants typically mentioned multiple differences, and that these are deep differences and not just ones of degree. Some of these perceptions are presented in participants' own words in the sidebars on this and the next page.

The following are the top ways they believe non-Aboriginal people differ from Aboriginal people:

* **Value systems.** Three in ten (29%) urban Aboriginal peoples think differences stem from different beliefs and values. Those in this group express the sense that non-Aboriginal people are more self-oriented and pre-occupied with material gain. They also feel Aboriginal people possess a sense of close-knit community, family orientation (especially a commitment to raising grandchildren) and respect for Elders that is less evident among non-Aboriginal people. The view that non-Aboriginal people possess a value system different from Aboriginal people is shared by First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit alike.

* **Cultural heritage.** Two in ten (22%) urban Aboriginal peoples also believe Aboriginal people have a very different set of cultural traditions and practices that set them apart from the non-Aboriginal population-at-large. Those in this group emphasize a distinct historical experience and Aboriginal languages as aspects of Aboriginal peoples' cultural heritage that distinguish Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal people. Inuit (29%) and First Nations peoples (26%) are most likely to view non-Aboriginal people as different from Aboriginal people in this way, followed by Métis (19%). As well, residents of Halifax (46%) are much more likely than those in other cities to believe a unique cultural heritage is a source of difference.

- **Greater socio-economic opportunity.** A smaller proportion of *UAPS* participants (12%) also feel non-Aboriginal people are different from Aboriginal people because they experience greater socio-economic opportunities, namely access to education. Important to note is that the general tone of this group is that non-Aboriginal people have less trouble understanding how to navigate institutions like the education system, thereby enabling non-Aboriginal people to enjoy greater socio-economic success than Aboriginal people.

- **Mindset.** Another way in which urban Aboriginal peoples perceive non-Aboriginal people as different is in terms of their attitudes and mindset (12%). Interrelated with value systems, non-Aboriginal people are seen as more arrogant, critical and judgmental than Aboriginal people, and generally close-minded towards Aboriginal people.

- **Historical ignorance.** The final main way in which urban Aboriginal peoples think non-Aboriginal people are different from Aboriginal people is in their general ignorance of Aboriginal history and experience (9%). Common themes among these *UAPS* participants are that non-Aboriginal people know little about Aboriginal issues (i.e., treaties, Indian residential schools, foster care), and are uneducated in the cultural traditions and practices of Aboriginal people in Canada. This ignorance is seen by this group to produce among non-Aboriginal people two kinds of attitudes towards Aboriginal people: either a sense of "Why can't you just get over it?" or a tendency to equate the Aboriginal experience with that of other immigrant groups in Canada. There is also some sense among this group that there is an unwillingness on the part of non-Aboriginal people to learn more about Aboriginal peoples.

Smaller proportions of *UAPS* participants (8% or fewer) mention other ways in which non-Aboriginal people are different from Aboriginal people. These include perceptions that in terms of spirituality, humour, lifestyle and physical appearance, non-Aboriginal people are different, and that non-Aboriginal people believe stereotypes of Aboriginal people.

Finally, less than two in ten (17%) urban Aboriginal peoples maintain there are no differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (another 6% are uncertain). Urban Aboriginal peoples in Winnipeg (31%) and Thunder Bay (24%) are notably more likely than those in other cities to think non-Aboriginal people are the same as Aboriginal people, as are individuals with no formal education.

Urban Aboriginal peoples' perceptions of how non-Aboriginal people are different (continued):

Most non-Aboriginal people still have their language intact; they haven't had cultural genocide in their background. I can't think of too many others who had their whole existence wiped out – Language – we've lost so much of that. ….how do you compare Aboriginal people who have lived here forever, to people who have come here from so many other cultures?

I would say priorities. Willingness to be involved in the general community. Aboriginal communities are more willing to contribute to the larger urban community ... [we have a] broader definition of community. We differ on social issues, for example: addictions are less talked about by non-Aboriginal people, less of a priority for non-Aboriginal people. Non-Aboriginal friends are more focused on self and not contributions to their community.

I think there is a real lack of awareness that non-Aboriginal people have about Aboriginal culture. Sometimes they act as if it doesn't exist.
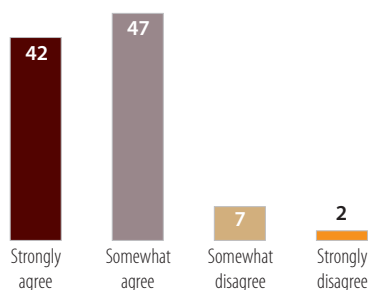
3. Experiences of discrimination

Negative behaviour and unfair treatment

Almost all urban Aboriginal peoples agree that others behave in an unfair or negative way towards Aboriginal people. Majorities say they have been teased or insulted because of their Aboriginal background.

Negative behaviour

"I think others behave in an unfair/negative way toward Aboriginal people."

42	47	7	2
Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree

Beyond how they feel perceived by non-Aboriginal people, the *UAPS* survey explored whether or not participants have experienced negative behaviour or unfair treatment because of who they are. Many urban Aboriginal peoples agree they do. Still, despite these experiences, they tend to feel accepted by non-Aboriginal people, and feel their experiences with them have shaped their lives positively.

NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR. Most urban Aboriginal peoples agree with the statement "I think others behave in an unfair/negative way towards Aboriginal people." Nine in ten either strongly (42%) or somewhat (47%) agree with this statement, while only one in ten (9%) disagree.

Overall, most urban Aboriginal peoples in all socio-demographic groups think Aboriginal people experience negative behaviour from others. But this perception is especially strong among those in Saskatoon (51% strongly agree), and those aged 45 years and older (48% strongly agree). Women are also more likely than men to *strongly* agree that others behave in an unfair/negative way toward Aboriginal people (47% versus 37%), as are Elders (57%). As well, this view is more common among those who feel they belong to a mostly Aboriginal community.

UNFAIR TREATMENT. A large majority of urban Aboriginal peoples also say they have experienced unfair treatment because of who they are. When posed with the statement "I have been teased or insulted because of my Aboriginal background," seven in ten strongly (37%) or somewhat (33%) agree. Another one in ten (10%) somewhat disagree, while a small group strongly disagree (18%) that they have experienced unfair treatment due to their Aboriginal background.

Unfair treatment

"I have been teased or insulted because of my Aboriginal background."

37	33	10	18
Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
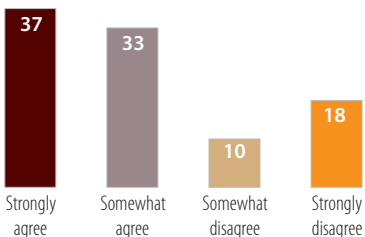
While similar proportions agree they have experienced unfair treatment because of their Aboriginal background, this view is strongest among First Nations peoples (41% strongly agree, compared to 33% of Métis and Inuit). This view is also strongest among Aboriginal peoples in Toronto (51%), who are more likely than those in other cities to strongly agree.

Who among urban Aboriginal peoples is *least* likely to feel they have been teased or insulted because of their Aboriginal background? Perceptions are influenced alternately by age, employment and, in one instance, city. Those aged 18 to 24, albeit still the majority, are less likely than older individuals to agree they have been teased or insulted (58%, compared to 71% of those aged 25-44, and 75% of those 45 years and older), as are those who are employed full-time (67%) or part-time (63%). In addition, while only small proportions of Aboriginal peoples across most cities say they have *not* experienced unfair treatment, this rises to one-third (strongly agree) of Aboriginal peoples in Halifax.

Sense of acceptance

Despite widespread perceptions of negative behaviour and unfair treatment, urban Aboriginal peoples tend to feel accepted by non-Aboriginal people.

Despite the fact that most urban Aboriginal peoples believe Aboriginal people are subject to unfair treatment, teasing and insults because of their Aboriginal identity, only a relatively small group feel non-Aboriginal people do not accept them.

Only one-third of *UAPS* participants strongly (8%) or somewhat (28%) agree with the statement "I don't feel accepted by non-Aboriginal people." Urban Aboriginal peoples are more likely to either somewhat (26%) or strongly (36%) disagree when presented with this statement.

Urban Aboriginal peoples across socio-economic groups generally display a similarly strong sense of acceptance by non-Aboriginal people. However, Métis do have a somewhat stronger sense of acceptance compared to others (42% strongly disagree, compared to 30% of First Nations peoples and 25% of Inuit). Residents of Vancouver (69%) and Winnipeg (68%), particularly Métis in these cities, are also more likely than others to disagree with the statement "I don't feel accepted by non-Aboriginal people." In comparison, Aboriginal peoples in Saskatoon (44%) and Regina (49%) are the least likely to disagree that they don't feel accepted by non-Aboriginal people. In other words, Aboriginal peoples in these two Saskatchewan cities are the least likely to feel accepted by their non-Aboriginal neighbours.

Sense of acceptance by non-Aboriginal people
"I don't feel accepted by non-Aboriginal people."

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
8	28	26	36
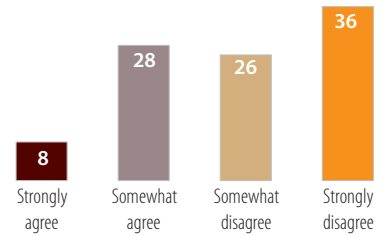
Impact of experiences with non-Aboriginal people

Seven in ten urban Aboriginal peoples feel their experiences with non-Aboriginal peoples have shaped their lives positively, making them stronger and more motivated to succeed, more accepting and tolerant, and reinforcing their identity as an Aboriginal person.

Majorities of urban Aboriginal peoples also indicate that their experiences with non-Aboriginal people have, ultimately, shaped their life positively.

When asked in what ways, if any, their experience with non-Aboriginal people has shaped their life and who they are today (unprompted, without response options offered), urban Aboriginal peoples are most likely to answer positively: seven in ten (70%) Inuit, Métis and First Nations peoples cite positive examples of how their experiences with non-Aboriginal people have contributed to who they are today. Summarized, their responses fall into the following four main categories:

- **Greater motivation.** A greater sense of motivation and desire to achieve is the top way in which urban Aboriginal peoples (36%) feel their experiences with non-Aboriginal people have shaped their life positively. They express this greater sense of motivation in multiple ways, including the belief that their experiences with non-Aboriginal people drove them to work harder, made them more ambitious, gave them needed encouragement and support, gave them a greater sense of responsibility, and made them want to disprove Aboriginal stereotypes.

- **Mentoring and a sense of direction.** A smaller group of urban Aboriginal peoples (18%) feel a non-Aboriginal teacher, professor or other individual gave them guidance about "how to stay out of trouble," pursue a career, and mentored them at a critical point in their life.

- **More tolerant and accepting.** Urban Aboriginal peoples (17%) also feel they developed more tolerance and acceptance of other people through their experiences with non-Aboriginal people. Specifically, they feel these experiences made them less prejudiced and judgmental, gave them a perspective on other cultures, and taught them more adaptability in a non-Aboriginal society.

- **Greater sense of Aboriginal self.** Finally, the fourth main way urban Aboriginal peoples (12%) feel their experiences with non-Aboriginal people has shaped their lives positively is through the greater sense they gained through these experiences of themselves as an Aboriginal person. Non-Aboriginal people either gave them a perspective on their own Aboriginal culture, reinforced their pride in being Aboriginal, or made them appreciate and want to learn more about Aboriginal peoples generally.

- **Negative impact.** Urban Aboriginal peoples are much less likely to feel their experiences with non-Aboriginal peoples have shaped their lives *negatively*. Among this small group (18%), individuals cite such negative experiences as exposure to racism and discrimination, shame, lower self-confidence and self-esteem, and hiding their identity as an Aboriginal person.

Finally, one in ten (11%) urban Aboriginal peoples say their experiences with non-Aboriginal people have had no impact at all on them, while seven percent are uncertain as to how their experience with non-Aboriginal people has shaped their life and who they are today.

4. Experiences with non-Aboriginal services and organizations

Contact with non-Aboriginal services and organizations

Urban Aboriginal peoples report a substantial amount of contact with non-Aboriginal services, particularly banks and the health care system, but also in other types of areas.

As a final dimension to better understanding urban Aboriginal peoples' perceptions of and experiences with non-Aboriginal people, the *UAPS* survey asked participants about their experiences with non-Aboriginal services and organizations. Specifically, the survey explored how much contact they have with these services and organizations, and the nature of their experience.

To what extent do urban Aboriginal peoples have contact with non-Aboriginal services or organizations? Of the seven non-Aboriginal service types included in the survey, banks or credit unions, and the health care system are by far the most likely to have been used recently by urban Aboriginal peoples. Nine in ten (89%) say they have made use of **banks/credit unions** in the past 12 months, and more than eight in ten (84%) say the same about the **health care system.**
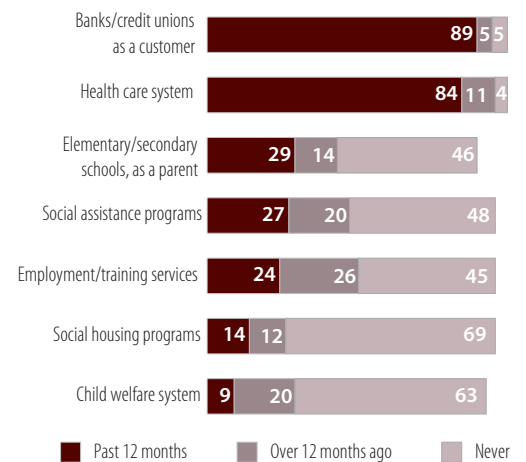
There is a substantial gap between these two non-Aboriginal services and others in degree of contact reported. The next most commonly used non-Aboriginal establishment is **elementary and secondary schools**, with three in ten (29%) urban Aboriginal peoples who say they have been in contact with schools as a parent in the past year. Similarly, one-quarter each say they have made use of non-Aboriginal **social assistance programs** (27%), and non-Aboriginal **employment and training services** (24%). In each of these three cases, close to half of urban Aboriginal peoples say they have never used these services (the remainder say they have, but that it was over a year ago).

Urban Aboriginal peoples are least likely to report experience with non-Aboriginal social housing programs and the child welfare system. Fourteen percent say they made use of **social housing programs** in the past year, and a similar proportion (12%) say they did so over a year ago. Nine percent report having contact with the **child welfare system** in the past 12 months, and another 20 percent have had less recent contact. Majorities of urban Aboriginal peoples say they have never had contact with either of these types of organizations.

There are consistent and important variations in contact with these non-Aboriginal services and organizations, particularly when it comes to socio-economic status and gender. Urban Aboriginal peoples with the least education and lowest incomes are consistently less likely to have made recent use of banks, the health care system, or elementary and secondary schools (as a parent), and are more likely to have had recent experience with social assistance programs, employment and training services, social housing programs and the child welfare system. Women are more likely than men to have ever been in contact with these non-Aboriginal services, with the exception of banks and employment services (for which level of contact is similar).

Contact with non-Aboriginal services and organizations

Have you made use of or been in contact with the following non-Aboriginal services in your city in the past 12 months, over 12 months ago or never?

	Past 12 months	Over 12 months ago	Never
Banks/credit unions as a customer	89	5	5
Health care system	84	11	4
Elementary/secondary schools, as a parent	29	14	46
Social assistance programs	27	20	48
Employment/training services	24	26	45
Social housing programs	14	12	69
Child welfare system	9	20	63

■ Past 12 months ■ Over 12 months ago ■ Never

Note: Percentages don't add up to 100% due to those who said they don't know, or chose not to answer this question.

There are also differences in experience with non-Aboriginal services by Aboriginal identity. First Nations peoples and Inuit are more likely than Métis to have made use of social assistance programs and social housing programs in the past 12 months. First Nations peoples are also more likely than others to have recently had experience with the child welfare system, and used employment and training services.

There are no consistent variations in contact with these non-Aboriginal services across cities, which could be due to the specific needs of the community and/or the varying availability of Aboriginal services in these areas. For example, urban Aboriginal peoples in Montreal are less likely than others to report recent contact with the health care system, elementary and secondary schools, and employment and training services (this last together with Vancouver residents). Also, urban Aboriginal peoples living in Toronto are more likely to report using social assistance and social housing programs (this last together with Regina and Halifax residents).

Have experiences with non-Aboriginal services been positive or negative?

Those who have been in contact with non-Aboriginal services are generally positive about the experience, with the exception of the child welfare system, where negative experiences outweigh positive ones.

Positive experiences with non-Aboriginal services tend to outweigh negative ones, with the exception of experiences with the child welfare system. However, perceptions vary across the types of services, and negative experiences are more common for those services more often accessed by urban Aboriginal peoples with less education and lower incomes.

Urban Aboriginal peoples who have ever used or made contact with these non-Aboriginal services were asked if the experience was generally positive or generally negative. They are most likely to report positive experiences with **banks and credit unions** (90%), **employment and training services** (84%), **the health care system** (82%), and **elementary and secondary schools (as a parent)** (80%). In each of these cases, only a minority (ranging between 8% and 15%) say they had a negative experience.

This pattern changes for those services that are more commonly used by urban Aboriginal peoples with less education and lower incomes. While over six in ten (64%) of those who have accessed **social housing programs** say their experience was generally positive, nearly three in ten (27%) say it was negative. Similarly, six in ten (58%) report positive experiences with **social assistance programs,** while three in ten (32%) say their experiences were negative.

Among urban Aboriginal peoples who have ever had contact with the **child welfare system**, negative perceptions of this experience (45%) outweigh positive ones (39%).
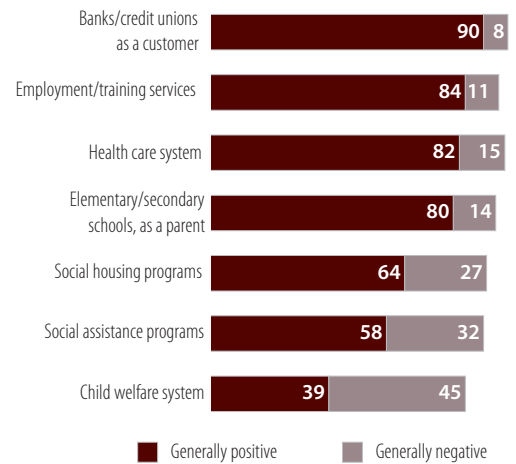
In most cases, urban Aboriginal peoples who have used these services more recently (past 12 months) are more likely to hold a positive impression of their experience than those who were in contact more than a year ago. The two exceptions are the health care system and employment services, which receive similarly positive perceptions no matter how recent the contact. This may reflect efforts that many cities have made in recent years to improve relations with their urban Aboriginal populations, or it could be that memories of negative experiences last longer than positive ones.

Perceptions of these services are remarkably consistent among those who have used them, with a few exceptions: the main variations are by city. For example, positive perceptions of one's experience with social assistance programs ranges from 81 percent in Thunder Bay to only 45 percent in Winnipeg. Positive experiences with the health care system are more common in Halifax (91%) than elsewhere, while negative experiences with elementary and secondary schools are most common in Canada's big cities, Toronto (26%) and Vancouver (21%). Finally, while negative experiences with the child welfare system outweigh positive ones across most of the 10 cities (residents of Toronto and Vancouver are divided), the opposite is actually the case in Thunder Bay (69% positive vs. 29% negative) and Regina (53% positive vs. 27% negative), and to a lesser extent in Montreal (51% positive vs. 36% negative).

Positive perceptions of social housing, and employment and training programs vary by number of years in the city, and are both more common among those have lived in their city for less than 10 years (69% and 89%, respectively). Younger people (87% of those aged 18 to 44) are also more likely than those aged 45 or older (78%) to have positive perceptions of their contact with employment services. Métis (83%) are more likely than First Nations peoples (76%) to report a positive experience with the elementary and secondary school system as a parent. Positive perceptions of banks are most common among those in the highest income bracket (96%), and yet are also at or approaching the 90-percent level for those at lower incomes levels.

Experience with non-Aboriginal services*

Was your experience with this service generally positive or generally negative?

Service	Generally positive	Generally negative
Banks/credit unions as a customer	90	8
Employment/training services	84	11
Health care system	82	15
Elementary/secondary schools, as a parent	80	14
Social housing programs	64	27
Social assistance programs	58	32
Child welfare system	39	45

■ Generally positive   ■ Generally negative

*Subsample: Those who have used the services

Note: Percentages don't add up to 100% due to those who said they don't know, or chose not to answer this question.

Negative experiences with non-Aboriginal services

Urban Aboriginal peoples who have had negative experiences with non-Aboriginal services were asked to describe the experience (unprompted, in their own words). Some of these experiences are presented in the sidebar on this page.

The most common concern is being treated poorly. Just over four in ten (43%) say their experience was negative because of racism or discrimination; they were treated unfairly or disrespectfully; or they encountered staff that were judgmental, mean or rude, or lacked empathy, didn't understand their needs or culture, or simply didn't believe them.

Three in ten (29%) had problems with process, such as long waiting lists or wait periods, complicated paperwork, missing documents, or expensive fees. Two in ten (20%) question the effectiveness of the service, saying it was not supportive, unhelpful and didn't actually achieve its goal. Nine percent have concerns that the services lack resources, such as qualified staff or funding, and therefore provide poor or disorganized service.

Other negative experiences relate to having an application rejected (5%), being misinformed or misdiagnosed (4%), or being removed as a child from their home (4%) or having their children removed from them (2%).

First Nations peoples (50%) and Inuit (48%) are more likely to say their negative experience with a non-Aboriginal service relates to being poorly treated (and particularly experiencing racism and discrimination) than are Métis (36%). Poor treatment is also a more common concern in Toronto (59%), Edmonton (55%) and Regina (54%) than in other cities.

Interestingly, urban Aboriginal peoples with a university degree (50%) are slightly more likely than those with less education (40% of those with high school or less) to say their experience with a non-Aboriginal service was negative because they were poorly treated. In turn, those with no formal education (27%) are more apt than those with a post-secondary education (14%) to say their experience was negative because the service was not helpful or didn't accomplish anything.

The types of concerns that urban Aboriginal peoples express vary somewhat by type of service. Poor treatment is the most common concern with most of the non-Aboriginal services discussed, but particularly for elementary and secondary schools (83%). The exceptions are non-Aboriginal social housing programs, for which the number one reason for a negative experience is waiting lists or wait times (48%), and the health care system, where wait lists or wait times (39%) is as common a concern as poor treatment. Those who had a negative experience with social assistance programs and employment services are more likely than others to say it is because the service was not helpful or effective (34% and 40%, respectively).

Importance of Aboriginal services

*Regardless whether they are users or non-users of non-Aboriginal services, or whether these experiences have been positive or negative, large majorities of urban Aboriginal peoples believe it is very important to also have **Aboriginal** services.*

Importance of Aboriginal services

How important do you think it is that the following Aboriginal services exist in addition to non-Aboriginal ones?
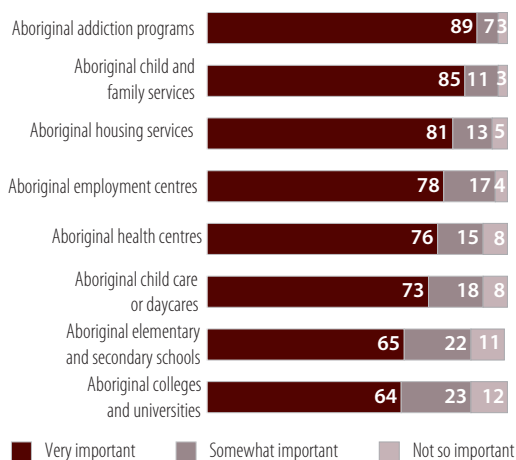
Service	Very important	Somewhat important	Not so important
Aboriginal addiction programs	89	7	3
Aboriginal child and family services	85	11	3
Aboriginal housing services	81	13	5
Aboriginal employment centres	78	17	4
Aboriginal health centres	76	15	8
Aboriginal child care or daycares	73	18	8
Aboriginal elementary and secondary schools	65	22	11
Aboriginal colleges and universities	64	23	12

■ Very important   ■ Somewhat important   ■ Not so important

Note: Percentages don't add up to 100% due to those who said they don't know, or chose not to answer this question.

There is a consensus among urban Aboriginal peoples that it is important for *Aboriginal* services to exist in addition to non-Aboriginal ones. This is considered to be most important in the case of addiction programs (89% very important), followed by child and family services (85%), and housing services (81%). More than seven in ten each say that Aboriginal employment centres (78%), Aboriginal health centres (76%), and Aboriginal child care or daycares (73%) are very important. Slightly fewer but still majorities of urban Aboriginal peoples say it is very important to have Aboriginal elementary and secondary schools (65%), and Aboriginal colleges and universities (64%). In all cases, most of the remaining participants say having Aboriginal services is somewhat important, and very few say it is not so important (ranging from a low of 3% to a high of 12%).

One might expect the perceived importance of these Aboriginal services to be higher among users of the corresponding non-Aboriginal service, or at least among those who had a negative experience with the non-Aboriginal service, but that is not always the case. The importance of Aboriginal housing services is highest among urban Aboriginal peoples who have recently used a non-Aboriginal housing service (93%), and yet is also considered very important by 79 percent of those who have never had occasion to use non-Aboriginal housing services. As well, those who had a negative experience with non-Aboriginal elementary and secondary schools (76%) are more likely than those who had a positive experience (66%) to say having Aboriginal elementary and secondary schools is very important. Otherwise, the perceived importance of these Aboriginal services is similar for both users and non-users of the corresponding non-Aboriginal service, and regardless of whether that experience was negative or positive.

There are some consistent differences in the perceived importance of Aboriginal services by city, Aboriginal identity, age, education and household income. For most (but not all) types of services, having an Aboriginal service is considered more important in Vancouver, Toronto and Halifax; among First Nations peoples and Inuit than among Métis; among older urban Aboriginal peoples (aged 45 and older); among those with no degree; and those with household incomes under $60,000. The perceived importance of Aboriginal services is also typically higher among those who feel they belong to a community that is mostly or exclusively Aboriginal.