

I. The Research – A Tale of Eleven Cities

The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study is the culmination of a research process started more than two years ago, in March 2008, by the Environics Institute. The original inspiration for *UAPS* stemmed from observations heard repeatedly from Aboriginal persons and organizations about the need for research that aims to understand the experiences, identities, values and aspirations of urban Aboriginal peoples across Canada, and how valuable they felt it could be in revealing and documenting what is happening in Aboriginal communities in ways that could lead to positive outcomes. At the outset, it was recognized that the success of the research would be determined by Aboriginal involvement in all phases of the process, including design, implementation and interpretation.

To accomplish its aims, the *UAPS* included three separate research elements. First, 2,614 person-to-person interviews were conducted (the “Main” survey) with First Nations peoples (status and non-status), Métis and Inuit in 11 cities across Canada: Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Montreal, Toronto, Halifax and Ottawa (Inuit only), between March and October 2009. Second, a telephone survey was conducted with 2,501 non-Aboriginal urban Canadians living in these same cities (excluding Ottawa) from April to May 2009. Finally, a pilot survey of 182 current and past National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF) scholars was conducted on-line from June to July 2009.

A description of each of these surveys (main, non-Aboriginal and NAAF) is provided in the following sections.

Main survey

Research design

The research design of the main survey was guided by an Advisory Circle of recognized experts from academia and Aboriginal communities across Canada (see page 12 of this report for a list of *UAPS* Advisory Circle members). The Advisory Circle first met in September 2008 at the Forks in Winnipeg to discuss and agree on the broad focus and direction of the research. The main survey of urban Aboriginal peoples was originally conceived as a standard telephone survey with follow-up in-person interviews with a subset of participants, but the Advisory Circle felt in-person interviews would more effectively capture the full spectrum of the urban Aboriginal population (e.g., overlooking the homeless or those in shelters, or those with cell phones but no land line). In-person interviews also allow for a longer questionnaire length and for the establishment of rapport between interviewer and participant, ensuring a greater depth of information on a wide range of topics and greater comfort discussing potentially sensitive topics. Finally, Aboriginal culture may be characterized as an oral tradition, making interview-based data collection the most culturally-appropriate choice. As a result, in-person interviews were chosen as the sole methodology for the main survey.

The Advisory Circle also developed the conceptual framework upon which the research is based. At its inaugural meeting, the Advisory Circle identified four themes – identities, experiences, values and aspirations – and a list of topics to be explored in the research.

Based on this framework, Environics Research Group developed an initial content outline that addressed these themes and topics, followed by several drafts of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to include both structured questions, to obtain quantifiable information, and open-ended questions, to capture greater depth and unprompted response to certain types of questions.

At each stage of questionnaire development, input was solicited from the Advisory Circle and study sponsors. Prior to the launch of the survey, the questionnaire was pilot tested by the Institute for Urban Studies

UAPS conceptual framework

Who are you? IDENTITIES	What’s your everyday life like? EXPERIENCES
What’s important to you in your life? VALUES	What do you want for your future? ASPIRATIONS

at the University of Winnipeg (which also served as the local project team in Winnipeg for interviews conducted among First Nations peoples and Inuit). The pilot test consisted of interviews with a small sample of Aboriginal participants, conducted in the same manner as for the full survey. A small number of relatively minor questionnaire changes were implemented following feedback from the pilot test.

Implementation

The implementation of the main survey was co-ordinated by two Aboriginal Project Managers, who managed the local research teams in each city. The Project Managers were responsible for recruiting a Project Co-ordinator in each city,² who are affiliated with universities or other organizations, or are independent community members (i.e., have no such affiliations), and most of whom are Aboriginal. Each Project Co-ordinator recruited and trained approximately eight to 10 local Aboriginal students and other community members to conduct the interviews (in total, there were 116 Aboriginal interviewers involved in this study). Project Co-ordinators themselves also received training in research methodologies and interviewing through the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

The main study was conducted with 2,614 individuals aged 18 or older who self-identify as First Nations (status or non-status), Métis or Inuit, across the 11 cities included in the study. The 10 main cities include Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. These 10 cities have a total population of 286,000 Aboriginal people, representing 46 percent of the urban Aboriginal population in Canada. Ottawa comprised the 11th city, and was added to include an important urban Inuit community. The geographic boundary for each city was defined as the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), and excluded urban reserves.

Perhaps the greatest methodological challenge in conducting this survey was defining and locating representative samples of Aboriginal peoples in each city. There is no sampling frame available for the urban Aboriginal population. The 2006 Census provides comprehensive and reasonably current population statistics, although Statistics Canada does acknowledge limitations related to its enumeration of Aboriginal Peoples due to “under-coverage” (individuals who are missed on Census Day, for example, because they are homeless or transient), and those living in institutions such as hospitals, jails or shelters.³ To ensure as representative a sample of urban Aboriginal peoples as possible, the 2006 Census was used to construct a profile of Aboriginal people 18 years and older in each city, based on Aboriginal identity (First Nations, Métis, Inuit), age, gender and education. Given the importance of First Nations Elders to their communities, efforts were made to include a minimum number in each city. In Toronto, the sample was also designed to include representation from both the 416 and 905 area codes. Interviews were mostly conducted in English, with a small number of French interviews in Montreal, and Inuktitut interviews among Inuit in Ottawa.

Based on the population profiles developed, quotas were established for all age, gender, education and identity groups in each city. To “populate” these cells, the study relied primarily on “snowball” or “network-based” sampling to identify participants. These are sampling techniques whereby study participants suggest friends or acquaintances as possible new participants, and are typically used with populations that are difficult to reach.

For the *UAPS*, Project Co-ordinators in each city worked with local Aboriginal organizations, colleges and universities, and community foundations, who referred individuals who were interested in participating in the survey. These initial individuals then referred their peers, and so on. Project Co-ordinators and

² There were two Project Co-ordinators in Winnipeg, one of whom was responsible for interviews with First Nations peoples and Inuit, and one of whom was responsible for interviews with Métis.

³ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-592-x/12-592-x2007001-eng.htm> (Accessed January 25, 2010).

interviewers were extremely resourceful and used a variety of other methods to recruit participants, including posters, recruiting at Aboriginal events, telephone numbers for individuals to call if they wanted to participate, or simply visiting areas of the city (e.g., parks or apartment complexes) where Aboriginal people live or gather. As potential participants were identified through these multiple sources, they “populated” the relevant cells of the city profile, so that the final sample in each city matched the population according to these characteristics (age, gender, education and identity). The characteristics were also verified with each participant prior to the start of their interview. Interviewing in each city took place over one to four months, with interviews conducted between March 4 and October 4, 2009.

This approach was ultimately successful in achieving a representative sample of Aboriginal peoples in most cities, and including hard-to-reach groups of Aboriginal peoples such as individuals who are renting a room in a rooming house or hostel (4% of the final sample), or living in a temporary shelter (3%), or who are homeless (less than 0.5%).

The research was conducted in accordance with established standards and procedures for social science research and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Research Ethics (SSHRC, NSERC, CIHR), as well the standards set out by the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA). Potential participants were fully briefed about the research at the recruiting stage, to ensure they could make an informed decision about their participation. The briefing explained the purpose of the study, how the information was to be used, and the time required, and ensured they understood the voluntary nature of the research and the guaranteed anonymity of their responses. Each participant who completed the survey was paid \$50.00 (either in cash or in the form of a gift card) as a thank you for their time. Each of the local research teams worked hard to create a safe space for participants to speak freely and without fears of being judged. The success of this approach is demonstrated by the fact that many interviews went well beyond an hour in length and produced a rich and detailed set of responses from participants.

A limitation in the sampling of the main survey is that it under-represents Métis in Saskatoon, Montreal and Halifax compared to the 2006 Census. The local research team in Saskatoon encountered difficulties in carrying out their mandate, and in the end too few interviews were conducted with Métis with a college or university education, suggesting there may have been particular difficulties in identifying more assimilated Métis for participation. In Montreal and Halifax, the lack of clarity within the communities-at-large in these cities around the definition of Métis identity may be a contributing factor.

Actual (unweighted) UAPS sample distribution by Aboriginal identity group compared to 2006 Census

	First Nations		Métis		Inuit	
	Sample %	Census	Sample %	Census	Sample %	Census
Vancouver	64	60	33	40	3	1
Calgary	55	40	42	60	4	1
Edmonton	52	41	42	58	6	1
Regina	59	52	40	48	1	*
Saskatoon	76	51	24	49	*	*
Winnipeg	50	35	48	65	1	1
Thunder Bay	71	72	29	27	-	*
Toronto	69	67	27	32	4	1
Montreal	65	62	10	35	25	3
Halifax	73	59	24	38	3	3
TOTAL	60	49	30	50	10	1

* indicates less than 0.5%

The adjacent table presents the proportion of interviews in each city conducted with First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit, in comparison to the population proportions reported by the 2006 Census.

At the analysis stage, data were weighted to accurately reflect the distribution of the population according to the 2006 Census. The data for Inuit have been included as part of the main survey results, and accordingly have been weighted to their appropriate proportion within the Aboriginal population of these 11 cities. A separate report focusing on the Inuit results combined across cities will be produced at a later date. The table on the next page presents both the actual (unweighted) and the weighted participant profiles in the 11 cities included in the main survey.

The adjacent table presents the household income, living situation and Elder status for survey participants (characteristics for which there are no comparable Census information).

Analysis and interpretation

Completed questionnaires were coded and data entered at Environics' data processing facilities in Toronto. The process of coding verbatim responses was conducted with Aboriginal involvement, to ensure cultural nuances were captured. In addition to having members of the Toronto interviewing team involved in coding some of the questionnaires, the final codes assigned to open-ended responses were reviewed by members of the Montreal interviewing team, under the auspices of the firm Acosys.

The interpretation of the study results was iterative in nature, and unfolded in stages. Initially, the data were analyzed and pulled together into a working draft report by the Environics research team. In November 2009, the Advisory Circle and some of the Project Co-ordinators met for a second time at the Forks in Winnipeg to discuss insights emerging from the research, and to agree upon the narrative and the conclusions of the study. The Environics team then revised the report, drawing further upon the expertise of members of the Advisory Circle as required. The Advisory Circle then reviewed and provided feedback on the revised report prior to it being finalized.

Once the *UAPS* was underway, it was recognized that there was a significant opportunity to expand upon the standard reporting for this type of project by creating a video archive of the lives of urban Aboriginal peoples, as told in their own words. The Department of Indian Communication Arts at First Nations University was commissioned to conduct 50 one-hour long video interviews with survey participants in each city, with the objective of bringing the study "to life" with the faces and voices of diverse individuals involved in the *UAPS*. This video archive will eventually be made available on the *UAPS* website www.uaps.ca. The hope is that 100 years from now the archives will remain an invaluable source of information about this time, and a yardstick against which to measure progress.

Survey of non-Aboriginal Canadians

The survey of non-Aboriginal Canadians is an important component of this study because it reveals how this population currently views the experience of Aboriginal peoples, reflecting some of the barriers and opportunities facing the Aboriginal community. A telephone methodology was chosen for the non-Aboriginal survey as it is the most effective and proven mode for identifying and contacting the population-at-large for this type of survey.

The *UAPS* Advisory Circle discussed the focus for the non-Aboriginal questionnaire and identified some question areas at its inaugural meeting in September 2008. Based on this input, Environics developed an initial content outline, followed by a draft questionnaire, which were circulated to the Advisory Circle and study sponsors for feedback. The content of this questionnaire is distinct from the questionnaire for the main survey (with Aboriginal peoples), although it includes a few of the same questions where comparisons were appropriate. The questionnaire also incorporates questions from ongoing public opinion syndicated research conducted by Environics (*FOCUS CANADA*) that allow for comparisons to historical data. The final questionnaire includes primarily structured questions, to obtain quantifiable information, but also incorporates a few open-ended questions to capture greater depth and unprompted response to certain types of questions.

UAPS participant profile

	(%) Weighted
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
<\$10,000	18
\$10,000 - \$30,000	23
\$30,000 - \$60,000	22
\$60,000+	10
Refused	9
LIVING SITUATION	
Renting an apartment or house	56
Homeowner	18
Living with friends or family	17
Renting a room in rooming house/ hostel	4
Living in a temporary shelter	3
Homeless	*
ELDER	
Yes	11
No	89

	Actual (Unweighted) (%)	Weighted (%)
IDENTITY		
First Nations	60	50
<i>Status</i>	56	46
<i>Yes, registered under Bill C-31</i>	15	14
<i>Non-status</i>	4	4
Métis	30	49
Inuit	10	1
GENDER		
Men	41	45
Women	58	55
AGE		
18-24	20	19
25-44	50	47
45+	29	34
EDUCATION		
No diploma	27	29
High school diploma	31	28
College degree	23	33
University degree	19	10
CITY		
Vancouver	10	15
Calgary	10	9
Edmonton	10	17
Saskatoon	9	7
Regina	10	5
Winnipeg	10	24
Thunder Bay	10	4
Toronto	10	11
Montreal	10	7
Halifax	8	2
Ottawa (Inuit only)	6	*

* Less than 0.5%

Prior to finalizing the survey for field, Environics conducted a full pilot test with “live” participants. This consisted of telephone interviews in the same manner as for the full survey, but with a small sample of participants. Following the pilot test, a small number of revisions to the questionnaire were identified and implemented.

This survey consists of telephone interviews conducted with a representative sample of 2,501 non-Aboriginal people (aged 18 and older) living in 10 of the cities covered by the main study (excluding Ottawa) (250 per city). Interviewing took place between April 28 and May 15, 2009. The margin of error for a probability sample of 2,501 is plus or minus 2.0 percentage points, 19 times in 20.⁴

National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF) pilot survey

The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation is a nationally registered non-for-profit organization dedicated to raising funds to deliver programs that provide the tools necessary for Aboriginal peoples to achieve brighter futures. The purpose of the NAAF survey is to measure the experiences and successes of these scholars, and derive insights from their lives and careers that will aid future generations of aspiring Aboriginal students.

Originally conceived as a larger study, the NAAF survey was ultimately conducted as a smaller pilot since older records were not up-to-date and did not always contain current contact information. The results of the NAAF pilot survey are based on an on-line survey completed by 182 current and past NAAF scholarship recipients. An on-line methodology was chosen because the NAAF typically communicates with its scholars by e-mail and therefore had relatively current contact information. The NAAF has also had success with on-line surveys in the past, and an on-line survey is appropriate both for the type of information the *UAPS* is collecting and for the audience (those with post-secondary education who are likely comfortable with this survey format).

This questionnaire is based on the version used for the main survey. The *UAPS* Advisory Circle and the NAAF provided input into removing sections and/or questions of less relevance (e.g., questions on political engagement, the justice system) and expanding others (e.g., education section, what a NAAF award means for identity). The questions were also revised as necessary from an interviewer-led format to a self-completion format appropriate for an on-line methodology. The final questionnaire included primarily structured questions, to obtain quantifiable information, with a few open-ended questions to capture greater depth.

The NAAF compiled a list of 1,800 e-mails for current and past scholarship recipients. This list was heavily weighted towards recent recipients, since older records are not up-to-date and thus do not contain e-mail addresses or current contact information. NAAF sent an e-mail to each scholarship recipient to inform them of the research, and invited them to participate in the survey and requested a reply to confirm their interest. A total of 296 NAAF scholars indicated their interest in participating, of which 182 completed the on-line survey. Two-thirds of participants in the NAAF survey are currently in school (61% full-time and 7% part-time), while one-third (32%) have completed or are no longer in school. This survey took place between June 16 and July 6, 2009.

Further details on the methodology of all three *UAPS* surveys are provided in the Appendix to this report.

⁴ Because the sample for the main survey is based on individuals who initially “self-selected” for participation, no estimate of sampling error can be calculated for the main survey. It should be noted that all surveys, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error, including but not limited to sampling error, coverage error and measurement error.

This chapter provides background information drawn from Statistics Canada and other relevant sources on the Aboriginal population in Canada. It includes a description of the Aboriginal identity population (First Nations, Métis, Inuit), along with socio-demographic information on population growth rates, urbanization, and socio-economic trends. As well, this chapter briefly highlights the enduring colonial legacy experienced by Aboriginal peoples living in urban centres today.

II. The Urban Aboriginal Context

First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples

For the purposes of this study, the *UAPS* designed the research approach, and reports survey results, based on three Aboriginal “identity groups”: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. *UAPS* participants identified themselves as belonging to one of these three groups. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the peoples captured in these three groups may consider themselves to be quite different from others in the same group. The categories “First Nations,” “Métis” and “Inuit” encompass a tremendous amount of Aboriginal diversity that, while beyond the scope of the *UAPS* to fully capture, does exist.

According to the 2006 Census, a total of 1,172,790 people in Canada identified themselves as an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations, Métis or Inuit. This population accounts for almost four percent of the total population of Canada.

First Nations people, Métis and Inuit are three distinct peoples with unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE. As of 2006, there are 698,025 First Nations people in Canada. “First Nations people” refers to Status and Non-Status “Indian” peoples in Canada. First Nations peoples are identified in the Constitution as one of the founding nations of Canada, along with the English and French. Many communities also use the term “First Nation” in the name of their community. Currently, there are 615 First Nation communities, which represent more than 50 nations or cultural groups and 50 Aboriginal languages.

The First Nations population increased 29 percent between 1996 and 2006. The majority of First Nations people are Status Indians, meaning they are registered under the *Indian Act*.⁵ The census enumerated 564,870 people who reported they were Registered Indians, 81 percent of the total First Nations population. An estimated 133,155 First Nations people identified as Non-Status, meaning they were not registered under the *Indian Act*.

UAPS participants who identified as “First Nations” are generally referred to as “First Nations peoples” and, where appropriate, as “status First Nations peoples” and “non-status First Nations peoples” for the purposes of this report.

MÉTIS. Of the 1,172,790 people who identified themselves as an Aboriginal person in the 2006 Census, 389,785 reported they were Métis. This population has almost doubled (increasing by 91%) since 1996. The term “Métis” used here refers to Aboriginal people of mixed First Nations and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis people, as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit or non-Aboriginal people.

The Métis National Council (www.metisnation.ca) defines Métis as “a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation.” The Métis people constitute a distinct Aboriginal nation largely based in western Canada. The “historic Métis Nation’s Homeland” is based on the traditional territory upon which the

“Canada is about to become a whole lot different in the next couple of generations – the Aboriginal population is growing faster than any other group of people.”

— Waubgeshig Rice

(The Globe and Mail on-line edition, July 20, 2009)

⁵ The *Indian Act* sets out certain federal government obligations and regulates the management of Indian reserve lands, moneys and other resources. Only Status Indians are recognized as Indians under the *Indian Act*, and therefore entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law. Source: Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census.

Métis people have historically lived and relied upon within west central North America. This territory roughly includes the three Prairie provinces (Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan), parts of Ontario, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories.

INUIT. In 2006, 50,485 individuals identified as Inuit. Inuit are the Aboriginal people of Arctic Canada. About 45,000 Inuit live in 53 communities in: Nunatsiavut (Labrador); Nunavik (Quebec); Nunavut; and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of the Northwest Territories. Between 1996 and 2006, the Inuit population rose by 26 percent.⁶

The Aboriginal identity population, 2006

Aboriginal identity	2006	Percentage change from 1996 to 2006***
Total population	31,241,030	9
Aboriginal identity population	1,172,790	45
First Nations people*	698,025	29
Métis*	389,785	91
Inuit*	50,485	26
Multiple and other Aboriginal responses**	34,500	34
Non-Aboriginal population	30,068,240	8

* Includes persons who reported a North American Indian, Métis or Inuit identity only

** Includes persons who reported more than one Aboriginal identity group (North American Indian, Métis or Inuit) and those who reported being a Registered Indian and/or Band member without reporting an Aboriginal identity.

*** Data have been adjusted to account for incompletely enumerated reserves in 1996 and 2006.

Sources: *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census, Statistics Canada*

Aboriginal population and proportion of CMAs, with population increase, 2001-2006

	Aboriginal population (2006) (n)	Proportion of CMA (2006)	Change 2001 – 2006
Halifax	5,320	1.4%	+51%
Ottawa-Gatineau	20,590	1.8%	+52%
Montreal	17,865	0.5%	+60%
Toronto	26,575	0.5%	+31%
Thunder Bay	10,055	8.3%	+23%
Winnipeg	68,385	10.0%	+22%
Regina	17,105	8.9%	+9%
Saskatoon	21,535	9.3%	+6%
Calgary	26,575	2.5%	+26%
Edmonton	52,100	5.1%	+27%
Vancouver	40,310	1.9%	+9%

Source: 2006 Census

A rapidly growing population

As noted, the Aboriginal population in Canada – First Nations, Métis and Inuit – grew between 1996 and 2006, experiencing an overall increase of 45 percent, a rate almost six times faster than the eight-percent increase in the non-Aboriginal population.

Much of this growth took place in urban centres, including in the 11 cities (i.e., Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Ottawa) that comprise the *UAPS*.

There are various factors that may explain the rapid growth of the Aboriginal population in Canada. These factors likely include natural population growth (i.e., births minus deaths), higher fertility rates and a reduction over time in the number of incompletely enumerated First Nations reserves. However, there is evidence that another key factor is ethnic mobility, which occurs when someone changes their ethnic affiliation over time. In short, more individuals are choosing to identify themselves as Aboriginal than in previous Census years.

Growing urbanization

In 2006, half of the Aboriginal population in Canada lived in urban centres (including large cities or census metropolitan areas and smaller urban centres), up from 47 percent in 1996. In turn, the proportion of the Aboriginal population that lives on-reserve or in rural (off-reserve) locations has declined.

⁶ <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/in/index-eng.asp>

Aboriginal groups differ significantly in their degree of urbanization. The most urbanized Aboriginal peoples are non-status First Nations peoples (or non-status Indians) and Métis, with 74 percent and 66 percent, respectively, living in urban areas. Status First Nations peoples (or Registered Indians) are less urbanized (38% live in urban centres), with about half of their population (52%) residing on reserves (and about 10% located in rural areas off reserve). Inuit are the least urbanized, with less than 30 percent residing in an urban centre.

A younger population

Half (48%) of Aboriginal people in Canada are children and young people under 24 years of age, much higher than the 31 percent of the non-Aboriginal population. This proportion is particularly high in Regina and Saskatoon, two cities included in the *UAPS*, which have more than half (56% and 55%, respectively) of their Aboriginal populations aged 24 or younger.

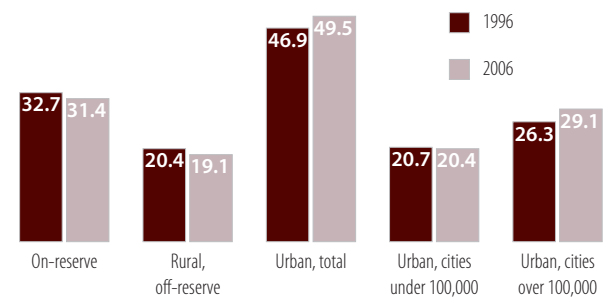
This has implications for the future job market, among others. By 2017, there is projected to be close to a million Aboriginal people of working age (15 and older), or about 3.4 percent of the working age population overall (Statistics Canada 2005). In the same time period, the number of young Aboriginal adults (aged 20 to 29) – those entering the labour market – is expected to grow by more than 40 percent, which is well beyond the projected growth of nine percent among 20- to 29-year-olds in the general Canadian population. The Aboriginal share of the young adult population is likely to be particularly high in the western provinces, potentially accounting for 30 percent of those in their 20s in Saskatchewan and 24 percent in Manitoba. A recent Statistics Canada publication concluded about the western provinces that “the degree to which these regions can integrate these young people in the labour force will become increasingly important.”⁷

Socio-economic gaps are narrowing, but slowly

Employment rates improved and unemployment rates dropped for Aboriginal peoples between 2001 and 2006, yet Aboriginal peoples remain less likely than non-Aboriginal people to be employed.⁸ Almost two-thirds (65.8%) of Aboriginal people of working age (25 to 54 years) were employed in 2006, up from 61.2 percent in 2001. By comparison, the employment rate for non-Aboriginal people was 81.6 percent in 2006 (up from 80.3% in 2001).

Unemployment rates between 2001 and 2006 declined more quickly for Aboriginal peoples (down 4.2 percentage points) than for the non-Aboriginal population (down only 0.8 percentage points). Despite this improvement, in 2006, Aboriginal peoples (13.2%) were twice as likely to be unemployed as non-Aboriginal people (5.2%).

Distribution of Aboriginal identity population, by location
1996 – 2006



Source: Richards, J. & Scott, M. (2009). *Aboriginal Education: Strengthening the Foundations*. Prepared for Canadian Policy Research Networks. Census data has been revised to account for under-enumeration of reserves.

7 Jacqueline Luffman and Deborah Sussman, *The Aboriginal labour force in Western Canada, Perspectives*, Statistics Canada, January 2007, Vol. 8, no. 1.

8 Statistics Canada. 2008. *Canada's Changing Labour Force, Census 2006*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 97-559-X. Ottawa, Ontario. <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-559/pdf/97-559-XIE2006001.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2010)

Similar patterns have been found in employment income and low-income rates among Aboriginal peoples in cities. Siggner and Costa (2005) found an overall decline in the gap in median employment income between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in most Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) between 1980 and 2000.⁹ Nonetheless, the most recent Census in 2006 continues to show a disparity in the median earnings even among those who worked full-time for the full year between Aboriginal peoples (\$34,940) and non-Aboriginal people (\$41,401). Another study found that, although the low-income rate among Aboriginal peoples in cities dropped between 1995 and 2002, Aboriginal peoples remained much more likely to fall into the low-income category (41.6%) compared to the general population (17.7%).¹⁰

The phenomenon of ethnic mobility described earlier may explain some of the improvement in employment rate and the reduced gap in employment income. That is, some individuals (those who are employed and have higher incomes) who previously did not self-identify as an Aboriginal person may now be choosing to do so.

A diverse population

The Aboriginal populations within each of the cities included in the *UAPS* are not uniform. Their composition varies by the relative proportions of First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit. For example, Métis comprise only one-quarter of the Aboriginal population of Thunder Bay, but are a majority (60%) in Winnipeg. First Nations peoples form the largest share of the Aboriginal population in most of the *UAPS* cities, with the exceptions of Winnipeg, Calgary and Edmonton, where Métis are the most populous group. In all cities, Inuit are only a small proportion of the Aboriginal population (less than 5%).

There is also diversity within the First Nations populations in each city. Some cities are home to many nations (e.g., Cree, Ojibway, Mohawk), while the First Nations populations in other cities come primarily from one or two nations of origin.

9 Siggner, A. & Costa, R. 2005. *Aboriginal Conditions in Census Metropolitan Areas, 1981-2001*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-613-MIE No. 008. Ottawa, Ontario. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-613-m/89-613-m2005008-eng.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2010).

10 Heisz, A. & McLeod, L. 2004. *Low-income in Census Metropolitan Areas, 1980-2000*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-613-MIE — No. 001. Ottawa, Ontario. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-613-m/2004001/4193746-eng.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2010).

The colonial legacy

This report cannot do justice in explaining the history and damaging effects of ‘colonial projects’ imposed upon Aboriginal peoples in Canada. These measures include residential schools, mission and day schools and other institutions, forced adoptions, forced relocation from one community to another, the delineation of status versus non-status Indians, denial of existence as in the case of the Métis Nation, and Bill C-31,¹¹ among others. As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has said, “Successive governments have tried – sometimes intentionally, sometimes in ignorance – to absorb Aboriginal people into Canadian society, thus eliminating them as distinct peoples. Policies pursued over the decades have undermined – and almost erased – Aboriginal cultures and identities.”¹² These assimilation policies have done great damage, the effects of which are intergenerational and therefore continue to be felt by Aboriginal peoples, not least in the difficulty many have in learning about their own history, family and identity. These impacts are best conveyed in the words of UAPS participants themselves:

Non-Aboriginal people, most 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. How do you compare Aboriginal people who have lived here forever to people who have come here from so many other cultures?

— UAPS participant, Calgary

11 *An Act to Amend the Indian Act* (S.C.-1985, C. 27), commonly referred to as Bill C-31, passed in April 15, 1985. Controversial and contested, the stated purposes of the Bill were to remove overt discrimination from the Indian Act; restore status and membership rights to those who lost them because of inequalities in the Act; and to increase control of Indian bands over their own affairs.

12 The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). 1996. *Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa, Government of Canada. p.3. ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/pubs/rpt/rpt-eng.asp.