



Introduction: A Profile of Edmonton's Aboriginal Population

Edmonton has one of the largest urban Aboriginal populations in Canada. The following statistics provide a profile of Edmonton's Aboriginal community. Data is taken from the 2006 Canadian Census, from *Aboriginal Edmonton* (City of Edmonton, 2009) as well as the *Report on Edmonton's Children and Youth: 2008* from the City of Edmonton and Success by Six.

- Edmonton's Aboriginal population is growing 2.5 times faster than the overall Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) population. Between 2001 and 2006, Edmonton's Aboriginal population increased by 27.3%, while the non-Aboriginal growth rate was 10.4%.
- The median age of the Aboriginal identity population is 25.1 years, which is much younger than the Edmonton CMA's median age of 36.4 years. Almost half of Aboriginal Edmontonians are under 25 years of age, in comparison to 32% of non-Aboriginal Edmontonians.
- 42.3% of Aboriginal people lived in poverty in 2001. This is over double the CMA poverty rate.
- The median income of Aboriginal households was \$51,551 in 2006. This is a 27% increase from the 2001 median income of \$40,595, and is 81% of the median CMA household income (\$63,082).
- In 2006, 37.5% of Aboriginal adults had a trades, college or university certificate or degree. 30% of Aboriginal women aged 20-24 had completed post-secondary education in 2001, compared to 17.3% twenty years earlier, in 1981.
- 9.8% of Aboriginal Edmontonians were unemployed in 2006. This is 3.3% lower than the 2001 Aboriginal unemployment rate.

Building Relationships with Aboriginal People in Edmonton

Edmonton's Urban Aboriginal Accord

The Urban Aboriginal Accord grew out of the Urban Aboriginal Community Dialogue Process, which began in 2005. The Accord provides a commitment by Edmonton's City Council for strengthening relationships between the City of Edmonton and Edmonton's Aboriginal population. It sets out guiding principles for working relationships between these groups. Find out more about the Urban Aboriginal Accord at www.edmonton.ca

Wichitowin: working together

Wichitowin Circle of Shared Responsibility and Stewardship is a community-driven model of an urban governance process that is inclusive of the many Aboriginal peoples and the agencies that serve them in Edmonton. Wichitowin is a participatory, solutions-oriented, inclusive process to identify concerns, develop solutions and take action in Edmonton's Aboriginal community, led by Aboriginal community members. Extensive consultation ensured that this process is strongly rooted in traditional Aboriginal principles and values. Visit wichitowin.ca for more information.

Aboriginal Agencies in Edmonton

The *Guide To Aboriginal Edmonton* provides a complete list of agencies serving Edmonton's aboriginal population. View a PDF of the guide online at www.edmonton.ca, or call the Aboriginal Relations Office at 780.944.7602 for a print copy. The Guide includes categories for emergency services, arts and culture organizations, business and economic development services, housing, employment, education, and many other resources.

A few organizations to take note of:

Creating Hope Society

Creating Hope Society exists to engage in a process of reconciliation that will allow Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal caregivers to arrive at a new place of understanding child welfare that will end, forever, the historically devastating impacts of child welfare. They provide programs for grandparents who are raising children, for Aboriginal mothers and for youth, in addition to events for the whole Aboriginal community. Visit creatinghopesociety.ca for more information.

Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society

Bent Arrow believes that the healthy upbringing of children is the responsibility of the whole community, and they work to provide guidance and support for young people. They offer a wide variety of services, including programs aimed specifically at parents, children, families, and pregnant teens. Visit www.bentarrow.ca for more information.

Aboriginal Children

Edmonton's Aboriginal population is young and active. The following statistics are taken from *The Early Learning experiences of off-reserve First Nations children in Canada* (Statistics Canada, 2010) and *Closing the Gap Between Vision and Reality*, the final report of the Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel (2010).

- In Canada, 94% of young First Nations children living off-reserve play outside every day in warm weather, and seven out of ten off-reserve First Nations children do arts and crafts every day. 50% of First Nations children under six years old living off reserve participate in traditional activities.
- One third of off-reserve First Nations children are raised by four or more people, including parents and grandparents.
- Aboriginal children make up 64% of the child intervention caseload in Alberta.

Alberta's Child Care System

At the inaugural meeting of "Gathering together for our Aboriginal children's future", Provincial Child and Youth Advocate John Mould suggested an explanation for the high representation of aboriginal children in Alberta's child care system:

- The over-representation of Aboriginal children and youth on child welfare caseloads stems largely from structural issues – from poverty, from health and wellness issues, and from social exclusion – rather than from the way child welfare systems operate.
- Aboriginal children are disproportionately living in poverty, in Alberta and across Canada.

"The only real way to decrease the number of First Nation, Métis and Inuit children who fall into care is to deal with the poverty and social exclusion that is far too great an influence on the lives of Aboriginal children and families in Canada and in Alberta."

Looking for Solutions: The Circle Alberta Dialogues

Family relationships play a critical role in the well-being of Aboriginal communities. Family connections help retain and recognize culture, build and strengthen identity, and provide a foundation for children.

The Circle Alberta Dialogues began in 2008 as a process for engaging stakeholders on critical issues, using relationship building as the framework for discussion. They aim to build bridges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The Dialogues have provided recommendations that emphasize family and suggest new ways to strengthen Aboriginal families, preventing the ongoing cycle of Aboriginal children in care. Recommendations include:

- Provision of parental support and education to new parents.
- Increased programming and support targeted to Aboriginal women as well as single parents.
- Increased pre-natal support targeted to young, Aboriginal mothers.
- Increased food security and nutritional education for Aboriginal women and their children both on-reserve and in urban centres.⁵

(source: *Circle Alberta: dialogues on aboriginal futures*. John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, 2010.)

Targeting poverty

Aboriginal children are disproportionately living in poverty. No program (federal or provincial) does more to lift families with children out of poverty than federal child tax benefits including the supplement for low income families. Unlike provincial social assistance with their demeaning means testing, all that is required to receive federal child tax benefits is filing an income tax return. Campaign 2000 estimates that - to lift every Canadian family out of poverty - the maximum amount per child would need to increase by about \$2000 to \$5400 per year.

Kinship Care

Many Aboriginal children in Alberta are placed in kinship care. Kinship care in Alberta approves a family home to care for a specific child because of a family connection or significant relationship to the child. Kinship care falls in the spectrum of Alberta's placement continuum, along with foster care, group care and residential care. Kinship care recognizes the importance of prior relationships between the child, caregiver and community, as well as the child's biological family, and is based on the understanding that these relationships require a unique approach to nurture and sustain. (source: *Kinship Care Review Report*. Government of Alberta, Children and Youth Services, 2009.)



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