



Aboriginal Population in Alberta

During the Aboriginal Programs Project survey, a number of ACR members asked for more information and clarification on “who are Aboriginal peoples?” This section was developed as a response to this question and provides an overview of the Aboriginal population in Alberta and a summary of key demographic trends. It is intended to provide useful information that helps ACR members put Aboriginal programs and practices into a wider context with regard to how the Aboriginal population is changing and the implications for developing successful programs.

All demographic data in this publication are derived from Statistics Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

A brief historical perspective

Aboriginal people are the descendants of the first people to settle on the western plains. Archaeologists believe that the first people came to America from Asia some 20,000 to 30,000 years ago; likely crossing a land bridge that once existed between Asia and Alaska. When the first European traders arrived in what is now Alberta, they met many different First Nations with distinct languages, beliefs, artistic traditions, histories, and alliances. Each First Nation had developed its own way of life and distinctive culture based on the specific natural characteristics of its home territory.

It is believed that the First Nations settled the plains about 8,000 years ago. They sustained themselves by hunting, primarily buffalo, and gathering. Later, these First Nations - including the Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, Plains Cree, Assiniboine and Sarcee - tamed horses and hunted buffalo with rifles they obtained through trade with European explorers and fur buyers.

In central Alberta, other groups such as the Woodland Cree and some Assiniboine/Stoney hunted and collected

food in the parkland areas in summer before moving north and west into the foothills and boreal forest to winter. They hunted buffalo but were more involved in fishing and trapping to support their way of life. In northern Alberta, many of the Athapaskan-speaking peoples, such as the Chipewyan/Dene, followed a different approach. Many hunted the caribou that move between the boreal forest in winter and the barrens in summer. Most Athapaskan groups also developed sophisticated techniques for fishing and hunting wild fowl.

During the 19th century, European fur traders married Native women. The result was the creation of a new people unique to Canada's plains. The children of these marriages are called Métis (meaning “mixed blood”) and they followed a way of life that was similar to that of First Nations.

Over the centuries, Aboriginal peoples have acquired knowledge and developed a way of life adapted to their specific environment. This has been expressed through traditional knowledge and beliefs which have been passed down from generation to generation. While traditional knowledge remains an important aspect of Aboriginal culture today, many Aboriginal people are also successfully engaged in mainstream economic activities and occupations.

Aboriginal population in Canada

The term “Aboriginal people” refers to the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America as defined in the *Constitution Act of 1982*, Section 35(2): “In this Act, the ‘Aboriginal people of Canada’ includes the Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada.” Just over 1.3 million people living in Canada in 2001 reported having at least some Aboriginal ancestry. This represents 4.4 per cent of the total population of Canada. In 1996, people who reported Aboriginal ancestry represented 3.8 per cent of the total population.



Using new data from the 2001 census, Statistics Canada (Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A Demographic Profile) has highlighted several interesting trends. From 1901 to 2001, the population of Aboriginal ancestry increased tenfold, while the total population of Canada rose by a factor of only six. However, the growth rate was very different in the first half of the 20th century compared with the second half. During the first 50 years, the Aboriginal population grew only 29 per cent, whereas the total population far more than doubled (161 per cent). This relatively slow rate of growth among the Aboriginal population occurred because high mortality rates more than offset high birth rates.

On the other hand, between 1951 and 2001, the Aboriginal ancestry population grew sevenfold, while the Canadian population as a whole only doubled. A major factor in this trend was the rapid decline in the infant death rate, mainly as a result of improved access to health services. The other factors included fewer incompletely enumerated reserves and an increased tendency of people to identify as Aboriginal.

Key demographic trends in Canada

Aboriginal peoples represent a significant and growing segment of the population in Canada and Alberta. Projected demographic changes make increased Aboriginal participation in the workforce important for society. While some of the barriers to Aboriginal workforce participation have lessened, other barriers to Aboriginal employment still remain. These barriers include skills and training, culture, communication and negative stereotypes

Based on an analysis of the Census 2001 Aboriginal data, a number of important trends have been identified in Aboriginal demographics, education and labour force participation rates. These trends represent:

1. The census shows a dramatic increase of 43 per cent in the growth of the Métis population between 1996 and 2001. This is attributed to a combination of

higher birth rates and greater awareness among Métis people related to their status.

2. The age distribution of the Aboriginal population shows that one-third are under the age of 15 and will be entering the labour force during the next 10 years - at a time when Canada expects a skilled labour force shortage.
3. As educational attainment increases, the gaps between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations become smaller, i.e., Aboriginal labour force participation, employment and unemployment rates become more like those of the non-Aboriginal population. Education attainment is increasing among all segments of the Aboriginal population.
4. There are many differences between segments of the Aboriginal population. In general, the Registered Indian and Inuit populations have lower levels of educational attainment than the Métis and Non-Status Indian populations. This tends to extend to other characteristics such as employment and income levels.
5. There is still a gap in the percentage of Aboriginal youth graduating from high school compared to the Canadian average. Sixty-one per cent of the population aged 25 to 64 reporting Aboriginal identity had completed at least high school in 2001 compared to 77 per cent for the non-Aboriginal population. By comparison, for the First Nations population living on-reserve, only 41 per cent had a high school graduation certificate (INAC Education Programs Report, 2003).
6. Between the 1996 and 2001 census, there was an increase of 63 per cent in the number of Aboriginal people graduating from university and a 46 per cent increase in the number graduating from college.
7. The employment situation on-reserve has actually worsened. Between 1996 and 2001, employment declined from 74 per cent to 70 per cent. There is



also the possibility that the data doesn't give a clear indication of the true unemployment rate on-reserve partly because of the seasonal nature of some employment on-reserve.

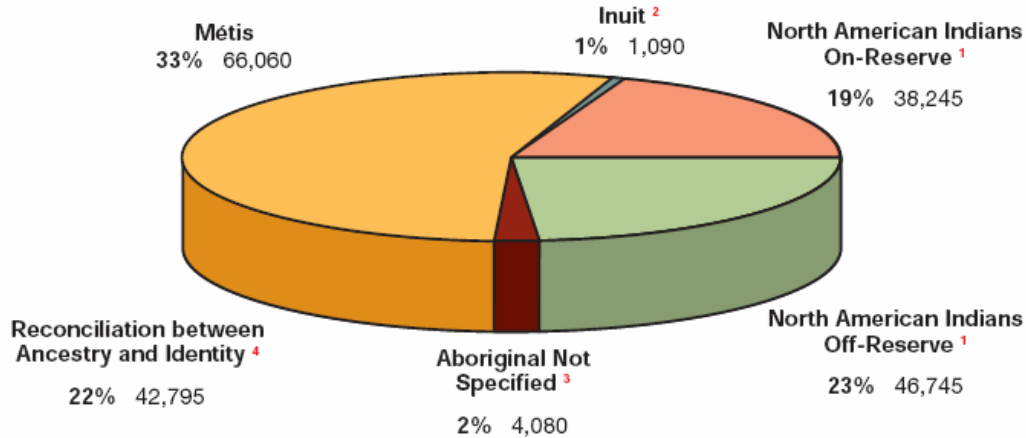
- 8. Twenty-four per cent of Aboriginal individuals reported that they had enough knowledge of an Aboriginal language to carry on a conversation. This was down from 29 per cent in 1996.

Size and composition of the Aboriginal population in Alberta

Alberta's Aboriginal population based on those reporting Aboriginal ancestry was 199,015 (2001 Census), which represented 6.7 per cent of the total Alberta population. This consisted of North American Indians (84,990), Métis (66,060), Inuit (1,090), Aboriginal not specified (4,080), and people who reported Aboriginal ancestry but did not self-identify as Aboriginal in the 2001 census (42,795)

Aboriginal Population in Alberta - 2001

Total 199,015 (Reporting Aboriginal Ancestry)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 census data (except where identified below)

1 On-Reserve and Off-Reserve categories for North American Indians are based on a percentage allocation derived from the 2001 census using ethnic identity data (55 per cent Off-Reserve and 45 per cent On-Reserve). By comparison, INAC Indian Registry System (IRS) data (2004) show 38 per cent identify as Off-Reserve and 62 per cent as On-Reserve.

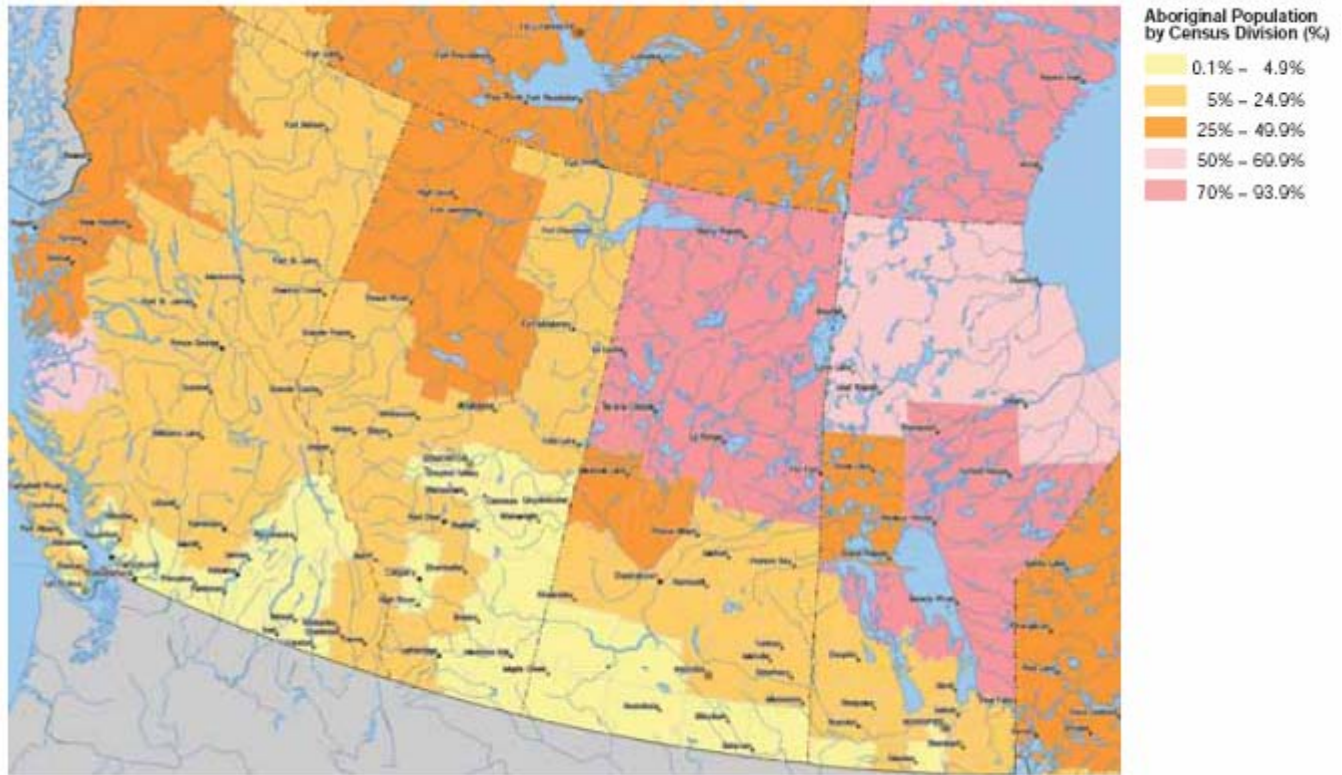
2 Inuit. There are no Inuit communities in Alberta, but 1,090 Inuit report living in the province, largely as a result of migration from the North.

3 Aboriginal Not Specified are people who self-identified as Aboriginal but did not indicate whether they are North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit.

4 Alberta's Aboriginal population reported by Ancestry was 199,015 in the 2001 census. Not everyone who reported having Aboriginal ancestry identified himself or herself as an Aboriginal person. Those people who self-identified as Aboriginal totaled 156,220 in the 2001 census.

The following map summarizes the percentage of Aboriginal population by census division in Western Canada.

Percentage of Aboriginal Population by Census Division, 2001



Source: Natural Resources Canada – The Atlas of Canada

Key demographic trends in Alberta

While the demographic trends for Canada generally apply to Alberta, the following are some key statistical indicators specific to Alberta. All data is from Statistics Canada (2001 Census) and Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (Alberta’s Aboriginal Population: Socio-Demographic Characteristics 201).

- The Aboriginal population in Alberta is significantly younger than the non-Aboriginal population. Approximately 44.3 per cent of the Aboriginal population is under 19 years of age compared to 27.5 per cent for non-Aboriginal people. The median age for the Aboriginal population was 23.4 years in 2001, while that of the non-Aboriginal population was 35.4 years (median age is the point where exactly one-

half of the population is older, and one-half is younger).

- The Aboriginal labour force participation rate and employment rate are significantly lower than the rates for non-Aboriginal Albertans. The Aboriginal participation rate was 74.4 per cent for males and 62.4 per cent for females, compared to non-Aboriginal rates of 79.9 per cent and 66.8 per cent, respectively. The employment rate is 59.5 per cent compared to the non-Aboriginal rate of 69.9 per cent.
- Aboriginal peoples’ incomes are well below the Alberta average. Aboriginal average annual income is \$26,490 for males and \$16,780 for females. For non-Aboriginal population, average incomes are \$41,071 for males and \$22,814 for females.



- While the proportion of overall income from employment is about the same for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Alberta, government transfer represent a higher portion of total Aboriginal income. Aboriginal income composition os from employment (82 per cent), government transfer payments (14 per cent) and other (4 per cent). This compares to non-Aboriginal Albertans with income from employment (81 per cent), government transfer payments (9 per cent) and other (10 per cent).
- Education levels for certain segments of the Aboriginal population are below the Alberta average: 56.1 per cent of Aboriginal people over 15 years of age have completed high school compared to 70.3 per cent of non-Aboriginal Albertans ; 27.6 per cent of Aboriginal people have a post-secondary degree or certificate, compared to the non-Aboriginal rate of 40.5 per cent. There is likely to be a wide range of variation across Aboriginal communities in Alberta based on national level data which shows only 41 per cent of the Aboriginal on-reserve population in Canada having completed high school.

Treaty areas and First Nations in Alberta

First Nations, which is a term preferred by many Aboriginal people and the Assembly of First Nations, refers to the various governments of the first people of

Canada. Its usage has increased since it emerged in the 1970s and is generally preferred to terms such as Indians, Tribes, and Bands. First Nations were first able to vote in Canada in 1960. There are over 600 First Nations in Canada, with 44 First Nations and 123 reserves in Alberta. There is approximately 700,537 hectares of reserve land in Alberta.

Alberta is included in three populated Treaty Areas covered by Treaties 6, 7 and 8. Treaties 4 and 10 have some Alberta land but are not populated. Treaties are legal documents between the Crown and a First Nation that confer rights and obligations on both parties. No two treaties are identical. Because of the legal, historic and sacred elements of the treaties, First Nations consider these documents to be the essential factor in any relationship between the Government of Alberta and first Nations people, leaders, governments and organizations.

The First Nations population if Alberta grew from 76,419 in 1996 to 94,422 in 2004 according to the INAC Indian Registry System (IRS). Of this total, 39 per cent (36,325) are registered in Treaty 6, 26 per cent (24,663) in Treaty 7 and 35% (32,700) in Treaty 8. There were 734 individuals not assigned to a specific treaty area. See pages 6 and 7 for a legend and map showing the Treaty Areas in Alberta and the constituent First Nations.

Legend of Treaty Areas and First Nations in Alberta

Treaty 8

1. Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation	13. Loon River Cree Nation
2. Beaver First Nation	14. Lubicon Lake Indian Nation (no reserve)
3. Bigstone Cree First Nation	15. Mikisew Cree First Nation
4. Chipewyan Prairie First Nation	16. Sawridge Band
5. Dene Tha' First Nation	17. Smith's Landing First Nation
6. Driftpile First Nation	18. Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation
7. Duncan's First Nation	19. Sucker Creek First Nation
8. Fort McKay First Nation	20. Swan River First Nation
9. Fort McMurray First Nation	21. Tallcree First Nation
10. Horse Lake First Nation	22. Whitefish Lake First Nation (Atikameg)
11. Kapawe'no First Nation	23. Woodland Cree First Nation
12. Little Red River Cree Nation	

Treaty 6

24. Alexander First Nation	33. Louis Bull Tribe
25. Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation	34. Montana First Nation
26. Beaver Lake Cree Nation	35. O'Chiese First Nation
27. Cold Lake First Nations	36. Paul First Nation
28. Enoch Cree Nation	37. Saddle Lake First Nation
29. Ermineskin Cree Nation	*Whitefish Lake (Goodfish)
30. Frog Lake First Nation	38. Samson Cree Nation
31. Heart Lake First Nation	39. Sunchild First Nation
32. Kehewin Cree Nation	

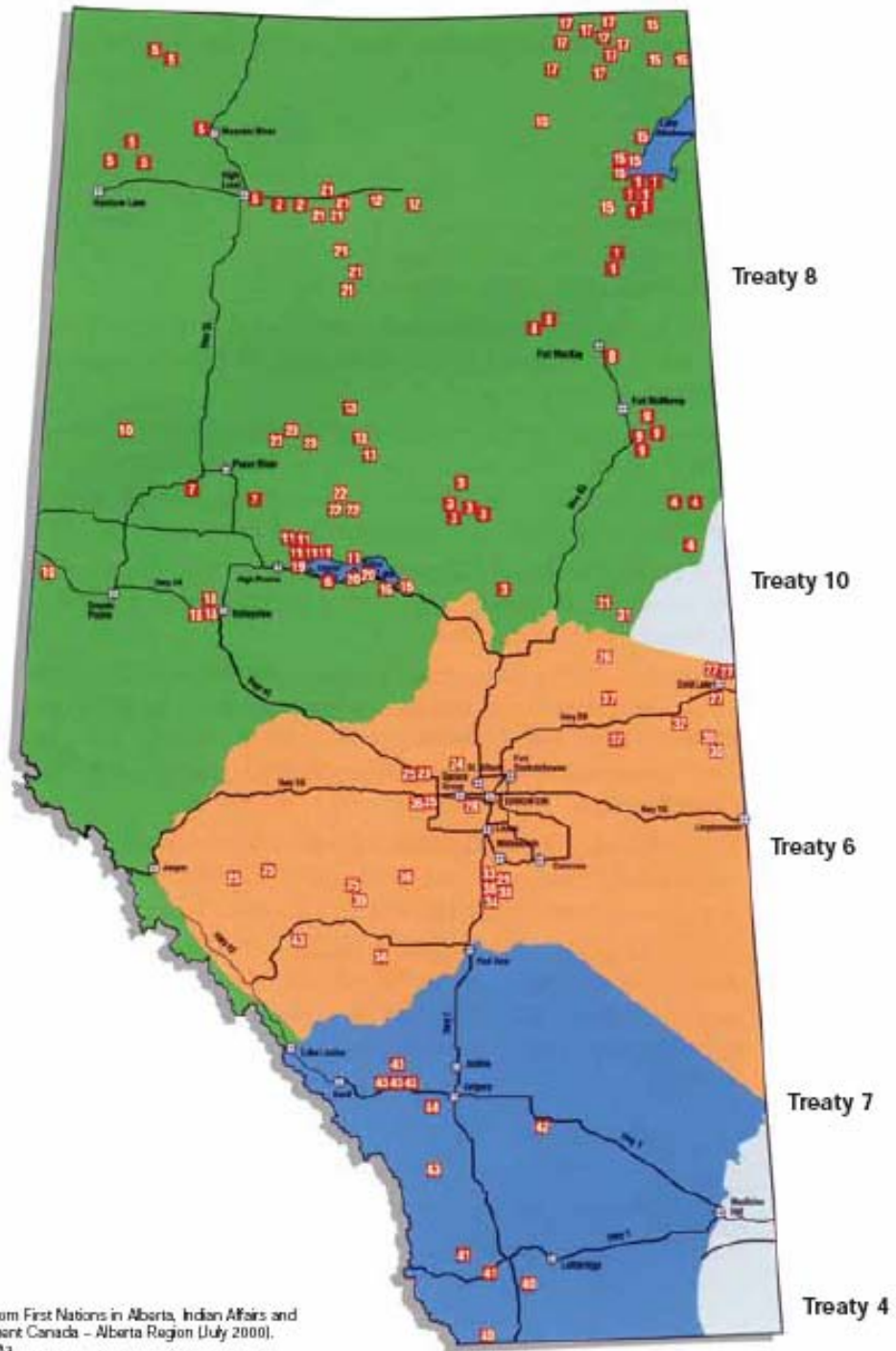
The Saddle Lake First Nation and Whitefish Lake (Goodfish) First Nation are administered separately but are considered one band under the Indian Act.

Treaty 7

40. Blood Tribe	43. Stoney Tribe
41. Piikani Nation	Bearspaw
42. Siksika Nation	Chiniki
	Wesley
	44. Tsuu T'ina Nation

Source: Adapted from First Nations in Alberta, Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada – Alberta Region (July 2000). QS-A011-000-EE-A3.

Treaty Areas and First Nations in Alberta





Métis population in Alberta

Métis, a French word meaning “mixed blood”, usually refers to the people of mixed Indian-European ancestry who emerged during the days of the fur trade. The Métis are recognized as Aboriginal people in the Constitution Act, 1982. Métis history and culture draw on diverse ancestral origins such as Scottish, Irish, French, Ojibway and Cree.

The largest Métis population, 66,060 (2001 census), lives in Alberta and accounts for almost 23 per cent of Canada’s total Métis population. There are eight distinct Métis Settlements in Alberta, covering 1.25 million acres, which were established in the 1930s. Under 1990 legislation, the Settlements were established as corporate entities, similar to municipal corporations with broad self-governing powers. The settlements are governed locally by elected five-member councils and collectively by the Métis Settlements General Council. About 12 per cent of Métis live in these settlements.

The Métis Nation of Alberta Association (MNAA) represents all other Métis people in the province. The MNAA’s Provincial Council consists of an elected provincial president and vice president and elected representatives from each of six zones across Alberta. There are approximately 65 MNAA locals. See page 9 for a map showing the Alberta Métis Settlements and Regional Zones.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996)

There has been a substantial volume of research, public consultation and discussion over the years on the direction of Aboriginal communities and culture, and their relationship to mainstream Canadian society. Aboriginal people want to preserve their values, traditions and culture while at the same time becoming

full participants in the economic, social and political life of Canada.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) examined in detail the reality of societal and cultural differences. There were two differences in particular that stand out and help to explain why effective Aboriginal programs are often difficult to achieve.

The community and the collective play a very large role in the Aboriginal individual’s sense of identity. He or she is unlikely to be comfortable with the individualism that many Euro-Canadians take pride in. If an Aboriginal person’s culture is demeaned, if their history is dismissed, if their community is dysfunctional, they will find their sense of identity eroded and their capacity to function effectively impaired. Attempts to deprive Aboriginal peoples of their communal strength have been a consistent theme throughout Canada’s history.

Aboriginal approaches to governance and conflict resolution depart in many ways from the practices of mainstream society. Involvement of the family and the clan are necessary for a sense of legitimacy. Clans are often excluded from a role in decision-making in a system of representation where the first past the post assumes all authority. This often results in dispute and dysfunction.

Notwithstanding the issues that remain, there has been substantial progress achieved over the last 20 years by Aboriginal peoples in Alberta and Canada. Major gains have occurred in the areas of education achievement levels, labour force participation and employment rates, life expectancy, and business formation rates. While Aboriginal rates in most cases are still below those of non-Aboriginal people, the gap is narrowing. The Aboriginal population is also much younger than the non-Aboriginal population, and this has important implications for the future labour force. More needs to be done, but there are reasons for optimism.

Alberta Métis Settlements

