



Submitted For:

THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S SUMMIT

In Response to

**THEME ONE:
HEALTH, SAFETY & WELLNESS**

Submitted By:

THE CONGRESS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

June 2007

Guiding Principles

- 1) CAP is committed to addressing root causes in a transparent, accountable, respectful manner. Band-aid solutions are not an acceptable approach to addressing Aboriginal issues.
- 2) CAP advocates for legislative change, eliminating all legislation that promotes and perpetuates inequities, and calls for policies and processes that are more appropriate and inclusive. This includes abolishing the Indian Act, repealing Section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act and addressing Matrimonial Real Property gaps on reserve.
- 3) CAP promotes Nationhood as an integral component to solving Aboriginal issues and promotes the inclusion of ALL Aboriginal people in governance structures and decision-making processes including youth, elders, men and women while fostering a vision of seven generations and balancing individual and collective rights.
- 4) CAP is committed to working in partnership with national, regional and local service providers to address jurisdictional issues and develop mechanisms that are dedicated to the equitable enhancement of life chances for ALL Aboriginal people which shall be preceded by equitable support for capacity development.
- 5) CAP believes that it is everyone's responsibility to nurture an environment of inclusiveness and mutual respect that is free from lateral violence, while promoting empowerment, healthy individuals, families, communities, and Nations.
- 6) CAP believes that Federal, Provincial, Local and Aboriginal governments, agencies and organizations have the moral responsibility to act in the best interests of ALL Aboriginal people.

ISSUE SHEET

ISSUE: Violence Against Aboriginal Women

Background:

The deconstructing of Aboriginal women's roles began with contact. Traditional ways of governance were systematically dismantled and women's societal positions fell from being central to community decision making to that of near exclusion. A history of discriminatory policies has institutionalized the subjugation of Aboriginal women in Canada.

Fast Facts:

1. Violence occurs in many forms including physical, mental, emotional and spiritual violence. Lateral violence is an outcome of colonialism that has had particular negative effects on Aboriginal women.
2. Aboriginal women experience disproportionate rates of violence, as seen in the high rates of incarceration, abuse, victimization, marginalization, discrimination and racism.
3. Systemic issues compound Aboriginal women's negative experiences with the judicial, political, social and administrative systems of both Canadian and Aboriginal societies.
4. Aboriginal women living both on and off reserve are often reluctant to report violence to police because they fear that their complaints will not be taken seriously.

Recommendations:

1. **That all levels of government in partnership with ALL National Aboriginal Organizations take immediate action to address the underlying root causes of violence against women.**
2. **That the federal and provincial governments provide ALL National Aboriginal Organizations with necessary and equitable funding capacity to educate .the Canadian public about issues affecting Aboriginal women with an emphasis on violence.**
3. **That ALL National Aboriginal Organizations be included in ALL short-, medium- and long-term planning and implementation strategies associated with the National Aboriginal Women's Summit.**
4. **That the federal government takes immediate steps to eliminate discriminatory legislation such as the Indian Act.**

ISSUE SHEET

Issue: Strategies for Aboriginal Healing and Wellness

Background:

The health of Canada's Aboriginal population continues to fall far below that of the general population. Reasons behind poor health outcomes within this population are heavily rooted in the desperate reality that a history of colonialism has created. While colonization might be viewed as a historical event, its effects continue today and poor health status is proof of that fact.

Colonial and western approaches to healing fail to take into account the whole person, and tend to look at issues in isolation. For Aboriginal people, health and wellness is best understood in a much broader context. It is not simply the absence of illness, rather it is the inclusion of spiritual, cultural, community, mental, physical, emotional and environmental well-being. Promoting health in this sense means nurturing growth, self-determination, peace, and above all, balance. For the Ojibwe nation this delicate balance is referred to as BIMAADIZIWIN or "the good life."

Fast Facts:

1. Not only do Aboriginal people have a lower life expectancy, we also have higher rates of infant mortality and experience more years lost. Rates of chronic disease such as diabetes are much higher and we are more likely to suffer mental illness and addiction.
2. Jurisdictional issues present the largest barrier to access to health care for Aboriginal people.
3. From a western perspective bimaadiziwin is akin to the population health approach.

Recommendations:

- A. That **ALL** levels of government in partnership with **ALL** National Aboriginal Organizations take the necessary steps to address the jurisdictional issues that prevent Aboriginal people from achieving equitable health status. This includes the repeal of the Indian Act.
- B. That **ALL** National Aboriginal Organizations be provided with equitable funding capacity so that we can achieve our goal of achieving a "Good Life." This capacity must be provided at the national, regional, and local levels.
- C. That **ALL** Aboriginal Organizations work in partnership with **ALL** levels of government, mainstream organizations, and each other with a vision to achieving optimal health and wellness for **ALL** Aboriginal people, families, communities and nations.
- D. That **ALL** National Aboriginal Organizations work in partnership with **ALL** levels of government, mainstream organizations, and each other to ensure that existing health services are adaptable to the needs of **ALL** Aboriginal people, families, communities, and nations.

ISSUE SHEET

ISSUE: Strategies to Protect the Environment

Background:

Aboriginal meaningful participation in the management of land use in Canada is largely absent. Jurisdictional and legislative issues bar the majority of communities from participating in land use planning processes.

Many Aboriginal people remain 'connected' to their traditional territories, but many have lost those linkages, particularly those who are not registered under the Indian Act. This growing sector of the Canadian Aboriginal population has no 'legal' linkage to the lands of their ancestors.

CAP supports Nationhood as a solution to off reserve Aboriginal peoples issues around accessing traditional lands and territories. Indian Nations defining their membership would do so through community-driven, inclusive, transparent approaches consistent with traditional mechanisms.

Indian Act requirements around leadership, membership and governance are neither appropriate nor representative of the needs and concerns of the majority of Aboriginal peoples; the majority of which reside away from reserves and traditional territory.

Fast Facts:

1. Aboriginal peoples have had a unique connection to the land since time immemorial. The seven generations approach has been the premise from which traditional lands were used prior to contact.
2. Legislation and policy governing rights to land use including hunting and fishing rights should be representative of ALL Aboriginal peoples.

Recommendations:

- A. Strategies to protect the environment be developed inclusive of ALL Aboriginal peoples regardless of status or residency, in partnership with all levels of government.**
- B. That Nationhood is considered as a viable option to addressing environmental issues around jurisdiction and ownership.**

ISSUE SHEET

Issue: Child Welfare and Poverty

Background:

The historic actions by the Government of Canada with respect to the treatment of Aboriginal children have destroyed traditional nations of Aboriginal People. Through assimilation policies such as residential school and the sixties scoop Aboriginal people have lost language, culture, and connections to traditional lands. While these policies are thought to be a thing of the past their legacy is perpetuated numerous child welfare policies, laws and legislation.

Fast Facts:

1. There are currently more children in care of the state than there were at the height of the residential school era.
2. Twice the proportion of Off-reserve Aboriginal children lived with a lone parent in 2001, as non-Aboriginal children did.
3. Off-reserve Aboriginal children are four times more likely to be hungry than non-Aboriginal children.
4. Aboriginal children experience more health problems.

Recommendations:

- A. That **ALL** levels of government in partnership with **ALL** National Aboriginal Organizations take the necessary steps to address the root causes related to Aboriginal child welfare in Canada.
- B. That **ALL** levels of government in partnership with **ALL** National Aboriginal Organizations immediately redefine Aboriginal child welfare priorities to focus on supporting and strengthening families and communities.
- C. That **ALL** Aboriginal organizations work in partnership with all levels of government, mainstream organizations, and each other to ensure that existing child welfare structures are adaptable to the needs of Aboriginal children and families.

ISSUE SHEET

ISSUE: Aboriginal youth “inclusion” into policy and programming directives

Background:

During the late 1990’s the Ministers met to discuss the potential of a National strategy for Aboriginal youth, resulting in a working group that included youth from the NAO youth councils through a special youth committee (NAOYC). During this time, the NAOYC identified the importance of a holistic approach to “leadership development” based on cultural retention, economic participation, political awareness and social inclusion, as the keystone to success. This concept was referred to as CEPS¹. During the early 2000’s, the working group and NAOYC were dismantled due to a lack of resources. CEPS was never implemented.

Currently, there is no indication that commitments directly relating to Aboriginal youth are forthcoming. Initiatives specific to NAO’s capacity to assist their youth councils, such as the Youth Intervenor Initiative were not renewed.

Fast Facts:

1. Aboriginal youth comprise one of the largest demographic groups among the Canadian populace², yet are rarely called upon when issues³ directly effecting them are addressed via new or current policy and programming directives.
2. Aboriginal youth will be tasked with implementing many of the long-term recommendations coming out of NAWS, and must therefore have the ability to do so.

Recommendations:

- A. In order to face the challenges of today and the future as identified during National Aboriginal Women’s Summit, Aboriginal youth require appropriate mechanisms and structures in place designed to address these root causes in a transparent, accountable and inclusive manner**
- B. A comprehensive strategy, that promotes the inclusion of Aboriginal youth in the design and delivery of policy, programs and services needs to be developed and implemented**
- C. Current Youth Councils at the National level should be provided the necessary holistically based leadership skills, capacity and funding necessary to responsibly provide input into program and policy directives**

¹ CEPS acronym stands for Culture, Economic, Political and Social.

² Stats Can 2001 Census: Approximately 50% of the Aboriginal population in 2001 was under the age of 25. For those living off reserves, 49% were under 25 and half of non-reserve Aboriginals under 25 were living in urban CMAs

³ Refer to attached fact sheet on Aboriginal youth statistics and demographics

Aboriginal Demographics in Canada⁴

StatsCan and related data sources

General

- Over 1.3 million people reported some Aboriginal ancestry (4.4% of the total population)
- 71% of Aboriginal people do not live on a reserve
- Almost half (49%) of the Aboriginal population lives in urban areas, up from 47% in 1996; Aboriginal people living in urban areas are more than twice as likely to live in poverty
- The median age of Canada's Aboriginal population is under 25 compared to 37.7 years for the non-Aboriginal population

Children and Youth

- 1/3 of the total Aboriginal population are 14 or younger, compared to 19% in the non-Aboriginal population
- 52% of urban Aboriginal children live in poverty. These children are 4 times more likely to be hungry and are more likely to suffer health problems as a result.
- 3 out of 5 Aboriginal children under the age of 6 live in poverty
- Poverty and risk of negative child outcomes are correlated
- 46% of urban Aboriginal children live in lone parent homes compared to 32% of children living on-reserve (17% of non-Aboriginal children live in lone parent homes)
- Urban Aboriginal children are over 7 times more likely to live with a relative other than their parent than non-Aboriginal child.
- 1 in 3 Aboriginal children moved in the 12-month period preceding the 2001 census
- Aboriginal youth 15-24 were twice as likely to be unemployed
- In 1996, 68% of Aboriginal youth were in school compared to 83% of non-Aboriginal youth
- Aboriginal Youth are 11 times more likely than non-Aboriginal youth to have abused solvents or sniffed aerosols
- 20% of Aboriginal youth reported abusing solvents
- Average age at which children begin abusing solvents is 9.72 years
- 30-40% of all children in care in Canada are Aboriginal
- Federal government funds Aboriginal Child and Family service agencies an average of 22% less than their provincial counterparts

⁴Note that rates vary from province to province and therefore the rates in some provinces might be higher or lower than the national average.

Socio-Economic data

- Aboriginal people living in urban areas were more than twice as likely to live in poverty than non-Aboriginal people -- over 55% live in poverty; this rate is as high as 66% in some urban areas
- The unemployment rate for the total Aboriginal population is 19.1% compared to 7.4% for the non-Aboriginal population
- Canada would see a 1.2% boost to the GDP if there were full Aboriginal participation in the Canadian economy
- Unemployment rate for Aboriginal peoples is at 19%
- Less than 2% are self-employed or unemployed family workers
- Between 1991 and 1996 the Aboriginal working age population grew by 33.4% compared to 5.7% for the non-Aboriginal population.
- The average income of Aboriginal people is 62% of the average income of non-Aboriginal people in Canada.

Education

- Only 8% of Aboriginal peoples between the age of 25 and 34 had completed university while 28% of all Canadians did
- Pregnancy and the need to care for children was cited as the main reason Aboriginal women aged 15-19 living off-reserve quit high school
- Of Aboriginal women aged 25 to 44 living off reserve that had started, but had not completed a post-secondary program, 34% cited “family responsibilities” as their reason for not completing, while 21% reported “financial reasons.”

Lifestyle Choices of Off Reserve Aboriginal Populations

- Almost half (44.9%) smoke at least occasionally, compared to 22.6% of non-Aboriginal people
- 15-17 year olds are smoking at 3 times the national rate; they start smoking 2 to 3 years earlier than the average Canadian
- 31.7% report drinking five or more drinks on one occasion, twelve or more times a year compared to 21.1% of non-Aboriginal people
- 33.3% report eating fruits and vegetables five or more times a day (up from 29.9%)
- 44.2% report being physically inactive (up from 43.9%)

Health Status

- 16.4 % rate their health as “fair to poor”
- 28.5% report having moderate to severe functional health problems (compared to 17.5% for non-Aboriginal pops)
- 6.7% report having diabetes (compared to 4.5% in the non-Aboriginal pop); this number is up from 5.2%
- 26.5% over 18 report having a BMI of more than 30 compared to 14.4% in the non-Aboriginal pop
- 16.8% sought medical attention within a 12-month span for injuries compared to 8.5% in the non-Aboriginal pop; this number is down from 20.4%
- Aboriginal women are almost three times more likely to contract AIDS than non-Aboriginal women (23.1% versus 8.2%)
- The rate of suicide is three times the national average for Aboriginal women, compared with non-Aboriginal women
- Aboriginal women off-reserve (28.8%) are more likely than non-aboriginal women to report moderate or severe health functional health problems
- Aboriginal women off-reserve (25%) are almost twice as likely to as non-aboriginal women (13.6) to report being obese
- Aboriginal women (18%) off-reserve are more likely than non-aboriginal women to have contacted a mental health professional in the last 12 months.
- Aboriginal women (16.6%) are almost twice as likely as non-aboriginal women (9.1%) to report being at a probable risk for depression
- Aboriginal women are almost three times more likely to contract AIDS than non-Aboriginal women (23.1% versus 8.2%)

Violence & Abuse

- About 4 in every 10 Aboriginal people aged 15 and over reported that they were victimized at least once in the 12 months prior to being interviewed⁵
- 21% of Aboriginal female victims of spousal abuse suffer from depression as a result of their victimization
- Overall, 21% of Aboriginal people, 24% of women and 18% of men, said they suffered violence from a current or previous spouse or common-law partner in the five-year period up to 2004; this compares to 6% of non-Aboriginal people.

⁵ Victimization and offending among the Aboriginal population in Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2004 General Social Survey (GSS)

- Rates of violent crime committed on reserves were eight times higher for assaults, seven times higher for sexual assaults and six times higher for homicides than rates in the rest of Canada⁶
- Despite high rates of victimization, Aboriginal people have relatively low levels of fear: About 92% of Aboriginal Canadians indicated being satisfied with their safety from criminal victimization
- In 2004, the Canadian Center for Justice Statistics found these same trends and reported that Aboriginal people were nearly twice as likely as their non-Aboriginal counterparts to be repeat victims of crime
- Aboriginal women are three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to suffer violence against women, including serious forms of life-threatening violence and emotional abuse at the hands of a marital or common-law partner.

Mobility

- 22% of Aboriginal people moved in the 12-month period preceding the 2001 census compared to 14% of non-Aboriginal people
- Between 1991 and 1996, 58% of Aboriginal women changed their home compared with 37% of non-Aboriginal women⁷
- For more than 40% of families, family violence was among the factors that caused them to leave their homes⁸

Justice

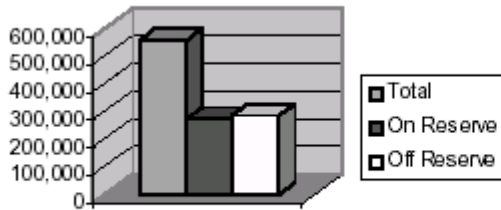
- Between 1997 and 2000, the average homicide rate for Aboriginal people was almost seven times higher than that for non-Aboriginal people. When taking population differences into account, it was found that Aboriginal people were 10 times more likely to be accused of homicide than were non-Aboriginal people
- Aboriginal women make up 29% of the Canadian prison population, but only 3% of the Canadian population overall and unlike men, have higher rates of mental illness, self-abuse and suicide.
- Aboriginal youth account for 24% of the youth in custody in ON, 23% in SK, 23% in MB, despite being only 3.9% of the total youth population in Canada
- The median age of Aboriginal youth in custody is 16 years
- Approximately 50% of maximum-security populations within the federal women's prison population are Aboriginal.
- Aboriginal women are more likely to spend more time in segregation units.

⁶ Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2004

⁷ Status of Women Canada

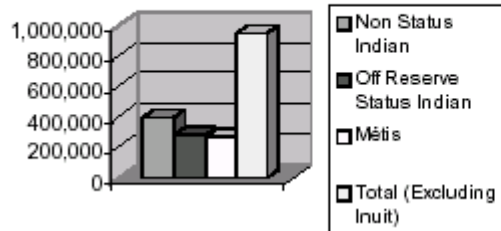
⁸ Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation, *Research Highlights, Family Homelessness: Causes and Solutions*, July 2003, www.cmhc.ca

Congress of Aboriginal Peoples Constituents



Status Indian Population:

- Total 558,175
- Number on reserve 274,215
- Number off reserve 283,960
- **Percent off reserve 51%**



Off Reserve Aboriginal Population of Interest to the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples

- Non Status Indian 399,470
- Off reserve Status Indian 283,960
- Métis 266,020
- **Total 72% (excluding Inuit) 949,450**