

**Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable
Lifelong Learning Background Paper**

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I. Introduction

At the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable, held in April 2004, education, from early childhood development to skills training, was identified as a priority area for investment to achieve a better quality of life for Aboriginal peoples. Discussions affirmed the importance and utility of the concept of “lifelong learning”, to both Aboriginal peoples and governments, in developing a strategy for future action.¹ As a result of these Roundtable discussions, an Aboriginal Lifelong Learning Roundtable was created.

The Aboriginal Lifelong Learning Roundtable will provide an opportunity for many of the key partners and stakeholders in Aboriginal early childhood development, education and training to identify ideas and strategies to improve learning outcomes for all Aboriginal peoples across the lifelong learning continuum.

Given the diversity of Aboriginal communities², there will not be a single model that will work for all. However, conditions promoting success, and components of effective programs and initiatives, can be used for future planning in the area of lifelong learning as it impacts First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. As there will be no single solution, it will be important to involve all partners – from the individual learner, parents, communities and Aboriginal leaders – to learning institutions, the private sector, education professional associations, program delivery agencies, provincial, territorial, Aboriginal and federal governments.

As learning outcomes are influenced by, and interrelated with, overarching factors (e.g., socio-economic conditions such as housing and income), it will also be necessary to ensure lifelong learning activities are co-ordinated with other relevant federal programming, in areas such as health, economic opportunities, housing and social services, to ensure an integrated and comprehensive federal approach to enhancing Aboriginal lifelong learning.

II. Context

Investments over the last 30 years in both K-12 and Post-Secondary Education (PSE) have made a real, tangible impact on the total level of Aboriginal educational attainment: First Nations communities now manage their own schools, in contrast to the days of Residential or Day Schools run by either Indian Affairs or the churches; and gains in education have accounted for the single biggest contribution to the closing of the gap in Human Development Index between Aboriginal Canadians and Canadian

¹Government of Canada, *Strengthening the Relationship: Report on the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable, April 19th, 2004*, p. 20.

²The term “communities” in this paper is intended to include all Aboriginal communities, whether on-reserve, off-reserve, rural, or urban.

society as a whole. In the past decade, the Government of Canada has also invested in other elements along the lifelong learning continuum: early childhood development, early learning, child care, literacy, skills development and labour market training programs.

That said, there are significant challenges facing the Government of Canada, First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, as well as provinces and territories. Despite the achievements of the last thirty years, the current levels of Aboriginal educational achievement are uneven, and do not compare favourably with the educational achievements of Canadians as a whole.

- 51% of the First Nation population, 42% of Métis, and 58% of Inuit have less than a high school graduation certificate compared to 31% of the total Canadian population.
- Only 23% of the First Nation population, 29% of Métis, and 21% of Inuit hold a post-secondary certificate/degree/diploma compared to 38% of the total Canadian working-age population.
- Approximately 48% of Registered Indians (both on and off reserve) and 53% of Registered Indians who live on-reserve between the ages of 15-24 are not attending school compared to 37% of all Canadians in this age group.(2001 Census)

The next ten years will see the birth of over 315,000 Aboriginal children who will need early childhood development programs. In that same period, over 315,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children go through the K-12 education system and potentially into post-secondary education (PSE) studies. The decisions to be made now by the Government of Canada, Aboriginal organizations, educators and communities, provinces and territories, and other directly interested parties, like parents, will be critical in terms of changing the status quo and creating the conditions for a radical improvement in the educational attainment results of Aboriginal learners.

III. Lifelong Learning Continuum Perspectives

There is a global interest in lifelong learning as a policy focus that can promote a broad range of social, economic, cultural and political development objectives. International organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have advocated a framework for learning systems based on the concept of “lifelong learning” or “education pursued throughout life.”³

³ Kurt Larsen and David Istance, *Lifelong Learning For All*, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD, March 30, 2001 (endorsed by the OECD members' Education Ministers); UNESCO, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the

In Canada, lifelong learning has become a policy priority for federal and provincial/territorial governments.⁴ Expert bodies such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the National Working Group on Education have expressed the importance of lifelong learning as a critical part of community development and nation-building for Aboriginal peoples. In developing Canada's Innovation Strategy to address the needs of Canadians in the new knowledge-based economy, the Government of Canada highlighted the importance of lifelong learning.⁵ In addition, the federal budget tabled in March 2004 focussed on "learning" as a theme for Canada's economic and social progress.

"Lifelong learning" can be understood as the acquisition throughout an individual's lifespan of knowledge and skills. Lifelong learning is often conceptualized as a series of learning activities taking place across each stage of life ("the continuum") that includes formal schooling through institutions as well as "informal learning", meaning learning that takes place outside of an educational institutional setting.

Applying the concept of the lifelong learning continuum, the stages and objectives of lifelong learning may be expressed as:

1. **Early Childhood Development (pre-natal to pre-school):** Aboriginal women of child-bearing age, pregnant women and families with new-borns and/or young children have the supports they need to ensure healthy early child development, including pre-natal health; and young Aboriginal children receive the supports they need for healthy development and enter school ready to learn;
2. **K-12 Years:** Aboriginal children and youth stay and succeed in elementary and secondary school, in order to be prepared for post-secondary education or to enter the workforce and to fully participate as members of

Twenty-first Century, UNESCO Publishing, 1996.

⁴ Several provinces have policy papers highlighting skills and learning issues in their jurisdictions. See for example, Government of Alberta, *Prepared for Growth: Building Alberta's Labour Supply*, October 2001; Government of Québec, *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training: learning throughout life*, Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002; Government of New Brunswick, *Greater Opportunity: New Brunswick's Prosperity Plan - 2002 - 2012*, February 2002; Government of Nova Scotia, *Skills Nova Scotia: Framework and 2002-2003 Action Plan*, Province of Nova Scotia, 2002. The structure of governments in many jurisdictions is also beginning to reflect learning as a policy priority. For example, the Governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan have both established Departments of Learning and British Columbia has a Ministry of State for Early Childhood Development.

⁵ Government of Canada, *Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians*, Canada's Innovation Strategy, Human Resources Development Canada, 2002; *Investing in Excellence: A Report on Federal Science and Technology, 1996-2001*, Industry Canada, 2001.

- their communities and Canadian society;
3. **Post-Secondary Education** (including trades, technical & apprenticeship programs): Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to and success in post-secondary education;
 4. **Adult Education and Skills Development**: adults, including school leavers, have the levels of literacy and essential skills to participate in continuous skills development, the labour force and their communities; access to active measures are supported along with social assistance; and opportunities for continuous learning and skills development; and
 5. **Seniors and Elders**: the needs of seniors in lifelong learning which improve their quality of life in areas such as health and access to social programs; the role of Elders as conveyors of valued cultural knowledge, values and guidance.

Factors at earlier stages of the continuum (e.g. health and developmental outcomes, social, cultural and economic conditions, formative events in an individual's life such as neglect and/or exposure to violence) can affect learning outcomes in later stages. As well, supports are necessary where each stage transitions to the next, so that Aboriginal learners can move successfully along the continuum. There are also policy considerations with regards to properly recognizing and incorporating traditional knowledge in all stages of lifelong learning; and just as importantly - how to protect and mobilize it, for the benefit of Aboriginal peoples and their communities.

The particular program and service needs of Aboriginal people will vary according to their particular social, cultural and economic conditions, history and knowledge traditions. It must also be recognized that Aboriginal peoples' needs vary depending on their gender and geographic location and that many Aboriginal people face multiple barriers - such as racism, gender discrimination, low incomes, and distance from major centres. These factors can impact learning outcomes and have implications for program and service needs.

IV. Current Federal Programs and Policies

Aboriginal peoples and communities, as well as federal, provincial and territorial governments, learning institutions and the private sector share responsibility for different aspects of Aboriginal lifelong learning across the continuum. As a starting point, the focus of this review is primarily on the role of the Government of Canada.

In response to the needs of learners along the continuum, the federal government has put in place numerous programs and services. In total, over 70 federal programs and services tied to the continuum are available to Aboriginal

peoples through 15 different departments (see Annex A). The vast majority of these are Aboriginal-specific initiatives while the others are programs and services available to the general Canadian population.

V. Overarching Issues:

There are a number of policy, program and service issues that arise throughout the continuum which will require examination in particular contexts for First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples and in the context of particular population sectors such as women and urban residents. These issues include:

Coordination and Integration of Program and Service Delivery

Given that there are 70 federal lifelong learning-related programs spread across 15 different departments, there is a critical need for coordination and integration along the federal Aboriginal lifelong learning continuum. This may include coordinated policy and program development to ensure programs throughout the continuum are interconnected, do not overlap and are complementary, as well as service delivery at the community level that better facilitates ease of access (e.g., through shared delivery platforms or a centralized or single window delivery system). The fact that responsibility for Aboriginal programs and service delivery is not specific to the federal government, but rather cuts across a number of jurisdictions, further reinforces the need for improved coordination and partnership both within the federal government and between Aboriginal, federal, and provincial/territorial partners.

Aboriginal Capacity Development

The Government of Canada has a role to support Aboriginal peoples to develop the tools that will enable them to assume greater responsibility and control over lifelong learning. There is a need throughout the continuum to build the capacity of Aboriginal peoples to deliver programs and services. This includes increasing the managerial, professional and technical expertise of Aboriginal organizations, as well as working with provinces and territories to increase professional development/targeted training for Aboriginal professionals, such as teachers, literacy practitioners, and curriculum/course designers.

Supports for Key Transition Points

Along the lifelong learning continuum, there are transition periods in the learning process that require special attention to ensure Aboriginal learners are well prepared to move from one stage of the continuum to another. Currently, there are many Aboriginal children and families who do not have access to early childhood development programs or services for special needs (such as speech

or behavioural therapy). Consequently, many Aboriginal children arrive at school not ready to learn, and face significant cultural barriers when they transfer between First Nation and provincial educational systems (usually at the high school level). Moreover, Aboriginal youth are often not prepared to make a successful start in post-secondary education (PSE) institutions and/or the labour market. Evidence suggests that this is in part due to lower literacy and other essential skills, as well as a lack of culturally sensitive support services. For this reason, some universities in Canada have developed Aboriginal-specific programs (e.g., counselling and tutorial services) to facilitate the transition of Aboriginal learners from high school to post-secondary education.

Role of Parents and Communities

Literature in the area of education and early learning emphasizes the importance of parental involvement for the success of Aboriginal children and youth and the involvement of parents and communities is central to Aboriginal perspectives on learning. The traditions and values of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples each reflect the central importance of the role of parents and communities in raising and educating their children.

Role of Technology and E-learning

Increased access to distance education is another important issue for First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. Most rural, remote and northern Aboriginal communities face difficulties in accessing learning opportunities. As a result, there is growing interest in distance learning, supported by high speed internet connectivity, videoconferencing equipment and related capital investments, as a means of overcoming the challenges of geography and isolation. Innovations such as e-learning have the potential to increase accessibility to learning for Aboriginal peoples at all levels.

Learners with Special Needs

Aboriginal infants, children, youth and adults with special needs and their families need access to services and supports, such as occupational, behavioural, speech and physiotherapy. The need for special needs education services for Aboriginal peoples is significant. For example, a 1999 BC Ministry of Education study conducted in 1999 suggests 23% of the on-reserve elementary/secondary population requires special needs education programs and services.

The Government of Canada, through Health Canada and INAC, has been providing some support for special needs services both at the ECD (e.g., Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Program) and elementary/secondary (First Nations Special Education Program) level. However, more may be required given the

ever changing provincial/territorial special education environments.

Funding and Capital Costs

In many current program areas, there has been a need identified for increased funding or more cost effective funding mechanisms. In concert with this, associated issues such as management regimes and capital costs for some programs (e.g., Aboriginal Head Start, child care centres, schools with sports facilities, technical high schools and adult education centres) will also be considerations in planning future initiatives.

Aboriginal Languages, Cultures and Culturally Appropriate Learning

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the National Working Group on Education have echoed the call by Aboriginal peoples for a culturally appropriate holistic approach to lifelong learning in its diverse Aboriginal contexts; with the aim of addressing the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical development of Aboriginal people through all stages of the life cycle - child, youth, adult and elder.

Culturally relevant and appropriate Aboriginal learning programs and services would help strengthen Aboriginal cultural identity and languages and facilitate the inclusion of Aboriginal people in a manner that recognizes their cultures and fosters their contribution to Canada. Language preservation is particularly critical since more than half of Canada's Aboriginal languages will become extinct within two generations given current trends.

VI. Key Issues by Continuum Stage

The following section provides a brief summary of the key issues for each stage of the lifelong learning continuum, excluding those already mentioned in the overarching issues section above. Please see Annex B for a more detailed analysis, including statistical information.

Early Childhood Development (pre-natal to pre-school)

There is abundant evidence that high quality early childhood development programs benefit children in a variety of ways, including promoting their readiness to learn better in school environments.

Recent Census figures demonstrate that Canada has a growing Aboriginal population, across all Aboriginal identity groups, with a significantly higher proportion of children and youth than the general Canadian population. These demographics imply a proportionally greater demand for pre-natal services and

supports for expectant mothers, early childhood development and quality child care programs for young Aboriginal children as well as childcare services to meet the needs of Aboriginal parents who wish to pursue formal education, skills training and remain in the labour force.

All provinces and territories have maternal/child health programming in place to provide supports to pregnant women, new parents and children identified with special needs. While clearly demonstrated in research as cost-effective, this type of public health programming is not available in most First Nation communities.

A significant number of Aboriginal children do not have access to early childhood development supports such as Aboriginal Head Start and First Nations and Inuit Child Care despite what is known about the demonstrated positive long-term impact these programs can have on health status and educational attainment.

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Despite recent positive trends, a gap remains in educational attainment between Aboriginal and other Canadian students. There are numerous factors that influence educational outcomes at this level. For example: high drop out rates, poor socio-economic conditions that impact student readiness to learn, lack of culturally appropriate curricula, limited parental and community involvement, cultural barriers and racism, high incidence of students with special education needs, and the geographic remoteness of many Aboriginal communities.

On-reserve education faces an additional challenge related to the lack of regional education systems. Since the early 1970's, INAC has devolved responsibility and control over day-to-day administration of on-reserve elementary/secondary education to First Nations. Devolution of responsibility for elementary/secondary education to First Nations was not accompanied by support for the development of regionally-based structures to support schools operating in First Nations communities. Band operated schools, therefore, generally operate without the support mechanisms that are available to other Canadian education providers through provincial education ministries and school boards.

Currently the capacity of on-reserve schools to engage and retain the necessary teaching staff presents a significant barrier to offering comparable educational programming. There are two key areas that need to be addressed: the first is to enable on-reserve schools to effectively compete with their neighboring provincial

school boards in recruiting teachers⁶; and secondly, to support strategies that will encourage more Aboriginal students to become teachers and thus increase the supply of teachers with an interest in teaching in Aboriginal communities. While over fifty percent of teachers in on-reserve schools are Aboriginal, there remains a need to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers at the high school level.

Post-Secondary Education

Aboriginal peoples are showing gains in post-secondary education, particularly in the area of trades, but there are challenges in keeping students in post-secondary education programs until graduation.

Aboriginal students in post-secondary education are more likely to be mature female students, and therefore more likely to have family pressures requiring special supports and strategies. This may suggest a greater need among some sectors of the Aboriginal population for support such as childcare in order to increase their access to post-secondary education.

Some post-secondary Aboriginal institutions have been successful in increasing Aboriginal rates through an understanding of Aboriginal needs, support, cultural-appropriateness and through the provision of a community of Aboriginal learners and faculty.

Adult Education and Skills Development⁷

Higher secondary school drop-out rates, lower rates of post-secondary education and corresponding low labour force participation and employment rates for Aboriginal peoples all indicate a need for enhanced programs and services in the area of adult education and skills development.

Supports are necessary to ensure that Aboriginal adults have the opportunity to obtain literacy and other essential skills necessary to participate in the labour force. Also, Aboriginal adults need the opportunities to continue to improve and upgrade skills to respond to a changing, knowledge-based economy and take

⁶Demographic trends show that a significant percentage of teachers are due to retire within the next few years, and intake in teacher training programs is not keeping pace with the resulting anticipated demand.

⁷ The term “adult education and skills development” is used to refer to adult learning activities such as academic upgrading, literacy, essential skills, continuing skills development, and other programs or training intended to empower Aboriginal learners to: find, get and keep jobs; go on to post-secondary education including university and college level education, technical training, apprenticeships; or to engage successfully in entrepreneurship.

advantage of entrepreneurial prospects.

Also key is providing training and skills development that truly matches the demands of the labour market to ensure Aboriginal people obtain longer-term, sustainable jobs.

Seniors and Elders⁸

The lack of access to new information and learning that is important to seniors, can be a barrier to maintaining good health in old age or to gaining access to important social programs such as pensions, other income support, health services and housing.

Elders are a valued source of knowledge, advice and skills in all Aboriginal communities. In the passing of language, culture, spirituality and traditional knowledge to the next generation, Elders bring the lifelong learning continuum full circle back to children and youth.

VII. Conclusion

Progress to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples by supporting lifelong learning in all of these diverse contexts is inherently a task of shared responsibility among all partners. Launching effective responses to complex challenges and policy issues will require holistic and coordinated approaches on the part of all partners. It will also be important to identify key priorities and critical leverage points on the lifelong learning continuum such as early childhood development, parental and community support, language, culture and curriculum issue, transition points and literacy and essential skills among others.

Overall, this roundtable provides an important opportunity to launch a broad partnership on lifelong learning in a way that is relevant to all Aboriginal peoples and with the aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of lifelong learning programs and services across the lifelong learning continuum and the spectrum of learning activities by Aboriginal peoples.

⁸ Older Aboriginal people are referred to as seniors and the term “Elder” is usually reserved as a title of honour to Aboriginal individuals in recognition of their knowledge, wisdom, experience and/or expertise. (Health Canada, *Reaching Out: A Guide to Communicating with Aboriginal Seniors*, Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 1998.) This paper will follow this usage.

Annex B: Key Issues and Statistics by Lifelong Learning Continuum Stage

Early Childhood Development (pre-natal to pre-school)

Recent Census figures continue to demonstrate that Canada has a growing Aboriginal population, across all Aboriginal identity groups, with a significantly higher proportion of children and youth than the general Canadian population. These demographics have implications across the lifelong learning spectrum for all Aboriginal peoples. This implies, for example, a proportionally greater demand for pre-natal services and supports for expectant mothers, early learning and childhood development and education programs for young Aboriginal children and for childcare services to meet the needs of Aboriginal parents who wish to pursue formal education, skills training and remain in the labour force.

Advances in neuroscience with respect to brain development in infants and young children show that the period from birth to age six is more rapid and dramatic than what was previously known. Critical periods of functions such as vision, emotional control, language begin very early, long before school entry. Experiences in this period have been shown to be the most important influence of any time in the life cycle and lay the foundation for a child's development, impacting on lifelong learning, health, and well-being.

There is abundant evidence that children who have experienced high quality early childhood development programs learn better in school. In fact, a majority of governments adopting lifelong learning strategies are motivated by the overwhelming evidence suggesting the importance of the early childhood years, including pre-natal health. By addressing developmental and cultural needs in the early years, early childhood development programs, such as prenatal health programs, Head Start programs and quality childcare programs, are highly effective means of ensuring children get the best possible start in life, and ensuring school readiness.

Prenatal health of mother and child is critical to postnatal development. While significant improvements have been made in Aboriginal neonatal health, significant concerns remain in some areas. Aboriginal women and children are at greater risk for compromised fetal and infant development. Many Aboriginal children are at risk in terms of developmental outcomes:

- approximately 28% of Aboriginal children under the age of 5 live in single parent families (it is close to 40% in urban centres);
- 58% of young Aboriginal children live in low-income families;
- incidence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is believed to be higher; and
- Aboriginal children have higher rates of some health problems, including

injuries, disabilities and respiratory problems.

The long term impact of developmental delays and impairment is a significant policy issue as it affects not only the individual's ability to learn, but his or her ability to participate in the civic life and the socio-economic development of their communities.

All provinces and territories have maternal/child health programming in place to provide supports to pregnant women, new parents and children identified with special needs. While clearly demonstrated in research as cost-effective, this type of public health programming is not available in most First Nation communities.

Despite investments in early childhood developments, a significant number of Aboriginal children do not have access to supports like Aboriginal Head Start and First Nations and Inuit Child Care. In fact, less than 20% of eligible children are able to participate in Aboriginal Head Start. These types of programs have been shown to have significant positive long-term impact on health status. Research also demonstrates that education attainments can be traced back to a child's early years at school, again demonstrating linkages along the learning continuum.

Kindergarden to Grade 12

There are many social, cultural and economic factors that can affect learning readiness in elementary and secondary school. For example, poverty generally has significant and lasting impacts on children's health, development and learning outcomes. Aboriginal child and family poverty is rooted in the legacy of economic and social marginalization that has flowed from the historical experience of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.⁹ The rate of Aboriginal children living in low-income families is more than twice the national rate. The 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) found a connection between family income and rates of Aboriginal children living in non-reserve areas repeating a grade; 16% of Aboriginal children in families with income below the low income cut-off have repeated a school year, compared to 10% of Aboriginal children belonging to families with income at or above the low income cut-off.¹⁰

Another factor showing a correlation with Aboriginal children's school success is

⁹ Sarah Cox, *Early Childhood Development - models and studies*, Education Renewal Initiative Secretariat, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, November 4, 2002.

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, *A Portrait of Non-Reserve Aboriginal Children –Results from the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS)*, April 2004.

parental education levels. Among Aboriginal children living in non-reserve areas, 22% of children aged 6 to 14 whose parent had not gone beyond elementary school have repeated a grade, whereas only 6% of children whose parent has graduated from university repeated a grade. Overall, as parental education level increases, the proportion of children repeating a grade decreases.¹¹

The roles of family and the community are known to be important factors influencing learning outcomes for children. In many Aboriginal societies, the involvement of parents and community are considered essential in the development of intellectual and cognitive abilities, the transmission of Aboriginal languages and cultures, the emotional and spiritual development of the child and for the child to learn how to behave socially.¹²

Reading to one's children is a strong indicator of parental involvement. The 2001 APS found a positive correlation between lower rates of repeating a grade for Aboriginal children overall aged 6 to 14 years living in non reserve areas, and frequency of reading or being read to. Gender differences are evident - while 56% of girls read or are read to on a daily basis, the figure for boys is 43%.¹³ There are differences among Aboriginal populations in this regard - while 27% of Inuit children aged 6 to 14 years read or are read to every day, the comparable figures are 51% for North American Indian children and 52% for Métis children.

From a national perspective, recent statistics show continuing gains by Aboriginal people in high school educational attainment. However, Aboriginal youth are still much more likely to drop out of high school than other Canadian youth (48% of off-reserve Aboriginal people aged 20-24 in 2001 had incomplete secondary school compared to 26% for Canadians of the same age).

Aboriginal young people are most likely to withdraw between Grades 9 and 10.¹⁴ Some reasons for withdrawal by Aboriginal youth at this stage have been identified: feelings of alienation after spending eight years in a school system that too often does not support their identity because of a lack of Aboriginal high school teachers; limited curriculum dealing with contemporary Aboriginal

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, (1997) Vol. 3, Chapter 5 .

¹³ Statistics Canada, *A Portrait of Non-Reserve Aboriginal Children –Results from the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS)*, April 2004.

¹⁴ Ben Brunnen, *Encouraging Success: Ensuring Aboriginal Youth Stay in School*, Canada West Foundation, December 2003.

languages, cultures, history and political issues; lack of parental and community involvement, especially where there are no local high schools; encountering racist attitudes that undermine self-esteem; the current emphasis of the public school system on intellectual cognitive achievement at the expense of spiritual, social and physical development; and the marginalization of youth in decision making about their education.¹⁵

Post-Secondary Education:

Aboriginal peoples are showing gains in some areas of post-secondary education, particularly in the area of trades, but there are challenges in keeping students in PSE programs until graduation:

- The proportion of those over 25 years of age with a trade certificate in 2001 was higher among Aboriginal people (16%) than in the non-Aboriginal population (13%);
- For those with college qualifications, 15% of Aboriginal people over the age of 25 possessed a college diploma compared to 18% among non-Aboriginal people; and
- The Aboriginal population continues to trail the non-Aboriginal population with respect to university graduates, – 8% of all Aboriginal people over the age of 25 had a university degree in 2001 compared to 15% for the rest of the Canadian population.
- For women aged 25-44 who started their post-secondary education, the most common reason for not completing their education was family responsibilities (34%) while financial reasons were the most common for men in the same age group (24% stated this reason).¹⁶

The Census shows differences in the rates of increase in educational attainment across Aboriginal identity categories. For example, North American Indians not resident on reserve (with or without status as “Indians” under the Indian Act) and Métis tend to have higher levels of educational achievement relative to Inuit and First Nations people resident on reserve.¹⁷

There is some evidence of regional differences - e.g. Aboriginal people in the

¹⁵ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, (1997) Vol. 3, Chapter 5 .

¹⁶ Statistics Canada, *Aboriginal Peoples Survey: Well-Being of the non-reserve Aboriginal population, 2001*, April 2004.

¹⁷ *Encouraging Success*, pp. 7-8 and *The State of First Nations Education in Canada, 1996 and 2001*.

Western provinces are less likely to participate in post-secondary education (at least in part due to the higher rates of withdrawal from high school in these provinces).¹⁸ Within the Western region, there are also variations between provinces, between Aboriginal people resident on reserve and those living away, as well as identity group differences among other variables.¹⁹ Brunnen concludes that the on-reserve/off-reserve residency variable is a significant factor influencing educational attainments, while identity group affiliation is not.²⁰

Aboriginal people, in general, face barriers to post-secondary education that include financial and non-financial factors including:

- Historical distrust of education institutions (legacy of residential schools and assimilative practices of education);
- Insufficient preparation at the secondary level (due to less successful learning outcomes for Aboriginal students in the public school system, and high drop-out rates in reserve and remote schools);
- Discrimination felt within mainstream institutions and in mainstream society; and
- Family and community ties and obligations make relocation difficult and expensive.²¹

These factors reflect the need for involvement of partners providing services in a wide variety of areas (including housing, economic development, income assistance, child care and education) and the need for a variety of financial and non-financial supports to Aboriginal learners. Some post-secondary Aboriginal institutions have been successful in increasing Aboriginal rates through an understanding of Aboriginal needs, support, cultural-appropriateness and through the provision of a community of Aboriginal learners and faculty.²²

Aboriginal women make up a higher overall part of the Aboriginal post-secondary student body at most institutions, and are often twice as represented in programs. They more often have children and families to support, and may need

¹⁸ Ben Brunnen, *Encouraging Success: Ensuring Aboriginal Youth Stay in School*, Canada West Foundation, December 2003 at p. 2-3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., *Best Practices in Enhancing Aboriginal Participation in Post-Secondary Education: Canadian and International Perspectives; Aboriginal Peoples and Post-Secondary Education: What Educators Have Learned*, Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, January 2004.

²² Ibid.

daycare, higher supports for livings expenses, etc. Aboriginal men are especially under-represented at the post-secondary level and may need special supports to address this problem. Aboriginal students are more likely to be mature students, and therefore more likely to have family pressures requiring special supports and strategies. This may suggest a greater need among some sectors of the Aboriginal population for support such as childcare in order to increase their access to post-secondary education.

The impact of formal education on Aboriginal people's socio-economic conditions is significant for all Aboriginal identity groups; with completion of a post-secondary education, having the greatest impact on closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people²³ in employment rates, especially for Aboriginal women.²⁴ This is significant as employment success rates of Aboriginal people increase as education levels rise. Thus, while Aboriginal people participating in the labour market are experiencing less success than non-Aboriginal people in securing and retaining employment the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is the least for those with a university degree.²⁵

Adult Education and Skills Development

Statistics on Aboriginal labour force participation and unemployment rates continue to show a lack of parity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. The 2001 Census shows the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people (19.1%) is more than twice that of the total Canadian population (7.4%). The survey also found lower participation rates in the labour force for Aboriginal people (61.4%) compared to the total Canadian population (66.4%).²⁶

Governments and Aboriginal peoples see an important role for adult learning to help address this situation. As the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) has noted, training and adult education can help create "greater equality

²³ Ben Brunnen, *Encouraging Success: Ensuring Aboriginal Youth Stay in School*, Canada West Foundation, December 2003, p. 8; *Achieving Potential: Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People*, Canada West Foundation, September 2003.

²⁴ Eric Howe, "Education and Lifetime Income for Aboriginal People in Saskatchewan" in *Aboriginal Policy Research: Setting the Agenda for Change*, Vol. I, (Toronto:Thompson Educational Publishing Inc., 2004) at p. 175.

²⁵ Ben Brunnen, *Encouraging Success: Ensuring Aboriginal Youth Stay in School*, Canada West Foundation, December 2003, p. 8; *Achieving Potential: Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People*, Canada West Foundation, September 2003.

²⁶ HRSDC, Fact Sheet on Members of Designated Groups 2001 Census.

among persons and groups in relation to the development of Canadian society, and each province and territory in particular.”²⁷

A number of broad national policy issues also affect the interests of First Nations, Métis and Inuit in regard to adult education and skills development, such as:

- Canada’s learning system has to date primarily focused on preparing youth for the labour market and less so on the learning needs of adults;
- Institutions and organizations delivering adult learning programs and services have experienced resource pressures and capacity constraints while facing rising client demand;
- Adult participation in workplace training is low by international standards; and
- The need to create a culture of lifelong learning in order to prepare adult learners to cope successfully with changes in the economic environment.

The growing involvement of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in entrepreneurship is another area where lifelong learning needs should be considered in regard to adult education, training and post-secondary education. In 1996, there were over 20,000 Aboriginal businesses in Canada and Aboriginal businesses are growing at an annual rate of approximately 7%. Aboriginal business owners represent 3.9% of the total Aboriginal population while the proportion of all Canadian business owners to the Canadian population is 7.9%.²⁸ Between 1981 and 1996, Aboriginal businesses grew at twice the national rate. Women and Métis showed the fastest growth among Aboriginal people as a whole and youth are showing a strong interest as well. The lifelong learning needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs will be diverse given their varied backgrounds and their participation in every sector of the Canadian economy - from the high technology sector to the service industry, tourism, agriculture and resources to name a few.

Also key is providing training and skills development that truly matches the demands of the labour market to ensure Aboriginal people obtain longer-term, sustainable jobs.

Seniors and Elders:

²⁷ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, *Survey of Trends in Adult Education and Training in Education* (Section 1.6 “Adult Education and Equity: Progress and Limitations”).

²⁸ Aboriginal Business Canada, *Aboriginal Entrepreneurs in Canada: Progress & Prospects*, 2001.

While the Aboriginal population is younger than that of the Canadian population overall, it is nevertheless, aging (albeit at a slower rate than that for the national population). Overall, the trend toward aging among all Aboriginal peoples is slower than for non-Aboriginal people.

The lack of access to new information and learning that is important to them, can be a barrier to maintaining good health in old age or to gaining access to important social programs such as pensions, health coverage and housing.

Elders are a valued source of knowledge, advice and skills in all Aboriginal communities. In the passing of language, culture, spirituality and traditional knowledge to the next generation Elders bring the lifelong learning continuum full circle back to children and youth.