

ABORIGINAL ECEC

CONTEXT

Canada's Aboriginal populations include First Nations and non-status native people (on- and off-reserve), Metis and Inuit. Although many Aboriginal people live in remote and/or northern areas, there are large southern, urban populations as well. Today the majority of Aboriginal people live off reserves, often in large urban centres.

Number of children 0-12 years identifying with an Aboriginal group, Canada (2001)

Age	North American Indian	Metis	Inuit	Multiple	Other Aboriginal
0-4	69,060	25,390	5,630	650	1,910
5-9	123,481	29,080	5,930	765	2,070
10-14	69,270	30,245	5,910	680	2,180

ISSUES

Flexibility/accessibility

All Aboriginal groups have larger than average child populations, making early childhood education and care an especially important issue. There is a particular need for a wide range of flexible services to accommodate the diverse needs of the Aboriginal community.

Cultural integrity

The maintenance of indigenous culture is a major concern for all Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal organizations point out that general standards for child care centres are sometimes too rigid for northern and/or remote communities and that they may not reflect traditional cultural norms and practices. Culturally sensitive early childhood education as it pertains to training and service delivery is of special concern. There is a strong interest among Aboriginal groups in developing ECEC programs that are operated and controlled by the communities themselves.

Government policy

Generally, funding for on-reserve social programs is the responsibility of the Government of Canada. In 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that

federal, provincial, and territorial governments co-operate to support an integrated early childhood funding strategy that a) extends early childhood education to all Aboriginal children regardless of residence; b) encourages programs that foster the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development of children, reducing distinctions between child care, prevention and education; c) maximizes Aboriginal control over service design and administration; d) offers one-stop accessible funding; and e) promotes parental involvement and choice in early childhood education options.

Although governments in some provinces regulate on-reserve Aboriginal child care, others do not. In some provinces, First Nations communities do not recognize provincial jurisdiction on reserves. First Nations and Inuit governments and organizations ordinarily have responsibility for administration of funds and developing programs.

At one time, federal funding for early learning and child care was limited to First Nations in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, in Ontario and Alberta where the Department of Indian Affairs Canada covered costs in accordance with provincial funding policies, and in Quebec where child care programs for First Nations children received national funding through the James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement. Until 1995, when the First Nations Inuit Child Care Initiative and Aboriginal Head Start were announced, there was very little spending for Aboriginal ECEC in much of Canada.

TABLE 2 Federal Aboriginal ECEC programs

Program	Department	Objective(s)	Eligibility	Spending (2005/2006)
First Nations/ Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI)	Human Resources and Social Development Canada	To increase the supply of quality child care services in First Nations and Inuit communities.	On-reserve First Nations and Inuit communities. FNICCI funds child care at 407 sites. FNICCI directly supports 7,500 spaces.	\$57.1 M
Child/Day Care Program Alberta	Indian and Northern Affairs	To provide early child development programming and learning services that are comparable to those offered by the provincial government to people living off-reserve.	On-reserve First Nations in Alberta (as a result of the 1992 Administrative Reform Agreement between Canada and Alberta).	\$4.1 M
Child/Day Care Program Ontario	Indian and Northern Affairs	To provide early child development programming and learning services that are comparable to those offered by the provincial government to people living off-reserve.	On-reserve First Nations in Ontario (as a result of a 1965 agreement between Canada and Ontario).	\$15.6 M
Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC)	Health Canada	To prepare young Aboriginal children for school by meeting their spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs (ages 2-6 years). (These may include early learning and child care as well as other child and family services.	First Nations, Inuit and Metis children and their families in urban centres and large northern communities (off-reserve). In 2005/06, AHSUNC provided services to 4,500 children.	\$31.2 M
Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve (AHSOR)	Health Canada	To prepare young Aboriginal children for school by meeting their spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical needs (ages 2-6 years). (These may include early learning and child care as well as other child and family services.	On-reserve First Nations communities. In 2004/05 9,415 children received services at 332 project sites servicing 365 communities.	\$50.2 M

First Nations Child & Family Service Head Start – New Brunswick	Indian and Northern Affairs	To maintain strength of family unit; assist children with physical, emotional, social and/or educational deprivation; and support and protect children from harmful environments (0-6 years).	15 sites in New Brunswick.	\$1.4 M
First Nations Elementary Education (including pre-k and kindergarten)	Indian and Northern Affairs	To provide programs comparable to those required in the province/territory of residence. Or to arrange for students living on-reserve to attend provincial schools.	First Nations students on-reserve including pre-K and kindergarten. In 2005/06 13,325 children attended kindergarten classes through the program.	\$51.7 M

Source: Government of Canada (2007, forthcoming). *Early childhood development activities and expenditures: Government of Canada report 2004-2005 and 2005-2006/Early learning and child care activities and expenditures: Government of Canada report 2004-2005 and 2005-2006*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Note: See provincial/territorial Aboriginal ECEC programs, Table 12.