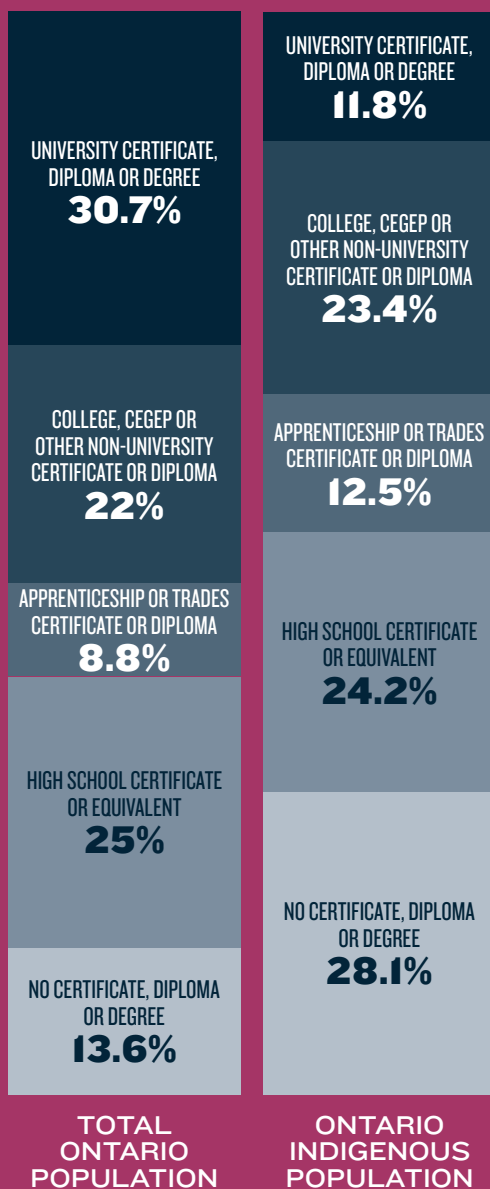


A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this document, the term “Indigenous” is used to describe persons of First Nations, Inuit and Métis origin. Other sources use different terminology. For example, Statistics Canada uses the term “Aboriginal” to describe persons from First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, while the Indian Act defines those who are “Registered Indian” as persons who register under the Act and prove descent from a band that signed a treaty. Those who aren’t registered under the Indian Act are generally excluded from certain federal programs and are not eligible for particular tax exemptions.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN ONTARIO



INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

Access to education for Indigenous people is a right enshrined through signed treaties and recognized in Canada’s Constitution. The legacy of colonialism, residential schools and racism has imposed significant barriers to Indigenous peoples’ access to post-secondary education. Despite the moral and legal responsibility of government to ensure access to education, financial barriers prevent many Indigenous people from attending a college or university.

There are at least 242,490 First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Ontario, which comprises two per cent of the province’s population. Between 2001 and 2006, Indigenous communities grew by almost 30 per cent, over four times the rate of Ontario’s total population. Indigenous communities are also younger, on average, with 43.4 per cent of the population under the age of 25. The rapid growth in the population, combined with the demand for older-than-average people to attend college or university, has placed more pressure on funding available for Indigenous peoples to access post-secondary education.

ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

There exists a significant gap in educational attainment between the Indigenous and overall population in Ontario. Where 13.6 per cent of Ontarians aged 25 to 64 have not completed high school, the proportion is double for Indigenous people. Notably, there is not a significant difference in college-level attainment, where fees are on average one-third of university tuition fees. While 30.7 per cent

of Ontario’s population has a university credential, there is a massive drop to 11.8 per cent for Indigenous people in Ontario and nine per cent of the Indigenous population in the North. Across Canada, eight per cent of the Indigenous population has a university credential.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN ONTARIO

There are more than 14,500 Indigenous students attending Ontario’s public colleges and universities. Overall, Indigenous students represent 1.7 per cent of university enrolment and 3.6 per cent of college enrolment in Ontario. In the Northern regions of the province, Indigenous students represent 9.2 per cent and 13.0 per cent of university and college enrolment, respectively.

In addition, there are approximately 1,100 Indigenous learners enrolled in the nine Indigenous institutions in Ontario – Anishinabek Education Institute, First Nations Technical Institute, Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute, Iohahi:io Akwesasne Adult Education Centre, Oshki Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute, Ogwehoweh Skills and Trades Training Centre, Seven Generations Education Institute, Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig and Six Nations Polytechnic. These institutions receive no public operating funds and must rely on partnerships with colleges and universities to grant diplomas or degrees.

FUNDING FOR INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Funding for Indigenous education was officially recognized to be the responsibility of the federal government in 1956, as part of the responsibility to uphold the Constitution and signed Treaties dating back to the 18th century. Through the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Act, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) – now known as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) – began providing some funding mechanisms to help pay for the cost of post-secondary education for Indigenous students.

Currently, AANDC administers the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) and the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). The ISSP provides funding to post-secondary institutions for course development for First Nations and Inuit students, including course design and delivery. Rather than providing capital funding or money directly to students, the ISSP focuses on costs associated with specific projects related to First Nations and Inuit education.

THE FUNDING GAP

The PSSSP provides locally-administered financial assistance to status First Nations and Inuit people and is meant to cover the costs of tuition fees, books, supplies, travel and living expenses. Before 1992, it was assumed that all eligible students would be granted money. In 1992, the PSSSP became a program that simply allocated a chunk of funding regardless of student demand and instead of being determined by the number of eligible students.

By 1996, the federal government

capped any increases to PSSSP funding by two per cent annually, regardless of how many students applied. Since then, funding has been unable to keep pace with the increase in student demand, living costs, inflation and tuition fees. In Ontario, undergraduate tuition fees increased by 210 per cent during the same period, which has denied funding to even more students.

The lack of funding through the PSSSP has forced communities administering the funds to make difficult decisions about who receives funding each year. In 2006, more than 22,000 status First Nations and Inuit students received financial assistance through the PSSSP. However, before the implementation of the funding cap a decade earlier, about 27,000 students received financial assistance. It is estimated that by 2007, about 22,500 people were unable to pursue post-secondary education due to a lack of federal funding. The Auditor General of Canada concluded in 2004 that it would take 27 years to close the education gap between First Nations people living on reserves and the Canadian population as a whole.

While the impact of the PSSSP continues to decline, non-status First Nations and Métis peoples continue to be excluded entirely by federal legislation governing support for Indigenous people. The PSSSP is not accessible to these students, leaving thousands without the resources to attend a post-secondary institution. In addition to increasing PSSSP funding, there have been continuous calls to extend eligibility for non-status and Métis students.

The Government of Ontario provides minimal funding for Indigenous post-secondary education in the province. The provincial government

provides no operating and some one-time capital funding support to the nine Indigenous institutions. Indigenous students don't receive any direct financial support from the province, with the exception of a bursary program introduced in 2009. The program provides bursaries to roughly seven per cent of the 14,500 Indigenous students enrolled at a college or university in Ontario. The bulk of the provincial government's spending on Indigenous post-secondary education – roughly \$10 million per year – is directed to colleges and universities for support services, counselors, curriculum and teaching projects.

ENSURING ACCESS

In order to address the massive education gap and eliminate the financial barriers to post-secondary education, an additional \$240 million is required to provide an adequate level of support for Indigenous students in college and university, while another \$210 million is needed to address the students that have previously been denied funding. It is vital that government funding is not only restored, but is enhanced for Indigenous learners in post-secondary education. Students who are able to access government funding and a college or university education become leaders in their field and continue on to provide meaningful contributions in their communities.

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