

# Closing Canada's Indigenous education gap

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**Universities  
Canada.**

Universities have a major role to play in closing Canada's Indigenous education gap and supporting the reconciliation process. The Indigenous community in Canada is young, full of potential and growing fast – but still underrepresented at universities across the country. Our shared challenge is to ensure that all First Nations, Métis and Inuit students can achieve their potential through education, which will bring meaningful change to their communities and to Canada as a whole.

Canada's universities recently adopted a set of principles to improve Indigenous student success and strengthen Indigenous leadership throughout the university community.

## What Canada's government should do

Tremendous opportunities exist for young Indigenous people and the country if we enhance access and success for Indigenous students at our campuses nationwide. To help make this a reality, Universities Canada recommends that the federal government commit to substantial, sustained growth in student support and financial assistance for Indigenous students, and new investments to enhance institutional programming that serves Indigenous students and communities.



### Canada's education gap

Indigenous peoples face significant barriers to accessing and succeeding in a university education. As a result, far fewer First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada have a university degree than non-Indigenous Canadians. This education gap undermines social cohesion and prevents Indigenous peoples from being full participants in the economy.

#### The facts

##### 650,000 Indigenous youth

There are about 650,000 Indigenous youth under the age of 25 across Canada.<sup>1</sup> This is one of the few growing segments of the population.

##### 9.8% obtain university degree

Only 9.8 percent of Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 in Canada have a university degree, compared to 26.5 percent of non-Indigenous Canadians of the same age group.<sup>2</sup>

##### 70% of jobs will require PSE

According to federal government estimates, more than 70 percent of jobs created by economic expansion in the coming decade will require postsecondary education. Indigenous youth must be afforded more opportunities to prepare for rewarding careers.<sup>3</sup>



### Improved access, improved outcomes

Research shows that financial support and role models are critical to the educational access and success of Indigenous students. Canada's universities are working with community groups and Indigenous organizations to improve and increase this support.

#### The facts

##### High demand for support

Demand continues to far outstrip the financial resources available for Indigenous students who want to pursue higher education. According to a recent study, the number of students supported through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's Post-Secondary Student Support Program declined by almost 20 percent since 1996 despite an increased population, higher K-12 graduation rates and an oversubscription to the program.

##### 50% higher earnings

With a university degree, Indigenous graduates can earn 50 percent more than their peers with only a high school diploma.<sup>4</sup>

##### Role models matter

A recent House of Commons report highlights the importance of role models who are able to nurture Indigenous students from an early age and provide them with the guidance and support they need to succeed in education and training.<sup>5</sup>

##### 82% employment

Eighty-two percent of Indigenous students who received funding from Indspire (a national organization that offers scholarships for Indigenous students) found work after their studies, and 84 percent of them are serving Indigenous people in their career.<sup>6</sup>

“When we see wrongs and untruths, we must fight against them; where there are people facing social injustices, we must stand up for them; and where there is racism, we must challenge it.... When understanding of First Nations, Métis and other Indigenous cultures is woven through all of our campuses, then real change will occur.”



David T. Barnard, Chair of Universities Canada and president of the University of Manitoba, in the *Ottawa Citizen*, June 7, 2015



## Targeted programs and resources

Canada's universities are committed to improving Indigenous students' success through programs and services that recognize the unique challenges they often face. On campuses across the country, universities are working to strengthen Indigenous education leadership within institutions, update academic programs to reflect Indigenous history and realities, foster meaningful intercultural engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and provide resources and spaces for Indigenous students.

## The facts

### Nearly 2/3 offer transition programs

Programs that help Indigenous students transition into university studies are offered by 61 Canadian universities. Seventy percent of universities offer counselling tailored to meet the unique needs of Indigenous students.<sup>7</sup>

### Hundreds of targeted initiatives

There are hundreds of initiatives in place at Canada's universities—including targeted programs and services, community outreach and mentorship, and financial assistance—aimed at promoting Indigenous student access, retention and success.<sup>8</sup>

### 25 Indigenous languages

More than 25 Indigenous languages are taught at Canadian universities.<sup>9</sup>

### 3/4 offer cultural activities

More than three-quarters of universities offer cultural activities for Indigenous students.<sup>10</sup>



## Partnering for student success

Universities across Canada are building new partnerships with Indigenous communities to help prepare the next generation of Indigenous leaders and cultivate an influential network of role models. These partnerships foster a collaborative dialogue on the unique needs of Indigenous students and generate innovative solutions.

## The facts

### Almost 3/4 link with local communities

Seventy-one percent of universities in Canada partner with local Indigenous communities. In addition to supports on campus, many have successful outreach programs in Indigenous communities, providing educational support and mentorship opportunities to students starting as early as the elementary level.<sup>11</sup>

### 1/3 of programs offered off campus

More than a third of programs designed for Indigenous students are offered off campus, increasing access to university education in remote communities.<sup>12</sup>

## Sources

<sup>1,2</sup> Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011

<sup>3</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada, Canadian Occupational Projections System, 2013-2022

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011

<sup>5</sup> House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Opportunities for Aboriginal Persons in the Workforce, 2014

<sup>6</sup> Indspire, Creating Positive Outcomes: Graduation and Employment Rates of Indspire's Financial Award Recipients, 2015

<sup>7,8,9,10,11,12</sup> Results from a survey about Indigenous representation and resources at universities conducted by Universities Canada in 2013. Percentages are based on number of respondents. 90% of Universities Canada member institutions participated.

## For more information

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