



# ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

## Post-Secondary Education Facts

*"Education is a pre-condition for full participation in society and the economy. Education is of strategic importance: improvement in education is a most powerful method for bringing about improvement in other social and economic outcomes" – Waslander 2009*

The legislative provisions that currently guide the federal government's provision of education for First Nations are found in Sections 114 to 122 of the *Indian Act* (1985). These provisions lay the foundation for a "basic" education for Indian children aged 6 to 16. The federal government interprets its role in providing support for post-secondary education as an issue of "social policy" rather than, a legal obligation.

The federal government supports some First Nations students to attend post-secondary education through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). The PSSSP has three components:

1. Student support, which includes:
  - Tuition support for part-time and full-time students that may include fees for registration, tuition and the cost of books and supplies required for courses.
  - Travel support for full-time students who must leave their permanent place of residence to attend college or university. Students may qualify for funding to return home twice per academic year.
  - Living expenses for full-time students to help cover the costs such as food, shelter, and transportation.
2. University College Entrance Preparation Program, and
3. Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) – supports the delivery of post-secondary programs, services and research.

The PSSSP is administered under Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) developed guidelines. National allocations are determined by Treasury Board. AANDC determines regional allocations based on historical allocations rather than identified needs. Regional AANDC offices determine local allocations. First Nations are contracted to administer local level funding within the federal guidelines. First Nations funding policies may vary dependent upon local level priorities.



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Funding from the ISSP program supports some program delivery by mainstream and Indigenous institutions. There are sixty (60) First Nations owned and controlled post-secondary institutions in Canada which strive to deliver a wide range of programs to approximately 10,000 learners, including preparatory programs, adult upgrading, trades and apprenticeship, certificate, diploma, degree and advanced degree programs. First Nations post-secondary institutions have demonstrated success at increasing access and graduation rates of First Nations learners and in building the capacity of First Nations communities. The Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples has noted "We cannot emphasize enough the importance of these institutions...the successes of Aboriginal controlled institutions should be acknowledged by government"<sup>vi</sup>

### Lack of Adequate Funding

There is not enough funding to support the numbers of qualified First Nations students that wish to enrol in post-secondary programs. The lack of adequate funding results in the following.

- First Nations are forced to determine 'priority' students for funding, rather than funding all qualified students.
- Funding limits have been frozen since 1996 with the exception of the 2% allowable annual increase; since that time the cost of education has risen by an average of 6% per year.
- The number of students supported continues to decline – 20% decrease or 27,500 to 22,000 from 1999 to 2009.
- Among 481,000 First Nation individuals, 25,000 have a university degree. Among 481,000 Canadians, 90,000 have a degree. We require 65,000 university graduates right now to close the attainment gap<sup>ii</sup>.
- "Welfare is more than twenty times as expensive as a university education"<sup>iii</sup>.
- "The closure of both the educational and labour market gaps would lead to cumulative benefits of \$400.5 million and savings of \$115 billion in avoided government expenditures over the 2001 to 2026 period."<sup>iv</sup>
- Funding is main barrier to attending a post-secondary institute.
- If First Nations were to graduate at the same rate as non-Aboriginal people over the period of 2001 – 2026, it is estimated that the Gross Domestic Product can increase by \$4.7 billion to \$8.8 billion. (Waslander, 2009)



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Canada endorsed the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples (November 12, 2010). Article 14 states that, "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning". Canada is obligated to "take effective measures" to ensure this happens.

The PSSSP is essential to support the numbers of qualified students that wish to attend post-secondary. Support for post-secondary needs to be guaranteed in legislation with adequate and sustainable funding.

### List of Sources, References, and Further Readings

1. United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
2. No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada, Feb 2007 (Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development)
3. Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity and Outcomes Panel. *Taking Action for First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity and Outcomes*. Ottawa: 21 Jun. 2010
4. Waslander, B. *Focusing Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's Post-Secondary Education Program: Targets and Impacts*, Ottawa: 24 June 2009

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<sup>i</sup> Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. *No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada*. Ottawa: Feb 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> Waslander, B. *Focusing Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's Post-Secondary Education Program: Targets and Impacts*, Ottawa: 24 June 2009

<sup>iii</sup> First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity and Outcomes Panel. *Taking Action for First Nations Post-Secondary Education: Access, Opportunity and Outcomes*. Ottawa: 21 Jun. 2010.

<sup>iv</sup> Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope*. Ottawa: Dec 2011.