

Executive Summary – Poverty or prosperity: Indigenous children in Canada

Canada cannot allow another generation of Indigenous children to languish in poverty.

Indigenous children are the youngest and fastest growing demographic in the country and they are struggling. This at a time when governments and the private sector alike are worried about a shortage of skilled labour and the baby boom is about to retire.

Poverty is not inevitable - and just because family experiences poverty does not mean they have to stay poor. Change is clearly possible, certainly desirable and absolutely required.

Many studies have shown that Indigenous children, and in particular, status First Nations children suffer greater rates of poverty than other children in Canada. These studies also show that part of the solution is to ensure that Indigenous children receive the same levels of funding for, income supports, social services, education and health that other Canadian children receive. However, simply increasing federal and provincial funding is not enough. Other solutions are required.

There are ways to enable economic growth and better governance for Indigenous communities. The wealth of natural resources and the jobs that go with development can be shared more equitably. Entrepreneurial activity in Indigenous communities, already on the rise, can be cultivated. First Nations can be supported in pursuing self-government, leading to greater electoral and financial accountability. Indigenous communities can be empowered to take control of their destinies

It is a question of will on the part of all Canadians – governments, business, civil society and individuals. The will to learn the full history of this country and its legacy, to understand the positive role governments can play, and to advocate for an end to the poverty experienced by Indigenous children.

Ending child poverty, particularly for Indigenous children, must remain a national priority.

It is up to all of us.

On the next page, learn more about the major challenges...

The Challenge:

- The average poverty rate for all Indigenous children is 40%, more than twice the national average of 17%.
- 50% of status First Nations children live below the poverty line, while another 27% of Métis, Inuit, and non-status First Nations children also fall below the line.
- Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing demographic in the country.
- Indigenous children trail the rest of Canada's children on practically every measure of wellbeing: family income, educational attainment, crowding and homelessness, poor water quality, infant mortality, health and suicide.

What we're doing:

Save the Children, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and our community partners are advocating to end the inequities facing indigenous communities. We are working for a future in which where every child living in Canada has an equal chance and where Indigenous communities have control of their own destinies. The failure of ongoing policies is clear. The link between the denial of basic rights for Indigenous children and their poverty is equally clear. Failure to act will result in a more difficult, less productive, and shorter life for Indigenous children. A different life is possible for Indigenous children in Canada. The choice is ours.

The Cost:

- \$7.5 billion – the total cost to bring all children in Canada up to the poverty line.
- \$1 billion – the cost for all Indigenous children to reach the line
- \$580 million – the funding required to lift status First Nations children to the poverty line.
- \$115 billion – the lost revenue to Canada (over twenty years) if graduation rates for Indigenous youth continue to lag behind national rates and if Indigenous youth/adults continue to lag behind in employment (*Centre for the Study of Living Standards*)