



Aboriginal Commission on Human Rights and Justice



The Aboriginal Commission on Human Rights and Justice (ACHR&J) advocates for Aboriginal People in Alberta, researches human rights issues and initiates public education about human rights from the unique legal and historic position and relationship of Aboriginal people in Canada.

Its goal is to provide support, research, and analysis to prevent and/or intervene on crimes against Aboriginal people as well as to advocate for positive race relations.

We are pleased to introduce our current project, *Shared Communities: Intercultural Dialogue Between Newcomer, Multicultural, and Aboriginal Peoples* that will create opportunities for dialogue and education between diverse communities. This project will contribute to increased awareness and knowledge about the history and contemporary realities of Aboriginal people as well as the experiences and contributions of newcomers to Canada. Increased dialogue will positively influence the beliefs, attitudes, and race relations for enhanced understanding and collaborations in our shared communities.



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Aboriginal Funding Realities

Aboriginal programming and funding needs to be channeled to peoples and organizations that not only acknowledge but practice the unique systems of Aboriginal knowledge, laws, and customs. Aboriginal organizations need to be funded to address Aboriginal issues within their organizational mandates.

The Justification:

Canada's troubling history of imperialism and colonization has had genocidal effects for Aboriginal peoples and this continues to occur through the best intentions and "allied" work of non-Aboriginal entities.

Knowledge creation and sharing is embedded in the culture. The dignity and survival for Aboriginal People rests with our ability to share and enhance these knowledge systems.

When programming or funding that affect Aboriginal people is channeled to non-Aboriginal entities, it weakens the credibility and legitimacy of "social justice" as it threatens the stability and survival of Aboriginal peoples and organizations and our complex knowledge systems.

Our Commitment:

The Aboriginal Commission on Human Rights & Justice expresses a desire to work in solidarity with organizations that have mandates for social justice, anti-racism, and human rights and we ask for wide support in strengthening the ability to maintain our cultures and knowledge systems through funded research, programming, and services.

Level of Need and Level of Funding:

Aboriginal population has grown by 51% between 1996 and 2006, 2.7 times as fast as the entire population.

Alberta's population has increased 53% in the same period. There has been a 70% increase in the Aboriginal population in Alberta's eight largest urban centres.

It is clear that Aboriginal people face disproportionate disadvantages in our society. Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented in areas of poverty, violence, children's services, incarceration, and racism and face multiple barriers of poverty, isolation, and discrimination. Aboriginal people have unemployment and poverty rates that are more than double the national average, a lower life expectancy, greater incidence of illness and alarmingly high suicide rates.

- Aboriginal women make up 45% of the overall prison population but represent only 3% of the Canadian population. 80% of incarcerated women are there for poverty-related crimes.
- Alberta has the highest rate of children in "care."
- Aboriginal people are disproportionately targets of racism, hate and bias, but do not report. A recent study of 330 Aboriginal people, 100% reported discrimination in employment, education, or from the police.

Funding to Aboriginal organizations from the total funding for Edmonton Family & Community Support Services, United Way, or Community Initiatives Program is between 0 – 6%.



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Myths and Realities around Aboriginal Funding

Myth:

Aboriginal people are already receiving special privileges and rights in Canada. Aboriginal people receive funding from their own governments as well as the Canadian/Provincial governments. They get the best of both worlds: they can pick and choose between Aboriginal services or mainstream services. Taxpayers should not have to bear the brunt of Aboriginal-specific funding.

Reality: The treaties that were signed between First Nations and what is now Canada provide certain benefits in exchange for land. The land that was ceded by Aboriginal people has allowed Canada and its new populations to prosper. In most cases, Canada has not honoured the terms of the treaties.

Aboriginal people are taxpayers. The cost to taxpayers to support Aboriginal programs is small compared to the benefits to society. Inuit, Métis and non-status Indians pay taxes. Registered Indians who earn income on a reserve for a company or organization that is located on the reserve are exempt from paying federal and provincial income tax. Registered Indians who earn income off reserve must pay income tax.

First Nation and Métis governments provide basic funding for their programs for their members. Federal funding does not meet the needs of Aboriginal people on reserve. Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada funds national women's organizations but not regional women's organizations.

Many Aboriginal people have fundamental benefits as all other Canadians, such as access to the Child Tax Benefit, Old Age Security, CPP, Social Assistance and Unemployment Insurance. However, they do not benefit from other services that are supposed to be universal such as access to and standards of medicare, schooling, or employment. For example, many Aboriginal workers are not organized under a union and do not benefit from the protections of a collective agreement.

Myth: Big Service Organizations, that are determined to be "stable" or "low risk," are the best organizations to offer Aboriginal programming and are accountable for service outcomes. Aboriginal people and organizations should be happy that there are organizations that want to help – even if they are not Aboriginal.

Reality: The evaluation criteria for "stable" or "low risk" does not account for Aboriginal values or standards for community service. Because of the lack of funding by existing service providers, Aboriginal organizations often do more than what is contracted because of the high needs. Staff are over-worked, underpaid, and burn-out is common. If funding for Aboriginal programming would be channeled to Aboriginal organizations, they would be more stable and present as a low risk to funders.

Evaluation of program or service outcomes has been completed and approved by people with little or no experience in the Aboriginal community and do not account for cultural engagement or knowledge preservation. Many Aboriginal organizations are involved in and support their communities in ways that are not captured through reporting and not valued by cultural-outsiders.

Socio-economic indicators for Aboriginal people have not improved in last decade.



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Myth:

It's Aboriginal people's own fault. Aboriginal families are living in poverty because they are not educated, they choose not to work, or they don't manage their money properly. Systemic discrimination could be addressed if more Aboriginal people would choose to participate on boards, work in government positions, or work in high-level employment.

Reality: Many Aboriginal Elders, academics, and professionals are community leaders and volunteer countless hours as part of cultural values and commitments but continue to live in poverty because of current funding realities. As of 2005, half of Aboriginal people had a total income below \$16,752, almost \$10,000 less than for the non-Aboriginal population. For registered Indians living on reserves, median income was even lower (\$11,229).

Lack of Aboriginal participation or representation can be traced, in part, to barriers such as personal cost, location, appropriateness of services, and having to decode the formal and informal rules or norms that are inherent in most institutions.

Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Says:

From *Creating Inclusive Communities Stakeholder Consultation: What we Heard (2006)*:

Participants in several consultation meetings noted that, because of the nature, depth, and pervasiveness of discrimination against Aboriginal peoples, special solutions are required. It was widely recognized that, as Alberta's indigenous people, Aboriginal peoples are not an ethno-cultural group, and their needs are not reflected in multicultural theory or practice. Participants suggested that caution must be exercised to ensure that Aboriginal peoples' unique heritage and cultures are respected and preserved. Participants in all consultation sessions agreed that the Education Fund should place a priority on the human rights issues of Aboriginal peoples in Alberta, and consider establishing a unique program to target discrimination against Aboriginal peoples.

From *Creating Inclusive Communities Framework for the Future 2007-2012*

...the Education Fund acknowledges the human rights issues of Aboriginal peoples in Alberta. Alberta's Aboriginal peoples are not an ethno-cultural group, and their needs are not reflected in multicultural theory or practice. Special solutions are required because of the nature, depth, and pervasiveness of discrimination against Aboriginal peoples.

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