

ABORIGINAL MYTHS & FACTS

There are more than a million people who identify as Aboriginal in Canada. They are important contributors to our history, culture and values, and the national economic picture. And yet there remain many myths surrounding Canada's Aboriginal population. Myths are misperceptions, which can lead to distorted thinking and a lack of understanding about Aboriginal communities, underlying Aboriginal socio-economic conditions, as well as the effectiveness of government programs and policy targeted to the Aboriginal community. While the information provided here debunks just ten – many more exist.

MYTH 1: *Aboriginal people do not pay taxes.*

FACT 1: Some do, some don't. All Inuit, Metis, Non-Status Indians, and Status Indians who live off-reserve pay taxes. The only people who are exempt from paying taxes are Status Indians who earn their income on a reserve for a company or organization located on the reserve.

MYTH 2: *Aboriginal people get all kinds of money from the government.*

FACT 2: Treaty People get a \$5.00 Treaty once per year, in cash. This is the same amount they received under the Treaties over 100 years ago. There has been no adjustment for inflation.

MYTH 3: *Aboriginal people do not have to pay for postsecondary education.*

FACT 3: Some don't, some do. Access to education is not free, it is a treaty right. Programs have been set up to defray tuition costs, travel costs and living expenses associated with post secondary education, though at present, there are no post-secondary support programs for students who identify as Non-Status Indian and Métis. Also, with more demand than funds, there has been increased limitations placed on applications and eligibility.

MYTH 4: *Almost all Aboriginal people live on reserve and in rural areas.*

FACT 4: False. Aboriginal peoples currently reside in every province and territory, with British Columbia, the Prairies, and Central Canada being home to the highest number of Aboriginal people. One in five Aboriginal Canadians lived on reserve in 2011. The majority of all Aboriginals (54% in 2011) live off-reserve in an urban setting. Both of these shares have been relatively constant over the past decade, cementing the fact that most Aboriginals are urban and off-reserve dwellers and have been for some time.

MYTH 5: *Aboriginal people are falling further behind in the job market.*

FACT 5: False. In 2008, 36% of all employed Aboriginal people worked in the goods producing sector and construction. The unemployment rate dropped from 17.4% in 2001 to 9.3% in 2008. Both the labour market participation rate and unemployment rate are better today than in 2001, which means that over the past decade Aboriginal people are increasingly participating in the market economy.

MYTH 6: Very few Aboriginal people start their own business.

FACT 6: *False.* Roughly 2% of all small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), or 32,000 businesses, are operated by Aboriginal entrepreneurs (only slightly lower than the 3.8% share of Aboriginals in the population). 51% of these firms belonged entirely or partly to Aboriginal women (while the Canadian average was 47%).

MYTH 7: Even if there are Aboriginal businesses, they're not very successful.

FACT 7: *False.* The majority of firms are profitable – six in ten reported a profit in 2010 and a third managed to boost annual revenues in 2010 despite the global downturn. Roughly half of survey respondents labeled their business a success, with seven in ten survey respondents anticipating revenue growth over the next two years. In addition, the growth rate of Aboriginals in self-employed positions is exceeding that of non-Aboriginals.

MYTH 8: Aboriginals should get mortgages and build their own new houses.

FACT 8: An individual cannot get a mortgage for on-reserve construction. Real property on reserves cannot be used as collateral for a mortgage. Could you afford to build a house if you couldn't take out a mortgage?

MYTH 9: Life is great on First Nation Reserves – it seems everyone has a new truck.

FACT 9: First Nations living conditions are rated as being similar to those of countries in the so-called Third World. In 2006, CBC found that 76 First Nations were under boil water advisory (water unsuitable for drinking unless boiled). In 2003, a study found that while a 4-litre jug of milk cost \$3.40 in Winnipeg, it cost \$12.09 in Wasagamack (a First Nation near Winnipeg).

MYTH 10: Residential Schools are history. Get over it!

FACT 10: The earliest residential school was founded in 1620 and last closed as recently as 1996. Children were forcibly removed from their families, and language, culture and religion were beaten and humiliated out of them. Frequently, children died of tuberculosis, malnutrition, or other diseases. Many suffered the worst kinds of abuse at the hands of the school authorities.

The education received was intended to be sub-standard, and as a result survivors haven't been able to gain meaningful employment or take their rightful place in Canadian society.

Financial compensation is small and not easy to obtain. Survivors and their families continue to be devastated by the effects of the compulsory Residential School System.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Roy Pogorzelski, BA, BHJ, MSc
Inclusion Consultant, Community & Social
Development Group, City of Lethbridge

T: 403-320-4130
E: Roy.Pogorzelski@lethbridge.ca
www.lethbridge.ca



CITY OF
Lethbridge

