



# Measuring First Nations Well-Being

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF MEASURING WELL-BEING

In order to identify effective strategies for improving the well-being of Aboriginal people, it is important to know where and how improvements in the various aspects of quality of life have been achieved and where significant gaps continue to exist. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) has developed a number of tools for measuring the quality of life of Aboriginal people in Canada. Two of the most important tools are the REGISTERED INDIAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI) and the FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY WELL-BEING INDEX (CWB).

### REGISTERED HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI)

The REGISTERED INDIAN HDI was developed by INAC to compare the average level of well-being of Registered Indians and other Canadians. It is based on the UNITED NATIONS HDI, which is a composite index used by the UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (UNDP) to measure and compare the quality of life in some 170 countries.

The UNDP identifies the following three important dimensions of well-being, each of which is captured by the HDI: 1) a long and healthy life, 2) knowledge and 3) a decent standard of living. The Registered Indian HDI uses STATISTICS CANADA CENSUS data and life expectancy estimates to measure these three dimensions. This results in a life expectancy index, an education index and a per capita income index as well as a combined human development index. These measures are currently available for the 1981-2001 Census years, and are broken down by region, gender, and on- and off-reserve residence.

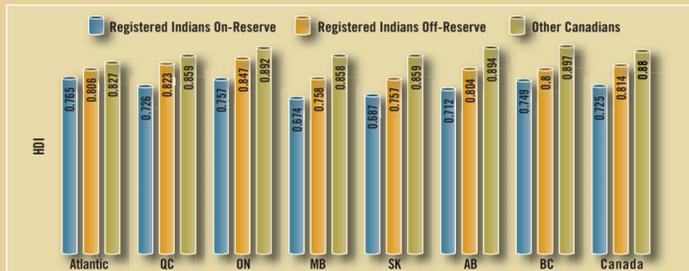
Analyses using the REGISTERED INDIAN HDI indicate that the gap in quality of life between Registered Indians and other Canadians has narrowed between 1981 and 2001, but that important differences in well-being still remain. The Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate at INAC is engaged in ongoing analyses using the HDI to find out how Registered Indian well-being is changing over time. This work includes examining the differences in well-being between men and women and between those living in reserve communities and those living in other communities.

#### THE HDI GAP HDI 1981-2001



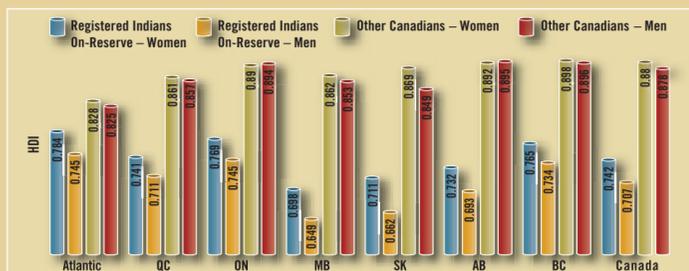
The chart above shows a considerable gap between the well-being of Registered Indians and that of other Canadians. However, the HDI gap has been narrowing since 1981; this reflects improvements in the education, income and life expectancy of Registered Indians. Despite these improvements, the overall HDI gap remained virtually the same over the 1996-2001 period, and the HDI for Registered Indians stayed much lower than that for other Canadians.

#### REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN HDI HDI BY REGION, 2001



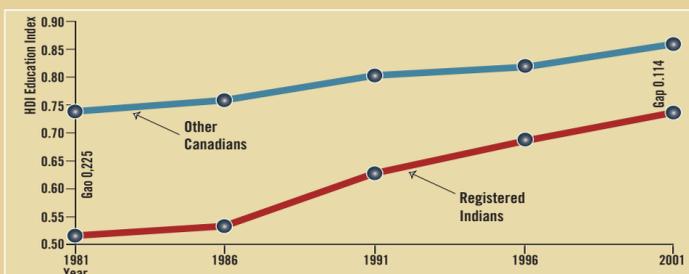
The quality of life of Registered Indians varies by region as well as between those living in reserve communities or settlements and those living off a reserve. In 2001, the widest gap between Registered Indians and other Canadians was found in the Prairie provinces. This is of particular concern as, among the 10 provinces, Aboriginal people make up the highest proportions of the total populations in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Average well-being, as measured by the HDI, was lower for those living in reserve communities or settlements than for Registered Indians living off a reserve. This gap was highest in Quebec, Ontario and Alberta, and the gap was lowest in the Atlantic region.

#### THE HDI GENDER GAP HDI BY GENDER, 2001



In 2001, at the national level, the gap in well-being between Registered Indian men and women was much higher than the gender gap seen among other Canadians. This was even more the case among Registered Indians living in reserve communities or settlements. Among Registered Indians, women scored higher than men in both education and life expectancy, but they had lower average incomes than men. The largest gender gaps in well-being were seen in the Prairie provinces.

#### THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION HDI EDUCATION INDEX, 2001



The greatest gains in the Registered Indian HDI have been experienced in education. 59.5% of improvements in the overall HDI between 1991 and 2001 were due to increasing educational attainment, compared with 21.6% due to longer life expectancy and 18.9% due to improvements in per capita income. In-depth analysis reveals that much of the improvement in educational attainment is due to the fact that an increased proportion of Registered Indians have finished primary and secondary school.

### FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY WELL-BEING INDEX (CWB)

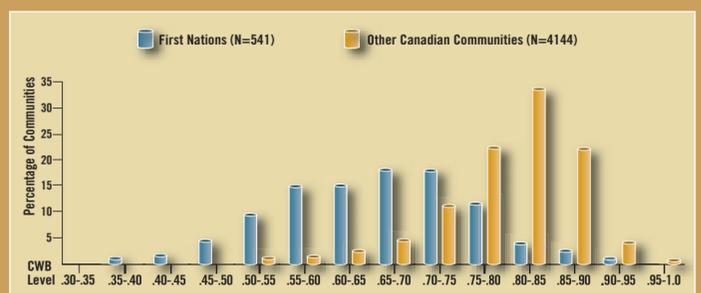
The FIRST NATIONS CWB was developed as a complement to the REGISTERED INDIAN HDI. While the HDI measures average levels of well-being among Registered Indians at the national and regional levels, the CWB measures the well-being of individual First Nations communities.

The CWB is used to compare well-being in First Nations communities relative to other Canadian communities and to examine the causes and correlates of well-being in First Nations communities in Canada. The CWB also allows for the identification of the prosperous First Nations that may serve as sources of best practices as well as the First Nations that are in greatest need.

The CWB was calculated using data derived from the 2001 CENSUS OF CANADA. Four indicators (education, labour force activity, income and housing) were combined to give each community a well-being score from 0 through 1 (with 1 being the highest). A CWB score was calculated for 4,685 Canadian communities. This number includes all Canadian communities that participated in the 2001 Census, that were captured in the 20% sample database, that had at least 65 inhabitants, and that did not have data quality issues.

#### COMPARING FIRST NATIONS AND OTHER CANADIAN COMMUNITIES

The chart below shows the distribution of First Nations and other Canadian communities across CWB levels. It demonstrates that well-being in First Nations was markedly lower in 2001. Nearly 50% of First Nations communities occupied the lower half of the index range (between 0.30 and 0.65) while less than 3% of other Canadian communities fell within this range. Importantly, however, this chart also shows that well-being varied greatly among First Nations themselves, and that several First Nations communities could be found in the higher CWB strata.



The disparity in well-being between First Nations and other Canadian communities is also evident when you look at those communities with the highest and lowest CWB scores. Although First Nations communities made up approximately 13% of all Canadian communities, 92% of the "bottom 100" Canadian communities in 2001 were First Nations. One First Nation did rank among the "top 100" Canadian communities in 2001, highlighting again that well-being varied greatly from one First Nation to another.

#### CWB ACROSS CANADA

The average CWB score for First Nations in 2001 was 0.66, as compared to 0.81 for other Canadian communities.



As shown in the chart above, however, the CWB gap between First Nations and other Canadian communities varied from region to region. The widest gap existed in the Prairie provinces, while in the North the average CWB score was only slightly lower for First Nations than for other Canadian communities.

The map below displays First Nations divided into three levels of well-being: below average, average and above average. Each First Nation was categorized according to how its CWB score compared to the average score of the 541 First Nations included in this analysis. The map demonstrates that, in 2001, communities with higher well-being were concentrated around the outer edge of Canada, while communities with lower well-being were more prevalent in the Prairie provinces.

For more information on the HDI and CWB visit [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/index\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/index_e.html) or call 1-800-567-9604.

