



The Community Environment

Information from the national and regional reports of the 1997 *First Nations and Inuit Regional Health*

What Questions Did The Regional Health Surveys Ask About The Community?

The 1997 Regional Health Surveys (RHS) included some national questions that were the same across the whole country and some questions that were only asked in particular regions. The national questions asked about:

- Attendance at residential schools
- Opinions about community wellness
- Community progress

Questions in specific regions asked about:

- Language, tradition and culture
- Income sufficiency
- The impact of residential schools



Residential Schools

Residential schools were considered important enough to be briefly covered in the national portion of the survey. They were also covered in more depth by Nova Scotia, Manitoba,

Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. According to the national results, 35 per cent of adults age 45 and older had attended a residential school. On average, they stayed there for six years.

Questions in individual regions showed that significant minorities feel attending residential school negatively affected their health or well-being. However, results from the national survey do not confirm this. Although the health of people who had attended residential schools is poorer than average, this is mostly because, as a group, these people are also older.

Other questions about the effect of residential schools gave mixed results. While 20 to 44 per cent of people said residential schools negatively affected their lives or communities, in Saskatchewan large proportions also said the experience was either OK or good. British Columbia's survey provides the most detailed picture. It suggests people feel their language and culture was affected more than their health.



Residential Schools Results from British Columbia

Percentage of participants who felt residential school had a negative impact on their:

Language	58%
Culture	62%
Current health	27%



Income Adequacy

Manitoba and Labrador specifically asked whether the household's income met basic needs. The answers are disconcerting. In Manitoba, 40 per cent said their household income is not sufficient for basic needs. More specifically, 28 per cent of people in Labrador and 46 per cent of people in Manitoba said they run out of money for food at least occasionally.



Progress in Community Wellness

The national portion of the RHS asked people whether they felt there had been progress in the past two years in a series of community characteristics. People tended to report that there had been progress in:

- Community infrastructure – water, sewage and especially housing
- Education
- First Nations/Inuit control of services
- Some traditional practices

They were less likely to think that there had been progress in:

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Job opportunities
- The availability of First Nations or Inuit health professionals

Labrador and Manitoba also asked people more specifically about problems in their own households. The most frequently reported problems were drinking, drugs, gambling, overcrowding, and communication among family members.





Reviving and Preserving Tradition

Many people believe language, tradition and culture play a role in mental health because they give people a feeling of being connected to their past, present and future. Across the country, more than 80 per cent of First Nations Peoples and Inuit agreed a return to traditional ways would promote wellness in the community. In Ontario, 91 per cent said it was important to revive and preserve Native language and culture, mostly for the sake of the children.

Nationally, people saw progress in some aspects of return to tradition, but not all. They thought there had been good progress in:

- Use of Elders
- Traditional ceremonies
- Use of language
- Cultural education programs in the schools

People were less likely to think there had been progress in personal responsibility for healing or in returning to traditional gender roles.

Although large proportions of people said they participate in traditional events and can speak an Aboriginal language, there is wide variation from one part of the country to another.



About the Regional Health Surveys

The statistics in this Fact Sheet are drawn from the 1997 *First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Surveys*.

The surveys covered people living in 186 First Nations communities spread across most of southern Canada and in the Inuit communities of Labrador. The surveys did not include people living off-reserve, in the North or in the James Bay area of Quebec. All told, the survey included 9,870 adults.

Sampling methods varied from one region to another. Also, the definition of adult varied. British Columbia considered anyone older than 16 years to be an adult while other regions counted anyone 18 and older to be an adult.