



TIME TO ADDRESS INEQUALITY FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Reconciling the Gap

“One in five people in Saskatchewan (20%) will be an Aboriginal person by 2036.”

Introduction

On October 25, 2017, Statistics Canada released information about the Aboriginal population in the country based on the 2016 Census.

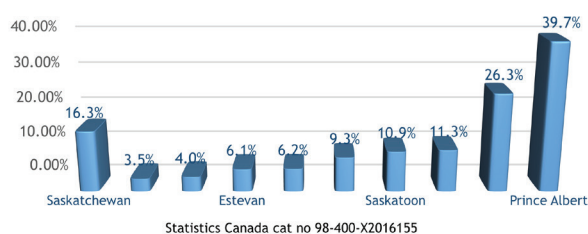
The Census information shows that the Aboriginal population in Canada is young and growing. Aboriginal people make up 4.9% of Canada’s total population (up from 3.8% in 2006). Since 2006, the Aboriginal population in Canada grew by 42.5%. They are also young with an average age of 32.1 years, almost a decade younger than the non-Aboriginal population.

This paper will provide an overview of the changing indigenous population in Saskatchewan, the persistent economic and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents, and call on the provincial government to immediately develop strategies to improve employment opportunities for indigenous people.

Aboriginal Population in Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, 175,020 people identified themselves as Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis or Inuit). That represents 16.3% of the total population, up from 15% in 2006. Among the provinces, Saskatchewan has the second highest percentage of Aboriginal people after Manitoba (18%).

Chart 1: Aboriginal Population in Saskatchewan, 2016 Census



Of those who identified as Aboriginal, 10.7% were First Nations and 5.4% were Métis.

Among Saskatchewan cities, Prince Albert has the highest percentage of Aboriginal people with almost four in ten residents (39.7%) identifying as Aboriginal. Second highest is North Battleford with 26.3% of its population being Aboriginal.

Statistics Canada estimates that one in five people in Saskatchewan (20%) will be an Aboriginal person by 2036.

Aboriginal people have lower incomes, higher rates of poverty

The census information also reveals that Aboriginal people have lower median incomes than non-Aboriginal people and, not surprisingly, higher rates of poverty. In Regina, for example, the median after-tax income of Aboriginal people is \$32,835. This is 72% of what non-Aboriginal people in the city earned (\$45,591).

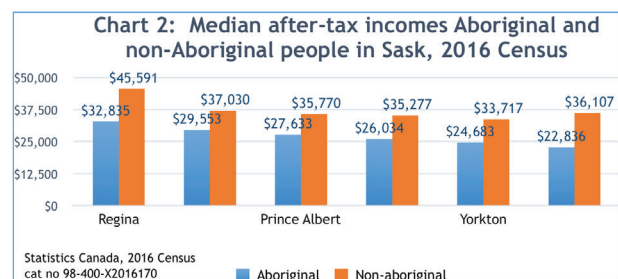


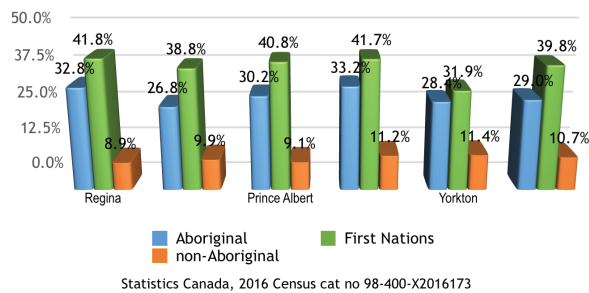
Chart 3 below shows that Aboriginal people, and particularly First Nations people, have poverty rates that are triple the rate for non-Aboriginal people.

One-third (33.2%) of Aboriginal people in the city of North Battleford were considered low-income, compared to only 11.2% of non-Aboriginal residents. The situation is even more dire for First Nations people: almost 42% of First Nations residents in North Battleford were low-income.

The rate of low income Aboriginal people is 3.7 times higher than the non-Aboriginal population.

In Regina, only 8.9% of non-Aboriginal population was considered low income. The contrast for Aboriginal people is stark: the number of low-income Aboriginal people in the city was 41.8% or 3.7 times higher than the non-Aboriginal population.

Chart 3: Rate of low-income people by Aboriginal status in Sask, 2016 Census



Trends in Aboriginal employment in Saskatchewan, 2008-2016

One factor that contributes to the higher rates of poverty among Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan is their lower levels of employment. In 2016, the Labour Force Survey showed that 55.8% of Aboriginal people aged 15 and over in the province were employed, compared to 66.4% of non-Aboriginal people. That is a gap of 10.6 points.

When we look at the employment rates for both groups in the age group 25 to 54, the ages when most people are employed and not in school or retired, the gap is even greater. In 2016, only 67.5% of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 54 were employed compared to 85.4% of non-Aboriginal people – a gap of 17.9 points.

The trends since 2008 show that employment rates for non-Aboriginal people in the province have been mostly stable from a low of 66.4% in 2016 to a high of 68.2% in 2013.



The trends for indigenous people, however, have fluctuated much more from a low of 53.9% in 2010 to a high of 59.0% in 2013. The gap in employment between the two groups was smallest in 2013 (9.2 points) and the largest in 2010 (13.4 points).

Unemployment rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan

In the last decade, Saskatchewan people have experienced record low unemployment – unless you are Aboriginal.

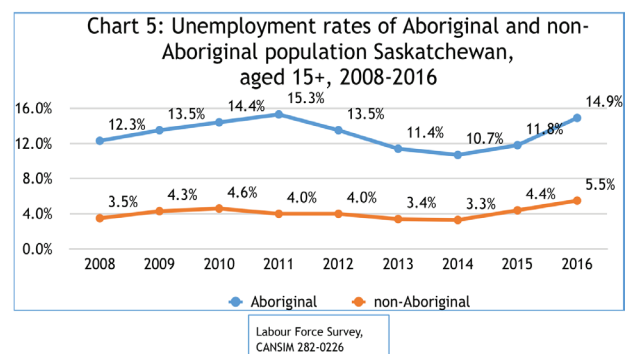


Chart 5 below shows that the Aboriginal unemployment rate in 2016 was 14.9%, the highest rate since 2008. Their unemployment rate is 2.7 times higher than the unemployment rate of non-Aboriginal people of 5.5%.

“Improving the employment levels of indigenous people in the province is critical”

The unemployment rate for indigenous people in Saskatchewan is likely much higher than 14.9% considering that the Labour Force Survey does not include the on-reserve population.

Time for Action on Aboriginal Employment

The persistently high rates of poverty and unemployment among Aboriginal people in this province must be addressed urgently, especially at this time of national reconciliation and de-colonialization.

In the 2010-11 provincial budget, the Saskatchewan Party government eliminated the Aboriginal Employment Development program and terminated 98 Aboriginal Partnership Agreements that were established to improve aboriginal employment. In 2009, the government's statistics showed that, through the 98 partnership agreements, 4,465 new hires were Aboriginal and almost 2,000 Aboriginal employees received work-based skills training.

Improving the employment levels of indigenous people in the province is critical for many reasons. As the baby boomers continue to retire, we will need to address labour shortages. The province must address barriers such as access to education, family responsibilities and other socio-economic factors, to ensure more Aboriginal people have meaningful employment.

We also need an employment strategy for indigenous people so we can address income inequality and high levels of poverty. It is well known that poverty is one of the most critical social determinants of health. Those who are poor are more likely to have lower health outcomes, greater risk of depression and mental health issues, lower educational success and lower life expectancy.

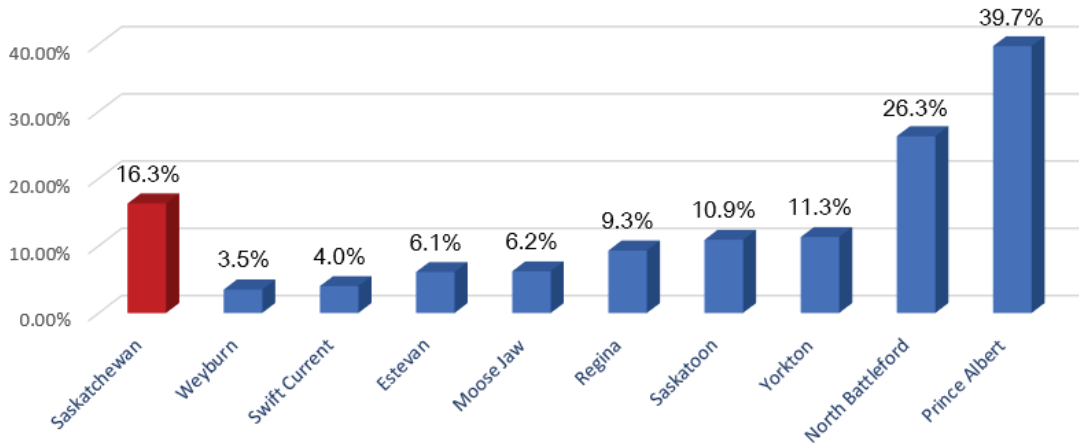
We cannot depend on the economy to address Aboriginal unemployment. When there is an

economic downturn, Aboriginal people are the first to suffer the consequences. In fact, increasing the educational and employment opportunities of indigenous people will have a positive impact on the economy. A study released in June 2016 by the Saskatoon Aboriginal Employment Partnership concluded that if First Nations and Métis in the province had the same educational attainment and corresponding income level as non-Aboriginal residents, their earnings would increase by almost \$1.1 billion per year.

It is time for the provincial government to develop bold strategies to improve the education, skills and employment opportunities for indigenous peoples in this province.

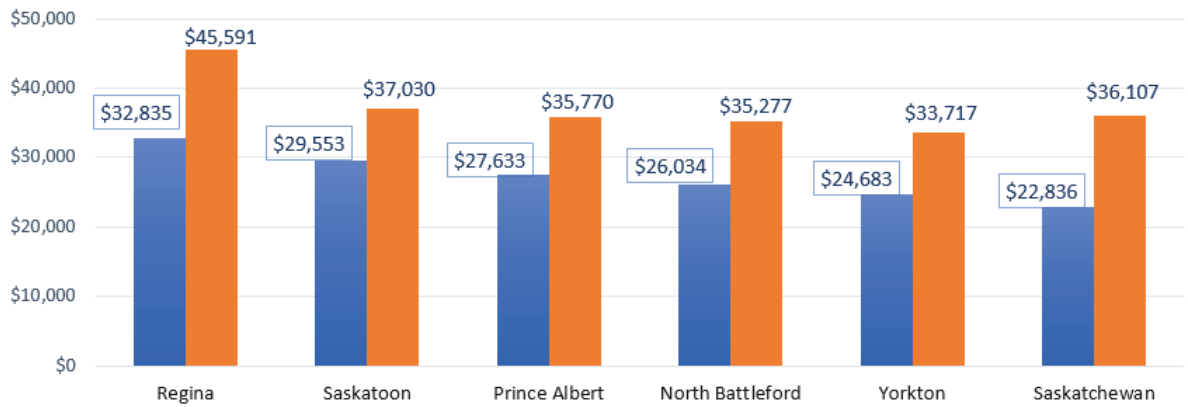
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Chart 1: Aboriginal Population in Saskatchewan, 2016 Census



Statistics Canada cat no 98-400-X2016155

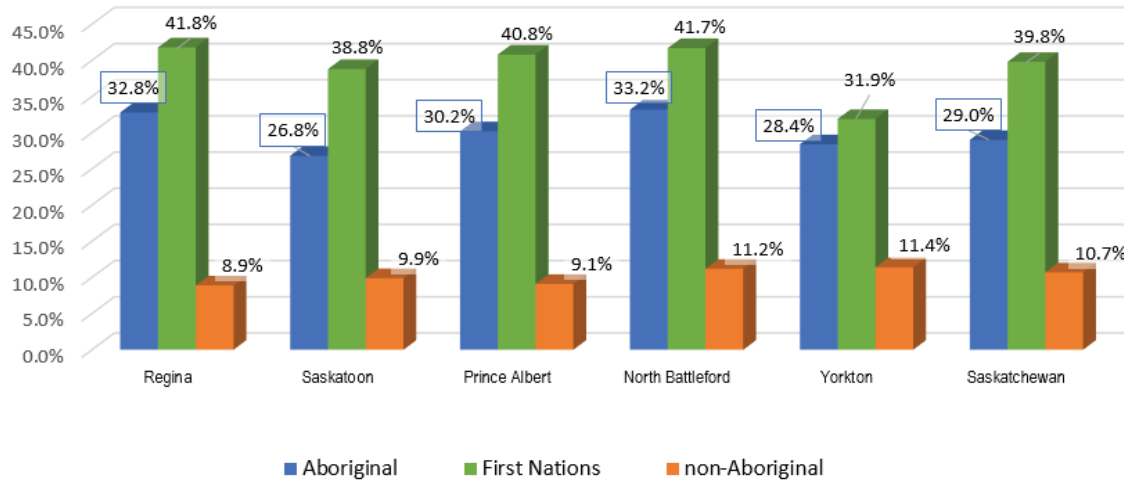
Chart 2: Median after-tax incomes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Sask, 2016 Census



Statistics Canada, 2016 Census cat no 98-400-X2016170

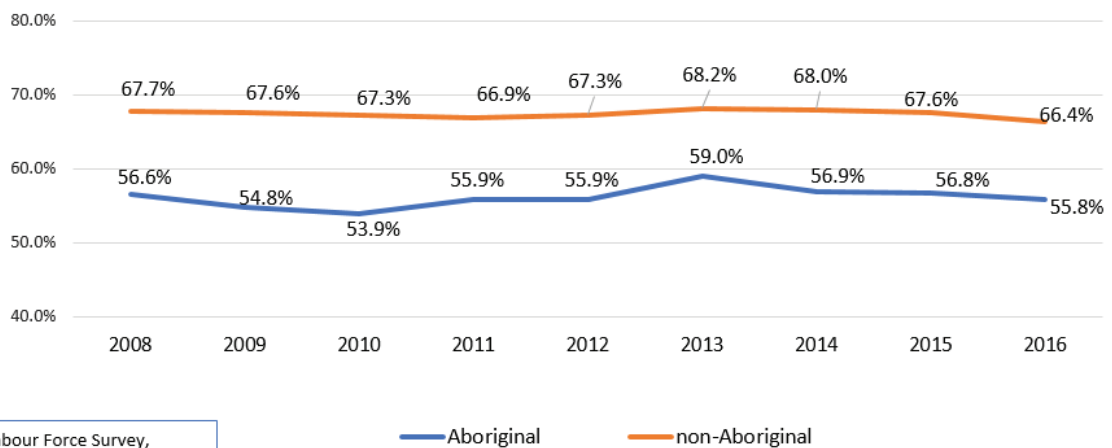
■ Aboriginal ■ Non-Aboriginal

Chart 3: Rate of low-income people by Aboriginal status in Saskatchewan, 2016 Census



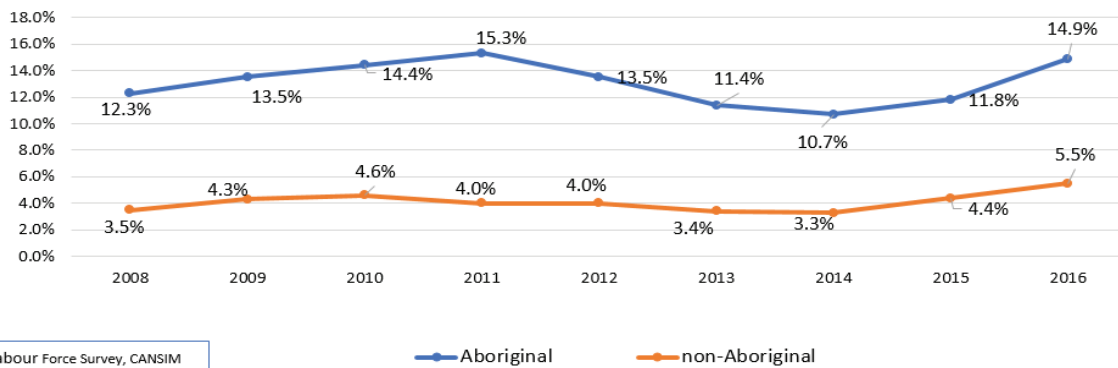
Statistics Canada, 2016 Census cat no 98-400-X2016173

Chart 4: Employment rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, aged 15+, 2008-2016



Labour Force Survey,
CANSIM 282-0226

Chart 5: Unemployment rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan, aged 15+, 2008-2016



1. In this paper we use both terms “indigenous” and “Aboriginal” to describe people who are First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Statistics Canada uses the term Aboriginal but increasingly the term Indigenous is used in Canada.
2. *City of Bridges: First Nations and Métis Economic Development in the Saskatoon Region*, Saskatoon Aboriginal Employment Partnership, June 2016

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