



# Submission to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs:

## The role of colleges and institutes in improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students

### Overview

Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) is the national and international voice of 141 publicly supported colleges, institutes, CEGEPs and polytechnics. Across close to 700 campuses and access centres, our members provide practical and flexible pathways for learners in urban, rural, northern, and remote communities to develop and rapidly upgrade in-demand skills needed to grow and adapt for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

CICan members serve as the primary access point to post-secondary education for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis learners, with 86% living within 50 km of a college or institute. Colleges<sup>1</sup> offer a broad range of training programs to address the needs of Indigenous students, whether they did not complete high school, are recent graduates, or are adult learners looking for training.

Canada's colleges provide more than 300 credential programs tailored to Indigenous students and communities, along with safe, inclusive, and accessible environments.

While delivering on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)'s Calls to Action, colleges are engaged in accelerating reconciliation and committed to working with Indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> "Colleges" refer collectively to publicly funded colleges, institutes, CEGEPs, and polytechnics.



communities to remove barriers to education. Over the last decades, colleges have advanced strategies to address ongoing barriers to access and success in post-secondary education. They have progressed in integrating land-based learning and Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing in curriculum, while expanding the number of First Nations, Inuit and Métis focused courses and offering Indigenous-centred services. 71 colleges and institutes are signatories of CICan's 2014 [Indigenous Education Protocol](#)<sup>2</sup>, which aims to help institutions strengthen their support for Indigenous students. CICan's Protocol also encourages members to translate its principles into actionable outcomes.

The Indigenous population is younger and growing at a faster pace than Canada's non-Indigenous population.<sup>3</sup> The persistent education gap must be addressed to ensure Indigenous communities' well-being and prosperity in a transforming economy.

On behalf of Canada's colleges and institutes, CICan is pleased to provide this submission to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs to inform the study on improving graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.collegesinstitutes.ca/what-we-do/advocacy/accelerating-reconciliation/indigenous-education-protocol/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm>

*Summary of Recommendations:*

**Recommendation 1:** The Government of Canada should substantially increase the investment in the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, the University and College Entrance Preparation Program, and the Inuit and Métis Post-Secondary Education Strategies to meet the current demand of Indigenous communities to access post-secondary education.

**Recommendation 2:** The Government of Canada should provide adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for Indigenous post-secondary institutions.

**Recommendation 3:** The Government of Canada should ensure that colleges and institutes have appropriate resources and capacity to provide training responsive to Indigenous community needs and wrap-around services and supports to challenge intersectional barriers facing Indigenous learners.

**Recommendation 4:** The Government of Canada should further leverage the college applied research expertise and infrastructure to support Indigenous-led research.



## Substantially increase the federal government funding to improve access to post-secondary education

### *The funding available does not meet the current and future demand*

Intersectional barriers facing Indigenous people to access post-secondary education persist. They include financial barriers, insufficient academic preparation, experience of racism and discrimination, difficulties with relocating to pursue studies, intergenerational trauma, and others<sup>4</sup>. Even though Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 increased their high school attainment rate<sup>5</sup>, they lag the Canadian-born non-Indigenous population, 88.9% of whom completed high school. Given that Indigenous peoples are one of the fastest-growing populations in Canada<sup>6</sup> and high school attainment rates continue to improve, the demand for access to post-secondary education will exceed the funding available through Indigenous Services Canada (ISC).

CICan shares the concerns of Indigenous communities regarding the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), the University and College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEPP) for First Nations and Inuit post-secondary students, and the Inuit and Métis Post-Secondary Education Strategies. These programs provide insufficient funding and have restrictive policies that will result in a substantial number of students being left behind. While additional budget investments occurred, an increase in funding is required to meet rising demand. As the Assembly

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<sup>4</sup> CICan (2021) *The Skills Compass environmental scan of college sector programs, program components and resources to support NEET Indigenous and Newcomer youth in training & employment.*

<https://collegesinstitutes.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/extcollab/EScuEww72WhLiFU9pLZvnIYBWCWYcoXEWp7cLjY2u2c8-A?e=w3HwFz>

<sup>5</sup> In 2021, 82 % of Métis had a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, 69.9% - among First Nations people, and 50.1% - among Inuit. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221130/dq221130a-eng.htm>

<sup>6</sup> According to the assessments made by the OECD, 350,000 Indigenous youth will turn 15 between 2016 and 2026. <https://www.oecd.org/publications/indigenous-employment-and-skills-strategies-in-canada-9789264300477-en.htm>



of First Nations pointed out, the current programs do not “reflect inflation, the rise in student costs, the rise in student graduation rates from secondary school, and population growth”.<sup>7</sup>

Besides the limitation on the number of students these programs can support, the program parameters create additional barriers. They include the requirement to maintain satisfactory academic standing with no room for failure and a limited list of programs and expenditures eligible for funding.

A post-secondary credential is a vital determinant of employment income. An expanding discrepancy between demand and access to post-secondary education will further exacerbate earning disparities between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people, caused by lower educational attainment, labour force participation, and access to higher-paying jobs.

### *Colleges as the primary access point to post-secondary education*

The unique presence of colleges in northern and remote communities allows them to increase access and forge strong relationships with Indigenous communities. Colleges are also the leading providers of adult education and upskilling programs for Indigenous students. According to CICan members, a significant proportion of Indigenous students are enrolled in adult basic education programs that provide skills for success training, which facilitate a successful transition to post-secondary education for Indigenous learners who do not have a high school diploma.

Colleges’ success in increasing access is reflected in the 2021 Census data, demonstrating that Indigenous peoples’ college diploma attainment for the 25 to 64 age group is higher (23%) than

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2.-First-Nations-PSE-Policy-Proposal-EN.pdf>



the national average (21%); this is also true for apprenticeship or trades certificates (11% for Indigenous peoples vs. 10% for the total population)<sup>8</sup>.

To increase access levels, several CICA members provide training in remote communities and on-reserve due to **fully equipped mobile classrooms**.

**Community-based programs** are designed for Indigenous learners in cooperation with Indigenous communities and aim to address labour market needs. These programs enable Indigenous students to begin post-secondary education within their community, allowing them to keep their support networks and reduce the financial burden of living far from home. This type of programming contributes to Indigenous community development by providing much-needed education for future employment and a role model for children and youth.

Responding to the TRC's Calls to **revitalize Indigenous languages** as a means of preserving Indigenous cultures, over 23 Indigenous languages are taught in colleges across Canada.

Colleges are also working towards advancing the TRC's Calls to Action focused on post-secondary education by developing and implementing **Indigenous strategic frameworks**, which include increasing the number of Indigenous staff, enhancing Indigenous cultural awareness training among staff, requiring all students to take a class about Indigenous culture or history, and fostering close partnerships with Indigenous communities.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb1/en/cv!recreate.action?pid=9810041401&selectedNodeIds=3D5,5D1,6D2,6D3,6D6,6D9,6D10,6D11&checkedLevels=0D1,1D1,3D1,5D5,6D1,6D2,6D3,6D4&refPeriods=20210101,20210101&dimensionLayouts=layout3,layout3,layout3,layout3,layout3,layout3,layout2,layout2&vectorDisplay=false>

## Provide adequate, predictable and sustainable funding for Indigenous post-secondary institutions

Varying by size, the scope of programs and geographical coverage, Indigenous institutions offer education “grounded in Indigenous languages, pedagogies, cultures, and worldviews<sup>9</sup>.” Seven CICan members located in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Ontario are designated Indigenous institutions, delivering culturally relevant programs as a means of preserving and strengthening Indigenous communities and their cultures and values.

CICan echoes the Assembly of First Nations’ position that Indigenous post-secondary institutions “lack secure operational funding and rely heavily on inadequate and unpredictable proposal-based programs.”<sup>10</sup> We advocate for adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for all Indigenous post-secondary institutions across Canada to ensure they grow and provide students with a path to succeed in education and employment.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/in-fact/filling-in-the-map/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2.-First-Nations-PSE-Policy-Proposal-EN.pdf>

## Culturally relevant training and wrap-around services are essential for educational retention and success

To increase recruitment, retention, and success of Indigenous learners, colleges recognize the unique and diverse cultures and needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students and aim to provide tailored training and supports.

Considering that some regions, such as the Atlantic provinces and the territories, have no Indigenous institutions and that many non-Indigenous colleges serve significant numbers of Indigenous students, there continues to be a need across the country for increased funding to develop Indigenous-centred programs and services at non-Indigenous institutions.

[CICan's 2021 environmental scan](#) identified best practices for supporting Indigenous youth in post-secondary programs and their transitions to employment. These included 1) establishing Indigenous student cohorts and case-management approaches to support students to completion; 2) offering wrap-around services that consider the health, social, cultural, financial, and academic needs of students; 3) facilitating transitions to employment, including through work-integrated learning.<sup>11</sup>

Current funding needs more flexibility for supporting long-term training for those Indigenous students who require additional time and assistance to complete the program. Culturally-relevant training helps develop expertise for building strong and capable Indigenous communities. For

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<sup>11</sup> <https://collegesinstitutes.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/extcollab/EScuEww72WhLiFU9pLZvn1YBWCWYcoXEWp7cLjY2u2c8-A?e=w3HwFz>



example, colleges intend to ensure that Indigenous learners have Indigenous-centred training opportunities in key sectors like **health care** and the **net-zero** economy.

Starting in the fall 2023, **Nova Scotia Community College** will offer a cohort-based learning in practical nursing. A culturally responsive curriculum will use a Mi'kmaq and Indigenous lens.

**Gabriel Dumont Institute** and **Saskatchewan Polytechnic** offer a joint kanātan nipīy (clean water) program, providing access to employment opportunities in water treatment and distribution facilities.

Customized services also include cultural and spiritual activities. On-campus Elders guide students, provide curriculum support, and liaise with Indigenous communities. As the number of Indigenous people in urban areas grows<sup>12</sup>, along with an increase of non-Status and Métis, on-campus Indigenous support services are essential for fostering or maintaining Indigenous students' connection to their communities and cultures.

According to the CICan's 2019 Survey of Institutional Infrastructure, there is an acute need to build or improve engagement spaces that reflect Indigenous cultures and help increase understanding among Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff.

CICan's Indigenous members, such as the **First Nations Technical Institute**, highlighted how braiding learning and healing together can be powerful in supporting student mental health.

CICan reiterates the importance of allocating dedicated funding for Indigenous on-campus mental health practitioners and for supporting Indigenous ways of healing.

The demographics of Indigenous post-secondary students speak to the challenges and barriers that must be addressed – Indigenous learners are often first-generation students with no family experience with post-secondary, they are often adult learners, come from lower socio-economic

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm>

backgrounds, and have family dependents<sup>13</sup>. Dedicated funding for colleges' wrap-around initiatives is required to increase Indigenous students' retention and educational success. Specific on-campus supports should include housing, daycare, transportation, and food bank programs. In addition, colleges should be able to provide educational equipment: limited access to a computer and the Internet<sup>14</sup> puts Indigenous students at risk of falling further behind.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/42-28-0001/2021001/article/00004-eng.htm>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/mr\\_20230327\\_e\\_44230.html](https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/mr_20230327_e_44230.html)



## Support Indigenous-led research capacity

Colleges' applied research centers and facilities are well-positioned to foster ongoing partnerships with Indigenous communities and support Indigenous-led research. With reach to almost every Canadian community, colleges facilitate innovation through partnerships with Indigenous businesses and communities and provide physical and technological infrastructure, and human resources, for advancing Indigenous-led research.

College applied research is unique in that the research problem is identified by the partner, most projects are completed within one year, and the intellectual property remains with the partner.

Colleges consistently engage students in applied research projects providing work-integrated learning experiences that help improve student outcomes and transitions to employment.

*The [Boreal Forest Plant & Seed Technology Access Centre](#) at Northern Alberta Institute of Technology is working on developing plant and seed delivery businesses within First Nations and Métis communities to reduce barriers to reforestation and reclamation by training highly qualified personnel from these communities.*

To strengthen Indigenous research capacity<sup>15</sup>, the Government of Canada should further leverage the college applied research expertise and infrastructure.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/research-coordinating-committee/priorities/indigenous-research/strategic-plan-2019-2022.html>