



Circles for Reconciliation Gathering Theme

Dispelling the Misconceptions About Indigenous People (British Columbia Version)

Many misconceptions about Indigenous peoples in Canada are based on stereotyping and lack of information. These misconceptions have serious consequences and are often at the root of the discrimination that Indigenous peoples continue to experience today and can adversely impact the effectiveness of our Indigenous workforce.

Dispelling misconceptions is one step towards building relationships based on mutual respect and trust. Here are 10 common misconceptions about Indigenous peoples, along with factual information that will help to dispel them.

(When presenting this theme at a circle, it is often effective to have participants read one of the misconceptions. Be sure participants feel free to pass and not read a misconception if they don't feel comfortable.)

MISCONCEPTION #1: All Indigenous peoples are the same.

The Facts: The Indigenous population is very diverse.

- There are 634 recognized bands in Canada and 3,100 Reserves. The band includes all the people in a community and its government. The reserve is the land allocated to the band. A band may have several Reserve lands and some bands have both urban and rural lands.
- In Canada today there are 11 major language families with over 50 forms. Some Indigenous languages are as different as Spanish is from Japanese. In British Columbia there are 34 distinct languages involving 61 dialects, representing 60% of the Indigenous languages in Canada. (Murray, 2019)
- There are 316 reserves in British Columbia, 47 of which are on Vancouver Island. On the Island there are three nations each with their own distinct language. (List of Indian Reserves in British Columbia, n.d.)
- **Coast Salish**
Coast Salish peoples include a variety of living along the Northwest Pacific Coast in British Columbia (Robinson, 2010) from the Lower



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Mainland and Vancouver Island south to western Washington and northwestern Oregon in the United States (Artibise, 2010).

- **Nuu chah nulth**

Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations stretches approximately 300km of Vancouver Island's Pacific Coast, from Brooks Peninsula in the north to Point No Point in the south, and includes inland regions (Artibise, 2010).

Kwakwaka'wakw (pronounced "kwa kwa ka wak") Nations Territories include coastal areas of northeastern Vancouver Island (Artibise, 2010). (north of Comox) and around to Brooks Inlet and mainland British Columbia (Robinson, 2010) as well as islands in between.

MISCONCEPTION #2: Indigenous peoples have always had the same rights as other Canadians.

The Facts: Only recently have Indigenous peoples begun to obtain the same rights as other Canadians.

- Registered First Nations peoples obtained the right to vote in 1960. Prior to this, while First Nations peoples were not explicitly denied the vote, a variety of qualifications such as British citizenship and property ownership made it virtually impossible for Indigenous people to vote (Indigenous Foundations, n.d. & Leslie, 2016).
- In 1884, an amendment to the *Indian Act* instituted prison sentences for anyone participating in traditional Indigenous ceremonies such as potlatch, thus denying these peoples their religious rights.
- In 1880, an amendment to the *Indian Act* provided for automatic loss of status of any Indian who earned a university degree or any Indian woman who married a non-Indian or an unregistered Indian. This was not repealed until 1985.
- Indigenous people were denied the right to organize politically. Amendments to the *Indian Act* in 1927 made it illegal for First Nations communities to hire lawyers or initiate land claims without the government's consent. In 2008, section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA) was amended so First Nations individuals can now make complaints of discrimination to the Canadian Human



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Rights Commission (CHRC) relating to decisions or actions arising from the *Indian Act*.

MISCONCEPTION #3: Indigenous peoples are responsible for their current situation.

The Facts: Many factors have contributed to the situation of Indigenous peoples in Canada

- Prior to European contact, Indigenous communities were strong and self-sufficient. While many Indigenous peoples were never conquered, the process of colonization resulted in their complete loss of control over their lives. For example:
 - According to article 32 (1) of the *Indian Act* no band or band member could sell anything to anyone other than another band member without approval in writing from the superintendent.
 - The Pass system, which was not repealed until 1941, required written permission from the Indian agent for a person to leave a reserve, to fish, hunt, sell their crops, get married, etc. The pass indicated why they were allowed to be absent, for how long and whether or not they could carry a gun.
- Policies of displacement and assimilation (for example residential schools and banning of potlatch) deprived Indigenous peoples of their traditional, social, spiritual, economic, and political powers.

MISCONCEPTION #4: Indigenous peoples have a lot of money.

The Facts: Indigenous individuals have lower incomes than others in Canada.

- Although Indigenous incomes rise with increased education, even highly educated Indigenous people still face a considerable income gap relative to non-Indigenous people.
- A 2014 study reports, “University educated aboriginal workers make 44% less than their non-aboriginal peers in the private sector. In the public sector, their wage gap is 14%.” (McInturff & Tulloch, 2014).
- In 2010, the median income for Indigenous peoples was \$20,000, compared to a \$27,600 median income for the rest of Canadians.



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While income disparity between Indigenous peoples and the rest of Canadians narrowed slightly in a decade, at this rate it would take 63 years for the gap to be erased.

MISCONCEPTION #5: Indigenous peoples have everything paid for.

The Facts: Certain services are paid for; what these are and who they are for is defined by statute or treaty agreements.

- Registered First Nations peoples have certain services paid for. These are part of the federal government's responsibilities as outlined in the *Indian Act*. When a registered First Nations person leaves the community, access to these rights are limited. Outside of the items defined by statute and agreement, Indigenous peoples pay their own expenses.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada provides certain services to the Inuit through its Indian and Inuit programs. The department funds services for these communities that other Canadians receive from their provincial or municipal governments. These services include education, social services, and community infrastructure such as water purification facilities and roads.
- On reserve schools receive less tax money than schools for non-Indigenous children. In 2017, the Parliamentary Budget Office estimated the federal government would need to add \$654 million in funding per year to match on-reserve school funding to non-reserve school funding.
- Aboriginal learners face significant challenges before they reach the post-secondary system. This includes a lower graduation rate and a lower academic GPA. In some cases, no GPA is calculated and in B.C. a Dogwood Diploma or an Evergreen Certificate is given to a graduating student. These certificates recognize school completion for individuals with significant disabilities, but are not recognized for post-secondary school admission (Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training, 2018).
- There are many reports that highlight the substandard materials and lack of inspections on buildings on reserve. There was a study done in 2014 that showed that approximately 30% of houses on reserve in B.C. are inadequate. (Wayne, 2015).



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MISCONCEPTION #6: Indigenous peoples do not pay taxes.

The Facts: Personal tax exemption occurs only in a few types of cases. Indigenous peoples pay significant amounts of tax every year:

- Registered First Nations peoples are sometimes exempted from paying personal taxes. Tax exemption is part of the federal government's statutory obligation as outlined in the *Indian Act*. Registered First Nations peoples working off-reserve pay income tax, regardless of where they reside (even on reserve).
- First Nations peoples without status and registered First Nations people living off-reserve, pay taxes like the rest of the country. Inuit and Métis people always pay taxes.
- There are many taxes beyond personal income taxes: income taxes on corporations and unincorporated businesses, federal and provincial sales taxes, and federal excise taxes.
- Most First Nations peoples opt to pay sales tax on purchases under \$500 due to the administrative costs of making a claim.

MISCONCEPTION #7: Indigenous peoples cannot adapt to life in the mainstream.

The Facts: Indigenous peoples have extensive and effective relationships with the rest of Canadian society.

- Indigenous peoples attend and graduate from a wide range of colleges and universities. The University of Victoria offers the world's first Indigenous Law Program which is training a growing number of students in both Indigenous and mainstream law—ensuring graduates can work fluently across cultures.
- In 2017, there were nearly 19,000 businesses located in Indigenous communities (17,000 in First Nations communities and 2,000 in Inuit communities). Combined, these businesses generated just over \$10 billion in total revenue and \$0.4 billion in profits. Nearly one half of these businesses are located in British Columbia.
- Of the \$32 billion Indigenous people contributed to Canada's economy in 2016, more than \$12 billion was from Indigenous businesses.



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MISCONCEPTION #8: Indigenous peoples do not have a good work ethic and are lazy.

The Facts: Indigenous peoples are skilled, productive and reliable employees who are valued by their employers.

- Indigenous peoples are valued as stable, reliable employees who contribute in many ways to corporate performance and participate extensively in work-oriented education and training programs.
- A 2016 study, which focused exclusively on British Columbia, showed that Indigenous entrepreneurs are doing better than their non-Indigenous counterparts with 78% of Indigenous entrepreneurs indicating that their business was profitable versus 74% of non-Indigenous entrepreneurs. The Indigenous tourism industry produces 1.4 billion dollars of Canada's annual Gross Domestic Product, and employs more than 33,000 people. (Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, 2016)
- First Nations' economic resilience is evident in their pursuit of economic opportunity in a manner consistent with Indigenous worldviews. B.C. First Nations are well advanced in terms of economic development regulations and policies. Eighty to ninety per cent of First Nations have a structured approach in the form of policies and laws, administrative procedures, and resource use agreements (Indigenous Business and Investment Council, n.d.).

MISCONCEPTION #9: There are no qualified Indigenous workers to hire.

The Facts: Indigenous peoples have the education, skills and expertise required for jobs in all economic sectors.

- Almost one-half (48.4%) of Indigenous people had a postsecondary qualification in 2011, including 14.4% with a trades certificate, 20.6% with a college diploma, 3.5% with a university certificate or diploma below the bachelor level, and 9.8% with a university degree. In comparison, almost two thirds (64.7%) of the non-Indigenous population aged 25 to 64 had a postsecondary qualification in 2011.
- A young and growing Indigenous population represents an opportunity for economic development in Canada. The growing



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number of young Indigenous people represents a supply of new workers, entrepreneurs and professionals.

- Many services are available to help employers find qualified Indigenous employees.

MISCONCEPTION #10: Métis people have the same rights as First Nations people

The Facts: This is not currently true.

- Indigenous people with Registered Indian status have special rights attached to treaties. These rights are not available to non-status Indians or Métis people.
- In 2016 The Supreme Court declared that Métis and non-status Indians must be considered “Indians” in the Constitution and thereby fall under federal jurisdiction. There was no new money attached to this decision.
- Note: this has nothing to do with the *Indian Act* and does not mean Métis people will get Registered Indian status or be placed on reserves.



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