

CREATING OPPORTUNITY

The Liberal Plan for Canada

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PART TWO

The Fabric of Canadian Life

C h a p t e r

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The priority of a Liberal government will be to assist Aboriginal communities in their efforts to address the obstacles to their development and to help them marshal the human and physical resources necessary to build and sustain vibrant communities.

Aboriginal Peoples

THE PLACE OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF Canada is a litmus test of our beliefs in fairness, justice, and equality of opportunity.

For generations, Canadian society has failed this test. Many Aboriginal people face enormous problems, both in their communities and in the cities across Canada where they live: absence of meaningful employment and economic opportunities, unequal educational opportunity and results, poor housing, unsafe drinking water, and lack of health services. They suffer also from the destruction and lack of respect for Aboriginal languages, values, and culture.

Past and current ways of dealing with these conditions are not working. It is time for a change. We must define and undertake together creative initiatives designed to achieve fairness, mutual respect, and recognition of rights.

The role of a Liberal government will be to provide Aboriginal people with the necessary tools to become self-sufficient and self-governing. Our priority will be to assist Aboriginal communities in their efforts to address the obstacles to their development and to help them marshal the human and physical resources necessary to build and sustain vibrant communities.

The Aboriginal population is an overwhelmingly young population. If we do not focus on the potential of these young people, we will face increasing costs to our social security, health, and justice systems, and we will have lost a generation able and willing to make a contribution. Canada needs their talent and energy.

Our goal for Canada must be a future where:

- Aboriginal people enjoy a standard of living and quality of life and opportunity equal to those of other Canadians;
- First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples live self-reliantly, secure in the knowledge of who they are as unique peoples;
- all Canadians are enriched by Aboriginal cultures and are committed to the fair sharing of the potential of our nation;
- Aboriginal people have the positive option to live and work wherever they choose; and
- perhaps most importantly, Aboriginal children grow up in secure families and healthy communities, with the opportunity to take their full place in Canada.

RENEWING THE PARTNERSHIP

A Liberal government will act on the premise that the inherent right of self-government is an existing Aboriginal and treaty right.

A Liberal government will be committed to building a new partnership with Aboriginal peoples that is based on trust, mutual respect, and participation in the decision-making process. It does not make sense for the federal government to be unilaterally making policy or budgetary decisions that affect the lives of Aboriginal people, without their involvement. A Liberal government will develop a more comprehensive process for consultation between federal ministers and Aboriginal representatives with respect to decision-making that directly affects First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

A Liberal government will be committed to gradually winding down the Department of Indian Affairs at a pace agreed upon by First Nations, while maintaining the federal fiduciary responsibility. We will work with Aboriginal peoples to identify where existing federal expenditures for Aboriginal peoples, currently in excess of \$5 billion a year, can be redirected into more productive uses. A Liberal government will also explore new fiscal arrangements with Aboriginal peoples.

A Liberal government will seek the advice of treaty First Nations on how to achieve a mutually acceptable process to interpret the treaties in contemporary terms, while giving full recognition to their original spirit and intent.

The Inuit are seeking a process for the negotiation of regional self-government agreements for Inuit living outside the future territory of Nunavut. A Liberal government will support this objective.

A Liberal government will take the lead in trilateral negotiations involving the provinces to define the nature and scope of federal and provincial responsibility for Métis and off-reserve Indians. A Liberal government will also provide assistance to enumerate the Métis.

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A YOUNG POPULATION

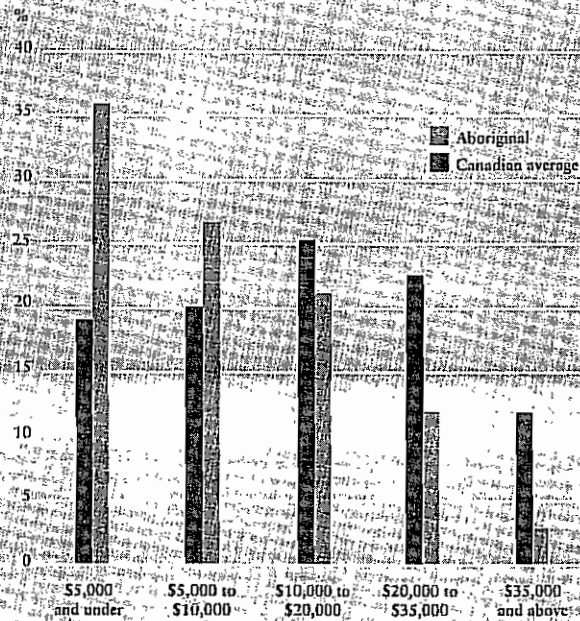
Age distributions reveal other differences between the total Canadian population and the population who identified with an Aboriginal group. The Aboriginal Peoples Survey reveals that the population identifying with an Aboriginal group tended to be much younger than Canada's total population: 37 percent were under the age of 15, compared with 21 percent for Canada's total population. Seven percent of the population identifying with an Aboriginal group were aged 55 and over, compared with 20 percent for Canada's total population.

Canadian Population by Age, 1991

Age group (years)	Total population (%)	Population identifying as Aboriginal (%)
0-4	7.1	14.0
5-14	14.0	23.4
15-24	14.2	19.4
25-34	17.9	17.6
35-54	27.1	18.4
55+	19.7	7.2

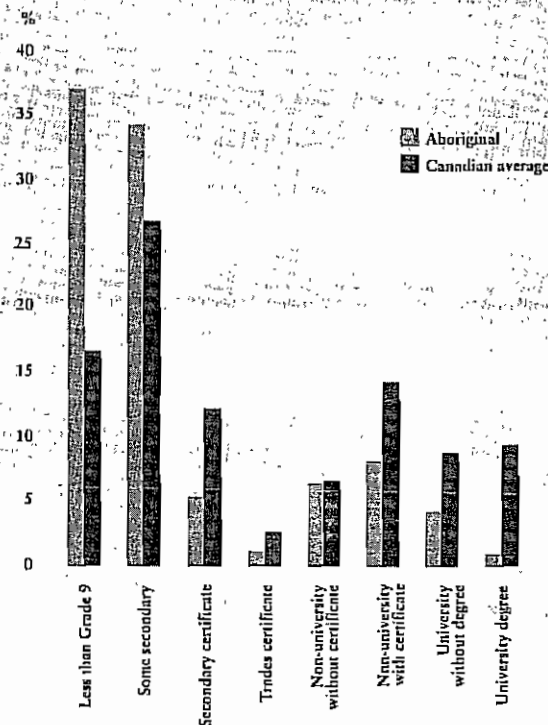
Source: Statistics Canada, 1993

Income of Aboriginal People Compared with the National Average, 1985



Source: Statistics Canada, 1990

Education of Aboriginal People Compared with the National Average, 1986



Source: Statistics Canada, March 1989

The untapped potential of Aboriginal peoples is untapped potential for Canada.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal peoples are the poorest in the country. A Liberal government, in partnership with Aboriginal peoples, will work towards improving their economic and social conditions. The untapped potential of Aboriginal peoples is untapped potential for Canada. Government studies show that a reduction of the Aboriginal unemployment rate to the national average by the year 2000 would increase the gross national product of Canada by 2.3 percent.

Aboriginal-controlled community enterprises and effective community development institutions will be supported as the main engines of economic growth for Aboriginal peoples. A Liberal government will also explore new approaches to obtaining capital for Aboriginal development projects, such as through a National Aboriginal Development Bank, whose initial capital will come from banks, corporations, and prosperous Aboriginal communities. Its mandate could include the issuance of Aboriginal Development Bonds, which Canadians could purchase to finance Aboriginal community development.

A Liberal government will adopt federal procurement policies designed to stimulate the growth of Aboriginal business and will set up an Aboriginal Trade Commission to cultivate national and international markets for Aboriginal goods and services, including tourism, arts, crafts, and the products of traditional economies.

HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Adequate shelter is a fundamental need of any society and a basic prerequisite for community prosperity. Properly designed projects for the construction of housing and infrastructure should also create jobs and training for members of that community.

A Liberal government will work with Aboriginal peoples to develop an approach to housing that emphasizes community control, local resources, and flexibility in design and labour requirements.

Aboriginal peoples are suffering an extreme housing crisis, brought on in part by the growth in the Aboriginal population, coupled with the Conservative regime's refusal, over nine years, to provide adequate resources to remedy the housing-need backlog. The 1992 report of the all-party Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs recommends a number of ways that existing resources could be reallocated to better address the housing crisis.

A Liberal government will work with Aboriginal peoples to develop an approach to housing that emphasizes community control, local resources, and flexibility in design and labour requirements. A Liberal government will bring together Aboriginal leaders, business and investment leaders, and other levels of government to define the appropriate legal instruments that will provide the security of repayment necessary to encourage private-sector financing to meet the need for housing.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Too many Aboriginal children are dropping out of school. Less than half the Indian school-age population reaches Grade 12, and in the Northwest Territories the success rate for Aboriginal children is approximately 3 percent. Many causes for the dropout rate are poverty-related or reflect an educational system that is not relevant to the lives of Aboriginal young people. The education system is not preparing these young people to meet the minimum educational requirements of the Canadian labour force.

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The needs of off-reserve, urban Aboriginal people are not currently being met. A Liberal government will initiate an Aboriginal Head Start program for preschool children and their parents, to be designed and run by Aboriginal peoples (see chapter 5).

A Liberal government will establish, with the participation of Aboriginal peoples, an Aboriginal Educational Institute that would specialize in curriculum development for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal schools, teacher orientation, distance education, standards development, Aboriginal languages, literacy, and the development of cultural survival programs for youth.

Postsecondary education assistance for Aboriginal students was first introduced by a Liberal government in the late 1960s as a deliberate strategy to close the gap between Native and non-Native education in Canada. The Postsecondary Education Program continued to meet the growing demand from the Aboriginal community for higher education until 1987, when the Conservative government restricted the criteria and capped the budget for the program. Eligible Aboriginal students are now being turned away from postsecondary institutions for lack of funding, while at the same time the government is more than willing to support many of these young people with welfare payments.

A Liberal government will remove the cap on postsecondary education specifically to provide adequate funding for Aboriginal students accepted at colleges, universities, and vocational institutes, and in adult education programs and professional degree programs. An additional \$20 million per year will be budgeted initially to address the backlog of eligible students who have been deferred as a result of the cap on funding. A review of the Postsecondary Education Program will also be undertaken with Aboriginal peoples to determine fair criteria for eligibility and special needs, including adequate child care for students in need of such a service.

HEALTH AND HEALING

The need for a new approach to health issues in Aboriginal communities is starkly obvious. Aboriginal young people are committing suicide at a rate six

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times the national average, and many are falling into a life of hopelessness characterized by a lack of education, alcohol and drug abuse, and, for too many, incarceration in our prisons.

A Liberal government will work in partnership with Aboriginal peoples to provide their communities with the tools and resources necessary to tackle these problems. Some communities have identified an urgent need for crisis-intervention counsellors, drop-in centres for youth, cultural survival programs, healing centres, or other resources. Successful models for these initiatives already exist. A Liberal government will initiate a comprehensive health policy, designed by and for Aboriginal peoples, which supports an integrated approach to dealing with physical and mental health issues and incorporates traditional healing methods.

Many Aboriginal communities, particularly in remote areas and the North, lack qualified mental health counsellors and facilities. A Liberal government will commit the necessary resources to train professional counsellors in traditional and contemporary methods and to assist communities to develop traditional healing centres or other culturally appropriate initiatives. A Liberal government will triple the current number of bursaries and scholarships available through Health and Welfare Canada for training Aboriginal health professionals and will make the bursaries and scholarships accessible to all Aboriginal peoples.

ABORIGINAL JUSTICE ISSUES

There is ample evidence to demonstrate that the conventional justice system is not working for Aboriginal peoples. They continue to be imprisoned at a rate greater than that of the overall population. Several years ago, the Canadian Human Rights Commission made the observation that Native youth today are more likely to go to prison than to college or university.

Numerous studies and inquiries have examined the Canadian justice system and Aboriginal peoples, including the Marshall Inquiry and the Manitoba Justice Inquiry. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has held a National Round Table on justice issues. There is clear agreement that change is needed and now is the time for action. Studies to date have been moving in the direction of either a separate Aboriginal justice system or, at the very least, major reforms to the present justice system to accommodate the unique cultures of Aboriginal peoples.

A Liberal government will act on Aboriginal justice issues as a priority and will consider alternative justice systems for Aboriginal peoples. We will also continue to support innovative alternative justice projects.

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A SECURE LAND AND RESOURCE BASE

The resolution of outstanding Aboriginal claims must be a priority for all Canadians. Aboriginal peoples require certainty with respect to land rights if their communities are to have a productive future. Until claims and grievances are resolved, uncertainty over land rights will limit the possibilities of economic development in many parts of Canada.

The objective of a Liberal government will be to uphold the honour of the Crown by settling claims through a fair and equitable process. The resolution of land rights will allow the federal government to meet its obligations and guarantee a secure land and resource base for self-government.

The current process of resolving comprehensive and specific claims is simply not working. A Liberal government will implement major changes to the current approach. A Liberal government will be prepared to create, in cooperation with Aboriginal peoples, an independent claims commission to speed up and facilitate the resolution of all claims. This commission would not preclude direct negotiations.

Most Crown land in Canada south of the 60th parallel is held by the provinces. A Liberal government will engage the provinces in redressing the grievances of the Aboriginal peoples over land and resource rights, including negotiating agreements for resource revenue-sharing. We will also promote co-management agreements between Aboriginal peoples and federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

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